Dancing Dynamite

Music: Michael Betteridge

Text: Lynn Pegler

For 13 solo strings and female actor

Score in C

Instrumentation

Actor (female) Violin I (a-d) Violin II (a-d) Viola I Viola II Violoncello I

Double Bass

Performance Instructions

Actor

All text is to be read at a natural pace where indicated in the score. The composer has given some indication of how long each section of text may take, although this is an approximation. Where the text is indicated with a specific rhythm this should be delivered in a natural fashion. In several places there are optional fermatas where the ensemble must wait until the indicated text has been delivered before continuing.

The performer should be amplified (head or lavalier mic preferable).

The text should preferably be learnt by memory - there are cues provided to assist rehearsal, especially for non music readers.

The piece is intended to be staged.

Composer's Note

There have been many pieces throughout the 20th century for ensemble and actor/narrator and composers still to this day are combining spoken word with music. Sally Beamish's *Spinal Chords* was commissioned by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE) with funds from the New Music 20x12 cultural olympiad fund and was composed for thirteen solo Baroque strings and actress/narrator (Juliet Stevenson). The text was written by journalist Melanie Reid and detailed her recovery after having a near-fatal riding accient that left her paralysed from the neck down. I was particularly inspired by this piece when I heard it in the summer of 2012 and wanted to create a companion piece for it. I approached librettist Lynn Pegler, who I had worked with previously on a competition for Manchester Metropolitan University writers and Royal Northern College of Music composers, to create a text. She had recently been involved on a project, that never came to fruition, about domestic abuse and we decided to tackle this issue in this new work.

I wanted, and needed, a reason for the text to be performed with music, so we decided on the character being a ballroom dancer, therefore giving me scope to play around with pastiche and 'familiar' material which I could develop, distort and re-imagine. The character's memories of dancing, and the abuse, are integrated into the score with rhythmised speech in which either the music reacts to her words, or the two are syncronised.

The piece uses tonality throughout in a variety of ways. The tonal structure of the piece moves slowly away from a tonal area of C in a spiral (C, D, B, E, A, F), before going through the keys of G, A, B and then landing in C again. Additionally this is spelled out in the 'overture' (up to B37). There is also a chromatic spiral gesture which is heard throughout the piece as a static leitmotif, later built into the tango (the final theme).

There are also several dance themes throughout which are, structurally, a set of very loose variations. They include: a foxtrot, a cha-cha-cha and a tango. There is also a waltz that represent home, safety and family. These themes are heard in fragments in the 'overture' and are further distorted and modified throughout the score. There is also an 'aggression' chord which has a semi-functional use as a dominant seventh chord, albeit with an added cluster on top.

The piece was composed February through April 2013. It was performed alongside Sally Beamish's *Spinal Chords* in the Carole Nash Recital Room at the Royal Northern College of Music in early May 2013. This production was directed by Jonathan Ainscough and Frances Paterson was the actor. It lasts around 13 minutes.

Text

Richie was gorgeous – James Dean brooding beauty and Fred Astaire feet dazzling with brilliance. All the girls would hang around the edge of the dance floor and ache to be picked by him. It was a marvel to discover any man who could shimmy a samba, but to find someone who looked like an American film star too, well, it was enough to make a girl swoon.

One, two, three, four, five, six. One, two, three, four, five, six.

My mother took me to my first dancing class, when I was six years old. Dressed in a little pink leotard. Ballet, ballroom - I loved it all.

Pirouette, pirouette. One, two, three, four, five, six. One, two, three, four, five, six. One, two, three, four, five, six.

Do you know how difficult it is to find a male dance partner the right height, who can actually move with a sense of rhythm? You have more chance of being abducted by aliens. When his partner emigrated to Australia, you'd have thought a handsome prince bearing a glass slipper had just swaggered into town.

He actually held auditions. There were 35 of us all desperate to be 'the one'. We whirled and twirled and smiled and sparkled – and when he chose me, it was the best moment of my life. 'I want YOU,' he said.

