‘Staccato Beans’

Composer: Tan Dun (b.1957)
Nationality: Chinese
Source/Date: *Eight Memories in Watercolour* (1978/2002)

‘Staccato Beans’ is a piano solo by Chinese composer Tan Dun. The piece features in both Tan Dun’s 1978 suite, *Eight Memories in Watercolour*, and in its 2002 revised release. This collection of piano solos is said to blend traditional Chinese folk music with sounds of the Western World. Dun’s original release is said to recall the period of his life in which the violence of the Cultural Revolution was coming to an end and Western music was no longer banned, hence its important inclusion in his composition.

Tan Dun is a Chinese composer, multi-instrumentalist and conductor. He is widely known for his work in music for film, including scores for *Hero* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, as well as his compositions for the 2008 Beijing Olympics medal ceremonies.

Preparation

As with all pieces that are intended to be performed at a fast pace, taking time to secure the basics first is a crucial step in the preparation process. The note patterns and finger position changes are relatively easily mastered. Be careful not to raise the tempo too quickly until you have truly mastered the articulations and dynamic changes.

Good hand positions and relaxed wrists are required to allow the various *staccato* and accented notes to be effective. Be sure to practise the left-hand opening bar in isolation, aiming for a clear contrast between the *legato* and *staccato* notes. Keep an even volume across the bar, taking care not to overly accent the first note of each bar so that when accents are required, they will have more of an impact.

When ready to assemble both parts together, rehearse at a slower speed to take the time needed to understand how best to balance the parts. Unlike some pieces where one hand takes on an accompanimental role throughout, this piece switches roles between both hands, as well as points where both hands should be well balanced to allow both contrapuntal lines to sing out, such as in bars 19 to 24.

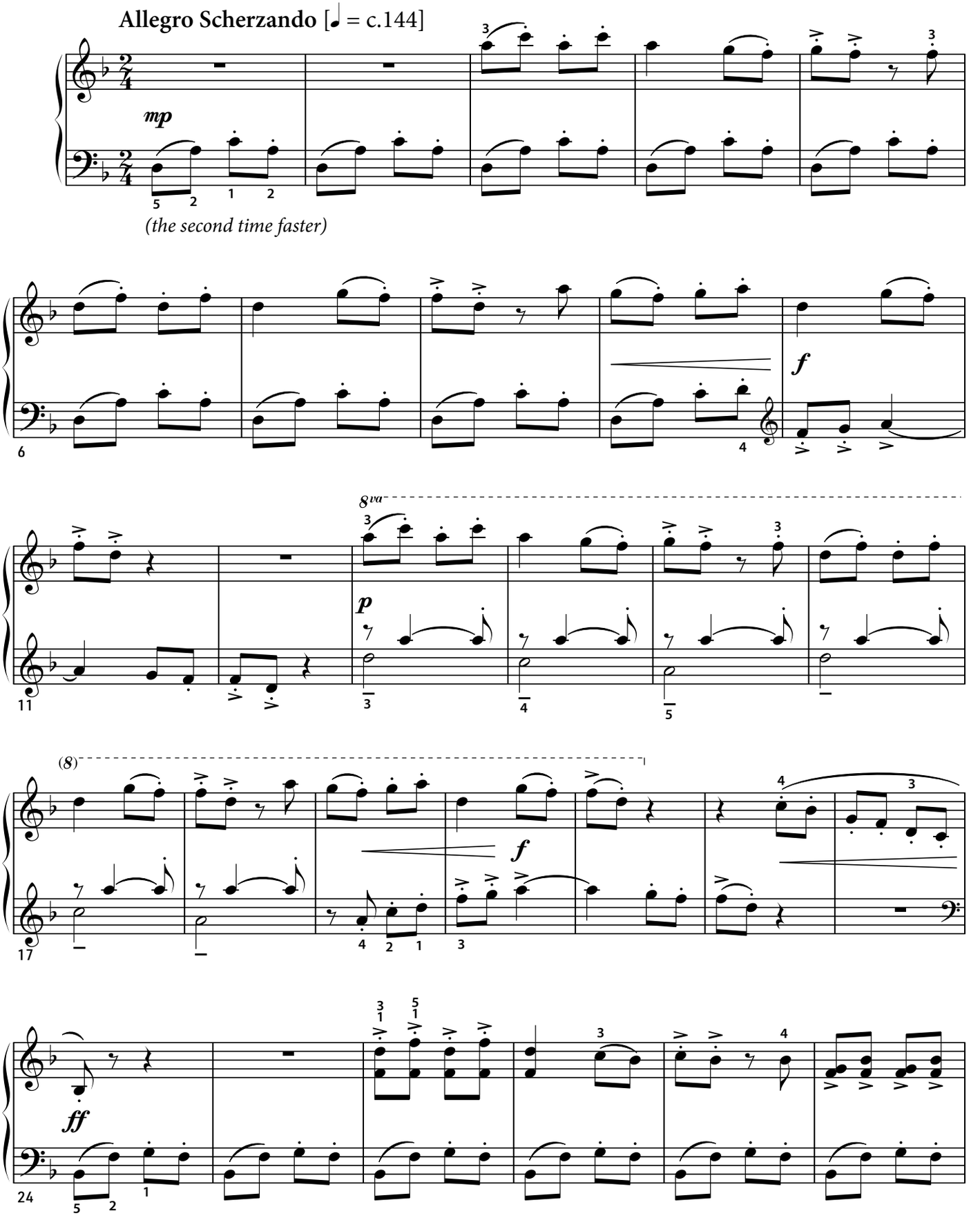
The piece is an exercise in dynamic variation and control, sometimes moving from one extreme to another within the space of a couple of beats. It can be challenging to control dynamics effectively and without affecting your articulation or tempo. If this is proving challenging, you may find rehearsing along to a metronome click will help to maintain an even pulse throughout.

