

Bennett's *Suite of Old American Dances*

An orchestral conductor's view

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I have never led a performance of Robert Russell Bennett's *Suite of Old American Dances* and I probably never will: it seems to me that the orchestral repertoire is sufficiently vast and rich to make a raid on the band repertoire unnecessary (I am aware of the fact that Bennett himself made an orchestral transcription of this suite, but I cannot imagine it sounding so fine in orchestral transcription as it does when the winds play it). Nevertheless, as I love this composition very much and consider it to be one of the crown jewels of the band repertoire, I would like to contribute a few insights concerning it.

Composed in 1949 and published the following year, the *Suite* proudly wears the mantle of a tradition that is hundreds of years old. During the 17th century, collections of dances for lute ("lute suites") were popular over much of Western Europe, and by the early 18th century that template had been pressed into orchestral service. From rather modest beginnings, the orchestral suite continued to grow in all its dimensions and in its seriousness throughout the second quarter of the 18th century, with J.S. Bach's four extant compositions of this kind furnishing our finest examples. In this mature form, a French-style overture opens the suite, setting the tone for what is to follow: a set of dance-like movements in a more-or-less predictable succession. Both the stateliness of that overture's opening and the polyphonic complexity of its second section make it clear that these suites are not actually for dancing, even though each of the subsequent movements typically bears the name of a dance (the "Air" in Bach's third suite being an exception). These movements as a rule followed the most standard of dance rubrics: two repeated sections, with the second section answering and "completing" the first. Furthermore, many of the dances were grouped in pairs – often contrasting – with a *da Capo* presentation of the first of the pair completing a rounded two-part movement (whose overall form is thus diagrammed ABA). This practice eventually led to the "Minuet and Trio" movements of classical symphonies.

Occasionally, the suite assumed the character of a concerto for a particular instrument or small group of instruments. Notable examples are the B-minor orchestral suite of Bach and a well-known suite in A minor by Georg Philipp Telemann. Both of these are *de facto* concertos for flute, with a *ripieno* accompaniment by strings. The thing that is most un-concerto-like about them is that all of their movements are set in the same key.

During the second half of the 18th century the orchestral suite went into dormancy and was more or less replaced by the wind serenade, designed with outdoor performance in mind. Following the lead of its forebears, the wind serenade tends to open with a weighty sonata-form essay followed by a succession of dance-like movements. In the best of these serenades – three by W.A. Mozart in particular come to mind – composers tended to stretch the boundaries set by earlier practices. So it is that in the celebrated *Gran Partita* we find a movement that is clearly an orchestral aria, a theme-and-variations movement and a rondo finale (whose character is nevertheless dance-like). By the early 19th century, even this second-generation practice was beginning to disappear, and the most talented composers generally declined to lavish their best

efforts on compositions of this type, preferring to make their reputations with more serious works. Those first-rank composers who *did* write collections of orchestral dances (Brahms, Dvorák) did not organize them in “suites.”

Edvard Grieg’s 1884 *From Holberg’s Time: Suite in Olden Style* is thus an anomalous revisiting of a practice long abandoned – and its title is quite revealing. And with a few other exceptions dating from the late 1800s and early 1900s, the “suite” generally came to be understood as a collection of the most popular sections drawn from a larger ballet, subject to casual re-arrangement or omission of movements in performance (the standard Suite from Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker* ballet furnishes one very well-known example).

During the first two decades of the 20th century, orchestral suites composed *as such* tended overwhelmingly to look back to earlier models, even to the point of near-plagiarism. Thus we have the suite for small orchestra drawn from Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella*, Ottorino Respighi’s *Ancient Airs and Dances*, Zoltan Kodaly’s *Galanta Dances*, Maurice Ravel’s *Le tombeau de Couperin* (this last is more “original” than the others cited). Of these, only *Pulcinella* was designed for dancing – but only in the overarching ballet context not as a derived suite.

Bennett’s *Suite* – the composition under scrutiny in this article – is likewise to be understood as music for listening not dancing (for unmistakable proof, see measures 158–66 of Movement 1!). As the Foreword to Edward Higgins’ recently-published full score makes clear, the title of the 1950 publication was furnished by the editor not the composer (Bennett’s title – *Electric Park* – suggests a descriptive work in several movements, after the manner of Debussy’s *La Mer* and *Nocturnes* and Ravel’s *Rhapsody Espagnole*). There are, however, compelling reasons for treating this work as if the title by which we know it were exactly what the composer intended in the first place. I believe these reasons will occasionally surface in the course of our examination.

The full score mentioned above (Hal Leonard, 1999) includes quite a bit of information about the work’s genesis and the dances upon which its several movements are based. I will not revisit that information here: instead, I recommend that the student of this work purchase the score.

A Synopsis of the *Suite of Old American Dances*

The *Suite* consists of five movements, whose respective tempo, form, character and key are as follows:

1.	Cake Walk	Allegretto	Sonata allegro	lively and energetic	B \flat major
2.	Schottische	Moderato	ABA	somewhat sultry	G Dorian
3.	Western One-Step	Allegro ma non troppo	Rondo	fast and vigorous	C minor
4.	Wallflower Waltz	Tempo di “Missouri Waltz”	AB	<i>valse triste</i>	F major
5.	Rag	Gaily, in easy two	Rondo	energetic finale	B \flat major

It is obvious that the key scheme for this suite is highly coherent – very much like what one would expect in a closely reasoned multi-movement symphonic argument. Likewise, the alternation of tempos (roughly, fast–slow–fast–slow–fast) calls to mind some of the later 18th-century wind serenades. The first movement’s formal complexity compared to the remaining movements harks back to the organizational template in use during the first half of the 18th century, when a French-style overture clearly functioned as the work’s center of gravity.

Movement 1: Cake Walk

Introduction (mm. 1–21)

The Cake Walk – and with it, the entire *Suite* – begins with a syncopated fanfare based on the B \flat pentatonic scale. From its opening F, its goal is the F one octave higher: having achieved it, the participating instruments sustain it long enough to convince the listener that the first movement begins with a dominant prolongation.

As the sustaining instruments die away, much of the rest of the band joins in with a syncopated linear progression, pan-diatonic in content and treatment, that – through a brief *stretto* in measures 9–11 (which results in a hemiola: 3/4 time imposed on the prevailing 2/4) – allows the lower-voiced instruments to land on an E \flat /B \flat pedal just before the downbeat of measure 12. But certain higher-voiced instruments (horns, trumpets, some of the woodwinds) cadence out onto an A major triad at precisely the same movement, and their contribution is reinforced by a more assertive and self-assured line in the upper woodwinds, cornets and trombones expressing the A pentatonic collection. As we will see, this tritone polarity – especially in its A/E \flat spelling – will exercise an important local shaping influence in the *Suite*. (It also constitutes a promise, to be fulfilled near the end of the final movement.)

An irregular and misspelled French augmented sixth chord on the last half-beat of measure 15 turns the music suddenly toward D \flat major, but this arrival proves to be nothing more than the first of a string (*progression* would be too strong a word) of major-quality triads (D \flat , E \flat , G \flat , A \flat) on their pentatonic-stepwise way to B \flat , the home key's tonic chord at last achieved at measure 18. Even here, the Introduction is not yet finished. For the next four measures we hear a repeated succession of falling whole-tone-related triads (B \flat , A \flat , G \flat , F \flat – the latter enharmonically respelled as E) which suggests to me that a Roman numeral analysis of this *Suite* would be largely unproductive. That is to say, this music is about as nearly in B \flat major as Hindemith's *Symphony in B flat* – hence the omission of a key signature (this applies to all of the movements).

I recommend that this 21-measure introduction be phrased as follows:

1–4	Fanfare
5–11	Continuation with <i>stretto</i> (2 + 2 + 3)
12–15	Strong assertion of tritone polarity
16–17	Beginning of a consequent to the “tritone polarity” section
18–22	Completion of Introduction, beginning with a phrase elision

Close adherence to the printed dynamics will produce a marvelous effect rarely heard in performance (only the opening fanfare is loud).