The best moment ever.

We were a match made in quickstep heaven. We waltzed across the nation's ball rooms, winning trophies for our tangos and adulation for our raunchy rumbas. The dream team - the dream man. How could any girl resist?

His fancy footwork was just as impressive off the dance floor. The golden pair became the golden couple. Was I not the luckiest girl in the universe? Everyone told me I was, as I slipped the ring onto my finger.

And for a while it was true.

I remember the day his halo slipped.

I was having trouble with a tricky turn. I think men forget we have to master all the steps backwards and in high heels. I tripped and the spike of my stiletto stabbed his right foot. Of course it must have hurt. I apologised a million times. I expected him to smile graciously through the pain and laugh it off.

But he erupted into a furious rage. "You stupid clumsy bitch," he said.

Of course. I knew it. I guess I deserved every harsh word... every harsh word... harsh word he hurled at me.

But still

It was never the same after that. The magic 'happy ever after spell' shattered for ever.

Tension led to trouble - the wrong foot, a misplaced arm. The aggression of his first strike... strike... sent me reeling across the rehearsal room. A bruised shoulder - no-one was there to see. And he was so sorry afterwards, said I shouldn't have provoked him, reassured me it wouldn't happen again.

I so wanted to believe him.

Slow, slow, quick, quick, slow, right arm, left toe, spin, trip, thwack.

Right two three, left two three, turn two three, bend two three, trip two three... thwack... thwack... thwack.

I got really good at explaining away bruised backs and broken arms at the hospital. Can one woman walk into so many doors and fall down so many flights of stairs?

But no-one questioned my story. He always came with me, of course, just to make sure I got my 'facts' straight.

Even my own mother believed the lies.

The shine from our trophy cabinet could have powered the national grid in the glory days. But as the tension increased, the accolades melted away. You need an inner self- confidence to project star quality. He couldn't see his bully tactics were strangling the golden goose.

He got more frustrated, more controlling, more violent.

Our last tango was in Blackpool, in the glittering ballroom where it had all started, underneath the Tower.

I couldn't stand it anymore. Perhaps being on home territory gave me the energy and confidence to make a stand. Perhaps it was my mother looking on lovingly from the audience. In her eyes the little six year old girl in the pink leotard. I curtseyed farewell to the glamour and misery and waltzed out of his life forever.

I didn't see him for five years then, until one lunchtime, out of the blue, I spotted him across the room in a busy restaurant in Manchester. I was sat in a corner. He didn't notice me. He seemed to be talking with passion to a young woman with beautiful long auburn hair.

On the way to the ladies, she passed me with the blank stare of a stranger. Her face was bruised and her arm in a sling.

Another unfortunate accident?