Performance

‘Allegro scherzando’ translates as fast and playful. With a wide range of articulations and an equally varied range of dynamics, this extrovert piece is full of energy and character. The faster tempo on repeat helps to drive the performance forward to an even more exhilarating second half and final flourish. While the energy and drive needs to be constantly present, particularly in the quieter passages, be careful not to let this piece turn into a runaway train.

‘Staccato Beans’

Tan Dun



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Technical Exercises

In this section you will be required to play a selection of exercises drawn from each of the groups below. The examiner will be looking for the speed of your response and will also give credit for the level of your musicality. Please see the syllabus guide for details on the marking criteria.

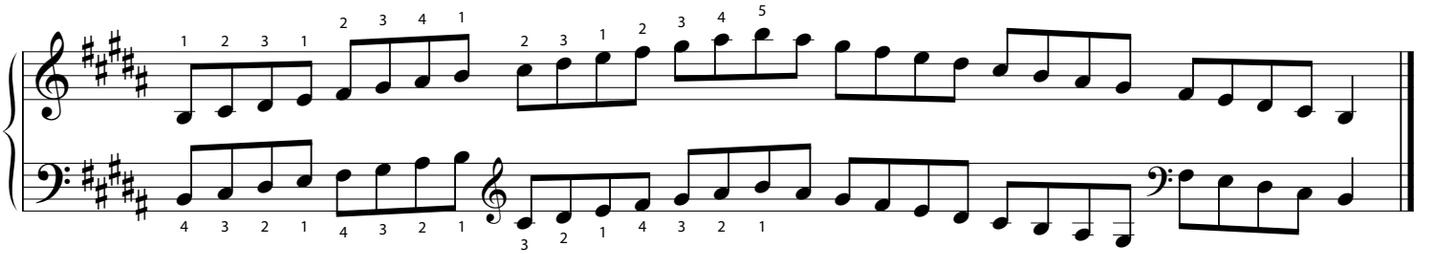
Candidates can choose to play either natural minor or harmonic minor scales

