

Piano

The perfect way to rediscover the piano

*Play it again*

**PIANO**

**BOOK 3**



Melanie Spanswick



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ED 14017

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## MUSICAL TERMS

Note values are given in the order American-British on their first mention within each section, then American terms alone thereafter.

whole note (semibreve)  
half note (minim)  
quarter note (crotchet)  
eighth note (quaver)  
sixteenth note (semiquaver)  
thirty-second note (demisemiquaver)  
sixty-fourth note (hemidemisemiquaver)

See also the table in Book 1, page 113

Other terms follow British usage, for example:

bar (Br) = measure (Am)  
whole tone (Br) = whole step (Am)  
semitone (Br) = half step (Am)  
stave (Br) = staff (Am)

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# From the author

*Play it again: Piano* is a progressive piano course consisting of graded piano pieces intended for anyone who has played the piano before and wishes to rediscover this fulfilling pastime. It is also a useful course for students of any age wishing to progress from an elementary to advanced level, whilst discovering a wealth of repertoire which is prefaced with helpful technical and musical suggestions.

*Book 1* starts almost at the beginning, with a look at the musical basics, musicianship and a step-by-step guide on how to learn each piece effectively, and *Book 2* builds on this foundation taking students up to advanced level. *Book 3* continues the journey from Grade 8 up to Associate Diploma level. You could go straight to *Book 3* if you feel confident enough and you are already an experienced pianist, but I would always recommend first reviewing the fundamentals of music and piano technique in *Book 1 and 2*.

Each book contains carefully selected pieces which gradually increase in difficulty and cover a wide variety of styles and musical periods. By the end of the third book, you should be able to tackle advanced pieces comparable to the Associate Diploma standard of the leading British exam boards.

For this third book I have selected 11 piano works which I hope you will find both interesting and rewarding to play. The book is divided into two sections: Post Grade 8 Diploma and Associate Diploma level (which are approximately equivalent to the diplomas of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College London and the London College of Music):

## **Post Grade 8 Diploma**

Grade 8 level – Post Grade 8 Diploma

## **Associate Diploma**

Post Grade 8 Diploma – Associate Diploma

In this volume we move from Grade 8 (the highest grade of amateur piano exams) on to diploma level music, which is considered similar to a standard of playing approaching a professional level. A selection of pieces to include some on the examination syllabuses has been chosen, and will hopefully inspire those considering undertaking these exams.

I have included photographs, diagrams and many musical examples to illustrate key aspects of piano technique such as hand flexibility, the Bridge position and finger strength, as well as advice on the most effective approaches to practicing. I will show you how to break pieces down in order to help tackle their technical and musical challenges. Once you have completed all three books of *Play it again: Piano* you will be able to select, analyse, practice and perform pieces with confidence and enjoy making real progress in your practice sessions.

You can also find a selection of teaching videos on YouTube available at [www.youtube.com/user/SchottM](http://www.youtube.com/user/SchottM).

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# How to use *Play it again: Piano*

*The first part of this book covers many aspects of piano technique and will serve as a resource to which you can refer when working through the rest of the book. Read these sections thoroughly: flexibility and relaxed movement at the piano are crucial for enjoyable playing. The practice tips and advice will make your time at the keyboard more effective and rewarding; keep these in mind when working through the repertoire.*

## **MUSICAL REMINDERS**

The *Practice Reminder* section at the end of this book focuses on extra beneficial material for warming-up pre-practice. It may be helpful to review this information before you dive in to work on the pieces; I recommend revisiting the warm-up exercises at the start of each practice session.

## **A NOTE ON REPERTOIRE**

Both units in *Play it again: Piano – Book 3* (Post Grade 8 Diploma and Associate Diploma) feature a selection of beneficial piano works; six in the Post Grade 8 Diploma unit and five in the Associate Diploma unit. Each section contains a technical study and a variety of Classical repertoire drawn from a wide range of styles to help further your technical and musical progress.

Every piece offers a different focus in terms of technique and musicianship, and is preceded by useful information including preparation tips, practice techniques, tailor-made exercises and ideas for your interpretation.

