

C:3 The Mexican Hat Dance

This is a good piece to choose if you are confident with playing quite quick quavers in a key with several sharps; if you are not comfortable with this, 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=q-Rqdgna3Yw> and the flute version of the piece <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QK4QWrecm8g> which is also available as part of your exam downloads; use the code in the back of your book to access these.

Start by playing the A major scale on page 12 of your exam pack or available online to download from Masquerade Music <https://www.masquerade-music.co.uk/freemusic.html>. Then look at the music and spot the additional sharps that occur, for example the D# at the start. Practise playing the following semitone moves: E D# E; C# C C#; B A# B (remembering an A# is just the same as Bb); G# G G#; then practise the high version of these.

Work through the music systematically to learn the notes, initially in four bar phrases with each phrases starting on the last two quavers before a bar line. See how the tune in the first eight bars is repeated an octave higher in the next eight bars, and how that higher version of the tune returns at the end in bars 24 – 32. The high A at the end of the piece may take a bit of practice so approach this by playing some octave hops, starting on a lower note and then gradually working your way up to the A. If you need a fingering chart, try the Yamaha interactive online one here https://www.yamaha.com/en/musical_instrument_guide/flute/play/play002.html

Then focus on the articulation, being aware of the mix of slurs, tongued notes, staccato and accents. The articulation is quite complicated and can be challenging, so work on it in two bar phrases at first, then increasing to four and finally eight bars. Try to play exactly what is written, even if it is not always what you would expect. You may find it helpful to practise the notes just slurred and tongued as written before adding in the accents and staccato.

Once you are familiar with the notes and articulation, focus on dynamics. There is quite a wide dynamic range from piano to fortissimo and everything in between so try playing one note piano then mezzo piano, mezzo forte, forte and finally fortissimo; don't make your forte too loud so that you still have space to increase to fortissimo.

Then practise playing each phrase with the dynamic marked. Fortunately the high version of the tune, such as in bars 8 – 16, is marked forte, which will help with getting the high notes to sound reliably! In the middle eight bar section from bar 16 to 24, gradually increase the dynamic every two bars to achieve a gradual build in sound and energy throughout this contrasting tune.

The Mexican Hat Dance is a traditional dance from Mexico, which involves transferring a sombrero (wide Mexican hat) from a man to a woman via the ground as a courtship ritual. Read what it says about it at the bottom of the music and maybe check out the dance online to get the feel of it.

The piece is marked Lively so you should aim for quite a fast speed and an energetic, dance-like feel. You could try playing along with a metronome or metronome app, aiming for a speed of about dotted crotchet = 112, (two beats per bar). Then try playing along with the example track from your downloads, and finally on your own; practise both with the example track and solo.