

'Silk Hat & Walking Cane'



Composer: Florence Price (1887–1953)
Nationality: American
Source/Date: *Dances in the Canebrakes* (1953)

'Silk Hat & Walking Cane' features as the third movement in Florence Price's piano suite, *Dances in the Canebrakes*. Originally composed for piano solo, the suite was also for orchestra.

Florence Price was an African-American composer born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887. She was initially taught music by her mother, a respected music teacher and went on to study piano and organ at the New England Conservatory, Boston. She began as a teacher and performer, but later in life went on to establish herself as a leading composer of orchestral pieces, radio adverts and silent films. Her Symphony in Em was first performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933 to great acclaim and, like her piano works, brings together stylistic features from both European and African-American traditions, reflecting her own cultural influences and passions.

Preparation



While much of the melodic material fits neatly under the fingers, there are several points in the music where the right hand plays two simultaneous lines requiring careful balance and phrasing, for example, in bars 14 to 23. Bars 21 and 22 involve holding the upper note while phrasing pairs of dyads underneath. This pattern can be easily adapted to create an effective warm-up exercise by 'staircasing' the motif in bar 21 as an ascending sequence. Try experimenting with different articulations to develop your ability to phrase multiple independent lines within the same hand.

The observance of rests, articulations and dynamics will help bring this piece alive. You may find that subtle *rubato* and additional dynamic shaping may be useful in bringing out the character and charm of the music. The move into the second main section at bar 55 benefits from a clear drop in dynamics for the two-bar introduction, before the melody enters in the following bar. Enjoy the constantly changing textures and articulations in this middle section, keeping the *staccatos* and accents precise so that the *legato* melody line can soar above.

The final section reprises the opening sequential melody with an increasing sense of scale and drama. Bars 94 to 98 will benefit from rehearsing slowly and in isolation to secure the fingering patterns and clean phrasing before applying the *accelerando*. Once secure, also take time to rehearse those bars leading in and out of this passage to secure the transition between phrases. Make sure you practise the final chord, starting to move the left hand over the top of your right hand as soon as it has finished playing the three lower notes to allow for a fast and confident spread chord effect.

Performance



The title of this third movement of Florence Price's 'Dances in the Canebrakes' evokes an image of a glittering ballroom full of theatrical drama and elegance. The flowing, syncopated melodic line, complete with straight eighth-note pattern accompaniment of the opening sequence, sets the mood for the poised and graceful cakewalk style. Set in three parts, a successful performance will be full of charm, light and shade, and sound effortless.

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.

- Major scales, minor scales, chromatic scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together, ascending and descending across four octaves.
- Contrary motion scales and pentatonic scales need to be played hands together, ascending and descending across two octaves.
- The examiner may also ask for *legato* or *staccato*.
- 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.
- 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 ♩=152 bpm.

1. F# major (four octaves, two octave example shown)

Musical notation for F# major scale exercise, two octaves example shown. The notation is in treble and bass clefs, showing the scale ascending and descending with suggested fingerings (1-4) above and below the notes.

2. F# major | contrary motion

Musical notation for F# major scale exercise, contrary motion. The notation is in treble and bass clefs, showing the scale ascending in the right hand and descending in the left hand with suggested fingerings (1-4) above and below the notes.

3. G^b major (four octaves, two octave example shown)

Musical notation for G^b major scale exercise, two octaves example shown. The notation is in treble and bass clefs, showing the scale ascending and descending with suggested fingerings (1-4) above and below the notes.

Sight Reading

In the exam, you have a choice between either a Sight Reading test or an Improvisation & Interpretation test. The examiner will ask you which one you wish to choose before commencing. Once you have decided you cannot change your mind.

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give you a 12–16 bar piece, to be played unaccompanied. You will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will ask you to commence the test.

Sight Reading | Example 1

Allegretto

The first system of musical notation consists of three measures. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The music is marked *mf*. The right hand starts with a whole chord in the first measure, followed by a half note chord in the second measure, and a whole note chord in the third measure. The left hand provides a simple accompaniment with chords and single notes.

The second system of musical notation consists of three measures. The right hand continues with chords, ending with a quarter note in the final measure. The left hand continues with a steady accompaniment.

[4]

The third system of musical notation consists of three measures. The right hand features more complex chordal textures. The music is marked *f* in the third measure. The left hand continues with a steady accompaniment.

[7]

The fourth system of musical notation consists of three measures. The music is marked *rit.* (ritardando). The right hand features chords, and the left hand continues with a steady accompaniment. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

[10]

Please note: The test shown is an example. The examiner will give you a different version in the exam