

On the Bayou by C.C. White

Grade 5 Flute Syllabus

About the piece

This piece is structured in three parts: an opening section (A), a contrasting section (B), and a closing section which brings back some of the musical ideas from the opening (A'). In each section, the melodic phrases are often grouped in pairs – like a question followed by an answer. For example, the G# in b. 10 sounds like a question mark at the end of a sentence, but by the end of the following phrase in b. 18, it feels like the music has settled – more like a full stop! This is the end of the first section.

The contrasting section starts at b. 19 in a new key, but the pairing of phrases continues a little longer. From b. 31, the flute and the piano start passing small melodic phrases between each other before coming together and building to the climax of the piece in b. 41. The closing section starts back in the original key (F major) and uses some of the same melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic material from the opening, but shared with the piano. As the flute climbs down from its upper register and begins repeating smaller pieces of the melody, we can feel the music winding down towards the slower, peaceful ending.

What about this piece conveys a 'bayou'?

A bayou is a still lake or river, often surrounded by trees and filled with swamp-dwelling wildlife. You might like to show your pupil some images of a bayou. The relaxed tempo, quiet dynamics, and lilting rhythms evoke the still atmosphere of the river, almost like a lullaby. The harmony, sparse accompaniment, and the rhythmic repetition in the flute and piano also feel reminiscent of folk music from the southern United States where bayous are most commonly found. You might wish to explore some other music by C.C. White.

What does the poem say to you?

The poem's night-time setting, the mystery of the 'fantastic shadows', and the sense of stillness suggested by the mirror-like quality of the water are just a few of the many things that we can draw out of this short verse. In this piece, we're looking for a sustained and beautiful tone with long arching phrases to help convey a still, calm atmosphere, giving our performance a folk-song appeal. Attention to the dotted rhythms will give the piece its defining lilt and, in the *Un poco più mosso*, we want to add a sense of flow to the faster music.

Performing the dotted rhythm

There are different approaches to this: we can either perform the semiquaver as exactly a quarter of the length of a crotchet, or, we can shorten the semiquaver a tiny amount (more like a demisemiquaver) with added emphasis on the following quaver. This second approach will produce a more folk-like lilt and expression, so it depends on the mood that our pupils want to convey with their performance!

How do the rhythms affect the expression of each section?

The dotted rhythm of the first section invokes the idea of a folksong and a relaxed atmosphere. By contrast, the B section opts for phrases with more constant quavers which create movement, direction, and add a little more intensity along with the slightly faster tempo. The distinctive rhythm, repetition of phrases, relatively straightforward harmony and slower tempo are all characteristic features of the first and last sections. As mentioned earlier, the middle section's faster rhythms and tempo create a flowing energy. Also in this section, the loosening of the phrase repetitions, the more complex harmony, as well as the melodic conversation between the piano and the flute, make for a more exciting and shimmering atmosphere beneath the moon's 'floods of light' and the starry sky.

How do the key and tempo change the feel of the music?

In bars 19-42, the music moves away from the home key to Bb major. When we change key back to F major in b. 43, it creates a sense of return, of coming home. This, along with the slower tempo from the start of the piece, allows the performer and listener to enjoy the familiar music in a new and welcoming light.