

Paris Sketches

by Martin Ellerby

A Guide to Rehearsal and Performance **Mark Heron**

Commissioning History

Paris Sketches was commissioned under the auspices of the British Association of Symphonic Bands and Wind Ensembles' Consortium Commissioning Scheme with funds from BASBWE, Bell Baxter High School, Bodmin Community College, Cleveland Youth Wind Orchestra, Hemel Hempstead High School, Northern Arts, Richmond School, Scottish Arts, South West Arts, Springwood High School and Yorkshire & Humberside Arts. The first performance was by Cleveland Youth Wind Orchestra in Ripon Cathedral in July 1994.

There is a revised and corrected edition dating from 2004 (Maecenas) and it is worth obtaining this as opposed to the first edition.

Paris Sketches has been recorded many times and a number of those available are listed in the score. Suggested starting points would be North Texas Wind Symphony/ Corporan (Klavier), Tokyo Kosei/ Bostock (Kosei) and RNCM Wind Orchestra/ Rundell (Classicprint).

Martin Ellerby

50 this year, Martin Ellerby is a composer of international standing whose works have been performed, broadcast and recorded to critical acclaim across Europe, Asia and the USA. His catalogue comprises compositions spanning a diverse range of media, including orchestral, choral, concert band, brass band, ballet, instrumental and chamber, together with a substantial number of commercial orchestrations and arrangements. Ellerby's works are published extensively and recorded on over 75 commercial CDs to date. Key performances include the BBC Promenade Concerts, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Barbican Centre, Royal Albert Hall, South Bank Centre and many major international festivals, including Edinburgh, Harrogate, Zurich and Kuhmo Chamber Music (Finland).

Martin combines a busy schedule as a professional composer with work in education and he is currently Visiting Professor at the Royal Air Force. He is also Artistic Director for Studio Music Company, London and Senior Producer for Polyphonic Recordings. More information about the composer can be found at www.martinellerby.com

Instrumentation Considerations

Paris Sketches is scored for a fairly standard wind orchestra plus an important piano part:

piccolo; flute 1 & 2; oboe 1 & 2; Eb, 3 x Bb (with *divisi* so six players needed), alto & bass clarinets; 2 bassoons; AATB saxophones; 4 horns; 4 trumpets; 3 trombones; euphonium; tuba; string bass; piano; timpani & 3 percussion

It would be possible to cover the double bass part with cross cueing but the wide range of orchestral colour utilised by the composer is such an intrinsic part of the work that having the full instrumentation is vital to a successful performance.

As explained by the composer in his detailed note in the score, the idea of 'bells' is a unifying thread through the work. Percussion sections will need to make sure that tubular bells and glockenspiels of good quality are available.

Rehearsal Suggestions

Paris Sketches is in four movements. Each movement is a snapshot of a particular district of Paris, imbued with implicit or explicit reference to composers who lived or worked in the city.

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

I. Saint-Germain-des-Prés

I take a tempo of around $\text{minim} = 54$, slightly less than the printed 60. I beat in minims virtually for the whole movement and would not recommend subdividing to any great extent.

1 Right from the beginning, the challenge is to balance the colours of the accompaniment whilst still clearly hearing the theme. The long note accompaniments are luscious and enjoyable to play but they can easily cover up the thematic figures. A certain Wagnerian *rubato* works well in this opening: pressing forward a little with the *crescendo* and relaxing the pulse as the phrase subsides.

6 Here, and in many places throughout the work, the 2nd & 3rd players will need encouragement to play out when they begin their phrases before, and in a lower register than, the 1st players.

8 Note the *staccato* in the horn and trombone which needs to be well projected to come through the otherwise very legato textures. The muted trombone at *mezzo piano* may need encouragement to play significantly stronger than his colleague's open *pianissimo*.

10 The *divisi* quaver lines in the clarinet parts should flow as if played by one player – and can usefully be rehearsed in that way. Make sure you have a pair of ears in the back of the hall to check that the piano can be heard.