This seems to me as good a place as any to say something about the proper way to play the syncopated figure that opens the work and reappears hundreds of times thereafter. One must always keep in mind that a system of symbolic notation in music is a kind of shorthand for something that was widely recognized and understood in the *milieu* in which that system was used. Almost any of the rhythmic patterns that composers write can be distorted to the point of grotesquery without actually violating what that written pattern *might possibly represent*. It is thus of paramount importance to understand how Robert Russell Bennett

would probably have “heard” this music “in his own head.” This can best be ascertained by singing the lines: he certainly would not have heard something like what an unassisted computer would make of this pattern. Surely he meant for the first note to be absolutely full-length, the second one to be quite short, and the third to be full-length, the fourth and fifth to be quite short, and so on. Try singing it, and see if it isn’t so. Try it any other way, and see if the result isn’t utterly crude and tasteless.

First Theme area (mm. 22–68)

The form of Theme I is $a a^1 b a^2$. That portion identified as a spans measures 22–29; a^1 , measures 30–37; b , measures 38–57 (the last four measures being a reiteration of the final four bars of the introduction); and a^2 , 58–68 (the apparent restatement of a begun in m. 58 is broken off at a phrase elision at m. 61; the remainder of the section is a transition to Theme II).

The pentatonicism established by the opening fanfare proves to be integral to the a portion of Theme I. Its first statement (22–29) begins exactly like the opening fanfare, and its continuation takes it all the way to the tonic pitch expressed in the lower octave and gotten to by means of an octave drop (m. 26). At the point where the tonic pitch is achieved, the final four measures of the Introduction are re-sounded to complete the phrase. The second statement (a^1 , mm. 30–37) gives us a re-ordering of the same collection, with a diatonic note (the A in m. 33) thrown in for good measure; this time the drop to low tonic is not so extreme. The final four measures of the introduction begin again at measure 34, but this time the bass descent continues. The harmonies in 36–37 can be understood as related to B \flat major, but one must invoke some rather remote secondary functions in order to read them that way (e.g. a \flat II 6_4 /IV on the downbeat of 37). As I indicated earlier (and as the preceding example illustrates), a Roman numeral analysis will at times seem alien to the character of the *Suite*, and will thus be mostly omitted.

The b portion of the theme begins at the subdominant level: its antecedent phrase (38–45) consists, oddly enough, of an obstinate reiteration of the head motive of the medieval *Dies Irae* in dance-like syncopation! (Whether Bennett had some extra-musical reference in view, I am unable to say.) This is sounded against equally obstinate hammerings of the E \flat major triad in the cornets; in its second four bars their harmony moves upward to F minor, while the “melody” continues as though nothing had happened (there is a slight rhythmic adjustment). The consequent begins in G minor (the submediant of B \flat), and moves to C minor (approximately) – or ii – at measure 50. (I say “approximately” because of the vigorous modal dispute between C major and C minor, expressed in the E \natural s and E \flat s of several instruments.) The tonic of B \flat major returns at measure 54, and once again we hear the final four bars of the introduction, setting up the return of a . It should not go unnoticed that the harmonic argument of much of the b portion of Theme I is predicated on a stepwise bass (not always expressed in a bass voice!): that is, from E \flat in 38 to F in 42 to G in 46. This last finally yields – *via* circle-of-fifths – to C (from which the music then moves stepwise back to B \flat).

The return of a at measure 58 – now at the *mezzo forte* level (when was the last time you heard a difference in performance?) – begins in the antecedent version as at 22 ff. But the trombones quickly opt for what appears at first blush to be an entirely new project at the downbeat of 61 (it is actually a rhythmically augmented and intervallically compressed

transformation of the upper woodwind/cornet/trumpet line at 45 ff.) – it is this bold move that sets the transition in motion. The goal of the transition is the D in 67 f. that constitutes the dominant of G (it serves the same function for the new key as the held F in mm. 3 f. did for B \flat). The harmonies in these measures are therefore related at least remotely both to B \flat major and G major; again, far-flung secondary functions would have to be invoked to explain all of them. It does seem to me worthy of mention, however, that the reiterated E \flat Mm seventh chords (V⁷/VII in B \flat) actually constitute – and are ultimately treated as – misspelled German augmented sixth chords in G! It's a rather bumpy ride, but it'll get you there.

The phrasing of the Theme I area is mostly regular. Eight-measure phrases prevail until measure 54, when the last part of the introduction returns as a four-bar interjection. We expect the same regularity from 58 onward, but a phrase elision at 61 defeats that expectation. From this point, a case may be made for two four-bar phrases from 61 through 68; the two-bar *stretto* at 65 f. and the sudden change of character at 67, however, cast some doubt on this interpretation.

Scrupulous observation of dynamic markings throughout the Theme I area will yield a very colorful and quite memorable presentation. Note that *forte* is achieved in only two places. In performance, it will also be necessary to make sure that groups of continuous sixteenth notes – which appear in two places in Theme I b – are played cleanly, with close attention given to every pitch along the way.

Second Theme area (mm. 69–139)

The tonal relationship between B \flat major and G major is not an obvious one: the one feature that allows them even to speak to each other is the single pitch shared by their respective tonic chords. That pitch is, of course, the last thing we heard in the transition. The arrival of G major at 69 is almost unbelievably fresh and bright sounding, and the thematic material itself is maximally contrasting.

Theme II is in two parts, hereinafter known as IIA and IIB. IIA spans measures 69–90, and IIB, 98–139. The measures I omitted (91–97) constitute a brief isorhythmic transition to IIB, and measures 130–39, which I included in IIB, are actually a closing and a bridge to the development section.

The form of Theme IIA is *a a' b*. The first of these subsections begins with a planing of root-position diatonic triads in G major; this procedure will be encountered again in the *Suite*. A brief response lands on an inverted tonic ninth chord used as “minor v” in m. 72 – this chord lends a momentary Mixolydian hue to Theme II. The follow-up to this promising beginning is a lovely legato fall in thirds against a two-pitch isorhythm (a sort of “measured trill”) derived from Theme I. A reiteration (*a'*) begins at measure 77, but this time the response takes us to an inverted E \flat eleventh chord (m. 80) used as “minor v” of B \flat (B \flat is the mediant chord borrowed from G minor). This time the treble response (81–84) is quite a bit more sophisticated and yields, in its final measure, a clearly functional vii^{♭7}/V in G (m. 84). This inaugurates a great sweep of planed parallel diatonic seventh chords (part *b* of IIA) that amount to a prolongation of V/IV. This leads – logically enough – to a prolongation of V/V, presented as a four-note isorhythm in Theme I rhythm (91 ff.), further complicated by an additional three-note isorhythm in solo trumpet beginning at measure 95. This isorhythmic passage serves as a transition to the second large part of Theme II, which begins with a

deceptive cadence on E \flat major at bar 98. Note that the motion to this cadence is from a prolongation of A (V/V in G major) directly to E \flat – a notable linear expression of the A/E \flat tritone dichotomy first heard in the introduction.

Theme IIB is unquestionably the finest melody in Movement 1. It is a gorgeous, richly harmonized line in E \flat major (the flat submediant key of G – note that once again a common tone is important, as in moving from B \flat to G). Much of the harmonic richness of this theme is attributable to the imaginative use of chromatic enhancements that inflect the modality now this way, now that. The use of high tertians – ninth and eleventh chords – also contributes to the voluptuousness of this passage. Meanwhile, the upper woodwinds skip along in Theme I rhythm, but in much more conjunct, arch-like figures than before. A remarkable pair of musical “sighs” at measures 110–13 moves the music momentarily to G \flat major (III/e \flat) at measure 114 – the beginning of an eight-measure interlude. The way out of this harmonic “purple patch” soon appears, as we return to E \flat *via* a PAC at 118.

A second statement of IIB commences at 122, but in its eighth measure we suddenly get a V/G, which returns the theme to its proper home key – with Mixolydian inflections – at measure 130. This is the beginning of a brief closing section. The music suddenly becomes deadly serious – even when deflected back to G Ionian (m. 134). The continuous 16th-note figure from 132 is now sequenced abruptly downward (mm. 136–39) in earnest unison; a hemiola in 138 ff., mired in D \flat , sets up the development section in that key – a tritone removed from the primary key of Theme II.

