

The Miller Dances the Right Steps at Last

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The cor anglais cadenza in the ‘Miller’s Dance’ from De Falla’s ballet *The Three-Cornered Hat*, or to give it its original title *El Sombrero de Tres Picos*, has always been something of a warhorse in the repertoire for the instrument. This is mainly due to the risk of cracking one or other of the bottom D’s that occur in the last three of its eight bars. But another section has often puzzled me, and this is the notation of the fourth bar of the solo where, instead of increasing the excitement in the music by going step by step via using adjacent notes in the scale, there is a sudden jump of a minor third from (as written for the cor anglais) G natural to B flat instead of including the A natural in between. Indeed, some conductors expect an accent to be added to the B flat, thus making a feature of this discrepancy.

A couple of months ago, I was lucky enough to hear on the BBC an Archive recording of De Falla himself playing the ‘Miller’s Dance’ as a piano solo, and sure enough (as I had always expected) he played the missing A. This really did seem to me to be the logical way for him to have composed the solo, so I decided to visit the British Library to look at the De Falla Autographs which have been on loan there from his publishers, J.W. Chester and Co, for several years. To my delight they had the piano score, an autograph in De Falla’s hand which contains the missing A! So far so good. An examination of the published piano solo version from Chester’s from 1921 was similar, the A being present. Now I must say at this stage that it has been difficult to ascertain when the actual orchestration was made, although it does seem that this occurred after the piano solo version, rather than the other way round. Of the available orchestral scores that I was able to see in the B.L., the earliest was a manuscript full score from 1920. But this was in a Spanish copyist’s hand, and the A natural was missing — and this was from the year before Chester’s printed edition for piano solo. Could it not be possible then, that the Spanish copyist made an unnoticed error when he made a

clean copy, an error that has since always been perpetuated? After all, this is not how the composer himself wrote the original music or how he himself recorded it.

But one last observation. The actual construction of the solo has a built-in excitement factor in the way that its notation progressively increases the drama. After bar 1, in which the cor anglais announces its presence, the onward movement commences in bar 2 in groups of three; in bar 3 in groups of 4; bar 4 would have had groups of 5 if the “missing” A had been there; and bar 5 has groups of 6, thus making the natural progression complete. Surely this alone ought to be enough reason for playing this missing A, but together with the other instances that I have mentioned, there is sufficient circumstantial evidence to play it that way in future. So next time it is your fortune to play the ‘Miller’s Dance’, try the original — and best of luck with the bottom D’s!!

I am happy to be able to report that since I started preparing this article in December, the missing A has been finally corrected by De Falla’s publisher, J & W Chester, Ltd.!! I contacted Chester’s early in the New Year and proposed my theory. It turned out that I could not have done so at a better time as they were in the process of preparing a new edition of the complete ballet. What’s more, the editor had in his possession a photocopy of the first orchestral score, which was in De Falla’s hand, sent from the De Falla Archives in Granada in Spain. This clearly shows the presence of that elusive A in the cor anglais part, and it was indeed the mistake of the Spanish copyist who had omitted it when he made the “clean” copy. This was then sent to Chester’s in London for engraving in the early 1920’s, and it was naturally assumed that this copy was correct, and the first printed edition was based on this supposition. So I am very happy that after so many years, the composer’s intentions can now be fully realized. ❖