

Lento recitativo and Vivace from Sonatina by Peggy Glanville-Hicks

Treble recorder Grade 8, list A

Peggy Glanville-Hicks was an Australian composer who moved to study at the RCM with Vaughan-Williams. This piece was published in 1939, the same year as Lennox Berkeley's Sonatina. It is an absolute gem and, in my opinion, deserves the same status as the Berkeley in our repertoire. It is a joy to play and presents some wonderful challenges, making it an excellent piece to study with more advanced students.

Dynamics, air shape and fingerings

The piece demands a broad variety of dynamics, and these are a challenge on the recorder. It can be helpful to work on dynamics with a tuning machine or a piano.

At the start of the second movement, we're required to play pianissimo. On the recorder, if we blow less, it will cause the pitch to be flat. So, we can try and compensate for this by using a sharper fingering that will help us to hit the pitch we're after when we blow less.

A good starting point for a soft fingering is to find the note a semitone above the note you require and to experiment with adding fingers to lower the pitch (although there are some fingerings where this doesn't work). There are usually a few options for each "alternative" fingering and so you can have some fun trying different options and seeing which works best in the phrase and also listening for a tone colour that you like.

The pianissimo D at the start of the second movement could be played using 01345, 01345⁶ (half of 6) or 013567. Once you have chosen a fingering, it could be practised within scales and other exercises. It's important that you use a piano or tuning machine to help you check that the new fingering produces a note that's in tune and also to help in training you to know how much air to use with each new fingering.

You might decide to play all the longer notes in this opening phrase using alternative fingerings, or even every single note. It will need a lot of practise to embed the fingerings into your muscle memory and to remember how much air to use to play the notes in tune.

There are some resources available with lists of alternative fingerings, if you'd appreciate some help. For example, you could look at the comprehensive list of alternative fingerings in Walter van Hauwe's "The Modern Recorder Player" Volume 3, published by Schott.

It will also help to slow down the air that you're using in piano sections. You can do this by raising the soft palette, just like the start of a yawn, with an "ah" mouth shape.

At the end of the second movement, we're required to play a diminuendo on a piano note. Try using fingers 3 and 6 at the start of the note, as on the video, and then gradually peel them away as you use less air to create the desired effect. You'll have to listen really carefully to keep the note in tune!

For forte sections, try using fast, channelled air with an "oo" mouth shape. Combined with "flat" fingerings you'll be able to enjoy playing loud but in tune! You can create fingerings by starting from the note a semitone below the one you're after, or by adding extra fingers to the standard fingering. When you blow with fast, strong air the pitch will rise, and you can practise with the piano or a tuning app to find exactly what you need to do to play the notes where it

needs to be. An example of this is to add a half-hole of finger 6 to the forte Cs in bar 26 and 27.

Articulation

There are so many articulation marks throughout the whole of the Sonatina.

Slurring on the recorder requires very neat finger work and careful co-ordination between the breath and fingers. For example, bar 42-45 of the Vivace requires us to slur across tricky cross-fingerings, half-holed fingerings and those with closed, open and pinched thumbs! Lots of practise needed here, perhaps work with dotted rhythms or playing the notes in groups of 2's, 3's, 4's and 5's to create new patterns and challenge the fingers. My top tip would be to make sure that the weight of the recorder is supported with the right-hand finger 7 on the ledge of the foot joint. This will save other fingers trying to support the recorder and will stop the recorder from wobbling around.

Staccato semiquavers feature in the Vivace. You could try using T-K-T-K articulation for this. Help your student to find the "K" articulation in their speech with a sentence such as *I took a cooker*. Here, they can naturally find how their tongue and mouth makes the T (as in took) and K (as in cooker).

This could develop into *I took a took a* to allow for repetition of the T-K-T-K sounds. You could encourage your student to think about where in the mouth the tongue makes the sound and which particular bit of the tongue is used. It's helpful to practise saying the sounds and then playing with them, on one note. This could then develop into playing on scales or excerpts of the piece itself. The T-K-T-K sounds used for staccato are even brighter, with the air being stopped by the tongue between each sound, as it prepares for the next sound to be made. The action is very fast and makes an immediate impact on the sound. This very short break between each note can be advantageous for the fingers, allowing them to move ahead slightly in preparation for the next note. Staccato articulation is strong and can be rather explosive, sometimes causing notes to split and be overblown. One tricky moment for this is bar 12 or 21, where we need to play staccato in the lower register. You might find that one hardly needs to blow at all as more than sufficient air is provided simply throughout the articulation.

Other tricky moments

Playing very low chromatic notes is tricky on a recorder. Before playing sections such as bar 21 or 45 in the Vivace, it's worth checking that the foot joint is in optimum position to make these fingerings as comfortable as possible. Students should practise finding the F sharp and A flat as it can be tricky to place the fingers exactly where needed on the double-holes. A fast movement with the wrist can help particularly when moving between the low F and A flat.

The final trill in the Vivace is not a favourite amongst my students! It's worth practising moving from the high E at the end of bar 93 into an alternative/trill finger for G (try 1234567), perhaps even slurring it to check all the fingers are as precise as possible! Then we just need to trill finger 5.

Final Tip

This piece really is a joy to play. Do remember that it's very much a duet with the piano and so have a good look through the score to see how the two instruments interact. There are some recordings available: do listen to them and also try to play through with a pianist (or play along with a recording) so you really do get to know the whole piece well.

About Lou Bradbury

Lou Bradbury is a recorder player and teacher. She loves to teach all ages and abilities of recorder player at her studio. She has taught at Junior Guildhall and Birmingham Conservatoire and enjoys adjudicating and running workshops. Lou is the founder of Little Notes, delivering live music classes to families. She regularly performs with Fontanella Recorder Quartet and has performed at many festivals and venues across the UK and Europe. Lou has often appeared on TV and Radio including 8 out of 10 Cats does Countdown with Jimmy Carr and plays recorder on the soundtrack to the Wicked Movie.