

A GUIDE TO REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

Kenneth Hesketh's DANCERIES

Mark Heron

Commissioning History

Danceries was originally written for symphony orchestra, the first performance being given by the Merseyside Youth Orchestra (of whom Hesketh was then a member) in the 1980s. The composer then undertook the transcription for wind for inclusion in the Faber Wind Band Series. The first performance of this version was given by the Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra conducted by Clark Rundell as part of the BASBWE/RNCM International Wind Festival in April 2000.

Danceries is published by Faber and lasts around 12 minutes. The work is included in the *National Concert Band Festival Repertoire List* at grade 4.5. There are a number of recordings of the work, notably by the RNCM Wind Orchestra & Rundell which was recorded in the presence of the composer.

Kenneth Hesketh

Kenneth Hesketh was born in Liverpool in 1968. Whilst a chorister at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, he began composing and completed his first work for orchestra at the age of 13. By the time he commenced studies at the Royal College of Music in London he had written much orchestral music, and as a college student completed his first formal commission for the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Charles Groves in 1988. After receiving bachelor and postgraduate degrees from the RCM, working in commercial music and completing several other commissions, Kenneth Hesketh attended Tanglewood in 1995 as the Leonard Bernstein Fellow and studied with Henri Dutilleux. In 1996, while completing a Masters degree in Composition at the University of Michigan, USA, he was awarded the Shakespeare Prize scholarship from the Toepfer Foundation, Hamburg at the behest of Sir Simon Rattle, which included a year's residency in Berlin. Returning to London in 1999, he became the Kit and Constant Lambert Fellow at the Royal College of

Music where he is currently Professor of Orchestration and Composition. In 2007, Hesketh will take up the position of Composer in the House with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra for two years. The scheme, devised by the Royal Philharmonic Society in partnership with the PRS Foundation, is designed to allow composers the time and space to create new work, and to take their place at the heart of the orchestral community. Hesketh's tenure with the RLPO will see the creation of works for many of the instrumental groups within the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society, from the orchestra and contemporary music ensemble (Ensemble 10/10, with whom Hesketh already has a thriving relationship) to youth ensembles, chamber groups and choirs. He will also take part in teaching and outreach projects in Liverpool and Manchester during the two years.

Instrumentation Considerations

Danceries is scored for a fairly large wind orchestra: - piccolo; flute 1 & 2 (with occasional *divisi*); oboe 1 & 2 (second doubles cor anglais); Eb, 3 x Bb (each part with *divisi* and so six players are necessary) and bass clarinet; 2 bassoons; AATB saxophones; 4 horns; 3 cornets; 2 trumpets; 3 trombones; 2 euphoniums; 2 tubas; string bass; timpani & 3 percussion.

Whilst with a small amount of cross-cuing it would be possible to perform the work without the second euphonium and tuba parts, all parts are really essential to a successful performance. One of the work's main challenges is achieving the correct balance and missing parts affect this significantly.

Hesketh notes in the score that a five string double bass and a bass clarinet going down to low C are desirable, although *ossiae* are provided in the parts.

The percussion parts are vital, and all three have some tuned work. The most challenging is the third part which has very

prominent writing for the vibraphone. The timpani and percussion parts can be played by four players, but if you have a larger section there is plenty to keep them busy.

Rehearsal Suggestions

Danceries is in four movements: 'Lull me beyond thee'; 'Catching of Quails'; 'My Lady's Rest'; and 'Quodling's Delight'. The composer's programme note is most helpful in describing the ideas behind the work, and is reproduced here verbatim:

'The term "Danceries" can be found in a copy of Playford's *Dancing Master*, an extensive collection of folk and popular tunes of the seventeenth century (and no doubt earlier). This publication was used by master fiddle players to teach the various dance steps of the day to a nobleman's house or a king's court. Whilst this present set of "Danceries" cannot be said to be an aid to terpsichorean agility, it will at least set feet tapping!

The melodies themselves are a mixture of new and old - well, nearly. Where the old occurs it has been adapted in mood and composition and is often interspersed with completely new material. The harmonies and rhythms bring a breath of the new into these themes and add to the drama of the set.