Now, a few words about performing Theme II. It is very important to honor the printed dynamics throughout this lengthy section. In the first part of the theme, we are called upon *by the composer* to maintain *piano* all the way through measure 84. Only by doing so can the great sweep of measures 85 ff. stand out in their proper relief. We are not allowed a *forte* until the isorhythmic transition that begins at 91. In IIB (98 ff.), *piano* is once again required of us. The singing quality that we wish to hear from those instruments that carry this beautifully harmonized line must not trump the dynamic that the composer has indicated. Note that the crescendo in 114 f. does not rise to anything like the clamorous, exuberant *forte* heard so often in performance: it’s only a little thing, and the prevailing dynamic is still *piano* (Bennett has his reasons, and as we approach the end of the movement those reasons will become clear). Moreover, the dynamic nuance in 118–21 is a modest one. Even at the general *poco crescendo* (mm. 126 ff.), most of the increase must be suppressed until the hairpin at 129 – *there* is where the music must suddenly flare into a full-fledged *forte* (this new dynamic prevails in the first part of the development). Finally, a word about the first of the eighth notes played by the first flute and piccolo in measure 98 and again in 122 (this applies to additional players in m. 112): that note *must not* be played full length *espressivo* as I have so often heard. Rhythmically-speaking, it corresponds to the second note of the opening fanfare, and must be played short for the reasons given above.

Development (mm. 140–70)

The development section is brief, and it is clear that elaborate harmonic argumentation is not in view here (its formal design notwithstanding, this movement is a Cake Walk). The preceding bridge more or less dumped the music onto D \flat major, and it proceeds from there with Mixolydian inflections. The first material treated comes from second half of the eight-

bar interlude that lies between statements of Theme IIb (mm. 114 ff.; the “developed” material is in 118 ff.). The first four measures of this passage (140–43) appear destined for a literal repeat from 144, but are soon turned to a V^7/E_b in 146. This allows for a *fortissimo* presentation of the voluptuous Theme IIB as from measure 98 (perhaps it is now clear why the earlier passage must be played *piano*!). This project is re-directed beginning in measure 152, and the music is deflected to G_b major at 153 (we’ve seen this kind of thing before, in the passage leading to m. 114). From that point a sort of chromatic “progression” takes over in all voices, its goal being the $E_b^6_4$ chord on the downbeat of 156. What follows is a dominant prolongation in E_b – which happens to be a tonic prolongation in B_b !

This is one of the most curious retransitions ever written. Over a timpani roll and otherwise sustained (and in some voices, repeatedly articulated) dominant (or is it tonic?) pedal, middle-voiced instruments play a 7/8-time version of the introductory material in measures 5 ff. This 7/8-time material is uncomfortably superimposed upon the prevailing 2/4 meter; most cruelly of all, the upper woodwinds have to punctuate – accurately – the “long third beat” of each 7/8 measure, with only a very clumsy-looking notational scheme to guide them (I recommend re-writing the passage, making 4 measures of 7/8 time out of 7 measures of printed 2/4 time: this should make things far easier for everyone concerned, including the conductor). The dynamic shape of this retransition is most impressive. It begins with a *fortissimo* timpani roll that quickly subsides to *pianissimo*. From that point, a slow, very carefully regulated crescendo returns the music to *fortissimo* at 167, where an augmented version of the opening fanfare against a plethora of trills introduces the recapitulation (note the re-ordering of introductory material). I must confess that I don’t trust individual ensemble players to manage their crescendos carefully (this goes double for *diminuendi*): experience has taught me a thing or two. I therefore advocate writing in “intermediate dynamics” to assist them in calculating the increase. For this reason I would place a *piano* marking in all parts at 160, *mp* at 162, *mf* at 164, and *forte* at 166 flaring into *fortissimo* at 167, as the final hairpin suggests.

Recapitulation and Coda (mm. 171–228)

When studying a recapitulation, the first question to tackle is the question of *regularity*. A recapitulation can be *literal*, in which case the only real difference is that both themes are presented in the tonic key (the number of measures is the same as in the exposition, and their function does not change much); it can be profoundly *irregular* (greatly truncated, whole sections missing, sections rearranged, etc.); or it can be fairly regular with noticeable adjustments. The recapitulation of the Cake Walk is of the latter type. Theme I is almost completely represented in its prior form, but Theme II (absent its first half) is so completely re-worked that it becomes, essentially, a coda.

The return of Theme I is structurally regular except for a singular event at measure 199, where the function of four measures (50–53) is compressed into a single bar, and the last four measures of the introduction that previously introduced the return of Ia (54–57) are omitted entirely. Its structural regularity notwithstanding, this recapitulation affords a great wealth of new details. Instead of the sweetly singing, harmonized version of Ia that we heard at 22 ff., we have a unison, *fortissimo* presentation in three octaves. The music that follows does make a diminuendo, but only to *mezzo-forte* this time, with new, “chattering” 16th-note figures appearing in woodwinds against a *harmonized* version of a^1 (179–82). Theme Ib is here accompanied by a lyrical countermelody in upper woodwinds, and its second phrase

(191–94) is at last brought into line with the prevailing harmony (cf. 42 ff.). Its continuation (195–99) is far more vigorous than before because of woodwind ornamentations (chromatic lower neighbors in 16th-note patterns) and, as I indicated earlier, four of its original measures are compressed into one. The transition from 203 onward takes the same shape as before, but with a much fuller orchestration and in a long crescendo (warn the ensemble against overdoing this: it's a crescendo from *forte* to *fortissimo* over the course of six measures!).

At measure 209, two measures are missing as compared to the exposition: this is where unison Ds were earlier held in order to establish the G major of Theme II. Here, Theme IIB simply comes charging in, in A \flat major, *fortissimo* (the reason for its prior statement in *piano* thus becomes clear). The theme is as richly harmonized before, but its presentation is far more muscular, and the dancing figure of the upper woodwinds is re-worked into a much more energetic flurry of sixteenth notes. The theme is not allowed to take its established course: its rising scale now leads to a sequence in E \flat major beginning at a phrase elision at measure 215. It is of course obvious where Bennett is heading – and this time *via* the time-honored circle of fifths rather than such stepwise progressions as we've seen earlier. So it is that B \flat major is finally achieved at the movement's final phrase elision, measure 215. The tonic chord is sounded triumphantly in upper saxophones, cornets, trumpets and upper trombones while upper woodwinds repeatedly rise through an octave's worth of chromatic scales in thirds and lower voices make a curious, halting cascade to the low tonic (note their strange, overlapped, sequenced pattern). The ending is as exuberant as anyone might wish.

Movement 2: Schottische

In the second movement the “somewhat sultry” Dorian version of G minor prevails, with a more coquettish E \flat -major “B” section set in high relief. The first “A” section occupies the first thirty measures; “B” runs from 31 through 64, with the last four of those measures serving as a retransition; and the return of the first part of “A” is written out and yields to a ten-bar coda at measure 80.

The tonal scheme of this movement is reminiscent of that of the Cake Walk: there, the two main themes were presented in B \flat major and G major respectively; here, the music falls from G minor to E \flat major. In the Schottische, however, the contrast is less vivid than in the Cake Walk, as E \flat major and G minor are much more closely related than B \flat major and G major. Tertian movement between related major and minor keys is practically a commonplace; tertian movement between two keys of the same modality is as rare as hens' teeth and always very attention-grabbing (in the Brahms Symphony No. 1, the move from the first movement's C-major coda to the E-major second movement produces much the same effect as the shift from B \flat major to G major in the Cake Walk).

The “A” portion of the movement is formally simple: it mostly consists of a single reiterated idea subtly elaborated on its succeeding appearances, self-contained but for recurring phrase elisions, and a brief closing.

Unlike the Cake Walk, the Schottische starts suddenly (it is the only movement in the *Suite* that begins without an introduction). Curiously enough, for the first three measures it is impossible to say whether the music is in G minor or G major (the F \sharp s in m. 3 signal either the Dorian or Mixolydian mode, but we cannot say which just yet). It is the B \flat in measure 4 that decides the case in favor of a minor mode – but it arrives simultaneously with the E \flat of

the Dorian mode on G – the “brightest” of the available Dorian-scale pitches. It is this arrival that lends much of the “sultry” quality that I referred to earlier. The tune is, as I indicated above, “self-contained:” it begins on low G, rises to high D, and descends again to low G (the descent – m. 7 – is somewhat Blues-inflected).

The structural feature that overrules the self-containment of this simple theme is the beginning of a second statement precisely at the downbeat of measure 8. And this turns out to be not quite a second statement: a more fully developed idea surfaces at bar 12 and holds good for eight measures, its conclusion (from m. 17) precisely as earlier (6 ff.). The rather thick harmonization in measures 13 and 15 is worth noting: this is less functional than colorful.

