

Notes on 'A Tennessee Rag'

This piece is great for all brass players who are looking at doing Grade 2 or looking for a piece at about this level, as it currently features on the ABRSM syllabus (up to 2020) for all brass instruments as one of the List B pieces.

A rag is a type of jazz piece which has lots of syncopated rhythms. Rags are often humorous and this piece is no exception. Think of yourself as a character in a funny black and white silent film or in a cartoon like Tom and Jerry, where you are up to some mischief!

In this piece there are three different types of articulation. Staccato notes (with dots underneath – to be played very short), tenuto notes (with lines underneath) to be played for their full length) and slurred notes (to be joined together). To get some practise on these different styles you can look up the worksheet under the Yellow Award, called 'Playing slurs, staccato and legato'. The combination of the staccato and tenuto notes at the beginning helps give the cheeky character to the piece. Make the staccatos extra short and light and 'lean on' the tenuto notes with a small accent at the beginning.

This piece is written in 4/4 but can feel a bit like a slow 2/4 as the most important beats are the first and third. You can imagine a tuba or other bass instrument playing throughout on the first and third beats of the bar.

The rhythm at bar 7 is a typical ragtime rhythm and comes back time and again during the piece. In bar 7 the Cs in the middle of the bar are tied together. If you are having trouble playing this rhythm you can take the tie out to start with, learn it this way and then try singing it with the tie before playing it as written. Alternatively, if you are a fan of Spiderman, the rhythm is the same as how 'Friend-ly neigh-bour-hood' is sang in the original theme song!

Dynamics also play a part in getting humour into the piece between bars 19 and 25. Try to make a big crescendo in the last three quavers of bars 20 and 24, but be careful not to lose control of your sound when you reach the note at the start of each following bar.

This piece is pure comedy. Enjoy!