Movement 1: "Lull me beyond thee". Gentle and lilting, almost a barcarole, this movement is very much a reverie. The original tune had the name *Poor Robin's Maggot* - a rather disconcerting title; maggot, however, in seventeenth-century parlance meant whim or fancy. This theme can also be found in *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay (first performed in 1728) under the title "Would you have a young lady" (Air 21).

Movement 2: "Catching of Quails" - a colourful, buoyant *scherzo* on an original melody. The thematic material is shuttled around the band to contrast with full-bodied tutti. The last few bars fade away to almost nothing before a final surprise!

Movement 3: "My Lady's Rest" - a tender *pavane*, also on an original theme, with Moorish leanings. Solos for principal winds and brass contrast with warmer *tutti* passages. The movement culminates with a final presentation of the theme before evaporating in held flute and trumpet chords.

Movement 4: "Quodling's Delight". The final movement to the set combining one of the melodies from Playford's *Dancing Master (Goddesses)* with an original contrasting melody. A dramatic and exuberant ending to the set of Dances.

A more detailed discussion of specific rehearsal and performance issues follows, and having a score to hand will be of some benefit.

First movement – 'Lull me beyond thee'

The tempo of dotted crotchet = 54 is possible. Personally I think a notch below that gives a bit more space for phrasing, particularly in a generous acoustic. However, care should be taken to make sure the music flows in a pulse of two beats to the bar. Apart from the very end there is no need to go into a quaver beat, although the style of the beat should at times be able to suggest the merest hint of subdivision.

Bar 1 The vibraphone part is consistently important, and careful attention should be paid to it. The correct choice of mallets will vary according to the acoustic and I find the vibraphone one of the hardest of all instruments to judge correctly from the conductor's position. A second pair of trusted ears somewhere in the auditorium is recommended.

I find it works well if all the Bb clarinets other than the bottom first part play *pp* at the opening. That part can then be brought out a little as a duet with the oboe.

3 The first flute, Eb clarinet and second & third cornets should then be encouraged to project their *mp dolce cantabile* phrase, especially the cornets to make sure the lower octave is slightly stronger than the upper one. Although the phrasing goes to bar nine, try to make sure the line doesn't become significantly louder as it goes up in register.

The bass line in low woodwinds, euphoniums, tubas and string bass may well need some attention with less experienced players particularly in bar six.

7 The grace notes should be played on the beat, not before.

12 This piece is a terrific exercise in balancing the relative importance of the different voices. Often there are three or four ideas going on, and the conductor will need to give careful thought to the relative importance of each line in any given phrase. In rehearsal, it is vital to encourage the players to listen very carefully to what is going on around them and assess how important they are in the scheme of things. The usual rules of mediocre wind band writing emphatically do not apply to this piece: very often the second or third part is more important than the first. A perfect example is the second clarinet at bar 12. You will need to encourage this part to be brought out, and insist that the other clarinets keep well down. Typical of Hesketh's attention to detail is the way he marks the second of each slurred semiquaver pair *staccato*. This innate understanding of orchestral texture and the characteristics of the instruments he is writing for is evident throughout the work.

Try also to get the euphonium and first flute to be aware of each other, the euphonium will tend to be a little late.

17 The second clarinet should emphasise the 3/4 phrasing of this bar.

19 The risk in the next couple of phrases is that the general dynamic becomes too high. More people are playing and so achieving the *mf* of bar 24 does not need everyone to play individually at that dynamic. The *forte* of 28 should in my view be very much *meno*.

35 Having said that, the *diminuendo* into 36 is much more effective if it is not anticipated, so keep the *forte* character going right up to the beginning of the *dim*. I also ask the trumpets to play their semiquavers *mp* with good clear articulation and not into the stand.

36 This is the only place in the work where the flute parts cannot be covered by two players. If you choose not to have more than one player per part, some re-scoring is necessary here, perhaps the low second flute part going to first clarinet. However, I suggest that you double the second flute part.

Needless to say, the difference between the quaver rest in 36 and the semiquaver rest in 37 is the thing here. The trill will also tend to be too long; make sure it lasts only for a quaver.