Another phrase elision at measure 19 functions exactly as before (at m. 8), with the same result. This time an apparent restatement of the theme yields to a mighty upswing in flutes and clarinets, to a suddenly *forte*, highly charged rhythmic presentation of a complete pentatonic collection functioning as “iv” (23 f.). Predictably, this gives way to “V” as represented by a closely harmonized dotted-rhythm descent in a large part of the ensemble (25 f.). A much quieter and much more modest upswing in the last part of measure 26 inaugurates a *pianissimo* repeat of the preceding, with a totally different outcome! (The sudden bursting-forth of G major at m. 29 – the grandmother of all Picardy thirds – is probably the most extravagant gesture in the entire *Suite*.) As a performance concern – in addition to the obvious need to observe the dynamics to this point – note the squared-off rhythm in measure 30. It is absolutely essential that this measure be performed *exactly as written* (more on this later).

Like the movement itself, the “B” section begins immediately (there is no bridge between the big sections – the second simply steps up to replace the first). The shift to E \flat major is arresting, and the new tune is (as with Theme II in the first movement) maximally contrasting. It is also in *a b a* form. In contrast to the “A” section, there no trace of severity in this music: its lilting opening phrase (essentially an inversion of m. 3) is offered in parallel thirds in two octaves (a very sweet-sounding presentation) against a warm, more deep-throated, dynamically-nuanced countermelody with just a hint of E \flat minor.

The apparent innocence of the new theme’s *a* subsection (31–42) belies its structural sophistication: a close listening makes it plain that we are not dealing with regular four-bar phrases. The irregularities, however, are not generated as they were in the “A” section of the movement, where the ends of whole phrases were simply re-assigned the role of the beginnings of new ones. Here, the structural anomalies lie a little deeper. On the surface, *a* looks for all the world like a neat succession of four-bar subphrases – three of them. But the ear – which cannot “see” – senses something completely different: namely, a four-bar phrase that, interrupting the forward motion after a mere two bars, spans measures 33–36. And what sounds like a consequent of that phrase – from measure 37 on – is almost immediately broken off by yet another four bar phrase (39–42), ending on the dominant and therefore calling for an answering phrase. And in retrospect, any attempt to rationalize a more “regular” structural layout than the one I’ve described yields something that the ear finds completely counterintuitive (try it, and you’ll see what I mean).

As the music returns to the tonic of E \flat major, the *b* subsection of “B” (43–52) begins with a very expansive tune in a number of mid- to low-voiced instruments, its warm harmonies

enriched by quite a few chromatic inflections. A delicate countermelody skips along nonchalantly above this rich theme, with an understated bass & horn “oom-pah” accompaniment completing the package. A more energetic consequent phrase begins at measure 47, but is broken off after two bars by the same music we heard earlier at 39–42, and of course ends just as inconclusively. (Structurally speaking, *a* and *b* “rhyme.”)

The return of subsection *a* at measure 53 is regular in all structural respects and in most of its details. The one change is the onset of the retransition at measure 61: this new and increasingly “threatening” music replaces the teasing half-cadential phrase that appeared in the corresponding place the first time through (39–42). The retransition’s harmonies are more linear than strongly functional, but they get the job done. Let us note in passing that *not once* was the music of section B allowed to come to a satisfactory conclusion.

The reprise of “A” (from m. 65) is virtually literal through measure 79, so other than passing mention of an enhanced role for the horns from measure 75, there’s nothing new to say about it. The coda, which occupies the last ten measures of the movement, begins with music that is somewhat new but clearly related to what preceded it. It is pretty much mired in the tonic of G minor for its first four measures (80–83). Then, over the continuing bass-range accompaniment that has underpinned so much of this movement, the melodic voices provide a great chromatic descent of parallel root-position triads. They momentarily come to rest on an E_b minor chord at measure 86, then find their way through functional harmony back to G – presented in the major mode for the last two measures (another Picardy third, but as delicate and evaporative as the earlier instance – 29–30 – was extravagant).

The Schottische is a really fancy piece of work, beautifully understated except for two amazing measures. It serves as one of the two “slow movements” of this dance suite. It must be played with the utmost tastefulness and attention to detail. Concerning the latter, here are a few that I find worth mentioning.

The *mezzo-piano* dynamic of the opening establishes a dynamic kinship with the first theme of Movement 1. This understated dynamic must be faithfully maintained throughout the opening section so that the events that begin in the last part of measure 22 can make their intended impact! This means that *all* of the accents in the first twenty-two measures are *within mezzo-piano* – they are not brutal *sforzandi*! (Moreover, these are all *tenuto* accents, which means, among other things, that the eighth note on beat 3 of measure 13 must *not* be played short. To introduce a space before the syncope is to cheapen the effect considerably: these two notes are essentially connected: dah-daaahhh.) The dynamic at 23 *ff.* is *only forte* (the *fortissimo* of flutes and clarinets is merely an accent on the first note of the phrase). The *pianissimo* that follows shortly thereafter must be the quietest sound those players have ever produced.

About the rhythm: it seems to me that the duple figures in the first twenty-nine measures absolutely *must* be “swung” as triplets. The square rhythms in measure 30, however, must be played *exactly as written*. Try it, and you’ll see why. The effect is absolutely unforgettable.

The music from 31 through 60 is unambiguously marked as to dynamic – with different volume levels indicated for different instruments, *all of which must be scrupulously observed*. Again, it seems to me that the rhythms must be “swung” throughout this section. The dynamic scheme of the retransition (61 *ff.*) is problematic on two levels. First, every part

except those for two trumpeters and a lone percussionist is marked merely *cresc.* – yet these instruments were playing in quite a range of dynamics prior to this moment. Moreover, Bennett does not indicate what volume the crescendo should take us to: we know only that it must be significantly louder than *mezzo-piano* since the members of the clarinet family are required to *drop suddenly* to that dynamic. Here are my suggestions, although, of course, I cannot be sure that they are the best solutions to this problem. First, have everyone in the group begin that passage *piano* (the parts with diminuendo hairpins just before m. 61 are in fact falling from *mp*). This means overruling the *mp* marking in the trumpets and percussion, but I believe the coherency of the result will justify the emendation. Ask everyone to be *very conservative* with the crescendo, even when it is reinforced with a long hairpin. Bring the ensemble up to no more than a generous *mezzo-forte*, as if the next downbeat would yield a true *forte* (let mm. 23–26 be your guide). Then, instead of reaching that intended *forte*, make the bottom drop out.

As for the coda: all parts begin *mezzo-piano*, clearly enough. The trumpet *solis* in measures 81 and 83 must swung and played absolutely *non-marcato*. Note that there is *not* an accent at the beginning of measure 83, nor at 85. Ask the ensemble to be conservative with their long diminuendo from 84: it only falls to *piano*, over the course of four not very fast measures! And you don't want their sound to have disappeared completely for reasons that will become *painfully* obvious from the second beat of 88 if you've allowed that to happen!

The staccato dot on the downbeat of 88 *in no way* implies an accent of any kind – it ought to be the most delicate musical gesture imaginable (those players whose long slur led to it must not articulate or accent it – they merely need to leave it as soon as they've sounded it). And the rising triplet figure that follows it must *diminish* to the top not get louder. The final grace notes in flutes, oboe and xylophone must be played as close to the principal note as possible: the result should be two dainty “chirps” whose components could not conceivably be separated in any listener's mind.

Movement 3: Western One-Step

Movement 3 is the antithesis of what came before: the Western One-Step is as blatant as the Schottische is coy. The C-minor setting is an appropriate follow-up to the G-major ending of the previous movement, and it seems to me that this music should proceed more or less *attacca*. The form of this movement is rondo; its refrain is in C minor and its contrasting episodes (68–97 and 119–88) are set in C major and F major respectively.