# Piano technique

## Posture, hand positions, flexibility and alignment

*The first two volumes of this piano course place much emphasis on physical flexibility and relaxed movement at the keyboard during practice and performance.*

*Book 3 will continue in the same vein, with plenty of tips and exercises to encourage good posture, hand positions, and easy movement free from tension, whilst developing finger strength and fostering ideal tonal production.*

At this point it would be prudent to visit (or revisit) the technique sections at the beginning of Book 1 and 2, as they contain useful exercises and important information on keeping wrists and arms relaxed, as well as ideas to implement finger strength.

There are also seven tips in Book 1 and 2 for scales, arpeggios and sight-reading practice, instigating good habits to help develop these necessary skills.

Technique becomes increasingly crucial as playing gradually improves, and more complex piano music, particularly advanced repertoire, such as that found in this book, is tackled. At this point in Book 3, we will continue to build on the technical exercises in Book 1 and 2, and examine various ways of keeping flexible at the same time as consciously developing the bridge, or hand/knuckle, position, whilst strengthening the fingers, particularly the fourth and fifth. It can be beneficial to work at these aspects separately, at the start of a practice session, mindful of observing hands, fingers and general posture during practice.

I have discussed wrist flexibility at length in the previous volumes, and hopefully you will now be implementing this important technique. Hand and arm alignment is vital, that is, the wrist and arm must not be too high or low when playing the piano (see Book 1 page 6). However, in order to hone real relaxation and flexibility, it is sometimes necessary to exaggerate movements to successfully assimilate the ‘feeling’ of looseness; this is especially true for those returning to playing the instrument, where tension and tautness throughout the upper body often cause issues.

### Tip

In order to develop a secure piano technique, we must master the concept of tension and release; tension is required to sound notes, but as soon as they have been played, the release of the muscles involved ensures comfort and flexibility in between notes, and provides the necessary relaxed physical stance to continue playing note patterns with ease.

### HAND FLEXIBILITY

Hands can easily become locked and tense, rendering playing an uncomfortable, tight experience. Wrists and arms should ideally feel soft, light and loose as we play, whilst the fingers and knuckles remain firm. But hands also need to be relaxed too, in order to open and ‘reach’ larger intervals with ease, such as chords and octaves. The aim should be to balance the hand so that it’s possible to use the fourth and fifth finger as easily and comfortably as the thumb and second finger.



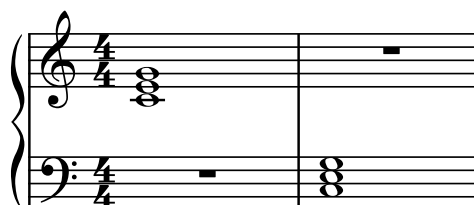
Let's examine the hand: Photo 1 shows the area to which I'm referring; the palm and surrounding areas, especially around the thumb joint. These are normally fleshy and soft when not outstretched or engaged; they need to stay this way as much as possible, during practice and performance. This does present some challenges, but the main aim is to keep the hand or the area between the wrist and knuckles, loose and relaxed. Photo 2 illustrates the area in the middle of the finger joints which can also have a tendency to tense.

Here are a few ideas to loosen the hand, helping it to feel less restricted during practice and performance. First, become aware of how flexible your hand actually is; with your left hand, feel the palm and surrounding fleshy areas of your right hand. Does it feel relaxed and malleable, or tight and locked-up? When relaxed, most hands are pliable, therefore aim for a comfortable, soft 'feeling' as you play. Learn the feeling of looseness and keep referring to this sensation.

Lay your hands on a flat surface away from the keyboard, and determine how far you can open them without detecting any muscle pull or discomfort (see Photo 3).

To begin with it may not be much, but if you practice this exercise, that is, just opening the hand, and keeping it open whilst relaxing or 'letting go' of the muscles (in the hand, wrist and arm) regularly, then your hands will become accustomed to being 'open' or outstretched. They will eventually be able to open out increasingly further whilst still feeling relaxed. Keep in mind the feeling of relaxation in the hand at all times. If you find this awkward, use your other hand to help you keep the hand open as you learn to relax and release or 'let go' of the muscles within (as in Photo 4).

