Piano

The perfect way to rediscover the piano

# Play it again

# PIANO

## BOOK 1



Melanie Spanswick

ED 13935

SCHOTT

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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)

See also the table on page 114

Other terms follow British usage, for example:
bar (Br) = measure (Am)
whole note (Br) = whole step (Am)
semitone (Br) = half step (Am)
stave (Br) = staff (Am)

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S&Co.9368
Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Weihergarten 5, 55116 Mainz, Germany
info@schott-music.com

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# From the author

*Play it again: PIANO* is a progressive piano course consisting of graded piano pieces for anyone who has played the piano before and wishes to rediscover this fulfilling pastime. *Book 1* starts at Grade 1, or elementary, level of the leading British music examination system standards, looking at the musical basics, musicianship, and a step-by-step guide on how to learn each piece effectively. If you would prefer much simpler pieces, with greater focus on learning notation and rhythm, I would encourage you to explore the *Prep Book* in this series, which is intended for Late-beginner to Grade 1 level. Book 2 follows on progressively from *Book 1*, so that you can use *Play it again: PIANO* whatever your current level. You could go straight to *Book 2* or *3* if you feel confident enough, but I would always recommend first reviewing the fundamentals of music and piano technique found in the *Prep Book* and *Book 1.*

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 first book, you should be able to tackle intermediate pieces comparable to Grade 5 standard of the leading British music exam boards.

For this first book I have selected 28 piano pieces which I hope you will find both interesting and rewarding to play. The book is divided into four sections: Elementary, Late Elementary, Early Intermediate and Intermediate, with the following approximate comparable graded exams (of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity College London and London College of Music Examinations):

| | |
|---|---|
| **Elementary** | Grades 1 to 2 |
| **Late Elementary** | Grades 2 to 3 |
| **Early Intermediate** | Grades 3 to 4 |
| **Intermediate** | Grades 4 to 5 |

I have included photographs, diagrams and many musical examples to illustrate key aspects of piano technique such as posture, hand positions and basic flexibility, 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 the *Play it again: PIANO* course you will be able to select, analyse, practice and perform pieces with confidence and enjoy making real progress in your practice sessions. Follow the QR code to find a selection of teaching videos on YouTube.

**Melanie Spanswick** MMus (RCM), GRSM (Hons), DipRCM, ARCM (PG)
**www.melaniespanswick.com**

Scan the QR code to listen to all 28 pieces or alternatively visit Schott's website: www.schott-music.com/shop/345320

# How to use *Play it again*

*The first part of this book covers the main 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: good posture, hand positions and 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 *Theory* section at the end of the book focuses on music notation, the bedrock of all music learning. It may be helpful to review this section before you dive into work on the pieces. For more on musical basics, take a look at the *Prep Book*, which provides plenty of information for those who feel they need it. The *Theory* section contains some exercises that are designed as note and rhythm 'reminders', and I recommend working at these at the start of each practice session. Key musical terms have been written in **bold** text on their first appearance in the book.

## A NOTE ON REPERTOIRE

Each of the four units in *Play it again: PIANO – Book 1* (Elementary, Late Elementary, Early Intermediate and Intermediate) features seven piano pieces: a technical study, one or two pieces in a popular style such as jazz, ragtime, blues, rock or Latin, plus an arrangement of a well-known work. The remaining pieces in each unit will help to further your technical and musical progress.

Each 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 and hand positions

*Sitting correctly at the piano is very important. First make sure your piano stool is at a suitable height (an adjustable stool is ideal); your forearms should be parallel with the keys when your hands rest upon the keyboard. Shoulders and arms should be totally relaxed and in their natural position (not raised). Your hands also need to be in a relaxed, natural position.*





Distance from the keyboard is imperative; sit towards the edge of the stool nearest the keyboard so that your feet can rest easily on the floor and support your body as you move (this will also be important when you come to use the foot pedals where the heel of the foot must rest on the floor).

Sit in an upright position without leaning too far forwards or backwards. The hip joint should move freely, so that you are able to reach the whole keyboard with ease.

Align your hands with your elbows and keep your wrists at the same level as your forearm, not raised or falling down.

Resist the urge to sit too near the keyboard as this will affect movement and tone quality.

## Tip

- Start your practice sessions with your arms swinging loosely by your side as you sit on the piano stool.
- Ensure your shoulders are not raised, and note how heavy, relaxed and flexible your arms and upper body feel during this exercise.
- Remember this sensation; this is the feeling and flexibility required whilst playing.