The first nine measures constitute an **introduction** to this movement – notwithstanding the fact that a version of its material surfaces repeatedly at phrase endings (e.g. mm. 47 ff.). This is one of those cases where the numbering of measures starting with the very first thing printed constitutes an obstacle to an understanding of the music's structure: the downbeat of this movement is actually at measure 2, with the opening cymbal crash and first three melodic eighth notes serving as an upbeat (we confront the same problem in some of the movements of *Lincolnshire Posy*). For whatever it may be worth, the high-voiced, more repetitive wind line (flutes, oboes, clarinets, 1st cornet) bears more than a passing resemblance to the tenor-voice melodic line in Movement 1, mm. 38–45 (it would be a stretch to claim derivation, but kinship between the movements is certainly established thereby). The remaining voices – minus the bass-voice and percussive “punctuations” – simply descend in parallel diminished triads, in the same rhythm. The result is music that is

strikingly dissonant in places. Those “harmonizing” voices take on a slightly different project from measure 5 on: they now move in parallel minor seventh chords, in the same *articulated* rhythm as the upper voices. It should be noticed that their “line” at this point is an augmented version of what the “tenor” voices of the ensemble (horns, alto clarinet) will be playing beginning at measure 10.

Understanding the first printed measure of the piece to be a structural upbeat, the phrasing of the introduction is regular, and involves a *stretto*.

The **Refrain**, or “A,” occupies measures 10 through 67. It comes to a full close, and may therefore be considered “self-contained.” It consists of two sections, and is best thought of as *a b* in form. The tune of the first statement of section *a* is found in the clarinets (including the E_b) and *must be heard* (there’s quite a bit of competition). The sudden drop in dynamic from *tutti fortissimo* to *solli piano* is one of the most dramatic gestures in the *Suite*.

A two-part accompaniment chugs along against the clarinet tune. One of those voices (the one played by bass-voice instruments, starting on either C or G) is reinforced at the perfect fifth. The other is a diminution of material already heard in the introduction (and discussed above); it is found in horns and alto clarinet. All of this material – including the tune – rises through a succession of levels (something like the landings on a staircase) to cadence out onto C_b major (!) for the consequent phrase, at measure 18. The descending (pentatonic) tune, now in three-voice harmony and assisted by a descending chromatic scale shared by the 1st cornet and 3rd trombone, returns the music to apparent *A major* by the last part of bar 23, from which position it is practically wrenched back into C minor at 26. What I’ve described are not functional tonal relationships: they are more like loose successions of tonal centers whose appeal lies in their very “slipperiness.”

One can consider the aggregate of harmonies in measures 24–25 to constitute a sort of half cadence, in which case the consequent phrase proceeds from measure 26 (the period is apparently parallel). The tune now enjoys reinforcement by one of the alto saxophones and one of the horns; from measure 28 its rhythm is adjusted and three-voice harmony again enters the picture. The tonal goal is first the chord on the downbeat of 32 (V/g), then the downbeat of 34 (V/c), then the downbeat of 36 (return to the tonic of C minor). This strongly functional harmony is set in motion by the rhythmically-adjusted, harmonized variant of the tune, from measure 28. I therefore suggest that a phrase elision actually occurs there: this is the best way of understanding the irregular phrasing from 26 to the downbeat of 36. The powerful sequenced syncopated figures of measures 32–35 deliver the music inexorably to the onset of the *b* section of the Refrain.

This *b* section (36–67) is far more tonally and structurally coherent than what preceded it. The music never strays far from C minor (the Dorian version). The material is stated twice. The first statement (36–51) exhibits classical regularity and features a modification of the introduction’s material as its closing phrase. The second statement (a varied one), which begins at 52, includes some melodic adjustments (skips are introduced into the line and triadic harmony now prevails) and adornments (in the high woodwinds). This time the “introductory material” appears four measures earlier than in the first statement, and the tail of the figure is spun off into a self-contained (and oddly quiet) closing in measure 67.

The **First Episode** is as lyrical as any stretch of music in the entire *Suite*, and as ambitious in its pitch range. It begins at measure 68 and remains in force until rudely interrupted at bar 98. It is set in the parallel major key and its harmonies never stray far from home.

The first two measures of this passage are actually a structural upbeat: the true downbeat is at 70, where the suspended cymbal figure begins. The tune is constructed as a kind of “call and response” in two long phrases, with tenor voices in unison both issuing the call and holding their final note as a static backdrop against which the rest of the band can deliver its more chiseled response in four-part harmony. The structure of phrase 1 (68–85, with the first two of those bars constituting an upbeat) is, from its actual downbeat (discussed above), utterly “classical” (4 + 4 + 8), with a two-bar structural upbeat (the “call”) ushering in each of the three subphrases. The response, heard first in measures 70–72, remains harmonically identical on second appearance (74–76), but with all of the upper voices moved to a different position (the bass line stands its ground). The eight-bar subphrase (78–85) features motion that is more nearly continuous, with oddly “halting” syncopated tied notes spanning barlines. The offbeat contributions that the rest of the ensemble is obliged to provide can be very difficult to coordinate in performance: the conducting solution is “syncopated” beats in the second half of 77 & 79. The beautiful phrase just discussed – all 16 measures of it – comes to a full close on a long C from the second half of 81; the response is more “final-sounding” this time, both because of the rhythm of the upper parts and the rising scale in bass instruments.

The second large phrase goes beyond phrase 1 in several respects (its upbeat figure in 84–85 is of course carved out of phrase 1 territory). Its first note is adjusted, and the adjustments have only begun. This time the range of the tune ascends all the way to the high dominant and the descent is more chromatic than before. The “response” is also somewhat re-written. (I believe the 1st cornet’s 2nd-beat notes in measures 87 & 91 are mistakes, and should be lowered a whole step.) Phrase 2 barely manages to cadence on the tonic (beat 2 of m. 97) when the *b* portion of the Refrain comes charging in. This phrase elision is one of the rudest musical interruptions I know.

This partial statement of the **Refrain** is identical in most respects to the music in 36–47 + 60–67, with an additional unharmonized, *fortissimo* “stinger.”

Episode 2 is another lyrical section, again with two-measure structural upbeats. So even though the section begins at measure 119, we actually feel the first downbeat at 121. The key is F major. Superficially, this music seems far simpler than that in Episode 1 (“simplistic” is a word that comes to mind initially), but the fact is that in structural terms, this episode is the more sophisticated of the two. Its form is essentially *a b* with both subsections presented twice. The second statement of *b* is elided into a retransition at 177.

Subsection *a* gives us the most triadic of all the themes in the *Suite*. It consists of an arpeggio that assiduously avoids the tonic pitch (the solo oboe begins somewhat cruelly on low C, *piano*), modestly harmonized by the clarinets, presented over a curiously and only occasionally articulated dominant pedal point. The “tune,” if that’s the word, rises to the tonic chord seventh in 125 and then again at 129, where it inaugurates a *mezzo-forte* dance-like, mostly conjunct figure in high contrast to what went before. (The “filling-in” of the oboe’s and clarinets’ rests by eighth notes in other instruments is sometimes known as *hocket*, which means “hiccough!”) By far the strangest feature of this music is the

meandering, descending chromatic figure presented by soloists of the flute and trumpet family – which appears to start a bar too soon! It turns out that these will be the very instruments who will present the dominant pedal on the *a* subsection's second statement, and at the moment they “cadence” on that pitch (m. 135), the vast majority of the ensemble joins them in a gorgeously harmonized version of a tune that had initially appeared simple.

This second statement (135–148, with the first two of those measures serving as an upbeat) owes its voluptuousness to a great many added sixth chords and chromatic inflections of every imaginable sort (the very first of those chords – on the 2nd beat of measure 135 – is a Neapolitan sixth; this is typical of the next 13 measures). I call attention to a kind of “response” in first trombone and companion instruments, from the second beat of 137, that exhibits the same sort of rhythm that we encountered in 76 ff. My main reason for pointing this out is to urge that the first of those notes be played *absolutely* full-length; that the syncopated note be played *off* its predecessor, not arising out of a brief space before it. The same goes for the C and E_b in measure 138. It is an inspired stroke of musical imagination, that the “hocket” fill-ins in measures 145 ff. are this time provided by a single percussionist, using a suspended cymbal.

The first statement of subsection *b* begins at a phrase elision at bar 149. This is exuberant music that insists repeatedly on beginning on beat 2. We are still unmistakably in F major, but the chromaticism we encounter turns us often towards darker territory. That impression is reinforced in the unison 8th note patterns in measures 152, 156 and 160. Note that each of them includes a melodic diminished third on beat 2. A diminished third has pretty obvious augmented sixth connotations, and this both darkens the music and lends it a sense of extraordinary power. The closing figure of *b* – 161–64 – *almost* goes into 3/8 time, but that meter is imposed only on the “punctuating” voices, not the voices that carry the burden of the line (alto and tenor saxophones, 1st cornets, 1st trombone, baritone). These measures must therefore be beaten in “2,” despite a powerful temptation to do otherwise.

