Symphony No. 3

Johannes Brahms, Op. 90

Example 1

Allegro con brio

in Bb

\[\text{in A}\]

5

\[\text{p dolce}\]

to A Clarinet

12

\[\text{mezza voce}\]

in A \[\text{pp grazioso}\]

16

20

\[\text{pp}\]

22

\[\text{p}\]

25

\[\text{to Bb Clarinet}\]

\[\text{in Bb}\]

2

\[\text{p legg.}\]

32

cresc.

35

Brahms – Symphony No. 3
The third symphony of Brahms has several important solos for the clarinet and therefore appears on almost every audition list. It’s interesting to know that Brahms originally wrote the entire part for the B-flat clarinet. However, when it was pointed out to him that the two big solos in the first movement sounded better when played on the A clarinet, he published the symphony that way. Unfortunately, there really isn’t enough time to change clarinets for either solo, and there is no time to warm up the A clarinet. For these reasons, many performers play the entire opening on A clarinet so I’ve included an A and a B-flat version leading up to the first solo.

The top line of EXAMPLE 1 is the way the part is published. The bottom line is the first eleven measures of the same passage transposed for A clarinet. The tempo is about quarter note = 60-72. I think the most exposed measure of this passage (measure 4) may be better on A clarinet anyway. It should be played with a large crescendo and a tenuto on the high note. In the B-flat version, the high E-flat is the only note in the altissimo register. It’s a note that is rather likely to squeak! In the A clarinet version you get to play both C-sharps as well as the E in the highest register, which often feels less risky. Don’t play the piano at the beginning of the measure too softly because that is exactly where the clarinet should emerge from the general orchestral fabric.

Measure 14 is the first solo. It’s the one asked on most auditions. As you can see, you have slightly less than three measures to change clarinets—not enough time! The idea here is to be heard above the orchestra while still playing with a warm piano quality. Resonate as many notes as you can, especially the first G and A. Be very careful to play all the eighth notes in tempo. Performers often rush the A to B in measure 14. In spite of the way the passage is printed, I think it’s better to slur from the first note in measure 14 to the first A in measure 15. Then slur from the next note (G) to the end of that measure. The next slur goes from the pp all the way to the first note in measure 18. I think the best place to take a breath is after the half note F in measure 19. Slur all the eighth notes in measure 20. After that, play the part as it is written.

As to dynamics, play a slight crescendo up to the E in measure 14, then a diminuendo back to the beginning of the next measure. Then play another crescendo to the E eighth note followed by another diminuendo to the end of the measure. In an audition it is very important to observe the pp in measure 16, and don’t crescendo up to the E in this measure (16). In fact, Brahms wrote a “hairpin” diminuendo. Be sure not to slow down just because it’s very soft here. When you finally get to the crescendo-diminuendo “hairpins” in measure 17, make them big ones. And in spite of what the part looks like, you should play less in measure 18 and more in measure 20 because the clarinet is unimportant in measure 18 and important in measure 20.

Be sure to play the throat A short in measure 21. Watch out for “grunt” on the A in measure 23. There is usually a slight ritard at the end of measure 24. Once the solo is over you change back to B-flat clarinet. The rest of the example is here just to help you be better prepared to play the piece. With the possible exception of measures 43 through 46, there is nothing else that would be asked on an audition. Count carefully in measures 29 to 34. The eighth-note passages in those measures “dovetail” so you should try to come in without any accents. The passage from measure 38 through measure 47 is characteristic of Brahms in that the music sounds like the bar lines are in a different place from where they appear. You should play these measures as if the bar lines were where they sound rather than where they actually are.
Scherzo
from A Midsummer Night's Dream

Example 1
Felix Mendelssohn, Op. 61, No. 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Mendelssohn – A Midsummer Night's Dream
The Scherzo from the incidental music to A Midsummer Night's Dream by Mendelssohn is, on many auditions, the selection used to demonstrate the player's ability to tongue fast. There are several points to keep in mind when playing this excerpt.

First, don't play the sixteenth notes short. You should play this piece as fast as you can, about dotted quarter note = 88. Trying to make the sixteenths staccato at this speed will only make them sound "pecky." The notes you should play short are the eighths. The Eulenburg score has, for the most part, staccato dots on the eighths but not the sixteenths.

The next thing to remember is that the flute part has the most important line for the first four measures. The clarinet part takes over on the fifth measure. Don't accent the B in that measure; the accents start on the sixth measure. Accent the C in the fifth measure and the B in the sixth and seventh measures. Try playing the B in measures 1 and 3 with the top side key to see if it works well for you. If it doesn't, you'll probably want to use the right-hand little finger for the B so you won't have to move your right hand as much for the first eight measures.

Start measure 15 a little louder than p so you can do the diminuendo. Be careful not to tongue hard on the last four or five notes in measures 16 and 17. Do two trills on each of the trills starting in measure 42. Be careful not to accent the last two notes.

If you can get started in time, EXAMPLE 2 is easier to play. Try to minimize movement in your left wrist.

The first three notes in EXAMPLE 3 should be rather short. You should diminuendo to a piano at the end. EXAMPLES 4 and 5 are both important, exposed passages.
Capriccio espagnol is a real orchestral showpiece containing many exciting solos for most of the instruments. The clarinet has its share of them, and they are, for the most part, extremely well written for the instrument.

Example 1 is from the first alborada. The tempo in the score is quarter note = 126, although it often goes faster. After a loud, energetic opening the clarinet plays its first solo. The most important things here are fire and energy. You should play the D’s as upper register notes, not with a side key. I like accents on the first notes of the first two measures, and again on the first note of each group of four sixteenths in the third measure.

At the fourth measure you come to the point at which you must decide if you are going to play one or two trills on the eighth notes. I used to think that it was almost impossible to do two without distorting the rhythm but I’ve heard players who can do it. Anyway, you have to do all of them the same. One “trick” is to start from the upper note and then do one after that—sort of one-and-a-half trills. If you decide that you are going to do just one, put a sharp accent on the first note of the trill and clip the end.

Play both eighth notes with equal strength and stay loud all the way through to the end of the last trill.

Example 2 comes fourteen measures after Example 1. The spirit and tempo are the same. Be careful to bring out the lower notes in measures 3 and 5, and watch that you do the correct articulation in measures 7 through 10. It helps to think of the last sixteenth note and the next two eighth notes as a little trumpet call. Here you have the same problem with the trills that you had in Example 1.

Example 3 is from the third movement, also an alborada, and the same tempo as the first. In fact, the music is the same except that it is a half step higher (in B-flat instead of A). Fortunately for us clarinet players, all we have to do is switch to the B-flat clarinet. Everything is easy until measure 5. The sextuplets are so fast that it’s hard to hear the notes even if they are well played. Dig out the low C’s. Starting with measure 13 you might try playing the passage the way it is notated in Example 4. Whichever way you decide to play it, be sure to separate the repeated C’s and B’s, and try to crescendo down to the last sustained C.

IV. Scena e canto gitano

Example 5

in Bb

Cadenza IV

\[\text{a tempo}\]

\[\text{dim.}\]