

Khachaturian Piano Concerto

This piece has some of the most lyrical and beautiful bass clarinet solos in the literature. Unfortunately it is not a popular concerto so it does not get performed too often.

The first movement has a solo at number 39 that is all by itself, mm =ca 76-84. Some conductor will allow you to play it the way you want, within reason of course, others will conduct every note giving you very little freedom to interpret. Of course this solo needs to be played with a full, rich and warm tone. The accent in the 4th measure should be done more with the air rather than the tongue, giving it more weight by leaning on it rather than an actually accenting it with your tongue. Take care to breathe either after the dotted quarter note in measure 5 or at the end of that measure, it depends on whether you, or the conductor, consider the last beat and a half in that measure to be an up beat to measure 6 or not. Pace your ritardano so that you don't get too slow. Check intonation with a tuner on the low D and Eb since these notes can be suspect on the bass clarinet.

The second movement has two big solo's, mm ca.69-72. The first solo at the very beginning of the movement should be played with some slight rubato but it is under the piano so you can't over do it. I suggest a slight tenuto on the first triplet followed by a little motion on the two following notes so you get to the next beat on time. Play the grace notes quickly and lightly. In measure 5 begin with a slight tenuto and make a very small accelerando through the crescendos, then a small ritard at the end. This of course is whether the conductor and pianist allow you to do it so don't over do it. Be subtle, but be expressive. I like to breathe after the Eb in measure 5 if needed.

The final solo at the end of the movement should also be played with a little rubato much the same as the previous solo. Choosing where to breathe can be the biggest problem. You don't want to take too many breaths, but you don't want a small choked sound either. Try to phrase the breaths so that they sound as part of the musical line. Some possible places are after the dotted quarter notes in measures 4,9,11 or 13 and after measure 6. Make sure you have enough air to support the ritard at the end of the solo and check the intonation on those low notes. The opening interval is obviously easier if you have an alternate Ab in the left hand. Most, if not all, the low C instruments should have that key. Make sure the pitch is a perfect 4th. The grace notes should be played the same way as in the previous solo. In measures 2 and 4 I prefer to use the regulars B for these as opposed to the side key for better intonation. Keep the right hand down on the G to help play it more legato. Be careful not to let the G go flat or the B go sharp. In measures 5-6 and 7-8 you can add a little rubato and exaggerate the dynamics throughout the solo. The last movement the bass clarinet is tacit so you can relax.