The second statement of *b* (165 ff.) is much like the first, but with some obvious differences: the first subphrase actually begins on beat 1, the previously unison 8th notes (the ones with augmented sixth connotations) are now harmonized, and instead of the closing that we heard in 161–64 we get the beginning of a 12-bar retransition beginning with a suddenly *piano* unison C on the second beat of 176.

That retransition may be treated in two parts, both six measures in length. The first runs from the upbeat to 177 through the first beat of 182. This consists of a broad and colorfully harmonized upsweep into A_b major, which is then “celebrated” by a dance-like, elaborately descending eighth-note figure in upper woodwinds and trumpets (this line includes “added sixths”). A sequence of that music begins with the upbeat to 183, which inaugurates another upsweep leading this time to C_b major at measure 185. The woodwinds and trumpets make as if to follow suit as before, but they are interrupted by another upbeat to a landing on D Lydian (m. 187); this provides the way back into C minor at 189.

The music that begins at measure 189 is essentially identical to that from measure 98; i.e. it is the final statement of the **Refrain** (the *b* subsection) that completes the rondo plan. This statement is artfully metamorphosed into a brief bridge to the Coda, by augmenting the two measures of material that had appeared in measures 114 f., into four bars at 205–08.

The **Coda** begins as a restatement of the Refrain, beginning at 209. Instead of continuing as before, however, the music grows gradually through a very carefully staged 12-measure additive crescendo which, once *fortissimo* is reached, breaks off suddenly at the timpani solo (m. 221 f.). This is the platform from which the second part of the Coda is launched.

The second part takes up the *fortissimo* where it was left two bars earlier, in the brightest possible modal contrast to the prevailing key (C Lydian). This is riotous, celebratory music that – were it not for a chromatic descent in bass instruments in 231 ff., is clearly destined to conclude on a sustained C major chord at measure 235 (try it, changing that bass descent to a string of Cs, and you’ll see what I mean). But that chromatic descent is in fact the biggest force to be reckoned with so far: its goal is the *fortissimo* A_b minor chord on the downbeat of 235: from this point the music can only end badly. An oddly-harmonized descending chromatic scale, growing softer all the while, leads to the only possible outcome: four measures of music identical to those we heard at the end of each of the previous statements of the Refrain (e.g. 64–67). It seems to me worth noting that the bass line that underpins that harmonized chromatic descent (235–downbeat of 239), over the course of its jagged trajectory, manages to sound all 12 chromatic pitches within 17 eighth notes, almost as though a tone row were being constructed (this will have significance for the next movement).

One additional comment that may or may not have relevance to anyone reading this commentary: in the copy of the score that is before me as I write, I find that I must turn three pages when I reach the end of measure 203, in order to find measures 204–19 (one page has gravitated to the wrong place). Perhaps you had better luck in your purchase of this otherwise fine full score.

Movement 4. Wallflower Waltz

We are about to explore some very melancholy music. This is nothing less than a portrait in sound of that unfortunate young woman who is never asked to dance, who endures every endless party with nagging discomfort and a flush of humiliation, and who has not the slightest idea what to do about her sad predicament (plastic surgery is out of the question, and weight loss may well be out of reach). We all know that girl. Some of us *were* that girl. Let us approach this music in the spirit of deepest sympathy.

In my synopsis on page 2, I indicated that the form of this movement is AB. That’s not the whole story. There is also a kind of “frame” placed around the music’s perimeter, and if this were a ballad I’d be tempted to think of the framing sections as a prologue and an epilogue. Its apparent simplicity notwithstanding, I believe this movement is more artful, formally-speaking, than any of the others. Who can say for certain where the B section ends and the closing frame begins?

The key of the movement is F major. The very first note makes it plain that the opening section – I’ll call it a prologue for convenience – functions as a dominant prolongation. But this is surely the strangest dominant prolongation ever written. The first six notes (mm. 1–4) sound half of the chromatic gamut; these are repeated verbatim in the subsequent four measures. The remaining six pitch classes find their way into the answering phrase, from measure 9 on (the aggregate is completed at the F in m. 14). Is this twelve-tone music? We are not allowed to discover the answer to that question, for the opening sixteen measures –

having again reached the dominant pitch that it was prolonging all the while – cadence neatly onto the tonic of the movement at measure 17 and the music proceeds in F major.

These opening sixteen measures can be something of a nightmare for the players and for the conductor. This is the only time the English horn appears in the score, and so of course that hapless musician has been sitting idle for quite some time before having to enter – perfectly in tune and with a beautiful sound – with a dreadfully exposed 16-bar passage. (This assumes that you have three oboists, and that the second oboe part has to this point been played by someone other than the English hornist.) There are ways to deal with the problems. The best thing you can do for this vulnerable player is to transpose some of the music in the previous movement and have him play along (to get the feel of the reed, find out how badly sharp or flat he’s going to be if he doesn’t make some adjustments, etc.) I recommend letting him double the 1st alto saxophone in measures 189–239 of the Western One-Step. Simply write out the saxophone part one whole step lower. This may forestall a lot of grief. (You might also counsel the flautists to keep their ears open and make some merciful pitch adjustments to accommodate a player who’s clearly at a disadvantage.)

So why is it that our poor wallflower sits out every dance? Because, for one thing – as the music that begins at measure 17 (the “A” section) makes plain – she’s not a good dancer (because she’s never asked! this is a vicious circle!). Through no fault of her own, she’s clumsy. This music gives us a rhythmic portrait of someone who’s *always* going to be stepping on her partner’s toes (or vice versa). Even the comically labored and stilted attempt at gracefulness in measures 25–32 lets us know that inviting her to the dance floor would only compound her humiliation. The consequent phrase – from measure 33 – is where we begin to hear a truly heartfelt musical response to this all-too-human condition. This is a very beautifully composed passage: note the intertwining lines and sweetly acerbic harmonies. (Surely this is musical pity. But who wants to be pitied?)

The PAC at the downbeat of measure 47 both furnishes a full close to what we’ve so far been exploring and simultaneously inaugurates a bridge to part “B.” This is a 16-bar bridge, the first half consisting primarily of another dominant prolongation. Against those held Cs, there is however a line that calls for notice: the 1st alto saxophone gives it its clearest expression. This is the melodic figure that will do service as the “theme” – if that’s the word – for the “B” section. The blues-tinted harmonies in these eight measures are truly gorgeous and again, they resist easy classification in a Roman numeral system. Note, for instance, that the chord on the third beat of measure 47 is two-thirds of an octatonic scale: what sort of Roman numeral would you put under that?

In the second half of the bridge, the focus shifts from held C to held F – i.e., from V/F to V/B \flat (the key of the “B” section). This is quite a passage: first beats are implied not sounded; the bass instruments descend uneasily to B \flat , then begin cycling a B \flat major scale repeatedly, as though it were a *chaccone* bass.

Over this diatonic bass line (harmonized by the horns) the flutes and oboe call to mind once again the pale, remote timbre of the movement’s opening, only this time in octaves. Their tune is as spare as anything Anton Webern ever wrote. Half of the chromatic gamut is sounded within the first seven notes, yet there is only one chromatic pitch in the bunch. And this is *all we get*: one brief, undistinguished motive recycled as inexorably as the stepwise bass line (in fact, it holds its ground even when the bass starts providing a functional

foundation beginning at 71). The long F that begins at measure 77 both provides a resting place for this dubious flute/oboe line and brings back the music that introduced this remote-sounding passage in the first place (cf. mm. 59–62).

Thus begins a second statement of the oddest music in the *Suite*, beginning at 81, this time in a rather unconvincing canon between solo cornet and lower-voiced instruments. This statement plays itself out exactly as before (I call attention to the chord in m. 94, which includes every note but G in the F# octatonic scale). Surely this stretch of music represents the state of mind of a very lonely individual, who imagines – and laments the fact – that her life *will never change*. Note that this music is never brought to a cadence: measure 98 remains unresolved. Instead, the opening simply returns unheralded.

