

Flight of the Foo Birds

Flute, Grade 5

Introduction

Flight of the Foo Birds is a fun, energetic and jazzy piece that will unlock new skills in your student's playing. They will develop playing in a swung style with off-beat rhythms and accents that will develop their rhythmical understanding. Your students may previously have played some jazz compositions such as 'Holiday-Time' from the previous Grade 4 syllabus. This piece is a great next step for them to further develop their jazz style. Likewise, if you want something that is going to unleash more energetic playing or to help broaden your students' repertoire, or if your student desires more jazz style, then this is the perfect piece for them.

There are some steps we can take instead of putting the music in front of them and making them sight-read. We could start without the music in front of them to begin with.

Listen to the piece without the music discuss the piece with your student.

This will help them get into the sound world and character of the piece from the beginning. Ask them similar questions to the part C of the Aural Tests:

1. How would you describe the character of the piece?
2. What in the music gives the piece its character (articulation, dynamics, tempo, tonality, style etc.)?
3. What do you like about this piece? Or what stands out to you in this piece?

You will quickly grasp what your student is drawn to in the piece and be able to help them create their own goals for the piece. The footnote of the piece says, "Let it 'fly' off the page with bounce and excitement!" It's a great opportunity to explain the context of the piece and the style they will need to play in.

The Jazz Style

Driving Swing is the direction at the top of the piece. Help your students find the groove in two ways. Firstly, demonstrate an F major scale swung, then have your pupil try. As time goes on, you could play the scale in thirds to encourage your student to stay in time whilst swinging. This will help build the confidence of playing with an accompanist in this style.

Secondly, put on the accompaniment or original track and do some improvisation in a call and response format (use the rhythms in the music as a guide). You could start on one note like a C, then onto an F, do some octaves and arpeggios. You could also try a pentatonic scale along with the track. There are lots of off beats in the piece so be sure to create some off beat patterns to imitate. Extra thought: how is your student counting and feeling the beat? In 4/4 or in 2? Explore the different feelings that both ways of counting give.

Structure

Look at the piece and help your student identify the structure. ABACBAA'. There is quite a bit of repetition happening within the piece as well as some improvised-like moments. Identifying the structure will help your students plan their practice more effectively and see the end goal clearer.

In time, when they are feeling rhythmically confident with some flow in the piece, look through the piano part together and study the relationship with similar rhythms. Guide them to see where the flute and piano are playing in a homophonic style together as opposed to the metronomic crotchet parts of the bass in the improvised C section. Encourage your students to observe the similarities between the parts with a rhythmic part to fall back onto.

Extra: little finger sirens! The Ab to G triplet figure may be hard at first for your students. Before playing the piece through (in the lesson and in their practice), put a timer on for a minute and build up the strength of the little finger by trilling between the two notes.