

C:3 Syncopation Rag

This is a good piece to choose if you are confident with playing syncopated rhythms with lots of accidentals; 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=E4iwiqC2DDA> which is also available as part of your exam downloads; use the code in the back of your book to access these.

Before beginning to learn this piece, it may be helpful to play one of the chromatic scales on page 20 of your exam pack or the one from your Grade 4 scales, all also available online to download from Masquerade Music <https://www.masquerade-music.co.uk/freemusic.html> Then look at the music and look for all the accidentals that occur; pencil in anything that might help you, for example the G_b in bar 4 is just the same as the F_# in bar 1!

Look carefully at the rhythms and where these are the same or different, for example the rhythm in bar 2 is the same as in bar 1, but the rhythm in bar 3 is different. You could try clapping the rhythms while tapping your toe inside your shoe to keep the beat; then try playing them on your flute. Focus on the rhythms and notes for now, working in small sections, and we'll add in the articulation and dynamics later on, once you've got familiar with the notes. If you need a fingering chart, try the Yamaha online interactive one here https://www.yamaha.com/en/musical_instrument_guide/flute/play/play002.html

There are some tricky phrases in this piece, where you may find that the notes don't fall under your fingers immediately. Bar 4 is an example of this, so work on that bar in isolation, looping it round several times until you get the pattern of notes under your fingers. The sections from bar 9 – 16 and 16 – 24 will also need careful attention and repeated practice of the phrases that fall within them, working in two bar phrases initially. You may need to work at learning the rhythms and notes, but it's a fun piece to play and will be satisfying and impressive when you can play it!

Then focus on the articulation, which is key to the style of the piece, being aware of the mix of slurs, tongued notes, tenuto, staccato and accents. The articulation is quite complicated and can be challenging, so work on it in short phrases at first. Look through the piece to see where patterns of articulation recur, and practise those together. 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. Where a staccato is combined with an accent, give a little extra push to those notes while keeping the tongue light.

There are a couple of places that might need a bit of extra practice to get the articulation right. Watch out for the difference between Bar 1 and Bar 3, where the notes are the same but the difference in articulation emphasises the difference in rhythm. The section from Bar 9 – 16 involves semiquavers grouped in threes going across the beats of the bar. Playing slowly at first, practise slurring them in threes and then add the accents at the start of each group of three. Gradually build the speed until you can play them fluently with the correct articulation. It is easy to lose track of the beat in this sort of passage, so try tapping your toe inside your shoe as you play so that the timing of your semiquavers doesn't go astray. Eventually you will find that you can play this section almost automatically!

Then practise playing each phrase with the dynamic marked. The dynamics fall within a limited range from piano to forte, often with a whole section in one dynamic. Practise playing the first couple of bars forte, mezzo forte, mezzo piano and piano to get a clear difference between each. Practise the section starting mf at bar 17, making the most of the diminuendo in bar 18 and crescendo in bars 19 – 20. The dynamics in the last four bars are particularly important, giving a fun, slightly jokey feel to the ending!

The high piano phrase in bars 15 – 16 may need a bit of extra effort to get a clear piano on these high notes. Practise playing some long notes in the high register, starting mf and making a diminuendo on your long note. Remember to support the air from the diaphragm area at the bottom of your lungs and push the air through gradually more slowly to make a diminuendo. Once you can do that easily, practise starting piano on a high note while trying to avoid the note cracking. It may help to practise these couple of bars mf to start off with, gradually reducing the dynamic to mp and finally p once you are confident with making the notes sound by supporting the air.

Syncopation Rag is an original piece for flute by the contemporary British composer, saxophonist and clarinettist James Rae. It is written in Ragtime, a style of music that was popular around 1900, most famously with the piano Rags by Scott Joplin, which are still popular today. Listen to a recording of one of these piano pieces such as The Entertainer https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ma3ECCC_ZI or Maple Leaf Rag <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rad6UvoGHV8> to get the right feel. You may have already played The Entertainer if you reached the end of Abracadabra Flute!

The piece is marked Moderato with a suggested speed of crotchet = 100; however pay attention to the note at the bottom of the page, which gives the option of a slower speed of about crotchet = 80. The speed is less important than getting the style of the piece correct, with its typical accented syncopated phrases. You could try playing along with a metronome or metronome app, aiming for a speed of between crotchet = 80 and crotchet = 100, (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.