### FLEXIBILITY

It is essential to develop good flexibility when playing the piano. Any rigidity or tension in the upper body will affect dexterity and sound quality. Here are a few tips to help develop freedom of movement in your playing (see left).

Flexibility is sometimes forgotten during practice sessions because our attention is focused elsewhere: reading the music and playing the notes. However, it is extremely beneficial to think about the body and how it moves during performance.

### FINGER INDEPENDENCE

Fingers should always work independently of each other and of the muscles and tendons in the rest of the hand. Finger joints must be well supported, with each joint fully engaged (as in the first photo below).

Don't let fingers collapse (as demonstrated in the second photo) as this will lead to weaker finger movement.



Correct



Incorrect

A 'hooked' finger shape encourages strong finger movement and excellent connection with each key, allowing you to play using the tips of your fingers on each note.

## WRIST FLEXIBILITY

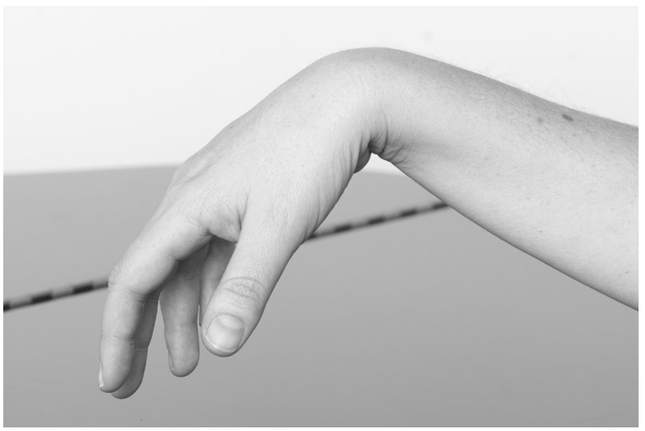
In piano playing, flexibility of the wrists should be considered very important, as any tension or stiffness here usually hinders successful playing. A good rotational movement and wrist flexibility will enable you to move freely around the keyboard. This should ideally be accompanied by a loose forearm, for easy movement up and down the keyboard.

*Flexible wrist: exercise 1*

Aim for constant movement in the wrist when playing as this will prevent rigidity; avoid holding your wrists in one position, or placing them too high or too low. In order to achieve this, try the following exercise:



Upwards movement



Downwards movement

**1** Start by waving your hand from the wrist, first upwards then downwards, with the wrist acting as a hinge. Do this with both hands.

**2** Now make a rotational movement as in waving goodbye.

**3** Finally, make complete circles in the air, using the wrists as a hinge.

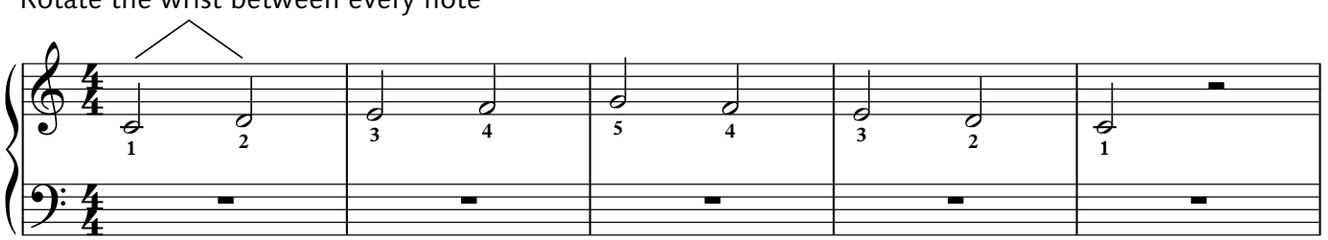
This might seem exaggerated, but it will help you to get used to the movement required to develop complete freedom.

*Flexible wrist: exercise 2*

**1** At the piano, place your thumb on middle C.

**2** Drop your wrist and hand whilst continuing to depress the key (the hand must ideally flop down on the keyboard in order to be really loose or released).

Rotate the wrist between every note



**3** The feeling in your hand and wrist should be one of complete relaxation with no tension whatsoever. Some muscle tension is necessary to play a note but, once sounded, try to release all the muscles and tendons in the hand.