38 The difference in dynamic between melody and other parts is extreme here. The *forte* marking in the Eb clarinet playing the lower octave compared with *mf* in the flute is helpful. Perhaps the piccolo need not play louder than *mp*.

46 This phrase is probably the loudest of the movement. Note however that even so it is not a *tutti fortissimo*. The clarinets should project as much as possible, and aim of course for a smooth line as they switch between semiquaver groups. I have found it more successful to get them to play three out of every four groups, rather than taking a beat each. The rest of the orchestra should aim for a very warm *cantabile*, the dynamic should not sound forced in any way.

54 The very florid and difficult writing in the woodwind parts here is scored for harp in the orchestral original. You will of course want to take this to bits and rehearse it very slowly, making sure the players know which quaver beat they are in, but ultimately they just need to go for it and aim for the type of effect you would get from a harp. Making sure the brass play a true *mf* and not louder will help here, unless the woodwinds are really struggling in which case maybe it's a good plan to get the brass to cover them up!

58 The *poco più* of bar 58 suggests something above *mf*. Then in 59 on the second beat Hesketh writes *mf* with *diminuendo* and also an accent in the upper woodwinds. Of course the tendency for the players here will be to give quite a heavy *fp*. This results in the quaver line in first clarinet and vibes being covered up by a too big a *forte* gesture and a poorly executed *diminuendo*. It seems to me that the composer saw all this coming so please follow his instructions carefully! Having said that, I think marking the first clarinet in the same way as the vibes would help, and they should both delay their *dim* somewhat.

Everybody must be very strict about coming off the long note in bar 60 in order to leave space for the first clarinet quaver at the end of the bar, and you will need to encourage them to play this *mp* quite strongly.

64 The ending of the movement poses a number of difficulties and the transparency of the writing requires some rehearsal time. Make sure the dynamics are correct: *mf dolce espressivo* in the first flute; *pp* in the clarinets; the

first horn's bell tones matching the vibraphone's articulation; the string bass vibrating on the *pizzicato* to give some body to the bass line; and the long notes in the low brass at 68 soft enough so as not to cover the woodwind detail.

The *rallentando* of 67 and 68 will happen quite naturally, but make sure you give a positive gesture to the bassoons and bass clarinet for the *a tempo* of the penultimate bar. I beat the beginning of the last bar in quavers (but without slowing down) as I find it helps the *sfz* in the horns and woodwind, and the timpani and string bass to place their last quaver, stopping the beat after the sixth quaver and then releasing the fermata.

Second movement – 'Catching of Quails'

The metronome marking of dotted crotchet = 90 is probably a maximum. In some acoustics a slightly slower tempo, around 84, is fast enough to capture the *vivace con vigoroso* feel of the movement.

Bar 1 Make sure the two trumpets combine to make a smooth diminuendo, whilst still maintaining clarity.

6 Throughout the movement, the dotted quaver/ semiquaver/ quaver figure needs attention. I find the tendency is to stress the first note which leads to a lack of clarity in the semiquaver. Asking the players to phrase towards the following bar helps.

8 Do not allow the accented dotted crotchet to be overdone – there needs to be something left for the *sfz* accented dotted crotchets which come later.

21 The bassoons especially should play *molto vigoroso* here.

37 The brass bell tones should be exaggerated with a really *fp* feel to each note.

45 On the other hand, the woodwind bell-like tremolos probably need a *diminuendo* feel in each bar or they will be too prominent.

46 You will be noticing by now that the articulation of the main motif is constantly varied. If this is fully realised, the possibilities for a wide variety of phrasing are significant.

56 The horns will enjoy being encouraged to do a very horn-like swoop to the next bar-line.

61 Make sure the dynamic comes

back here.

74 The *subito piano* is very difficult to execute but marvellously effective if it can be achieved. This is well worth insisting on.

79 The *tenuto* duplet quavers can be very *cantabile* but make sure the *diminuendo* happens to let the *sfz* in the following bar in alto saxophone and third clarinet come to the fore.

85 As at bar 46 of the first movement, the clarinets and flutes need to aim for a continuous line with their semiquavers.

