Thomas Baker

Black Crook Galop

Arranged for Concert Band by

Ted R. Marcus

Instrumentation

Piccolo  Trumpet 1
Flute  Trumpet 2
Oboe  Trumpet 3
E-flat Clarinet  Horn 1
Clarinet 1  Horn 2
Clarinet 2  Horn 3
Clarinet 3  Horn 4
Alto Clarinet  Trombone 1
Bass Clarinet  Trombone 2
Bassoon  Trombone 3
Alto Saxophone 1  Euphonium
Alto Saxophone 2  Baritone T.C.
Tenor Saxophone  Tuba
Baritone Saxophone  String Bass

Percussion 1 (snare drum)
Percussion 2 (crash cymbal, concert bass drum)
Mallets (xylophone, bells)
Timpani

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PROGRAM NOTES

In 1866, two New York producers brought over a French ballet troupe to perform at the New York Academy of Music. But a fire destroyed the Academy shortly before the troupe’s first scheduled performance. The producers visited William Wheatley, the impresario and manager of the state-of-the-art Niblo’s Garden theatre, for help in finding a new venue. Wheatley realized the ballet troupe could add some much-needed pizazz to the rather inane melodrama he was then rehearsing. He also added songs, dances, special effects, and plenty of scantily-clad chorus girls. The result was a five-and-a-half-hour extravaganza called The Black Crook, which opened at Niblo’s Garden on 12 September 1866. History books often cite The Black Crook as the first Broadway musical. (The title refers to the show’s “crook-backed” villain, a “hideously deformed alchemist,” sorcerer, and master of black magic.)

It really wasn’t the first Broadway musical, but it was an enormous hit. The original production ran for an unprecedented 474 performances, followed by multiple revivals in New York and London. Versions of the show toured the country for the rest of the nineteenth century, and there was even a silent movie version. Then The Black Crook disappeared into the history books.

A prompt book (stage manager’s script) from the 1866 production survives; it’s on the New York Public Library’s Web site. But the only extant music from any version of The Black Crook is sheet music published in 1866: One song and four instrumental “gems” for piano. “Black Crook Galop” is one of those piano selections. Though hardly a lost treasure, it’s a notable piece of Americana with musical as well as historical interest. A galop (yes, that is the correct spelling) was a lively dance inspired by the galloping of horses, popular on both sides of the Atlantic in the 19th century.

“Black Crook Galop” is the work of Thomas Baker, The Black Crook’s musical director. The British-born Baker was a leading composer, arranger, and conductor of music for New York theatres. It’s impossible to know how (or if) this galop was used in the show, as the prompt book contains scant information about songs and music. But the sheet music provides a clue. The cover and title page say it was “arranged by Thomas Baker,” suggesting he compiled themes from The Black Crook’s score into a galop created specifically for publication. Piano arrangements of two-steps, polkas, waltzes and other social dances based on themes from operas and operettas were mainstays of music publishers’ catalogs in the 19th century. (I’ve included the original “Black Crook Galop” sheet music as an appendix. The last page is a “bulletin of new and popular music” offered by the publisher, William A. Pond.)

I have not attempted to re-create the sound this music might have had in 1866. Wind bands in those days were just too different from today’s concert bands. Instead, I imagined time-traveling back a century to 1913, and the director of a prominent concert band handing me a yellowed copy of the “Black Crook Galop” sheet music to arrange for their next concert. Classic marches and novelties from that era are still frequently performed (with minor editorial adjustments). But I did score the final recapitulation of the first theme (measures 102-116) for a wind quintet, as a distant echo of Thomas Baker’s 16-member orchestra at Niblo’s Garden.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

The original sheet music had no tempo indication. I’ve marked this version somewhat facetiously as quarter-note greater than or equal to 132. A galop is lively, but the correct tempo is no faster than woodwind players can cleanly play their decorative figures. Attention to dynamics is, of course, crucial to making this piece exciting.

Baker called for a D.S. (printed as “D.C.”) after measure 101 back to measure 5, and marked measures 102 through the end as a coda. That repetition may have been appropriate for dancing, but I consider it excessive for concert performance. I have accordingly noted the D.S. as optional.

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