Little Maggie

solo violin

Larry Polansky

1984
LITTLE MAGGIE
Performance Notes

SINGING

The violinist should sing all the verses. It is not necessary, in fact it is not preferred, that the violinist be a trained singer in any way. What is looked for is a natural, rather informal singing style, the most important quality being a relaxed and uninhibited manner. The notation for the voice should serve as a guide, but the performer may take liberties with it if he/she wants. The voice part may be sung in any octave. Since the voice notation is largely drawn from the singing of bluegrass bands, and in particular, the Stanley Bros. performance of "Little Maggie", vocal ornamentation within that style can serve as a model for the violinist.

CHORDAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Below each line of music, in (mostly) uppercase letters, the chord changes of the piece are provided. Ideally, these chords should be played by the violinist, on a detachable footpedal device of the kind that rock organists frequently use. In this case, only the roots of the chords (and possibly fifths, if the footpedals are so equipped), are necessary. The accompaniment might also be played by a separate accompanist, on a simple sounding organ, Casio or other electronic keyboard, harmonium, or any other sustaining instrument with a relatively simple waveform and no vibrato. The dynamics of the accompaniment should vary slightly in response to the violin part—for example, softer in Variation III, louder at the end and in the Introduction. In general, however, they should be fairly constant—soft enough so as not to interfere with the nuances of the violin part, but loud enough to be heard and felt clearly. If the violinist is miked (which is preferable in a large hall, and even in a small one to allow the player more dynamic freedom, especially in the soft sections), the accompaniment should be combined in the output mix so that it blends spatially with the violin. Throughout most of the piece, the chords consist of major triads, but in certain variations (like II), more extended chords are used. The accompanist or violinist might also take certain liberties with the rhythmic feel of the chords—syncopating slightly to taste, and in response to the rhythmic movement of the piece, but in general the chords should
change on the indicated beats. Voicings of the chords are left to the player. If a string instrument is used (like an autoharp, pedal steel, dobro, or even guitar), simple interconnecting runs between the chords may be played, but with discretion. The accompanist should also take care to follow the violinist's tempo closely.

HARMONICS

All harmonics are notated by their sounding pitch, the "node" (diamond shaped note in parentheses), and the string (in roman numerals). This fingering schema is often omitted if the harmonic is a second (octave), in which case there is only one way to play it on the indicated string, and when a given harmonic is used frequently in succession. Since many of the harmonics, especially the higher ones (4th, 5th, 6th and 7th), have several (n-1) places where they might be played, the notated fingerings are to be taken as suggestions only. Even the string on which a harmonic is played (for example, the high D which is the same on the IV and III string) can often be changed if the violinist feels it necessary. Since many of the harmonics are quite difficult to produce, their reliability will vary greatly from violin to violin, bow to bow, and player to player, and the violinist may occasionally substitute artificial harmonics or even fingered pitches as a last resort. For many of the higher harmonics, a rather tenuous sound (hard to avoid) is desired—with a high percentage of bow noise (this is especially true in Variation III and in parts of the Introduction). Open strings are notated in the same fashion as harmonics, but without a node of course.

TEMPI

The entire piece should be played in a fast fiddle-tune tempo, though there is room for a great deal of liberty from variation to variation, and even within the variations. The Introduction and Fiddle Tune (at the end) should both be quite fast, but Variations III and V, for example, might be played slower to bring out the sonorities more. Variation IV should be played as fast as possible.

PIZZICATI

Several styles of pizzicati are used in the piece—from normal pizz. to thumbed strumming and even the use of a plectrum. Often, the violinist might find it expedient to switch the position of the instrument for the extended pizzicato sections (Variation I; Verse V; Variation V), but this is left to the player. If Variation V (or even Variation I) is played with a plectrum, either a plastic or hard felt type may be used. If any of the pizzicato harmonics prove to difficult to
sound at the indicated tempo, the player may substitute a different fingering (string), or even play them as stopped pitches rather than break the tempo.

INTRODUCTION

Only two pitches are used in the Introduction, G and C#, and there is only one chord (G).

DYNAMICS

Two types of dynamics, parenthetical and not, are used. Parenthetical dynamics signify slight changes within the prescribed markings, and might almost be considered phrasing or "breathing" suggestions to the player.

