



Pearson

Rachel Portman: *The Duchess* – ‘The Duchess and End titles’, ‘Mistake of Your Life’, ‘Six Years Later’ and ‘Never See Your Children Again’ (For component 3: Appraising)

Background information and performance circumstances

The composer

Rachel Portman was born in 1960, in Surrey and was educated at Charterhouse School and Oxford University. Her early work included writing music for student film and theatre productions, which led eventually to television work, including music for *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (BBC), Mike Leigh’s *Four Days in July* and Jim Henson’s *Storyteller*. She has since written music for over 100 films, most famously for *Chocolat* and *Cider House Rules*. Her score for *Emma* won her the Academy Award (Oscar) for Best Original Score in 1996 (she was the first female composer to win in this category)

She has also written a children’s opera – *The Little Prince* – and a musical based on *The Little House on the Prairie*. Her musical style has been described as lyrical and accessible. She was awarded the OBE in 2010.

The piece

The Duchess was a 2008 film, directed by Saul Gibb, starring Kiera Knightley. It was based on the eventful and controversial life of Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire.

Set in the late eighteenth century, the score includes movements by contemporary composers Beethoven and Haydn, as well as Portman’s own music.

Performing forces and their handling

- Portman uses a fairly limited orchestral palate here, using instruments that might have made up the orchestra at the time in which the film was set (the Classical period):
 - Woodwind
 - Horns and trumpet

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- Timpani
- Harp
- Piano
- Strings.
- The textures are dominated by the string section, with most of the melodic interest (in the cues set here) being in the upper string parts:
 - Bowed, arpeggiated accompaniment figures are favoured ('The Duchess' and 'Mistake of Your Life')
 - Pizzicato off-beat chords ('Six Years Later').
- A **solo violin** is used in 'The Duchess' (from bar 17) and in the corresponding sections in 'Six Years Later' and 'End Titles'.
- The **harp** is used as an accompanying instrument throughout, playing quaver figures ('The Duchess') or arpeggio figures ('Mistake of Your Life').
- The **piano** plays a prominent part in the middle section of 'Mistake of Your Life', playing a plaintive mid-range melody over upward arpeggio figures.
- **Timpani** are used to provide an ostinato pedal in 'Mistake of Your Life'.
- **Horns and woodwind** are used to provide harmonic filling/doubling. There is **very little** use of individual woodwind or brass timbres for important melodic ideas.
- Most of the writing is **restrained** and **non-virtuosic**, avoiding extremes of range and dynamics.

Structure

'The Duchess'

Uses three ideas, all in the same key – D major.

A	Bars 1–16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● String melody with harp/string quaver accompaniment and off-beat string chords
B	Bars 17–34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Solo violin melody
C	Bars 35–43	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bars 35–36 present tutti idea using an auxiliary figure ● Bars 37–43 solo violin plays idea based on bars 12–13

'Mistake of Your Life'

Introduction	Bars 1–18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Low string chords over bass pedal and timpani ostinato
A	Bars 19–34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bars 27–34 are bars 19–26, transposed up a tone (G minor–A minor) ● Same rhythm, played four times

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B	Bars 35–42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piano melody, backed by strings/woodwind • Bars 39–42 are bars 35–38, a tone lower (a sequence)
A	Bars 43–59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Melody from 19, an octave higher • Crotchet countermelody using rocking thirds • Second half of idea altered to allow extended dominant chord (bars 57–59)
B	Bars 60–69	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutti version of B idea (an octave higher)
A	Bars 70–82	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses first phrase of A • Ends on unresolved 6/4 chord

'Six Years Later'

Introduction	Bars 1–2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes strong D Major tonality
A	Bars 3–23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triadic melodic ideas, combined with a chromatic lower auxiliary
Link	Bars 24–29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction texture used, with augmented triad for interest
B	Bars 30–34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material from 'The Duchess' A section
	Bars 35–50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 'The Duchess' B section
	Bars 51–63	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From 'The Duchess' C section
Coda	Bars 64–66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quaver fifths from opening of 'the Duchess'

'Never See Your Children Again'

A	Bars 1–21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gently dissonant string quaver figures over sustained descending bass line • Slow, rising stepwise melody
B	Bars 22–37	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textures and material from opening section of 'Mistake of Your Life' • Finishes on dissonant/unresolved chord

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'End titles'

Similar in content and structure to 'The Duchess' (Ideas A–C)

A	Bars 1–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shortened from 'The Duchess'
B	Bars 9–24	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slight variations made (some bars omitted) on material from 'The Duchess'
C	Bars 25–40	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repeated and extended
D	Bars 41–50	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Material based on auxiliary figure from 'The Duchess' (bars 35–36)
C	Bars 51–60	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acts as a coda

Texture

- Mainly **homophonic** textures, supporting the melody.
- **Ostinato** textures used:
 - Quaver fifth accompaniment in 'The Duchess'.
 - Timpani texture at opening of 'Mistake of Your Life'.
- **Pedal textures** – tonic bass pedal bars 17–34 in 'The Duchess'. Also Tonic D pedal throughout 'Never see your children again'

Tonality

As in much film music, the relatively short cues do not often allow for, or require, modulation to sustain interest

'The Duchess'

- Modal D major.
- Consistent use of C[natural] (flattened seventh) suggests **Mixolydian mode**.