12 Bring out the 4th horn and even though the composer specifically points out that he intends the *tenuto* marks throughout the work to refer to length rather than emphasis

this is one of a few places where I think a bit of added articulation helps.

14 As often with the “second part of a conversation”, ask the trombones to play a little more strongly than the horns. At 16 however, the register of the upper woodwinds takes care of this without the need to mention it.

16 Make sure the players are aware that there are often *crescendi* and *diminuendi* happening concurrently. Perhaps delaying the former here will help the latter to be noticed.

18 A quick *diminuendo* is needed so that the dramatic horn line is heard to full effect.

20 There is no need to subdivide the *ritenuto* as long as the oboe and trumpet are aware of each other. Your main focus should be the tempo of the *poco più mosso* and helping the glockenspiel and flutes to be together.

23 Again, note the articulation of the themes in 23 and 24 compared with 25 onwards. For me, the *staccato* suggests a slightly hesitant feel.

24 It is worth rehearsing only the triplet fragments from 27 to 35 to check they are all balanced. I find that 2nd alto and low trumpets in 29 sometimes don't project enough.

34 Again, the *ritardando* is achieved by the players listening to each other and not by any subdivision. At 35 treat the 2nd & 3rd clarinets as if they are a full size 2nd violin section of 14 players and make the kind of sweeping *legato* gesture that will encourage them to play out and set the tone for the rest of the upper woodwinds. Measure 39 is for me the climax of the opening movement and so 38 is the only place where I make the *ritenuto* a bit more than *poco* and beat 4 crotchets. I go straight back into minims on 39 and focus on the clarinets to get a strong entry from them on the 2nd beat which also re-establishes the tempo. Everybody needs to release the long notes here and not play too *sostenuto* if the counterpoint is to be heard effectively.

43 A quick *diminuendo* is necessary so that the low-lying horns and euphonium can be heard and to create space for the piccolo at the end of the bar.

44 The oboe, marked ‘like a bird’ should be encouraged to play very virtuosically and perhaps not too accurately.

50 As the quaver/semiquaver rest/ semiquaver figure starts to appear, be absolutely sure it is rhythmic and not influenced by the preceding triplets. At 51 the trumpets can be encouraged to lift the bells and play their scurrying triplets very dramatically – just make sure they don't rush!

As the movement winds down to its soft conclusion many of the same principles of articulation, balance and ensemble mentioned above apply again. Be sure at bar 70 that the horns' stopped notes can be heard, and feature the tubular bells from 70 to the end. In the penultimate bar, make sure the tam-tam player knows to ‘warm’ the instrument – it can be tricky to get the top of the *crescendo* coming early enough.

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II. Pigalle

Inspired by ‘the Soho of Paris’, this brisk and extremely entertaining movement is in complete contrast to the previous one. The conductor must be ‘in character’ before beginning as much of the effect is lost if it takes 16 bars to get going. Small, focused and clear beating with lots of articulation in the end of the stick is needed to help the rhythmic figures: over-conduct and it will just get progressively slower and heavier. The printed tempo of crotchet = 144 is good; if the players and the acoustic can handle it, a notch quicker is also possible.

2 The shape of bars 2 – 3 and 4 - 5 is crystal clear to the conductor from looking at the score. Remember though that the players don't have that information and they will tend to play their 2 or 3 notes as individual fragments rather than part of a 2 bar phrase.

10 Exaggeration and attention to detail is the key in much of this movement – the very rapid *piano* / *crescendo* / *forte* of the euphonium, bari sax, bassoons etc in bar 10; the *staccato* then accent of the clarinets and saxes in bar 11; the *fz* in the timpani at the end of 12 and then *ffz* at the end of 13. It's all in there – just make sure it happens!

15 The brass parts here are a great exercise in articulation. If the players can achieve the *diminuendo* as they go lower in the register and still get clarity on the *piano staccato* they will be in good shape for the rest of their careers.

