

Grade 8

Group B

Bartók **Dance in Bulgarian Rhythm no. 2** **Boosey**

The *Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm* are the final pieces in the important collection of piano pieces entitled *Mikrokosmos* which Bartók assembled during the years 1926-1939. These dances are characterised by asymmetrical rhythms and bar-lengths.

In this particular dance, there are three beats in a bar but, as can be seen by the time signature (2+2+3), the beats are not all the same length. The first two beats are worth two quavers while the third beat is worth three quavers. This irregularity, combined with the brisk tempo, gives the music a compelling degree of rhythmic vitality.

The three-bar introduction sets out the rhythmic essence of the piece which imbues the music with a nervous tension. The playing should have the audience sitting on the edge of their seats in anticipation of what is to follow! Clarity of articulation is paramount here. It is a good idea to practise the initial pattern with just alternating thumbs so that the technique required for the rapidly repeated G may be honed.

In order to achieve the opening *mf*, aim to keep thumbs quite close to the surface of the key so that the tone remains controlled and not too percussive. The bracketed pedal indication in the introduction (and in other such marked places) allows the performer to decide on the colour.

A bright *forte* sound is required at the onset of bar three, which gives the main theme an opportunity to assert itself (no pedal here, of course). Features of articulation should be carefully observed so that the character of the theme emerges as Bartók intended. The staccato needs to be incisive and the two-note slur executed with a clear release before falling onto the stress of the next bar; there should be no hint of accentuation on the second note of the slur.

A more flowing *legato* style emerges in bar 16 (to be played less loudly); undulating wave-like patterns provide a perfect foil for the rhythmic repetitions of the first part of the piece.

The following *crescendo* (watch out for accidentals) culminates in a *forte martell*. The term *martell* is short for *martellato* and literally means 'hammering-out', so try for a more punchy attack here. Take note of the third beat accents in bars 24/25 and also the articulation detail in bar 26 which leads up to the LH *marcato* theme.

Do not allow the tempo to slacken in bars 37-39. A change of texture in bar 45 requires the *legato* phrases of the RH to be accompanied by even and purposefully-placed chords in the LH (not accented however). In bar 54, allow the tempo to relax in conjunction with the *diminuendo* before proceeding with the **a tempo** coda. The repeated rhythmic motif becomes the essence of the coda as the music fades into the distance; the final four bars require absolute precision in the counting.

Bartók's six books of *Mikrokosmos* are graded from 1-minus to 8-plus. Many of the early ones are technical exercises barely suitable for concert use, but this closing piece is an impressive finale to the whole set, and audiences love it. Bartók's musical notation was ferociously accurate (printers dreaded his sarcastic comments on any inaccuracies in their proof copies), making every dot, dash, slur and dynamic strictly compulsory in performance. His sense of enharmonic awareness (when to write F#, and when Gb, for instance) was far more refined than ours, producing – for grammatical reasons obscure to all except serious analysts – odd-looking chords that sound, but don't look, like Eb and C major triads in bar 9; notice B major (check that F#) amid bar 52, C major and F major triads in bars 66 and 88. Subtleties abound: notice the semitones expanding bar by bar through tones and major thirds during the canonic bars 25-29, and the slowly descending scale (one high note every two bars) in RH accompaniment to LH tune from 81. It's still a most exciting piece.

Pedal each chord in bars 1-16, but keep written rests clear. The 'second subject' from bar 17 may go more finger-*legato*: long-held bass notes are vital here, as also from bars 21 and 39. Try starting LH of bars 33-34 with 3rd finger and playing G# octaves to relieve the possibly over-stretched RH (but this doesn't work in 35). Keep counting quavers when they stop (bars 46-64) to avoid rushing or dragging – and count bars through 68-74 (a seven-bar 'till-ready') while carefully holding one long unchanged pedal. Good editions suggest taking bar 49's tenor middle C with RH: try the same ploy one chord earlier, as well. Non-aligned LH chords starting bars 47 and 49 nevertheless sound simultaneously, as do similar RH discords in 74-77, nearly impossible to notate any other way. Keep pedal unchanged

through bars 91-94, their semibreves eventually producing a sustained F# major chord.

It's impressive, though not compulsory, to observe the last RH bar's rest either by using middle pedal or else soundlessly re-pressing the bass-clef chord as soon as possible after 96 and re-peddalling.