

The Dreidel Game

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Program Notes

Of the many traditions passed to us during the holiday season, one of the oldest and most favorite is the dreidel game. This game is known today as being played by those of Jewish faith during the Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah, which coincides with the Christian practice of the Christmas season. The game is a very simple one that uses a 4-sided top called a *dreidel*. The game is a gambling game where each player contributes money or candy into the pot. Each side of the top is marked with a symbol that tells the player what to do after his/her spin of the dreidel. A player either: (1) passes the turn to the next player without collecting any of the pot; (2) collects the entire pot; (3) collects half of the pot; (4) puts loot back into the pot. A player exits the game when he/she can no longer ante up. Many times “losing” players receive consolation prizes. The winner will collect all of the money or candy.

Performance Notes

The melody for this piece is the traditional dreidel song. The simple binary melody is placed in settings that are meant to be comical and fun. Applying the printed articulations and dynamics will certainly add to the appropriate comical style of the piece. The dissonant “oom-pah” parts in the clarinet and xylophone (first appearing at 25) should be played lightly and with a sense of humor. The trombone glissandi should be raucous (not gross...but close!) and fun. The cowbell, triangle and tambourine parts add more playful colors to the piece as well.

This may be the first time that a beginning clarinet section will have a piece where the 2nd part sounds higher than the 1st part. This is done because many bands put the stronger players on the 1st part. Even though both clarinet parts will need to learn F# and G#, most of the accidentals are handled in the 1st clarinet part.

The trumpet section deals with a similar part distribution issue at 57 where the melody is in the 2nd part while the 1st part plays a higher harmony part.

You may encounter some accidentals in the alto sax and clarinet parts that, by this time, you have not had in your method book. The fingerings are pretty easy and the students will quickly pick up on the Dreidel melody motif as it gets passed from voice to voice.

Percussion Performance Notes

If at all possible the bass drummer should use hand dampening as opposed to internal muffling (like on a marching bass) or draping a cloth or towel over the instrument. I like to teach my students that bass drums should be played with good technique that includes using different beating spots and hand dampening. This piece is a perfect demonstration of how the bass drum part imitates the note length in the bass line. You certainly do not

want a long and ringy bass drum note sounding when the tubas are playing short. Your young bass drummer will hear this as well but might need to be shown how to match the note length with hand dampening. In this piece, loud passages can be played toward the middle of the head and all other passages can be played @ halfway from the center to the rim. A bass drum is not just a big loud target that anyone can hit! It takes special skills and fine musicianship to be a good bass drummer.

The timpani part can be optional but it really adds to the color of the piece. Good timpani playing at this level is primarily about beating spot and tone. I have found success if the players try to be consistent in playing the right mallet to the right of the pedal and the left mallet to the left of the pedal regardless of the drum that they are playing on and the passage. I call it “target practice.” They need to hit the same target with each stroke. The basic stroke is more similar to that on a keyboard instrument than a snare drum stroke. Players should try to pull the tone out of the drum by popping the mallet off of the head immediately after contact is made. This “popping” concept gets refined as the young player learns more about controlling articulation through grip and stroke and by starting to feel the natural rebound of the mallet off of the head. The timpanist should try to muffle the drums on all of the rests.

The triangle/tambourine/cowbell part should be performed by at least 2 players: one doing triangle and the other on the cowbell and tambourine. The tambourine part will sound clear and articulate if the player holds the tambourine flat or a slight angle in one hand and strikes it with the other. If you bring the tambourine to the playing hand or tap it against your leg you get some extra jingle noise that diminishes the clarity of the rhythms. If one player is doing both tambourine and cowbell, he/she should hold a stick in the striking hand (as described above) and use it to hit a cowbell resting on a table.

Xylophone is my first choice for the mallet part but bells, marimba or vibes (no pedal) will work as well. Doubling of the mallet part with any and all keyboards at your disposal is very acceptable.

The snare drummer should interpret the rolls as 5-stroke rolls and not just a single buzzed or bounced 8th note.



Jeffrey T. Parthun, Sr. lives in Lafayette, Indiana. He and his wife, Kim, have four grown children. He is a band director in the Lafayette (IN) School Corporation where he currently directs the concert and jazz bands at Lafayette Tecumseh Junior High School and is an assistant director at Lafayette Jefferson High School. During his 25+ years as a public school teacher he has taught instrumental music at every level from elementary band and orchestra through teaching applied percussion at Purdue University. Jeff holds degrees from Butler University (MM) and Northwestern University (BMEd) where he studied band arranging with John P. Paynter, Don Owens and Don Casey. He was a private percussion student of Roy C. Knapp (PAS Hall of Fame), Bob Tilles, Dr. Terry Applebaum and Tony Caselli. In addition to a busy teaching schedule he is active as a freelance percussionist and has performed and recorded with many regional jazz and concert groups including the Los Blancos Latin Jazz Band (www.losblancoslatinjazz.com). He is an experienced adjudicator/clinician/arranger for concert, jazz, marching and percussion ensembles. He is a member of the Central States Judges Association and has judged state and circuit championships in Mississippi, Ohio and Tennessee. He also adjudicates for the Indiana Percussion Association and the Indiana State School Music Association. He is an award-winning member of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), Percussive Arts Society and American Federation of Musicians. He can be seen (briefly!) as the band director in the Paramount movie “Blue Chips” with Shaquille O’Neil and Nick Nolte.