'Mistake of Your Life'

- G minor.
- Mixture of diatonic minor (with F♯s) and modal passages (with F[natural]s).
- Some passages 'slip' into A minor briefly (b 27)
- Final unresolved second inversion chord leaves cue sounding unfinished.

'Six Years Later'

- Modally inflected D major.

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'Never See Your Children Again'

- D minor.
- Cs imply **transposed Aeolian mode**.
- Dissonant and unresolved final chord leaves tonality in doubt.

'End Titles'

- Modal D major (see 'The Duchess').

Harmony

- The harmony is predominantly **tonal**, but the presence of modal elements, and the avoidance of conventional functional progressions, is more characteristic of **non-functional harmony**.
- Little or no use of conventional cadence progressions (the move to the extended chord V at bars 57–59 of 'Mistake of Your Life' could be interpreted as an *imperfect cadence*).
- Frequent use of the progression I–V (minor dominant):
 - D–Am progression in 'The Duchess' and in 'Six Years Later'.
 - Gm–Dm (and Am–Em) used in 'Mistake of Your Life' (bars 19–34).
- Relatively small number of chords used in all cues.
- Harmonic sequence used in B idea of 'Mistake of Your Life':
 - Gm–Eb–F–Dm (bars 35–42).
 - Flattened chord VII (F) (bar 39).
- 'Darker' cues use more dissonant material
 - Opening of 'Mistake of Your Life' uses dissonant minor ninths and elevenths (b 11).
 - Simultaneous seconds and thirds in opening idea of 'Never See Your Children Again' (bar 5).
 - The ending of 'Never See Your Children Again' uses descending harmonies, over a tonic pedal, finishing on chord that combines a D pedal with a G minor triad and a dissonant D \flat .
- Most chords are three-note triads (major and minor).
- One or two minor seventh chords are used, or are created by harmony.
- Some 'unconventional' second inversion chords used – at the end of 'Mistake of Your Life' (bar 81).
- Augmented chords used (for colour) in the link section of 'Six Years Later' (bar 25).

Melody

Melodies here are mostly built from two-, four- or eight-bar units, with predictable and clear phrase endings.

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'The Duchess'

Three ideas:

- A
 - Built from a two-bar idea (bars 1–2) expanded by sequence in bars 3–4.
 - Auxiliary shape in bar 2 is used later in the cue (b 35).
 - Basically a triadic idea.
- B
 - Based around the D major triad.
 - Descends in later phrases from tonic to subdominant via the flattened leading note (C natural) (bar 22).
- C
 - Auxiliary idea (bars 35–36) developed from bar 2.
 - Descending stepwise idea, also using flattened seventh, based on idea from bars 7–8.

'Mistake of Your Life'

Two melodic ideas:

- A
 - Rising, stepwise figure, initially using the first five notes of G minor scale (but expanded to cover an octave in the second phrase).
 - Expanded by transposition into A minor.
- B
 - Piano idea, featuring auxiliaries and a rising and falling minor sixth.
 - Expanded by descending sequence.

'Six Years Later'

- Triadic ideas.
- Decorated at time with chromatic lower auxiliary notes (bar 6).

'Never See Your Children Again'

- Slow, rising stepwise idea.
- 'Rocking' quaver figures throughout.

'End Titles'

- See 'The Duchess'.

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Rhythm, tempo and metre

'The Duchess'

- Simple Quadruple time at $\text{♩} = 116$. However, the note values suggest a slow tempo, heard in minims here.
- Regular, clear pulse.
- Few syncopations in melody (but accompaniment does use some).
- Quaver ostinato rhythm is used extensively.

'Mistake of Your Life'

- Slow Simple Triple time at $\text{♩} = 69$.
- Clear pulse from bar 19 onwards. Bars 1–18 are very slow moving and pulse is not clear.
- Repeated rhythms in both A and B ideas give structure and unity.

'Six Years Later'

- Compound Duple time at $\text{♩} = 60$.
- More lively rhythmic feel.
- Traditional 'oom-cha-cha' accompaniment figures.
- Some figures start on the second quaver of the bar.

'Never See Your Children Again'

- Slow, gentle, Simple Triple time at $\text{♩} = 66$.
- 'Rocking quavers' more or less throughout the piece.

'End Titles'

- See 'The Duchess'.

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