21 This is another place where the *tenuto* needs to be clearly articulated and maybe even just slightly short of full length.

33 Make sure the new figure in the horns and trumpets is heard clearly. At 37 the effect is fabulous only if the brass play really strongly in their *fortissimo*; the bass instruments do the quickest ‘zingy-est’ *ffzp* of all time with a really late *crescendo*; and the woodwinds, trumpets and horns actually achieve *staccato and piano*.

42 The flute grace notes need to be really tight and close to the beat. In 43 it is hard for the flutes and oboes to line up correctly with the tuba and bassoon. If you try to help too much you will probably just make it worse. This is one of several places in this movement where you can usefully stop conducting and train the players to sort out these ensemble problems by listening to each other. This is also a spot where the double bass is vital. If none is available you will need to cross cue into bari sax or bass clarinet – whichever does the best *pizzicato*!

47 Another spot of difficult ensemble because the trumpets are so far away from the piccolo. What actually helps most is to make sure the bassoon plays strongly and rehearse it without the piccolo a couple of times.

52 I sometimes do 52, 53, 55 & 56 in two to emphasise the contrast between the more lyrical idea in the flutes and oboes and the rather rude interruption of bar 54. It's a little bit like conducting Mozart – the players should have settled into the feel of it by now so free it up and conduct the music rather than the beats.

63 Another double bass moment.

67 You can let the alto saxophones play the way saxophones like to play!

71 Look out for the accent in the middle of the bar. I try to get this bar to feel as if it's somewhere between a 3/4 and a 6/8.

76 In my experience the 2nd and 3rd trumpet flutter tonguing can't be too loud.

83 Make sure the accent happens on the last quaver for these five bars.

95 Note the variety of 'shapes' – make sure everybody plays the *crescendi* and *diminuendi* exactly as printed to get the effect of the different lines coming in and out of the texture.

99 This just must be a real *pianissimo* and don't let it get too loud too soon – it will get louder as people join in so don't even consider indicating any kind of *crescendo* until about 106.

109 Bells up in the horns is a nice effect.

117 I've heard performances with a slight comma at the end of 116, presumably to allow the acoustic to do its worst and then make the beginning of 117 clear. That's not to my taste and I prefer the slightly disconcerting feeling of the *pianissimo* grumblings in the bass and alto clarinets emerging unnoticed from the crash bang wallop of the percussion. Again, make sure you achieve a very soft dynamic and that the beginning of the *crescendo* in 121 is still *pianissimo* – it is worth getting the players to mark that in the parts. In such a riotous movement these few moments of virtual silence have a huge role to play.

126 Make sure all the semiquavers in the piano are heard; sometimes it sounds like quavers.

III. Père Lachaise

1 The *pizzicato* shape of the notes is very important here, and should be adopted by those who play on the second beat as well. Getting a good balance between the glockenspiel and the vibraphone is important and difficult. The answer is different in every acoustic and the players will need to experiment with different mallets. What sounds right on the podium may also sound unbalanced in the hall so make sure you listen from the back as well.

5 The solo lines should of course be played very expressively, for me with a touch of *rubato* in the phrasing but not too much. It's important not to be a control freak in this kind of movement – let the soloists play and see what they give you in terms of phrasing and *rubato*, it might be better than what you had thought of! Your job here is to listen to balance, help the accompaniment to stay together and make the solos sound great.

39 Look out for the 2nd & 3rd trumpet here. You are after a bell-like articulation, not too much accent, and will probably need to ask the 2nd player to play softer and the 3rd louder. Apart from these *fzps* the loudest dynamic in this movement is *mf* so be sure that the sound never becomes forced or strident.

43 You'll have a nice time getting vibraphone, alto sax, Eb clarinet, oboe, flutes and piccolo playing this unison perfectly in tune!

63 Ask the players to be brave and play a little behind your beat and to take a real risk with the *pianissimo*.

69 These bars need quite a clear beat to get the piccolo, oboes, alto sax and glock together and playing the rhythm cleanly.