.....  
Now play a triad:





As you play, with your other hand, note how your engaged hand responds whilst playing – are the fleshy areas still relaxed? If they are tense, revert to playing a single note, preferably with the third finger, and as you depress the note, aim to release the muscles within the hand; at first this will require focused concentration. As the note is struck, notice how the muscles react; you must decide if they feel relaxed or tense and uncomfortable. If they are rigid, as the note is held by the finger, relax the surrounding hand by releasing any tension in the wrist and whole arm. Again, you may need to hold the note in place with your other hand until you have learned the sensation of relaxation.

Try this exercise: clench the hand, and then swiftly ‘release’ the clench, relaxing the muscles. This can be one way of assimilating the feeling of tension and the subsequent ‘release’ of muscles.

When you feel relaxed playing just the one note, experiment further with the triad in the example, until you can keep the notes depressed without feeling any tightness. Now play two notes a sixth apart, in bars 1 and 3 of the following example:



Rock from side to side as you play this interval (from C to the A and back), ‘letting go’ of any tension in your hand as you depress the notes. In between the notes, practise dropping your wrist; lowering it in a relaxed manner, as opposed to raising it high above the keyboard. A constantly moving wrist can help tremendously with flexibility; although playing with a low wrist in a fixed position is as inconvenient as playing with one that’s too high – my suggestions here are for practice purposes only.

Now play the interval of a sixth (both the C and A) at the same time, as a two-note chord, releasing any tightness in your hand muscles, but still keeping the notes depressed. When this feels comfortable, move up to an interval of a seventh and finally, an octave (as in bars 2 and 4 of the example). As the hand gets used to the wider position, allow your muscles to keep releasing any tension. Eventually the hand will learn to enjoy the outstretched position and its relaxed stance allows for an easier grasp of chords and octaves, fostering a healthier technique, free from pain and discomfort.

**Tip**

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When we learn how to ‘let go’ of tension as we play, at the same time as keeping the fingers in place, the hand starts to release its grip.



## THE BRIDGE POSITION, KNUCKLES AND FINGER STRENGTH

The so-called **Bridge** position is essentially the position the hands assume when the knuckles remain prominent, like this:



The Bridge position allows the hand to remain relaxed, yet in control of the fingers, and the fingers in turn can be relatively independent.

In Photo 5, my knuckles remain at the high point of the hand position, clearly visible above each finger, forming a 'bridge' across the hand. The Bridge position wasn't previously mentioned in Book 1 and 2 for the reason that it can prove a distraction for some less experienced players, especially for those in the earlier learning stages. When students slowly develop finger strength gradually and naturally, the Bridge tends to form on its own. This takes time and patience, but by this stage of learning, the Bridge can really benefit piano playing and it is for this reason it is being discussed here.

The Bridge position not only allows the hand to 'balance' properly, but it also forms the basis for strong fingers, particularly the fourth and fifth fingers. This in turn helps with ease of playing octaves, chords and any extended finger pattern.

Without this position, there can be a tendency for the hand to be weighted towards the thumb, second and third finger, whereas when the Bridge has been developed, the third finger can remain at the centre-point of the hand, and the fourth and fifth can potentially be active and strong.

Photo 6 demonstrates a hand position, which can also be practiced away from the keyboard. My fingers are straight, wrists are fairly low and relaxed, and the knuckles protrude. This position is unnatural and should **never** be employed whilst playing, but it will draw your attention to the importance of raised knuckles; if they remain flat or out of sight during piano playing, or are lower than the hand or fingers, then the hand won't feel aligned and using the outer fingers with any strength might prove uncomfortable and cause physical problems. Each knuckle connected to every finger and thumb should ideally be raised, particularly those belonging to the weaker, outer fingers.



The following exercises can be done at the start of a practice session, perhaps after a warm-up, and just for a few minutes; observe your hand positions as you play. Similarly, when working at repertoire, aim to think carefully about the upper body. As mentioned in *Play it again: Piano Book 1* and 2, the whole arm and wrist must feel supple, relaxed and loose. Only the fingers and their corresponding knuckles should be firm.

As you depress each note, sink into the keys, down to the key bed, past the double escapement action or the 'jolt' felt at the bottom of the key (on grand pianos) and aim to play on the tips of your fingers, with the finger joints fully engaged. This will require some thought and care when using the outer fingers, and may therefore feel unnatural at first. Between each half note (minim), keep your wrist and arm completely relaxed; it can help to use a circular wrist motion (as discussed in Book 1 and 2). Observe the knuckles as you play, so they don't disappear and they remain firm, that is, they don't sink into the hand.



