

“On the Trial” from The Grand Canyon Suite by Ferde Grofé
Dotted quarter = ca. 132, Presto at the end ca. 144

This excerpt is probably the most well known and will almost certainly be asked at an audition. The first time two times the solo passage is played it is identical but when it returns at the end of the movement there are a few different notes at the bottom of the passage and it is much faster this time. This presto section at the end begins before the solo and although it starts with a tutti passage you should be prepared to play it if asked.

I play it, and recommend that you use the 1 and 2 fingering for the opening A# to F#. There is less coordination involved than using the side key A#, but either one will work. You will have to make sure the bridge key is coordinated perfectly when using the 1 and 2, which is why some players don't like to use it. When you begin the solo, try to imagine that you're playing the oboe solo prior to your entrance so you have momentum when you begin, you could even pretend you're playing it without making a sound. Enter strongly but without an accent. Keep your fingers close to the keys to avoid sounding awkward. Be very careful of intonation and tone quality in measures 2 and 3. The B and D# are often sharp, and the G# and E could go flat or unfocused if not well supported.

It is important to obtain a homogeneous quality throughout this solo. Although staccato is indicated, it should be thought of more as a clean, strong articulation, not a true staccato. In other words, not as short as possible, it shouldn't sound clipped. It is critical that the articulation not be forced or hard. If you're asked to do the presto section, the speed will necessitate a lighter tongue stroke. There is also a big diminuendo this last time as well. You might want to consider leaving the B key depressed while playing the D# in measure 2, but be aware of possible intonation and tone color discrepancies.

If you're having a problem cracking the low register, it could be that your reed is too soft or unbalanced, your finger-tongue coordination is faulty, your voicing is too high, or your embouchure is too rigid. The ritard needs to be very well paced, each measure slower than the previous one. Make sure the rests slow down in proportion to the length of the notes as you ritard. Some conductors do a large ritard while others do very little. Also, some conductors will follow you and others make you follow them. There should be enough space after the last quarter note to take a quick breath if necessary without being noticed due to the ritard. I would not recommend using the chromatic F# or the chromatic B in measures 5-8 but the “regular” fingerings instead to avoid it sounding clumsy.