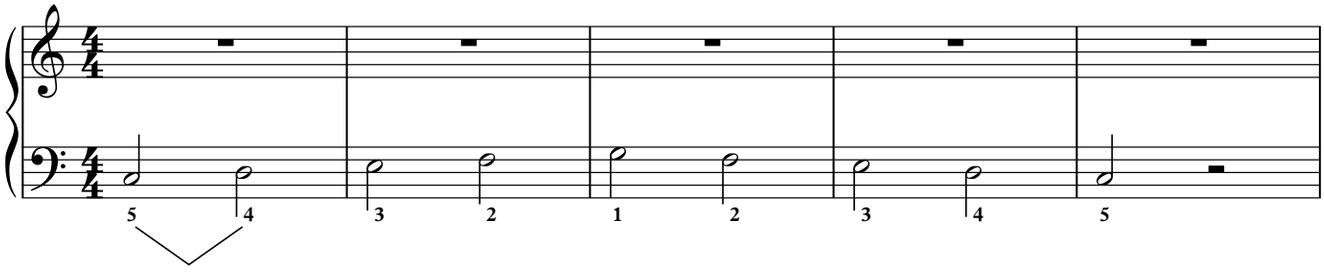
**4** Repeat this technique for the subsequent notes. Each note is held for two beats, so there is plenty of time to move the wrist and the hand between notes.

**5** Once you are able to recognise the feeling of relaxation after each note has been played, play the exercise once again but this time rotate the wrist, that is, make a circular motion between each note. This is demonstrated in the photos below, where my wrist makes an anticlockwise circular motion: from a high position (right) to a low position (left).





Now try the same exercise with the left hand:




Rotate the wrist between notes

Aim to begin practice sessions with these exercises and you'll find your wrists will become gradually more relaxed and supple.

## ARM WEIGHT AND SOUND

Being able to produce a good sound is vital as it determines control and evenness. Dynamic range (level of loudness), nuance and articulation (or touch) all become much easier too. The arm can only become really effective once it is free of tension, at which point it can combine with the wrist to produce a warm, rich tone. To achieve this, revisit the exercises above and ensure each finger and thumb plays deeply into the keybed.

As you are rotating your wrist, add the weight of your whole arm behind it and each finger. You will essentially 'caress' or massage the keys as opposed to playing (or hitting) them directly from above. The resulting sound should be warm, rich, penetrating and deep, and in no way harsh, weedy or meagre (which tends to be the case when the keys are just hit). It is important to listen carefully to the quality of the sound you create during your practice sessions.

# Practice
# Sight-reading and scales

*Sight-reading and scales form a crucial part of successful piano playing. Whilst they might initially appear perfunctory and dull, if worked at regularly and in small doses, the benefits will soon become apparent.*

**SIGHT-READING**

In many ways sight-reading music is similar to learning to read; we gradually become accustomed to what will come next because we have seen the words and phrase patterns many times before. It's the same with music; until common note shapes, patterns and chords have been internalised, slow, careful and thorough preparation is important.

To sight-read fluently is a wonderfully rewarding skill but it requires regular, concentrated work. As it demands a lot of focus, it can be a good way to begin practice sessions.

## Tip

With practice you will be able to move through these seven points with increasing speed and confidence. Start with very easy piano music. There are several books dedicated specifically to sight-reading such as the *Piano Sight-Reading* books by John Kember (Schott Music). Above all, have fun experimenting with a range of styles. Ten to fifteen minutes devoted to sight-reading in each of your practice sessions will pay real dividends.

## 7 sight-reading tips

**1** Note the key signature. This indicates which notes (if any) need to be sharpened or flattened throughout the piece. When playing, keep the key signature in mind at all times!

**2** The time signature (placed after the key signature at the beginning), will show you how many beats to count (for example, if the piece is in $\frac{3}{4}$ then there will be three quarter note (crotchet) beats in each bar).

**3** Play through the music for each hand separately and slowly without following any rhythmic beat, but making a careful note of the fingering. This will help reading skills immeasurably and provides the opportunity to find the notes without the burden of keeping time.

**4** Watch out for patterns, both rhythmic and melodic, as well as any scales, arpeggios and chords: these can all act as signposts.

**5** To assimilate the rhythm properly, slowly tap the rhythm of the notes with two hands on the piano lid (the right hand tapping the top stave, and the left hand tapping the bottom stave). Count aloud all the time whilst clapping and be sure to keep a regular pulse.

**6** You are now ready to play with your hands together. Choose a very slow tempo (a third or even a quarter of the intended speed). If the piece consists predominantly of sixteenth notes (semiquavers), then count in sixteenths; if it is mainly eighth notes (quavers), count in eighths and so on. Starting your sight-reading practice material with a slow, steady speed is the key to playing fluently without hesitations. Gradually increase the tempo as you become more confident and fluent; becoming proficient at sight-reading takes time, so be patient!

**7** Try not to stop or hesitate; keep on playing through your mistakes – maintaining a steady pulse is more important than playing all the right notes.