- Major scales, minor scales, chromatic scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together, in legato feel, ascending and descending, across three octaves (except contrary motion scales and pentatonics, which must be played over two octaves).
- Candidates must choose to play ***either*** natural minor ***or*** harmonic minor ***or*** melodic minor scales in the exam. The examiner will ask the candidate to state which set of minor scales they have prepared.
- Pentatonic scales are right hand only.
- Groups A and B (scales & arpeggios) must be played from memory. You may use your book for Group C (Technical Studies).
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- Candidates will be marked on tone quality and consistency, maintenance of pulse, and accuracy. Performances slower than the stated minimum tempo may be subject to qualitative judgement by the examiner, according to extent and commensurate with the grade.

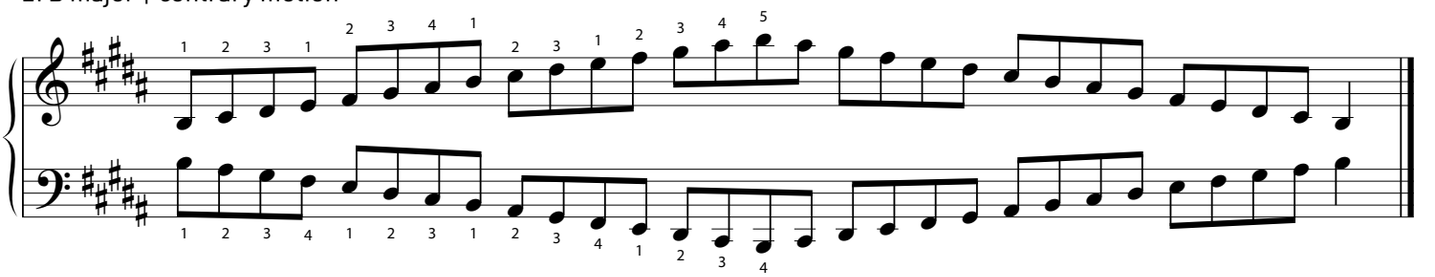
Group A: Scales

The minimum tempo for this group is ♩ = 126 bpm.

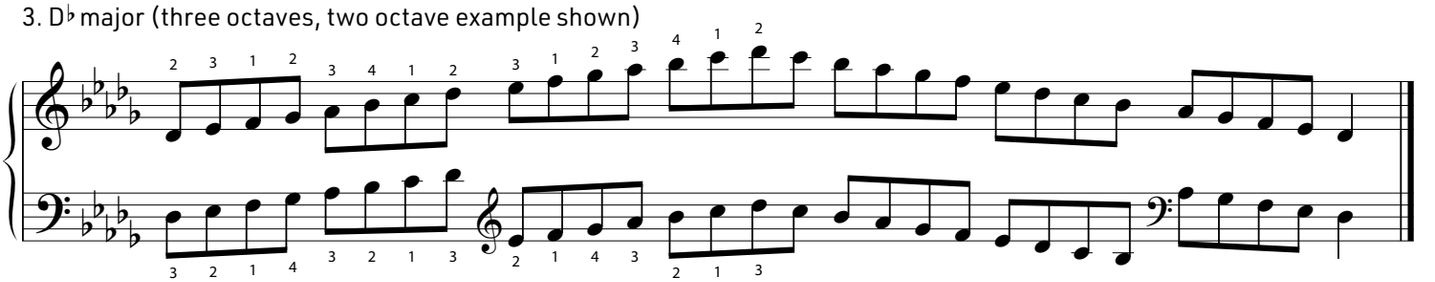
1. B major (three octaves, two octave example shown)