But this is no mere coda: perhaps “epilogue” is the better word after all, since we have here a synthesis of the prologue’s strange atonal music and the harmonized “chaccone bass” from part B. One of the more intriguing aspects of this ending is that the final arrival on F – the tonic key of the movement – sounds for all the world like a half cadence. There are a couple of reasons for this. One is that a prolongation of V/B \flat keeps recurring between statements of the “prologue,” biasing the ear of the listener in that darker direction (F major and V/B \flat are two quite different things). The other is the role of an irregular German augmented sixth chord that replaces a wished-for dominant of F in measures 117 f. (We are so used to hearing augmented sixth chords cadence on dominant chords that it’s hard to hear this one any other way. But there are precedents for using augmented sixth chords this way. One of the most impressive instances known to me is in the seventh measure of the finale of Brahms’ Fourth Symphony.) This poor girl will not experience closure for a long, long time (if ever).

The vibraphone’s quasi-quartal closing arpeggio is an inspired touch.

I dare to hope that our neglected wallflower will eventually compensate for her adolescent chagrin by earning advanced degrees in philosophy and high-energy physics, by solving Gödel’s Theorem, by her appointment as Ambassador to the United Nations (I wouldn’t wish the Presidency on her or anyone else), and by winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

Movement 5: Rag

Surely no finer *finale* to an already masterful suite of dances can be imagined, than the one we are about to explore. It is in this movement that Bennett fulfills a promise made in the introduction to Movement 1. Like that opening movement (as well as the fourth), this *finale* opens with a dominant prolongation – but this one is in the wrong key! The primary key of the movement is B \flat major: this prolongation belongs to E \flat . But when the first theme bursts in at measure 17, it does so as if B \flat had been heard as tonic all along. This is not without precedent in the *Suite*: the very same thing happened in Movement 1 – even involving the same key relationships – at the retransition (mm. 156–66).

From measure 3 of the present movement, it is clear that we’re dealing with the prolongation of a dominant eleventh chord in E \flat major (i.e. V¹¹/IV). The rhythm here is a spare sort of invertible counterpoint, with the bass and alto/tenor voices simply trading rhythms at measure 5. A truncated repeat begins with the upbeat to measure 7, with the

sustaining instruments now a minor third lower (they've moved to a different position in the same chord).

The rhythm “squares off” in measure 11 to accommodate the additive figure that will finally carry us to the main theme. This figure begins low in clarinets, both moves upward and acquires a parallel third two bars later, and finally includes the cornets in parallel seventh chords. The crescendo in these six measures must be carefully controlled.

The primary theme – the one that serves this rondo-form movement as its **Refrain** – begins at measure 17 as a rapidly sequenced lower neighbor figure in 3/8 time superimposed on the prevailing duple rhythm (its unadorned pattern is D-F-E \flat -C-D-B \flat -G-C – a kind of whacked-out “Westminster Chimes”). Like the impressive cornet figure that led to it, this part of the theme proceeds in parallel seventh chords. Its first subphrase reaches a half cadence at the last possible moment in measure 19; a bass-instrument response confirms it, and returns it to the tonic on the downbeat of 21. The second subphrase behaves the same way, except for a rhythmic augmentation of the bass-voice response (m. 24).

The next twelve bars (25–36) supply the needed consequent. The form of this consequent phrase is essentially *a b b*, with each of those three subsections occupying four measures. This passage is more nearly rag-like than anything we've heard so far, and the melody is extremely attractive. The bass instruments turn the music immediately toward the subdominant with their A \flat in measure 25, and the upper voices offer an internal sequence in measures 26 f. (this may be the best feature of this melody). The two “*b*” subsections (29–32 and 33–36) also stand in an internal antecedent-consequent relationship to each other. The first of those subsections ends inconclusively (the D \sharp in the 2nd flute part in m. 32 is certainly a misprint – that should be a \natural sign), and the second provides its answer, complete with a strong PAC at bar 35.

The upbeat to measure 37 launches a six-measure bridge, consisting of an attractive two-bar figure sequenced down a perfect fourth in 39 f., and a two-measure unison closing gesture that ends on the dominant pitch. Any time a large ensemble goes to pure unison, the composer is of course focusing our attention on something important. In this case, the highlighted feature is made quite clear by a triplet upsweep to the first of its two notes. And those two notes are an E \flat and an A (m. 41) – a small collection which, as we've noted earlier, has some significance in this *Suite*. In this case, that tritone bi-chord, having been sounded, begins to *shrink* in a wedge-like fashion, with one line falling chromatically from E \flat while the other rises to meet it (they converge on C). This is presented in a herky-jerky rhythm that once again suggests a momentary superimposition of 3/8 time on the prevailing duple meter.

The “B” section of the movement – **Episode 1** (43–88) – is initially underpinned by a harmonized two-bar *basso ostinato* figure sounded 16 times in all. Its first two statements could be considered introductory, with the real substance of this episode beginning in measure 47. The “theme” of this section begins with a searching, upwardly-aspiring figure, its reach extended gradually from A \flat to B \flat to D – from which it is finally able to sing its mostly falling song, cadencing finally on the tonic (the foregoing description applies to mm. 47–58). At measure 59 we begin an apparent repeat of the twelve measures we've just heard, this time with the melodic line harmonized in thirds. But some adjustments in bar 68 point us in a new direction. Beginning in the following measure, and over the same harmonized bass, the treble voices present a more self-assured, insistent figure in octaves. This part of the

theme promises great things; but it is broken off abruptly at bar 75 with yet a third idea. The harmonized bass line gives the game away: the project has changed to a transitional one. This transition (75–88) is one of the more elaborate ones in the entire *Suite*. Its phrasing is 6 + 4 + 4. The 6-bar section is made up of three 2-bar units whose relationship to each other is obvious (note especially the dense chromaticism of the harmonized bass – this is some of the most dissonant music in the *Suite*). The first of the four-measure subphrases (81–84) amounts to the quoting of a familiar schoolyard taunt over a chromatic harmonized bass now moved to off-beats. In the following four measures, the bass line moves upward chromatically against both the intense chromaticism of its own harmonization and the held (and elaborated) Ds of instruments who sustain them *versus* instruments that insist on them with the same rhythm of the bass line. Were it not for the final few notes of the bass line itself, this music might very well cadence in G minor.

Of course, it doesn't. Instead, an emphatic B \flat major triad on the downbeat of measure 89 inaugurates the first return of the **Refrain**. For its first 12 bars (89–100) it is structurally identical to the music in measures 17–28 (but the elaborations are quite wonderful, and the *fortissimo* called for here will be most effective if *mezzo-forte* was maintained before!). The continuation from bar 101, however, represents quite an advance on that earlier statement. Instead of the music's being allowed to go its former way, the composer brings back the 3/8-time first phrase and extends it all the way to a closing that begins in 105. And this closing is no simple affair either. If an "average" composer were writing it, we would probably expect something like measures 105–106 + 111–112 (try singing it, and you'll see what I mean). Instead, we get a four-bar insert in which the 3/8 head motive is stretched to the breaking point, over a dangerously sustained version of its rhythm in most of the other instruments, with a few finally capitulating to the lower-neighbor figure from the second half of 109 (the danger alluded to is in clean ensemble performance – this is a difficult passage to "feel"). Dark harmonies – including a Neapolitan chord and an irregular German augmented sixth – deliver the music to a powerful cadence and a hammered ending (111 f.)

The movement could end here, and we'd have a perfectly satisfactory ABA-form composition. The reason it doesn't is that it's the finale to a dance suite in the grand tradition, and a more impressive summary movement is called for. Bennett has a full-fledged rondo in view. And his most stunning compositional surprise is still up his sleeve.

The onset of "C" – or **Episode 2** – at 113 sounds for all the world like the beginning of a Trio. We are in E \flat major, and the two-voiced theme's essential lyricism fits that warmer key perfectly. The harmonic rhythm has become utterly regular, and the bass line is almost simplistically functional. The form of this episode is *a b a*. The phrasing of *a* (mm. 113–28) is classical: 4 + 4 + 8. The D \flat s at the end of the second four-bar subphrase (mm. 119 f.) point the music momentarily toward the subdominant; otherwise, this passage is entirely innocent of chromaticism. A very quiet, unison fillip in clarinets (127 f.) propels the music into its *b* section.

The *b* section exhibits the same sort of harmonic regularity as the previous 16 measures, and sports the most Gershwin-esque tune of the *Suite*. The counterpoint in this passage is of the "familiar" or "chorale" type, with all participants engaged equally in the attractive syncopations that lend this music much of its charm. There's a little more chromaticism to reckon with here: it appears in measures 139–41 in the form of three irregular French augmented sixth chords. The music quickly returns to its former repose, but its easy 16-bar

course is broken into with an anticipation of *a* at 143 (this actually has the effect of *extending* the *b* section by two additional measures).

