

NEW SERIES

GUIDE TO
PERFORMANCE

John Robert Brown

ALTANGO, FOR ALTO SAXOPHONE AND PIANO

ABRSM Grade Six

The tango is a powerful dance of a type that has been all but forgotten today, edged out from our dreary dance world of discos and DJs. Tango came to Europe from South America in the late nineteenth century, a dance of seduction. The partners come together to represent a beautiful three-minute love affair. A fiercely passionate dance, the vertical expression of a horizontal desire, the music to accompany a tango should be played with intensity and colour.

Begin your preparation of *Altango* by checking exactly how fast 68 beats per minute is on your metronome. To play it faster or slower than this is fine, but first know the original speed. Arrive at an interpretation of your own.

Sometimes the tango is called the grandson of the habanera. Indeed, the piano states the traditional habanera bass line for much of this piece, the habanera bass predominating over the inner line. Such an inner line is sometimes called a thumb line - though the pianist won't get very far in this instance if the thumb is used.

These two characteristics are present in the first four bars:

Lively $\text{♩} = 68$

In the two bars before letter 'F' the pianist must emphasise the powerful off-beat accents in the left-hand, observing the written dynamics.

Saxophonists should strive for a smooth crossing between the lower and upper register. Play the minims (half notes) to their full length. The flurry of notes in bar 52 is not as difficult as it looks.

Nevertheless, practise this bar thoroughly so that it is no worry to you when playing for others. Perhaps you could memorise the bar; memory is a great aid to technique. A long note followed by a rest ends exactly where the rest begins - that is, where a following note would begin. The end of a note (known as the release) is as important as the beginning (the attack). In bars six, eight and ten, for instance, the minims end on 'one'. *Altango* demands a bold and strong vibrato on the saxophone's long notes. Allow the note to settle for a micro-second before beginning the vibrato, and aim for a deep and not-too-fast pulse. The effect of vibrato is diminished by distance, or by reverberation (echo). A vibrato that sounds great in the tenth row of the audience will sound overdone to someone sitting next to you. So keep this in mind if criticised by those listening close by. Tell them to walk away! A faint-hearted and shallow vibrato won't carry at all, and will disappear. This phenomenon is very similar to the reason why stage actors declaim out into the auditorium, not to their neighbours on stage. Be an actor.

In my opinion the final saxophone note of *Altango* sounds better without any vibrato, but you'll have to be careful to play it exactly in tune.

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1 Broomfield Road, Coventry,
CV5 6 JW, England
Tel: +44 (0)24 7671 2081
Fax: +44 (0)24 7671 2550
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www.warwickmusic.com