

MASTERclass

DANCING SOLO FOR SOLO CLARINET (1994), LIBBY LARSEN

by Caroline Hartig



Caroline Hartig
(B & L Photographers, Inc.)

[Libby Larsen's *Dancing Solo* (Movements I, II and IV) is one of the required pieces for the 2003 I.C.A. Young Artist Competition. Ed.]

As a passionate supporter of contemporary music, much of my career has been devoted to seeking out new works worthy of performance. As many of my colleagues know, identifying such works is not always an easy task. *Dancing Solo for Solo Clarinet* by Libby Larsen was commissioned by and dedicated to me for my solo recital at Carnegie Hall in March of 1994. I well remember my anxiety over finding a program of repertoire that was well balanced, appropriate, and of interest to my audience. I knew that, in addition to the standards I selected, I needed a work that would showcase the soloistic and lyrical possibilities of the clarinet today. This meant I needed to commission a composer who was absolutely first-rate and who had the ability to speak

For Caroline Hartig DANCING SOLO for solo clarinet - with shadows LIBBY LARSEN

Example 1

to today's audience. Enter Libby Larsen, virtuoso composer.

In my initial conversations with Libby, she asked me many questions about my favorite composers and works for clarinet. She also asked for a tape of my playing that included both new and traditional works. I had really enjoyed playing unaccompanied solo works such as *A Set for Clarinet*, Donald Martino; *Wings*, Joan Tower; and *Moonflowers Baby!*, Meyer Kupferman, so we decided that we would create a work for solo clarinet.

As we know, a solo work puts the performer on an entirely different platform than when performing with accompaniment. The performer must outline the harmony, provide the subtlety of color, rhythm, dynamics, and forward motion, and most of all, create the musical line. Unaccompanied works clearly present many challenges, yet they also provide an opportunity for the performer to find a unique voice. This is especially true if the work is well written and the performer and composer realize the importance of their symbiotic relationship. Such was the nature of the creation of *Dancing Solo*. Having performed it numerous times as well as having recorded it (Innova #512, <innovare recordings.com>), I find that the work allows each performance to take on a new shape. It provides a vehicle for me to demonstrate what the clarinet can do both technically and musically while allowing me to exhibit multiple musical interpretations.

I have enjoyed coaching *Dancing Solo* and have received many calls and e-mails from students and colleagues with questions regarding the work. It is loaded with

contemporary techniques and technical twists that challenge the performer and stretch the limits of the instrument. There are four movements that are skillfully interwoven to form a cohesive work. *Dancing Solo* is inspired by instrumental virtuosity, which parallels the kinetic motions of the human body. In Larsen's notes to the performer, she writes the following: "Dancing alone — improvising with the shadows, the air on an inner beat, upon a fleeting feeling — has always enthralled me. In *Dancing Solo* I am making a dance for the clarinet, a dance composed of color, rhythm, beat implied and explicit, and breath: the music is the dance and the dance is the music."

I am pleased that *Dancing Solo* is finding its way onto concert stages around the world. That it has been selected for the 2003 Young Artist Competition is a great tribute to this wonderful work. It is my hope that the following suggestions will provide some insight for future performances.

Movement I — with shadows

This movement begins with graceful ballet-like gestures, which gently rise and fall. It contrasts moments of rapid movement with immobile single notes and the extreme dynamics must be emphasized. The opening figure is important, as it returns throughout the work. (See Example No. 1.) Be sure to state it with confidence and clarity. If played too fast, the major-seventh jump from the first partial C to third-partial B can be unclear or missed,

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and the performer should avoid pulsing or bumping on the beats of the many whole and dotted whole notes. Strive to maintain the beauty and focus of the tone without pulsing the sound, and keep the *pianissimo* dynamic marking until the *crescendo* begins. The phrases can be set off by a slight breath or *luffpause* to help the phrase breathe and to define the extreme and varied dynamics. The attacks on the clarion B and A¹ should be seamless, so you should have the air ready without bumping the beginning. The sound should be fluid and emerge out of no-where. Notice that there are no bar lines for the first two lines until the first six-eight bar where the rhythmic motion really begins. The interjections of A to B eighth notes (the "shadows") should anchor the texture and interrupt like another voice or clarinet.