A second statement of *a* begins at 147, with the orchestra bells furnishing a touch of additional brightness. There is absolutely *nothing* in bars 147–54 that hints at what’s about to happen in 155! This sudden harmonic swerve has an enharmonic common-tone pivot: the D \flat that formerly turned the music toward the subdominant is here re-spelled as a C \sharp – the 3rd of the tonic chord of A major. And what we are hearing is the ultimate fulfillment of a promise the composer made in the last half-beat of the eleventh measure of Movement 1! This must surely be one of the most gorgeous, most unforgettable moments in all of the wind band literature. And the return to E \flat at measure 161 – which corresponds structurally to the phrase elision at 143, discussed above – is almost as breathtaking. Do notice that *all* of this takes place at a very quiet dynamic level: this is music that argues its case in dimensions more artful than sheer decibels.

An attractive 16-bar retransition begins at that return to E \flat , with the baritone horn singing a sweet, sequenced and reiterated descent in half notes. When the music returns to B \flat major in 169, however, it becomes clear that the composer’s intent was to invoke something like the chiming of the hour, and the cornets’ harmonized and accented version of the baritone line recall (in spirit, at least) the outline of the Refrain’s opening phrase (discussed above, and likened to clock chimes). The accumulation of energy throughout this retransition is handled beautifully. It begins with the rhythmic figure in bass instruments in 165 – a breaking up of the tonic pedal. When that pedal moves to B \flat , its rhythmic elaboration is immediately apparent, and this fragmentation of the pedal is grown into a pair of quotations expertly wedded to each other (compare the bass line in 173–176 to the flute/oboe line in 129 ff., and its ending to m. 20).

The music that begins at 177 is far more than the mere return of the **Refrain** necessary to fulfill rondo-form expectations. The juxtaposition of three formerly independent musical ideas is absolutely extraordinary. The upper woodwinds and brasses give us a statement of the Refrain virtually identical to the one heard in 89–112. But this is *over* a bass line that continues to represent the *b* section of Episode 2, and *against* the tolling of the cornets’ “bells,” now in the trombones. This ending is a *tour de force*, one of the finest known to me.

It remains only for me to say a few words about the performance of this movement. Just as in my treatment of earlier movements, I *urge* faithful adherence to all of the composer’s dynamic and articulation markings. This means, for instance, that the woodwinds and solo trumpet that begin the movement must begin *forte* with a *single accent* (no accent on the long note, as I have so often heard) and a carefully regulated diminuendo to *piano* exactly at the downbeat of bar 3. Everything must be kept quiet for the eight measures, with the single exception of a brief rising-up of the same instruments that opened the movement (this time *mezzo-forte* followed by a *plunging* diminuendo to an almost immediate *piano*). From the time the crescendo begins in the second half of bar 10 until its culmination in *fortissimo* at the downbeat of 17, every moment of it must be regulated *precisely* in order for it to have its intended effect. From the evidence I see at the point where the cornets enter, the ensemble should only have reached *mezzo-piano* in measure 14! Have you ever heard this passage played that way?

Note that the music *immediately* returns to the *mezzo-piano* level as the Refrain begins. And it must be held there, even through the bass instruments' rhythmic answers in 20 and 24, all the way to the consequent phrase which rises (*only*) to *mezzo-forte* on the second half-beat of measure 25. The only time we re-visit *forte* territory in this first thematic area is at the unison figure that begins with the upbeat to 41 – a figure which, as I pointed out earlier, has special significance (and therefore merits *forte*!).

Since Bennett was very careful with his articulation markings, I wonder if we have not become accustomed to hearing him grossly misrepresented in the first four measures of the bridge (37–40)? As they say, the “traditional” way of performing a Beethoven symphony has a lot to do with the last bad performance you heard of it. There's nothing at all in the score to suggest that the lower voices in 37 ff. (saxophones, lower cornets, trumpets, horns, trombones) should play their line *marcato*. So why do we do it? I suggest we may want to explore the alternative – we might be surprised at its effectiveness.

The first episode (43 ff.) is immediately *mezzo-piano*, with each of the long notes in the harmonized *basso ostinato* diminishing noticeably. The instruments that play that reiterated figure must be held to that softer dynamic even against the thematic instruments' *mezzo-forte* in 47 ff. The same applies to the second statement (59 ff.) which must not be played *louder* than the first statement on account of the *divisi*. And check this out: the section from bar 69 on is *still* to be played at that *mp-mf* level! Moreover, and most challenging of all, the long crescendo from measure 75 must increase *imperceptibly* to its *fortissimo* culmination fourteen measures later!

I'm not sure I've ever heard the first three measures of the closing (105 ff.) played as written. The first note in 105 *must not be accented* – it simply resolves the vigorous line that leads to it. The repeat of that bar – measure 106 – must be played the same way, and measure 107 must likewise begin with an unaccented note.

The harmonized cornet line beginning at 113 cannot possibly be played *legato* enough! But the players might make a pretty good stab at it if they're asked to play it under two four-bar slurs and an eight-bar slur. Then, ask them to play it again, this time lightly touching the teeth with the tongue at the articulation points without changing *anything else* about the way they played it the first time. It also cannot be played *sweetly* enough. Perhaps they should be reminded of how it felt the first time they fell in love. The E \flat and 1st B \flat clarinet lines cannot possibly be played softly enough! (The biggest challenge is the B \flat clarinet's written high C – especially the beginning of it, *sans accent*.) Do ask the players to use the crescendo in 116 to get them safely to the higher note, and insist that they drop back to their former dynamic once they've left it; so also for measure 120.

The graceful clarinet figure in 127 f. should begin at an almost inaudible level and gradually blossom into *piano* at 129. The flute/oboe line from that point must be as *tenuto* as possible. And the breathing places are not arbitrary: in order to preserve the classical phrasing of the line, the breaths must be taken after the tied E \flat in 133 and after the tied E \flat in 137. And when I talk about breaths here, I *do not* mean that the oboist should inhale: he should simply let the line drop, in order to accommodate the breaths that the flautist *must* take at those two points. (A breath in 141 is impermissible.)

Absolute *legato* must also be the norm for the bassoons and trombones in 143 ff., and of course for the cornets in their second statement. And the radical shift to A major at 155 must be handled with utmost delicacy, while finding ways to lend it appropriate performance “weight.” A slightly accelerated vibrato, for instance, would help put it across.

Piano must be assiduously observed all the way to the downbeat of 173, where the dynamic suddenly rises to *mezzo-forte*. Don’t spoil the effect by spilling the beans. Likewise, the return of *forte* at 177 needs to be a terraced presentation (try it both ways, and you’ll see how effective it is if we play *exactly what Bennett wrote!*)

In 193 ff. we again confront the need to keep downbeat notes *unaccented*. And I’d like to recommend something shy of the *blastissimo* ending I’ve sometimes heard inflicted on the work’s two final measures.

In the *Suite of Old American Dances*, Robert Russell Bennett has given us a real treasure – one of the finest in the wind band repertoire. Let us treat it as we would any other treasure: with loving care and deepest respect.

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Postscript: The night before I put the finishing touches on this article, my wife and I paid a visit to George’s Majestic Lounge on Dickson Street. We more or less dragged each other there, on account of the fact that a friend of ours was playing in a band that night and we felt obliged. We dropped a \$20 cover charge for the privilege of entering a miasma of cigarette smoke and a deafening wall of more or less undifferentiated sound – with notable percussive accents – from which there was absolutely no reprieve. For about an hour we endured a poisonous atmosphere and a *physically painful* onslaught of raw decibels. By the time we left, smelling like Bombay whores, we both had pounding headaches and we wondered at our sanity for subjecting ourselves to something that many people gladly pay for, night after night after night.

It occurred to me as I reflected on that experience, that the music I love, study and write about probably doesn’t stand a chance in the *milieu* we’re creating. Most of the people in that lounge were college-age. They’re our future leaders and tastemakers. The music of Beethoven has absolutely no meaning for them (many of them could not correctly spell his name). Neither does the music that we once proudly held up as “America’s new classical music” (this includes, of course, the music of Robert Russell Bennett). Suggestions, anyone?