INTONATIONS

In Variation II, the intonations of pitches should correspond as closely as possible to the harmonic series on G (as indicated in the footnote in that variation). In the Introduction, the C# might be played consistently flat about a quarter-tone (or as an 11th harmonic to G), but this is optional. Throughout the rest of the piece, intonation should more closely resemble that of traditional fiddling than 12-tone equal tempered, for example: slightly flat (just) thirds (about 14 cents), flat sevenths (seventh harmonics, about 31 cents narrow of tempered), and true fifths. This should not be done in any mechanical fashion, or even considered to be "microtonal," but rather naturally by ear, and the playing of Tommy Jarrell and others might be used as an aural model.

SLURS AND PHRASINGS

Slur markings do not necessarily indicate bow changes, but are meant to simply give a sense of the desired phrasing. In addition, the indicated bowings may be altered slightly at the players' discretion, although in certain cases, when there is an obvious "motivic" reason for them, they should be respected even if they prove difficult. The same applies to indicated fingerings—the player may take certain liberties with them, but not without some consideration as to their musical purpose!
Thanks to Malcolm Goldstein for originally suggesting and inspiring the piece, and to Jody Diamond for her care and support during its composition.

Larry Polansky (Boston, 1981—Berkeley, 1984)
The musical notation on the page contains various musical symbols and notes, indicating a piece of music with specific instructions. The tempo is marked as 100-120, and the instruction “In general fast, like a fiddle tune” is present. The notation includes various sections labeled with numbers and letters, indicating different sections of the piece. The dynamics, indicated by terms like “f” (forte) and “p” (piano), and articulations, like “staccato” and “legato,” are also present. The overall structure suggests a well-organized musical composition with attention to detail in terms of tempo, dynamics, and articulation.
N.B. Ms. 41-104 should be played "in position" as much as possible so that the sound will be continuous.
N.B. Pull-off (p.o.): second note is not plucked by right hand but sounded by left-hand
Hammer-on (H.o.): "hammer" or "pull-off" motion, as guitar/mandolin/banjo
style.
\* N.B (mm. 182-191) This passage may be too difficult to fast to play in normal position. The violinist may find it necessary to hold the instrument like a mandolin and pizzicato with the thumb in a rapid alternating shuffle, the heel could also be held against the chest (as in some traditional fiddling) to facilitate the transitions to and from arco.

The passage may as a last resort, be played arco.
**K.B.** Crescendo harmonics may be played as stopped phrases if they prove too difficult to sound.
Verse I

Voice

how can I ever stand up, just to see those two blue

(Bounce how gently, as an accompaniment)

F D G D

Voice

eyes?

A shining like two diamonds in the sky

F D G Variation II (J. V. sempre in variation)

(coda see page)

G (for rest of page)

* Until 285 tempo may be rubato, even a little slow.
In this variation, intonations should be as close to the harmonic series (above) as possible.

G and D harmonics optional from this point on.
*(From previous page): Natural harmonic fingerings and notes indicated in this variation can be taken as suggestions. For example, any of the six notes on the D string producing high G (7th harmonic) as a natural harmonic will suffice and the player should use that which presents the easiest fingering and/or strongest sensitivity. String indications should be adhered to.

In general, rather than non-vibrate sounds with a lot of bow-range are not only unavoidable but desirable.*
Verse III

G

Going down to the desert (re) with a suitcase in my hand.

F

Going to leave this country.

D

I'm a

G

Britle and fine (two vib.)

G

F

D
Variation V

Resonant, L.V throughout. (dynamics ad lib.)

* this entire variation may be played with a plectrum.
Last time I saw little Maggie she was sitting on the banks of the sea.

Phrase: (Verse I)

Verse II:

Last time I saw little Maggie she was sitting on the banks of the sea.

Phrase: (Verse II)

Chorus:

Last time I saw little Maggie she was sitting on the banks of the sea.

Phrase: (Chorus)
"banjo on her knee"

Variation III (for Tommy Smell)

**668**

First: Brunton's, as a fiddle tune. A little brittle, with a rough bow sound.

**677**

towards the bridge

Slight bow towards bridge

(Continuing; loud; dynamics as Ib.)

G

(at the head)
G G C D D G D

Vie. Yonder stands little Marie with a dram glass in her hand.
Vln. She's drinking away her troubles, and a

Vie. courting some other man.
Vln. (to bridge...)

11 12