The interjections continue in the next 4/4 section. (See Example No. 2.) The 32nd-note figure that interrupts at the end of the bar must be quick and quieter than the rest of the bar — I suggest right-hand B. It helps to double-tongue for technical ease and speed, but if you do not double tongue, you can begin with a "ha" on the first B and rapidly single tongue the last three notes. Push ahead gradually and don't accelerate too soon. The low A¹ grace note should come before the beat so that the low G sounds on the beat and continues the forward harmonic progression, which resolves to the throat A. The composer asked that a *luffpause* or breath be taken after the throat A whole note. Move into the *pppp* seamlessly climbing up to the clarion A, and be careful not to *crescendo* until indicated. The next sextuplet, which begins on throat B, needs to be practiced slowly for good execution. Note that it is the opening motive transposed on B. There should be a natural marked on beat seven of the first line of page 3 on the D quarter note tied to an eighth, followed by the eighth note to cancel the preceding eighth dotted eighth of the two-thirty-second-dotted-eighth (c-e-d) figure. Also note that the next to last quarter note at the top of page 3 should be marked an E natural. In the section marked quarter = 132, try to measure the trill and play the runs in strict groupings. It helps to emphatically accent the beginnings of the quarter note trills. (The same holds true for the parallel passages in the last movement.) The septuplet after the two groups of 32nd notes works

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Example 2

Example 3

Example 4 a-c

well grouped three plus four. The multiple quintuplets that follow can be grouped two plus three. Of course, the final outcome should be that of hearing the quintuplets cleanly as written—the audience should not be aware of your practice methods. Breathe after the high-D half-note trill so that you do not have to breathe after the low A¹, which should smoothly transition into the 2/4 marked quarter = 60-66. The last section continues the interjection counterpoint. Observe the *acceleration poco a poco* and play special attention to the varied dynamics to the end.

Movement II — eight to the bar

This movement (marked quarter = 104-112) must swing and be very jazz-like, and the performer should pay close attention to the markings indicated, especially *tenutos* and accents. Be careful not to lose the low Gs in the first two bars, as they are key to making the opening phrase clear. The

"pulse 8" (Example 3) should be "laid back" and is much like a "ha ha" from the diaphragm. Do not rush.

As a general practice, I find it helpful to transpose difficult technical passages to several different keys. This approach is applicable to the chromatic 5/4 bar (See Examples 4 a - c.). If you can play a difficult passage transposed up or down several steps, the actual written passage will become more playable and comfortable. Most players are quick to identify passages that they find tricky. While it is likely that some passages might pose initial difficulty for even the most skilled player, mastery is simply a matter of efficient and effective practice. To achieve the fastest technical mastery possible, PRACTICE SLOWLY!! You will learn the notes sooner, and most of all, they will be at your command. The difference between those who have a successful performance and those who do not is largely due to clever preparation time and the effectiveness of their practice. Because there are several difficult passages

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throughout this work, I recommend slow and efficient practice so that the muscle memory is thorough and solid and will be at your command when it really counts — when you are on stage.

Likewise, I find it helpful to assign groupings to the passages that are difficult and this practice technique also works for Examples 4 a - c. These parallel passages can be divided into triplets and practiced slowly. Again, be sure that the listener remains unaware of your practice scheme. The result should be one of seamless connectivity in the difficult runs and passages. As a stylistic matter, be sure to make a difference between the figures marked "straight" and those marked "swing." Take a bit of time to establish the flutter-tongue clarion G (Example 5) before glissing to the altissimo G. I like to use the following G fingering: thumb, register key and first finger in the left hand and fork in the right hand (be sure to have the finger close to the post, so the note won't be too flat), plus the E¹ speaker key. Make an extreme difference between the bold *fortissimo* and the next section marked *pianissimo*. Make full use of the rests written to allow the motion to stop completely and then suddenly start again. The next stubborn passage (Example 6) is similar to the opening motive. It helps to practice it as I have marked it. The pulsing here should be more of a "ha ha," being careful not to rush the pulsing from the high C to the low Cs. Just let them sound naturally. The rest of the movement dissipates effectively, especially with use of the dynamics and tempo as marked.

Movement III — in ten slow circles

Although this movement is not on the Young Artist Competition list, I will offer a few words about it. Its sinuous lines make it difficult, and they require much control in the extremes of the instrument. Each phrase is slightly different and requires many colors and shadings. It should be played freely and with a sense of melancholy and soulfulness.

I find that circular breathing helps to make the phrases connect seamlessly, but if you don't feel comfortable with circular breathing, be sure to breathe in logical places that don't disrupt the musical flow. There are many possibilities for breaths — it is simply a matter of breathing unobtrusively within the character of the phrase.