76 With young players the muted 2nd & 3rd trumpet solo can be tricky. Make sure they know what effect their mutes have on tuning in this register and consider rehearsing it with them playing it open so that they gain some confidence about the pitch and sound world.

82 I don't know the composer's view on this, but if you have sufficient players you could consider having the *lontano* trumpet solo played off stage or from a suitable balcony.

85 The *Dies Irae* figure in the bells and glockenspiel should ring out across the band and players will welcome a clear cue. At 92, even though they are marked down to *piano* the bells and glock should still be clearly heard.

IV. Les Halles

I find this is usually the movement that less experienced players have most difficulty with. Rehearsing it well under tempo (around dotted crotchet = 108) and well under volume pays dividends. It is also a good idea not to always leave it to the end of the rehearsal when brains and embouchures are tired. There are no major musical problems but it does take time to fit it all together.

1 The effect of the opening should be exactly as the composer writes: *tutti* woodwinds generating *fortissimo* in the first two measures then the sound dropping off considerably when the *divisi* starts in bar 3. The trumpets should start only *forte* in bar 2: in other words they *crescendo* to the woodwind dynamic, not beyond it. Make sure the duplet quavers of the glockenspiels are heard – brass headed sticks will almost certainly be needed.

3 Throughout the movement, make sure the thematic figure that begins in the horns is played correctly. Too often the first couple of quavers get lost because they are low in the register.

16 I ask the flutes and oboes to take the dynamic down to *piano* so that there is plenty of space for the solo clarinet lines. Make sure those players really play *forte* and their colleagues with the long notes don't.

26 As a general point, the syncopations should always be played slightly stronger than the long notes which accompany them.

41 The rhythm in the bassoons and piano is not as hard as the players will probably make it sound in the first rehearsal, but be careful they do actually play it in 12/8 – it can easily turn it into a 4/4 bar with off beat quavers after the 3rd and 4th beats.

48 Make sure the accents come on the right beats.

55 You may need to bring the clarinets down a dynamic so that the oboe is heard clearly.

67 Direct your attention to the horns and trumpets and conduct the articulation of the bell tones. 69 is a challenge for many of us but it can be done.

72 If the pitch of the pitched drums is too low this can sound messy.

95 Enjoy the *legato* but make sure you are not too slow. Clearly point out the canonic entries and keep the minims and long bass notes out of the way. 99 should be very sonorous – make sure the trumpets and trombones are playing into open air not the music stands – and not hurried at all. In 100 I make the *diminuendo* over two beats and the *crescendo* on a slightly held back 3rd beat. I ask them all to breathe after the 2nd beat of 102 and then take quite a lot of time over the *ritenuto*. The 2nd trombone should delay the *diminuendo* so that the quavers in 104 are clearly projected.

105 The Berlioz theme should feel much gentler here than at 95, but still not too slow, so make sure the 1st clarinets and flutes don't need to have to fight their way through the texture.

114 I find *mf* a bit loud for the tenor drum to begin with and at 116 the bass drum whilst not being too loud should be quite dry so that we notice the duplet quavers against all the 12/8. You also need to hold the percussion back for long enough that the piano can be heard when it enters at the end of 117.

120 If you want to get any sort of *diminuendo* out of the trombones on their pedal Bb you'll need to tell them to mark the beginning of 120 *piano*.

126 The duplet rhythm of the horns and side drum should come through clearly and it is worth rehearsing only 1st & 3rd horns, piccolo, flutes, oboes and Eb clarinet in 128 and 129.

130 The feel here should be, as the man says, *Maestoso* and therefore slower than its two previous appearances but still leaving the opportunity for the horns to have the final say in 132 with the kind of soaring holding back of the tempo that they enjoy so much.

133 After all the 12/8, I imagine the final *allegro* to be quite military and four-square, ending with a very short final note and rapidly dampened bass drum and timpani.

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