

Rachel Portman: *The Duchess*

CD 2 tracks 9–13

The award-winning composer Rachel Portman (b. 1960) has created the scores for many films. These are mainly adaptations of literary classics and costume dramas, notably *Emma*, *Chocolat* and *The Cider House Rules*. Although most of her work has been in film, she has also written a musical 'Little House on the Prairie', an opera, *The Little Prince*, and a choral symphony for the BBC Proms. Portman composes at the piano and orchestrates much of the music herself. Her style often uses lush string-based **orchestrations**, eschewing electronic instruments and synthesised sounds.

The Duchess (released in 2008) is an 18th-century costume drama based on Amanda Foreman's biography of Georgiana Cavendish (1757–1806), Duchess of Devonshire. It is a chronicle of the life of the aristocrat focusing on her loveless marriage, her friendship with Lady Bess Foster and her affair with the politician Charles Grey.

Although *The Duchess* is set in the late 18th century, the score is not a slavish **pastiche** of the music of that period. References are made to the styles of the time, but Portman's music is a 21st-century adaptation of those styles combined with familiar movie **underscoring**.

Following the score

The **cues** are written in short score where there is often more than one instrument on each staff and only the most important parts are shown.

'The Duchess' (Opening)

This **cue** is scored for strings, harp, woodwind and horns. It falls into three sections, each with a different theme:

Theme A	Theme B	Theme C
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Each of the three themes is similar in its instrumentation and use of stepwise movement. The themes are underpinned by a simple harmonic scheme with

much of it being based on the chords of D major and A minor. The cue opens with the harp playing a quaver motif which appears several times in the score.



'Mistake of Your Life'

In this cue the music reflects the mood of the Duchess's failing marriage. It is in triple time and alternates between two main themes.

Intro	A	B	A	B	A
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The cue opens with slow-moving strings over a sustained D with a repeated timpani figure. Theme 1 is a simple four-bar idea. Notice the ways in which this short idea is transformed melodically and harmonically.



The cue ends with low, ominous string chords.

'Six Years Later'

Dance rhythms create a different mood in the opening of 'Six Years Later'. It is in the style of a waltz with an 'oom pah pah' accompaniment in the strings.



Again we hear alternating chords of D major and A minor, which create ambivalence in the otherwise light-hearted theme. At bar 29 the music pauses and moves into a new section, which uses material from the opening **cue**.

'Never See Your Children Again'

When the Duke discovers that Georgiana is having an affair with Charles Grey he threatens to forbid her from seeing her children again if she does not end the relationship. A sustained D is heard against a background of **dissonant** harmonies with much use of dynamic shading and a short ascending theme. The timpani figure from 'Mistake of Your Life' reappears leading into a new section where the harp motif is heard against the sustained D. The final chord adds an ominous sound to the proceedings with a G diminished chord over the sustained D.

'The Duchess' (End Titles)

Much of the material in this cue is taken from the opening. Its overall structure is as follows:

Theme A	Theme B	Theme C	Coda
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The themes are underpinned by a simple harmonic scheme where the chords change every two bars. The coda makes much use of the alternation of D major and A minor chords once more.

What to listen for

- Listen to 'The Duchess' (Opening). Describe some of the similarities between the three themes.
- Listen to 'Mistake of Your Life'. Describe some of the ways in which theme A is transformed.
- Which material from the opening cue is used in 'Six Years Later'?
- How are dynamics used in 'Never See Your Children Again'?
- Listen to the music for the end titles. Which musical elements does it have in common with the opening cue?
- Which elements of the music belong to the period that the film is set in and which are more contemporary sounds?

Wider listening

Listen to other examples of film scores from different periods and genres. *The Duchess* could be described as a historical romance. You could compare the ways that music is used to establish atmosphere, time and place by Debbie Wiseman in the autobiographical film *Wilde* (1997), which is set in the 19th century, and by Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard in the epic historical drama *Gladiator* (2000). You could also explore the ways in which the orchestra is used by Takemitsu in the Japanese film *Black Rain* (1989) and by John Williams in *Schindler's List* (1993).

♩ = 116

Violin
Harp

Viola
Cello

p

5

cresc.

(+ Double bass)

9

mf cresc.

sim.

13

rit.

a tempo

(Hp.)

p

(Timp. + Vc.)

(+ D.B., Low Ww.)

(Vln. solo)

f

mf

(Vla.)

(D.B. tacet)

21

3

25

(Vln. solo)

(+ Bassoon)

(+ D.B.)

(+ Hp.)

8

29

3

33

(Tutti)

(+ Bsn.)

(+ D.B.)

(Ww., Horns)

f

sim.

8

37

(Vln. solo)

(Vln.)

(Vc.) *mf*

(Ww., Horn)

rit.

8

40

(Vln. solo)

(Vln.)

(Vc.)

(Tutti)

♩ = 69

Viola

pp

Timpani
Cello &
Double Bass

9

♩ = 80

19

(Violin)

p

(Harp)

27

Più mosso

35 (Strings)

(Ww. Hrn.)

(Str.)

Più mosso
(Piano)

cresc.

39

(Vc.)

rit.

rit.

p

$\text{♩} = 92$

(Ww. + Str chords cont.)

(Vln.)

p cresc.

(Vc. + Hp.)

accel. poco a poco

49

55
(Horn)

60
♩ = 100
(Tutti)
ff

65
rit.

70 **Tempo primo**
(Str.)
pp (Vc. + D.B.)
p

77

The Duchess: 'Six Years Later'

Music by Rachel Portman

♩. = 60

Strings pizz. & Harp

p

(Violin arco) *mf*

(Strings, Horn)

6

mf

sim.

(+ Bassoon)

11

p

mf

(Bsn.)

(Double Bass)

16

(Tutti)

f

(Str. arco)

20

p

(Str. pizz., Hp.)

(Bsn.)

(Bsn.)

24 (Str. arco) molto rit.

29 $\text{♩} = 120$
(Vn.)

p (Hp. + Vln.)

(Vla.)

p (Vc.)

(Timp. + Vc.)

35 (Vln. solo) (Tutti)

(+ Hp.)

f

39 (Vln.)

mf

3

43

(Str. + Ww.)

mp

mf (Vln.)

47

3

51 (Tutti)

f *mp*

55 (Vln. solo)

(Vln.) (Vc.) (Ww, Horn) *mf*

59 (Vln.)

mp rit. (Tutti)

64 $\text{♩} = 72$

p rit.

♩ = 66

Strings

pp *p*

9

mf

15

rit.

p *mf* *p*

Tempo primo

22

niente

(Harp)

p (Vln.)

(Timp.)

(+B.D.)

p

(Vc. + D.B.)

28

Musical score for measures 28-33. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature. It features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and slurs. The lower staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature, providing a harmonic accompaniment with slurs and ties.

34

(+Vla.)

Musical score for measures 34-37. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. It features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and slurs. The lower staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature, providing a harmonic accompaniment with slurs and ties. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 37.

♩ = 120

Violin
Harp

pp *p*

Viola
Cello

5

cresc.

(+Double Bass)

(Violin solo)

9 *mf* *p*

3 rit.

13 *a tempo*

3

17
mp (+Horn, Woodwind)
3

21
3

25

29
cresc. (Vln.)

33
(Vln. solo)

37
cresc.

41 (Tutti) *ff* (Hrn.) (Ww.)

45 (Hp.) *dim.*

49 (+Hp.) *mp dim.* (Vln. solo) *p* (Hp.)

53

57 *rit.*