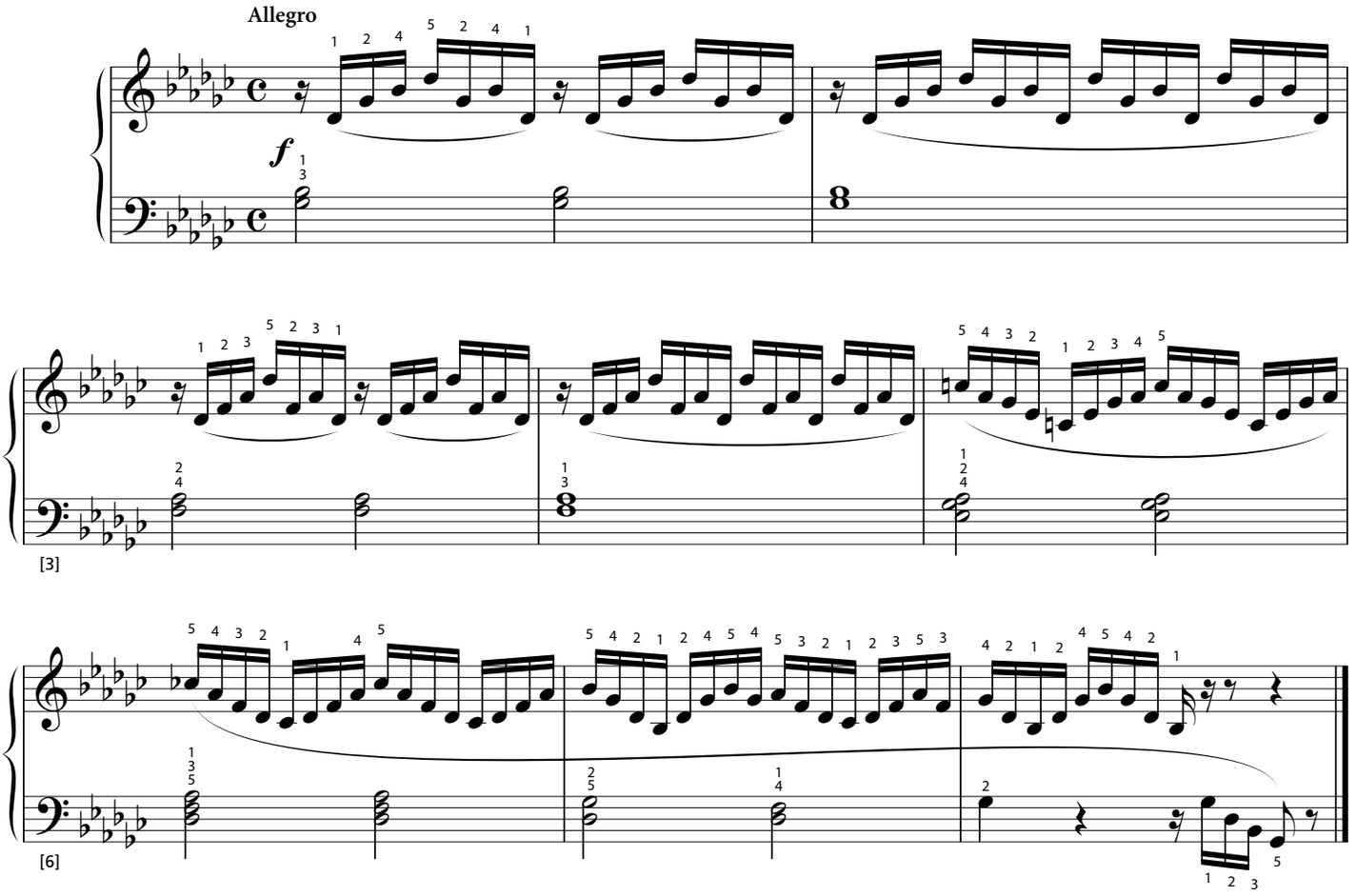
2. B major | contrary motion



3. D♭ major (three octaves, two octave example shown)



Group C: Technical Studies

In this section candidates must perform their choice of one of the following technical studies.

Technical Study 1