

C:1 Swinging Circles

This is a good piece to choose if you are confident with playing in a jazzy style with swing quavers; if you are not comfortable with this style, maybe consider choosing another piece.

Before starting work on this piece, try to listen online to a recording of the piece <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fKY1i9fbLk> which is also available as part of your exam downloads; use the code in the back of your book to access these.

If you have not played many pieces with swing quavers before, think of a crotchet dividing into three, with the first quaver taking up two thirds and the other quaver taking up one third. Practise saying 'ski-pping ski-pping ski-pping', with the 'ski' twice as long as the 'pping' while clapping the beat to get the rhythm in your head. In this piece, where you have just one quaver, it is always the second (shorter) one.

Get familiar with the notes, working initially in four bar phrases and bearing in mind that the phrases start at the end of a bar. The A# in bar 8 is the same as Bb; make sure you use the side lever fingering for this as you will be moving to a B afterwards. The G# in bars 11 and 12 is played with the left hand little finger on the closest / first part of the key in addition to the normal G fingers; listen to how it raises the sound by half a step. The higher G# in bar 15 is played just the same plus the octave key.

Then focus on the articulation, with its mix of tenuto (full length) notes, staccato (short) and slurs; try to play exactly what's written. Be aware that the upbeat at the start is a crotchet while the lead in to bar 3 is only a quaver. Add the final pause.

There is not a wide dynamic range in the piece, so concentrate on starting mezzo forte and make sure that you include the crescendo in bar 4 (up to forte in bar 5) and the diminuendo and crescendo in bars 7 – 8; practise from the last quaver of bar 6 up to and including the first two beats of bar 9 to get the hang of this feature. The second half is forte; make it sound strong and confident but not too loud or brash.

This is not a fast piece, and has a cool, laid back feel. The three in a bar time signature helps the music to flow naturally from one bar to the next. It may help to think of each bar as a circle; imagine a windmill or wind turbine in the countryside to get in the mood!

You could try playing along with a metronome or metronome app. Then try playing along with the example version; practise both with the track and on your own.