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Example 5

Example 6

Example 7

No matter what type of breathing you use, it is always best to have a plan in mind as well as an alternate plan in case of emergency. As the player performs the movement more and more, they will know where the breaths work best and make most sense musically, as this movement can convey a very personal statement. In the fourth line, you should be careful to make a smooth connection to the high G and choose a fingering that is in tune. This is an excellent place to practice high-register intervals transposing the bar up and down to add flexibility especially with the interval of the fifth from C to G, etc.

Movement IV — flat out

This movement is great fun to play. The energy is non-stop and stamina is a must. I recommend using two stands and having all five pages set so that you can move freely from page to page. Take as much

time as you need to recover after the third movement. While this seems logical, I have witnessed many a performance where the player begins while still fatigued, only to have a very bumpy run. Just remember that you won't become less tired if you begin too soon, especially since "flat out" has virtually no significant rests.

The real trick in this movement is to keep the energy constant and flowing. It is marked "as fast as possible," but be sure to pick a bright tempo that still can be controlled. The rhythm must be impeccable from the very beginning. (Example 7) You must feel the sub-divided beat especially when moving to a figure such as the one that transitions from bar 8 to 9. The run must fit into the rhythmic pulse of the movement. The opening motive of the entire piece (Example 8) is stated again, so be sure to be meticulous with the phrasing to help the listener make the connection. In Example 9 bend the G² eighth note to clari-

Example 8

Example 9

Example 10

on C, and in the second bar do a chromatic gliss as fast as possible. The gliss from G to F in bar 3 should be fairly long, yet rhythmic. It can be started a bit sooner than notated, and once the top F is reached, follow the short marking indicated with an accent. In the quarter-note rest, breathe in the time of the next run to give a good rhythmic start to your technique with plenty of rhythm in the fingers. Throughout this movement, use the quarter and half rests to effectively begin and end the phrases. The silences can of course be used to breathe, but they are also useful to provide successful transitions from one phrase to the next.

The long jazz-like run on page nine, (Example 10) is one of the most fun to play in the entire piece. It must be learned carefully and slowly, and it helps to emphasize the accents indicated. Notice that the accents are not on the beats. The "detached, furiously" marking (Example 11) sounded loudly like two-clarinet counterpoint similar to the first movement. It helps to practice these passages slowly, finding each note on the reed as the passage skips from the various partials. Once the notes are learned and your embouchure has a muscle memory, it is helpful to practice "advancing" the fingers to achieve the shortness of the note, i.e., Bonade's

tonguing technique known as "fingers ahead." When employing this method, be sure that the air is effectively behind the tongue and don't replace air speed/support with tongue and jaw pressure. As the passage goes on, be sure to take enough reed and mouthpiece, for as fatigue sets in, the embouchure can tend to creep up on the reed causing control and production problems. Where "highest possible note" is marked, I use a full-fingered altissimo B¹. It fits well into the chordal structure and is a solid while still maintaining the drum it is short while still maintaining the dramatic arrival point that it is. Use the half rest as an effective stop to the motion before it begins again. The section on page 11 must have the feel of improvised, free-form jazz. Note that on line 2, measure 2, the A on beat 4 is an A natural. Also on page 11, line 6, measure 2, third beat, the second note should be played B natural. In line seven, the last note of the line should be played D natural. Execute the accents where written and note the error on the second to last line of page 11. (See Example 12) The low D printed should be a low F. Another printing error occurs on the last page in measures 7-13 where the downbeats should all be A¹s just as in the beginning of the movement. At this point, the movement is preparing for a quick halt,

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Example 11

Example 12

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Hartig is Associate Professor of Clarinet at Ball State University and has taught at the Oberlin Conservatory. She performs frequently with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and is a Buffet Artist/Clarinetist. She may be contacted via e-mail at <char-tig@bsu.edu>.

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Caroline Hartig is active as a clarinet soloist and chamber musician throughout the United States, Europe and Canada. She has performed in major concert halls including Carnegie Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, Symphony Hall (Boston), and the Fritz Reiner Center for Contemporary Music. She has performed as a guest artist for the International Clarinet Association, has been heard on National Public Radio's "Center Stage from Wolf Trap," and is widely sought after for her new-music collaborations. Hartig can be heard on the compact disc *Dancing Solo* (<innovarecordings.com>), which features her performing the solo and chamber clarinet works of Libby Larsen. Her most recent CD, *Clarinet Brillante* (Centaur

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but don't lose steam yet!! Use your adrenaline to finish with the same adrena that began the movement. At this point, you should commend yourself, as will the audience, for performing and preparing this wonderfully challenging work. Good Luck!

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