The Duchess.

Selected Scenes.

R. Portman 2008.



Points of interest

* The use of Classical & period scoring.
* The references to the music of Beethoven & Haydn.
* The use of old English modality.
* The use of thematic transformation.
* Portman’s reaction against electronic influences in film music.

**Most commonly used time signatures**

**4/4 - 4 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**3/4 - 3 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**2/4 - 2 crotchet beats in a bar.**

**6/8 – 6 quaver beats in a bar.**

Film Music

Set Work 2

**Harmony & Tonality**

* The score is predominantly in the key of D major.
* The harmony is functional throughout (suggesting the Classical era) and is mainly based around primary chords, especially the tonic and the dominant.
* The 7th is often flattened to produce a modal quality. The Dorian mode is a feature of old English music.
* In modal sections there is still a feeling of tonic/ dominant movement through the use of both the Dorian and Aeolian modes.
* The *Opening*  section is based around three different melodic motifs giving it the structure of ABC.
* *Mistake of Your Life* has a recurring motif suggesting a more strophic structure: Intro, ABABA.
* *Six Year Later* is through composed and uses cues from earlier scenes but in a transformed version.
* *You’ll Never See Your Children Again* reintroduces the original themes producing a structure of ABC coda.

**Melody**

* Most of the melodic material used *in The Duchess* is derived from three motifs which are often transformed to suit the mood and atmosphere of the scene.
* The three motifs are diatonic and Classical in nature featuring stepwise movement & periodic phrasing.
* Often the 7th note is flattened (in D major) giving the music a modal quality (Dorian mode) suggesting times past.
* Sequences are used to build tension.

**Structure**

**Social & Historical Context**

**Sonority**

**Texture**

**Rhythm, Metre & Tempo**

* Portman was influenced by the techniques of Steiner and Wagner in her use of leitmotifs and thematic transformation.
* The scoring evokes the period when the film was set.
* The references to modal harmony suggest Portman’s interest in old English music.
* Portman follows the conventions of Classical period composition but with a modern twist, for example the use of modality and the more independent piano and trumpet lines.
* A typically Classical chamber orchestra is used evoking music of the period.
* The trumpet and piano are given more independent lines than they would have been in the Classical period.
* In *Six Years Later* the pizzicato strings produce a dance-like quality.
* Dissonance is used at moments of great tension. (For example the final chord of *You’ll Never See Your Children Again* which can be described as a G diminished).
* Much of the texture in *The Duchess* is homophonic suggesting its’ Classical origins.
* The use of pedal notes helps stabilise the harmony – often based around the tonic and dominant.
* Pedals are often used to build dissonant chords (as appears in *Mistake of Your Life).*
* The timpani is often used to reinforce the harmony through tonic and dominant pedals.
* The piano often uses triadic accompaniments.
* Simple time signatures are used throughout the score.
* In the first cue the 4/4 metre is blurred by the quaver rhythm on the first beat followed by a minim in the middle of the bar.
* The second theme contrasts duplet quavers with triplets.
* Repeating quaver motifs are a characteristic of each of the themes.
* Longer notes are usually based around the tonic and dominant.

Wider listening: *King Kong –* Steiner, *String Quartet in D -* Haydn, *Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis –* Vaughan Williams.