Dancing Dynamite

Lynn Pegler

Michael Betteridge













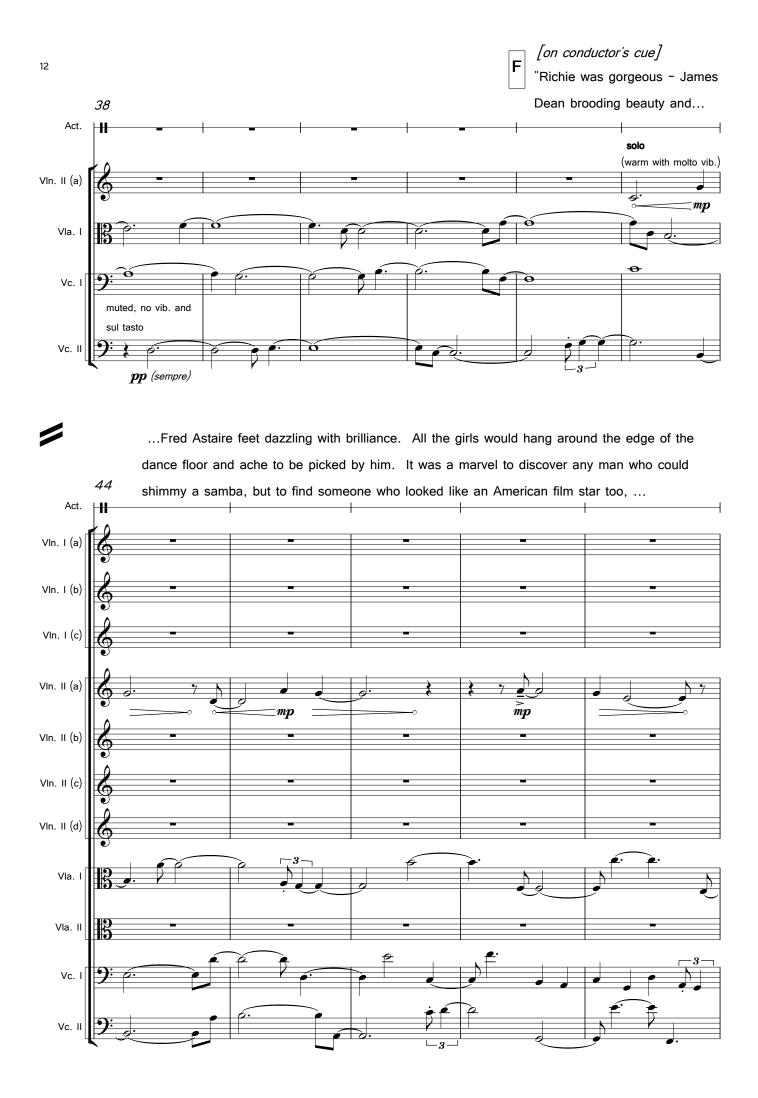














[Straight on]

"My mother took me to my first dancing class, when I was six years old. Dressed in a little 52 pink leotard. Ballet, ballroom - I loved it all."





[In silence]

"Do you know how difficult it is to find a male dance partner the right height, who can actually move with a sense of rhythm? You have more chance of being abducted by aliens. When his partner emigrated to Australia, you'd have thought a handsome prince bearing a glass slipper had just swaggered into town."



poco rit. _







J







... We waltzed across the nation's ball rooms, winning trophies for our tangos and adulation...







Μ









[After two bars of cha-cha-cha rhythm]

"I was having trouble with a tricky turn. I think men forget we have to master all the steps

103 backwards and in high heels. I tripped and the spike of my stiletto...





















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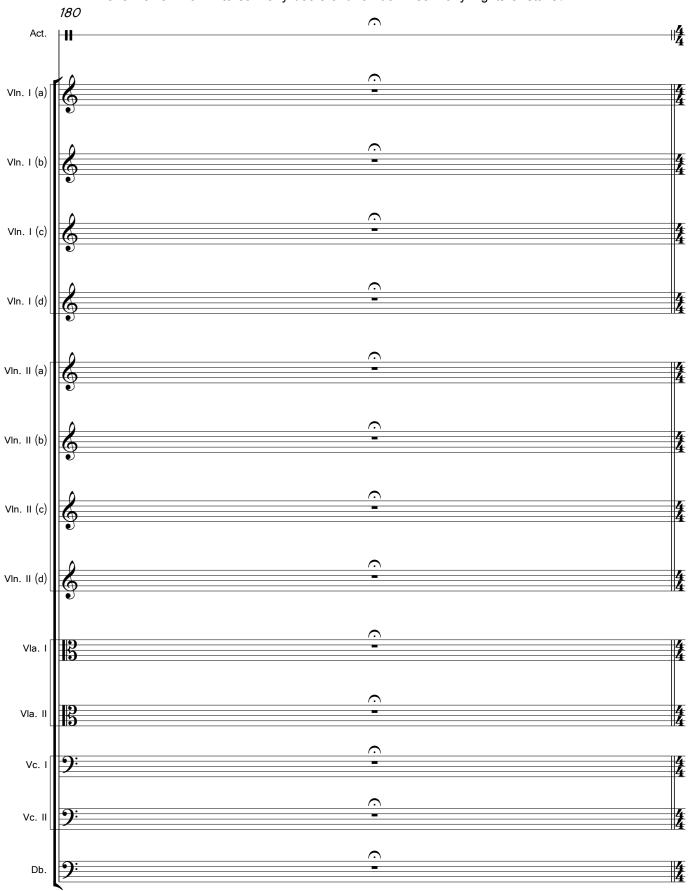