101 The character should change markedly here and it is important the accompaniment parts do not balance up to the oboe and flute. Make sure you check your German dictionary so that you can field the inevitable question from bassoons and bass clarinets....

109 The hemiola in the woodwind semiquavers should be emphasised with a stress on the start of each group of four.

123 The ending requires good conducting and some rehearsal. I start the *accelerando* a little earlier than marked and try to make sure it continues to speed up in the 2/4 bar. Bar 128 is simply a downbeat which stops and does not rebound anywhere. Allow a reasonable length of time for the *fermata* and then give an upbeat in one. The alto sax, horns, string bass and timpani are the key to the following four bars which slow down gradually. I subdivide the last of these (bar 132) in quavers. The 4/8 bar is absolutely *a tempo* and beaten in two, coming to a rest on the penultimate bar and then giving an upbeat in one and a sharp, jagged downbeat which encourages the accented *ff* offbeat in the last bar.

Third movement – 'My Lady's Rest'

Again, I think the metronome marking is just slightly on the quick side. The emphasis should absolutely be on the *andantino* and therefore not too slow, but a quaver pulse of around 100 to 104 still achieves this, giving the possibility of some ambiguity between whether the pulse is in six or two, but also a little more space for phrasing. The beat needs to be a very flowing six in the bar, but with many possibilities of ghosting through the second, third, fifth and sixth quavers to achieve something closer to a slightly sub-divided two in the bar.

Bar 1 Make sure the rhythm in the third clarinet and bassoons is clearly defined, and also that you hear a slight sizzle in the horn.

3 The bass clarinet and first bassoon should play a more solo dynamic for the first couple of bars, coming back to *piano* when the oboe comes in.

5 Make sure the oboe plays *mp espressivo* and is clearly heard over the accompaniment.

6 One of the most delightful features of this movement is the detail in the accompanying parts. Whilst their general dynamic should be very soft, moments such as the third clarinet at the beginning of bar six and again at bar 13 can be featured.

11 The vibraphone should be audible, and the notes of the chords spread in a guitar-like manner.

13 Note that the flute joins the oboe melody at a *piano* dynamic so should not dominate the double reed sonority which is such a feature of this movement.

17 The cor anglais entry on the *pp* low C is very difficult and should not detract from the *mp* entry of the oboe just after it. You could consider omitting that note and asking the bass clarinet and bassoon (who are in a more comfortable register) to play a little stronger until the cor is established.

21 Dynamic contrast in the lower registers is vital in this movement and there must be clear differences between the *mp* solo lines, the *piano*, *pianissimo* and at 47 the *ppp*. As always, you will need to demand these lower dynamics, but equally make sure that the *pianos* are ample enough to give the players somewhere to go.

25 The bassoon and bass clarinet can again come to the fore in these two bars. Be sure also that the first clarinets do not spread their upwards run on the last quaver of 26 over too long a time.

27 The *mf* here will come without any encouragement so be sure it is not too loud and that the sound does not become forced in any way. The one line which does need to be brought out is the counter melody in third clarinet and third horn.

39 The flutes, piccolo, oboe and Eb clarinet have a very attractive accompaniment here. However, make sure firstly that they give the *staccato* quaver more length than the *staccato* semiquaver and secondly that the *cantabile*

line in cor anglais and second clarinet is clearly heard.

42 I take a little bit of time at the end of the bar which gives time to really make the *diminuendo* happen and prepare the *pp* of 43 which must be very soft.

47 If you have impressed your audience with the quality of the *pianissimo* at 43 you can create a magical moment at 47 if you can get the players to find an even softer dynamic. Cheat a little by omitting any players who are doubling a part and work in rehearsal at getting the players to find out just how quietly it is possible for them to play before the note does not speak.

49 The *mp* of the cornets and trumpets is then really quite loud by comparison. You might like to point out to the players that the difference between *ppp* and *mp* is the same number of dynamic steps as *mp* to *ff*.

50 The bassoons and euphonium should then really sing out their *cantabile* line and I find a slight *più mosso* is effective here to move things along after the hushed drama of the previous phrase.

66 A slight holding back at the end of this bar is effective for the *forte* (only!) at 67. In 71, the *più forte* final quaver is the loudest point of the movement but the players must *diminuendo* rapidly on the *fermata* and the conductor must give them time to do so.