In the example above, try to balance the hand using the third finger as a pivot, moving the wrist laterally (lateral wrist motion is discussed on page 69) to the right as you play from E to G (as in Photo 7), then back to E as the centre point, moving laterally to the left when playing down to middle C.



These exercises will hopefully help to cultivate finger independence, and will draw your attention to the necessity of fully engaging the weaker fingers (the fourth and fifth). There are many exercises which may prove valuable here by a variety of composers, but irrespective of your choice, practice little and often so that suppleness remains in the upper body and crucially, nothing causes pain.



## Tip

If you can observe and correct movements as you practice, after a period of time, they will become a habit – a good habit!

## THUMBS

Thumb exercises have been included in Book 2 (see page 9), but now we will take them a step further, focusing on thumb movement and slightly more demanding exercise patterns. It's too easy for the thumb to strike a key, with little direction, or physical or tonal control. The following exercises are designed for thumb movement awareness, building digital control and thumb joint flexibility.

Circular Thumb Patterns:



Photo 8 shows the thumb in a lowered position with the thumb under the hand, photo 9 shows the thumb as it passes through the middle position, and photo 10 illustrates the higher position of the thumb. As the thumb passes through these positions, it forms a circular upward movement. Practice moving the large thumb joint at the base of the thumb flexibly between these positions, guiding the thumb up and down; do this slowly, with pliable muscles whilst keeping the rest of the hand still, yet relaxed. The mastery of this movement makes larger intervals using the thumb, such as thumb under movements necessary in scales and arpeggios, that much easier.

Now try the following exercise:



Photo 11 demonstrates the relaxation needed in the hand to play the intervals in bar 5 (of the example above) without feeling tight, taut or tense in any way. Once you can do this easily, that is, you feel completely relaxed and loose whilst keeping the notes depressed, playing larger thumb under movements, such as those found in arpeggios, will feel comfortable and painless and will hopefully lead to note accuracy and smooth *legato* playing.

Exploring the wonderful thumb resonance might also be a helpful exercise. The following example demands a soft thumb approach, using the weight of your arm, essentially exploring sonority. Employ the fleshier area of the thumb tip, that is, the area before the very tip or end of the thumb, and start by playing softly, building the sound throughout the exercise. Allow your thumb to ‘keybed’, or touch and press notes at the same time, or play to the bottom of the key (there are many descriptions for this activity), past the point in the key bed where we experience a sudden ‘jolt’ or escapement action.

In this exercise, the thumb movement should ideally be combined with a loose wrist and arm to produce a ‘full’ or rich sound. The wrist will need to move up and down freely for a full tone; down as each note is depressed, ‘cushioning’ the thumb as it plays deeply and into the key, and up as the note is released. The sustaining or right pedal might be an enjoyable addition to this exercise to begin with, and aim to change your sound on each individual note:



Now try the following exercise, joining each note with no gaps in the sound. To do this successfully, you will need to listen to the ends of notes; keep the first note depressed right until the end of the beat and then quickly leave it, playing the second carefully to match the sound of this second note to the decay of the first one. It requires a quick, precise movement but a slower key depression; even though some of the intervals are larger here, you can still aim to ‘join’ the sound.



Another interesting exercise for thumb control is the chromatic scale:



Unconventional fingering, such as in the example above, will encourage thumbs to move actively and seek to play each note fully, depressing the key attentively for accuracy. Try replacing the second finger with the third for variety.

**Tip**

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At no point should these movements feel uncomfortable or painful; on the contrary, they are designed to encourage various parts of the hand to move easily, freely and actively.

# Post Grade 8 Diploma

## Sonata in E major

Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757)

### Set up

**Key:** E major

**Time signature:**  $\frac{3}{4}$

**Tempo:** Andante  $\text{♩} = 80$

**Style:** Baroque

**Technical Focus:**

Ornamentation, articulation, phrasing, and balance of sound between the hands.