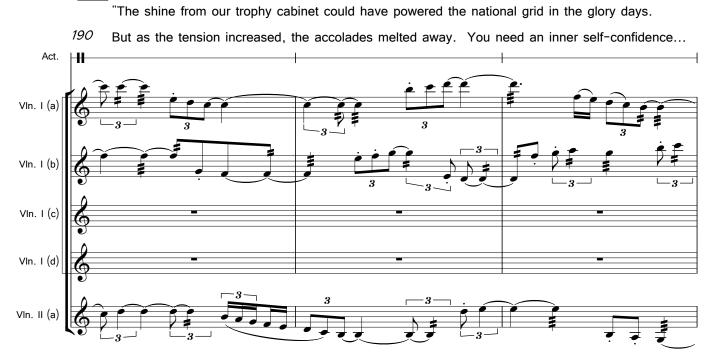
[In silence]

"I got really good at explaining away bruised backs and broken arms at the hospital. Can one woman walk into so many doors and fall down so many flights of stairs?"

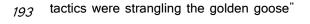




DD [On conductor's cue]



...to project star quality. He couldn't see his bully



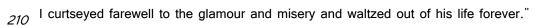












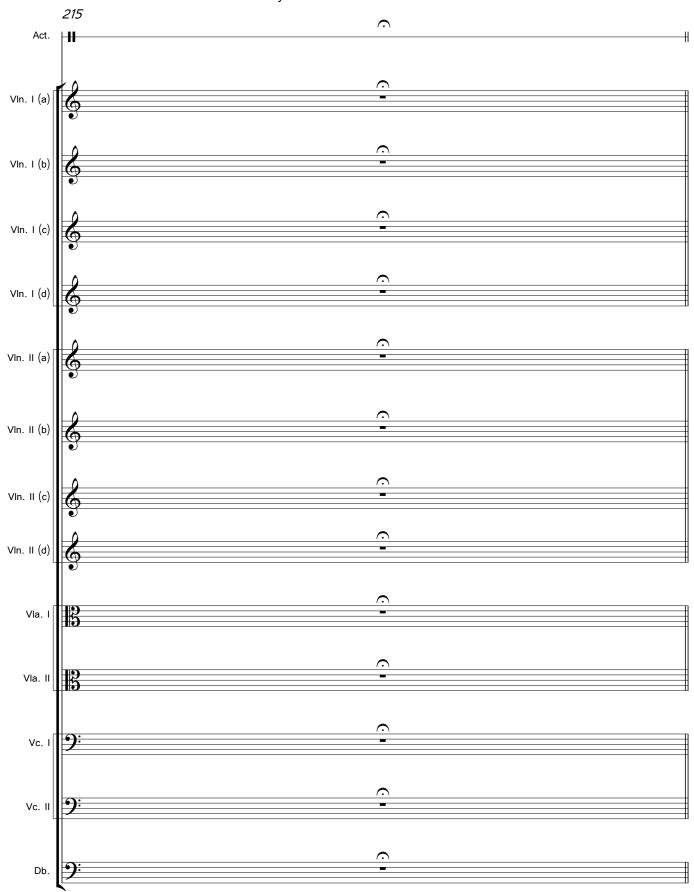






[In silence]

"I didn't see him for five years then, until one lunchtime, out of the blue, I spotted him across the room in a busy restaurant in Manchester"







^{...}the blank stare of a stranger. Her face