73 The brass always misread this rhythm! In the penultimate bar, beat clearly in nine. Quaver eight is directed to the vibraphone, quaver nine to the first clarinets, and the downbeat of the last bar is concerned with trying to get the triangle, flutes and trombones to articulate together.

Fourth movement – ‘Quodling’s Delight’

Bar 1 Of course, the movement begins *attacca* from the previous one. The metronome marking of crotchet = 144 is spot on. The low brass and winds need to lock into the snare drum rhythm and be careful not to be late starting their quavers at the end of the bar.

3 The *tenuto* marking in the brass needs quite a clear articulation, and then the dynamic should be released when they reach the minim.

6 The placing of the accents is something often overlooked in other

performances I have heard.

7 Make sure the horns and trumpets link the crotchet to the minim. The tendency is for them to play it too short and not loud enough.

14 I ask the players to make sure the first three quavers are all *fortissimo* before doing a rapid *diminuendo*.

16 The flutter-tonguing flutes and hand-stopped horns should be heard.

24 I find I have to make sure the clarinets, bassoons and alto saxes do enough with the *mfps*. Of course the marking suggests that the attack should not be too heavy, but it is important that they release the sound sufficiently. The trombone figure might need to be encouraged, given that it is muted.

36 This passage is difficult for the first flutes and will need some attention to get the right effect.

43 Make sure the trumpets and trombones play their dynamics accurately here.

46 The tendency here is for the tempo to slow. This can be made to work but I prefer to keep the same speed with as much of an *alla breve* feel as the metric changes permit.

50 The *staccato* notes in the bassoon are a nice touch, and can be brought out. The piccolo and second oboe always seem to want to rush their semiquaver group.

55 The 5/4 bar is best thought of as 2/4 + 3/4.

59 Try to find a gesture which encourages the low brass pedal note not to be late.

73 The dynamic might have got quite loud here, so you could bring the start of this bar down a little to make a more effective *crescendo*. If you have lost any tempo in the *cantabile* section, make sure you have an *a tempo* at 74. Be with the trombones to make sure they don't get behind.

80 The *mf* always seems to come out too loud so I ask them to start much less than that. At 82 the long notes need to release in order that the detail of the articulation in the theme comes through.

90 Asking the cornets to play not necessarily any louder, but the bells up a little will help to bring this through. 92 and 93 are tricky and it is worth spending some time making sure the dynamic is soft enough; the semiquavers are placed after the quavers; and the tempo does

not drag.

102 Ensemble often seems to be a problem in this section. The woodwinds also like to over-blow which can make what should be a *cantabile mf* sound harsh. At 109 make sure the people with the melody are aware of the horns and second and third clarinets. Sometimes this whole section can work nicely in *alla breve*.

126 I like to bring the trumpet part out here, the top Cs bring this episode to a dramatic conclusion.

130 The tempo of letter K is very quick, particularly with *ancora più mosso* and a *con fuoco* to come. You might go for something a little slower, but the point is that it should be quicker than the main tempo of the movement. Of course, getting this to work at a quiet dynamic will require some rehearsal.

137 I find if the players think of the three quavers into the next bar as *alla breve* the necessary forward impetus happens naturally. The *fortissimo* here should be controlled – if the players are playing as loud as they can you will lose detail and tempo and in any event you need something left for bar 149.

152 The rhythm here is of course difficult to play at this speed. The tendency is actually for the players to get to the last two semiquavers of the bar too soon, the tied quavers immediately before those being longer than they think.

156 The players with long notes and tremolos should delay their *crescendo* so that the rising scales can be heard. The horns can use this bar to put their bells up in preparation for their blazing tremolo in the last bar.

In summary, *Danceries* is a terrific concert work which is extremely popular with audiences. However, its challenges should not be underestimated and in order to do justice to the range of detail in the score careful preparation and rehearsal is needed. Much of the variety is very subtle and even very fine players will not instinctively take care of it themselves. Therefore, as an exercise in score study and rehearsal preparation for conductors it is an excellent work to programme, in addition to being a rewarding and enjoyable piece to perform.