Italian composer Scarlatti wrote over 555 sonatas for the harpsichord. Whilst generally short works, they contain some of the most idiomatic writing for the instrument; full of harmonic surprises, technical challenges and melodic expressivity. This Binary form Sonata fully illustrates Scarlatti's style and possesses a simplistic beauty.

### PREPARATION

For the scale and arpeggio of E major, please refer to Book 1 (page 107). The opening introduction sets the scene for the whole piece. Improvisatory in character, it might be described as two separate voices answering each other; I like to think of it as an oboe and cor anglais enjoying a conversation!

The opening ornamental patterns might be written out like this:

For smoothness and fluency, think of this opening as one phrase, and ensure the fourth and fifth fingers are working efficiently. This could be practiced as a five finger exercise around E major. Focus on moving the wrist laterally (for lateral wrist motion, visit page 69) guided by a relaxed forearm, to the right or away from the body for the first note group, bar 1, beat 2, and then to the left, bar 1, beat 3, and bar 2, beats 1 and 2, supporting the weaker fingers. The fingers require powerful clarity, producing a rich tone, matching the other fingers, and allowing for crisp, clear articulation.

When practicing each note group, try using the following techniques for bar 1 and all similar passages:

Start with a *fortissimo* dynamic for each note group, playing deeply into the keys, very slowly until you can easily negotiate every note with the suggested fingering; play the note groups evenly and rhythmically listening carefully; you could practice each group in the introduction in this manner. Practice tools such as repetitions, accents, various touches, and dynamic contrasts, will help attain independent finger strength. However, only do this in short bursts.



# Ornaments

This sonata features several types of ornament or embellishment (the trill, *appoggiatura*, and *acciaccatura*). Book 2 contains more information about ornaments (page 118). The ornaments here are to be played on the beat. Here are a few practice ideas:

Let's take the trill from bar 3, beat 3, which must be perfectly coordinated in both hands. The trill would usually begin on the upper note in this style, and will essentially be a four note trill. However, as it appears at the end of a phrase, you may prefer to elongate this trill, so that it extends to cover the entire beat. Practice this passage very slowly, with a deep tone at first; playing beyond the double escapement action, giving the second and fourth notes special attention:

The musical score consists of two systems of piano ornaments. The first system shows two measures of a trill exercise in 3/4 time. The first measure is marked with '1' and '(or 43)', with fingerings '1 3' and '2' indicated. The second measure is marked with '2' and features a trill with accents (>) on the second and fourth notes. The second system shows a continuation of the exercise, marked with '3', with fingerings '1 2' and accents (>) on the second and fourth notes. The score includes a treble and bass clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 3/4 time signature.

It's easy to 'swallow' or rush these notes; make sure they sound clearly and are equal in length to the first and third notes of the ornament. Applying different rhythmic practice patterns helps to assimilate the feeling of the fingers striking the keys at precisely the same moment, as does practicing in different octaves

around the keyboard, as notated in the example. Concentrate on the final note in each trill; this, too, can suffer from rushing or 'tripping over' to the next beat or bar. Now repeat these practice suggestions with accentuation on the first and third notes in the trill.

Listen to all notes in every embellishment pattern; they must sound neat and expertly coordinated with active fingers. For practice purposes, I've included the tied B (first note in the left hand, beat 3) to coincide with the right hand, but you may prefer to practice as written, that is, played before the main beat.

Once you've practiced with a full tone, lighten your touch, keep fingertips close to the keys, and apply minimal finger movement, akin to softly skimming across the keys. After the heavy preparation work, fingers should move easily, producing an even tone, free from bumps. How fast can you play these passages? Experiment at all speeds, from very slow to extremely fast, eventually settling on a manageable speed, suitable for both the passage and your fingers.

Scarlatti gave minimal indication as to the length of his *appoggiaturas*, but it is generally assumed that they take half the time of the original note. Phrase off *appoggiaturas*, such as those at the end of each section (bars 41 and 89), with a much lighter second note, matching the tone evenly:

The musical score shows a single measure in 3/4 time, marked with 'mp'. The first note is a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter rest. The second note is marked with an accent (>). The score includes a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 3/4 time signature.

When articulating ornaments, resist the urge to lock or stiffen the wrist or hand; aim to keep them flexible and relaxed, remembering that the fingers should work from the knuckles, supported by a relaxed hand and wrist.