

Unfamiliar Listening Example Answer 2018

Instrumental Music Depicting The Life of a Heroic Character

Question:

Instrumental Music

Discuss how this piece is characteristic of the Baroque concerto, giving musical reasons for your answer. Relate your discussion to other relevant works. These may include set works, wider listening or other music. (20 marks)

Audio:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1liX6_W74NHk0gOgk_YXU6XZc1lCmyOx4/view?usp=sharing

Markscheme:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Hn2uSqOCg3Xhrpy9mB5XDGTgivlkiUo-/view?usp=sharing>

Answer:

This piece of music like others which came before it such as Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique* depicts the life of a character, in this case a hero (unlike the anti hero of Berlioz's work). Like *Symphonie Fantastique*, the music suggests that it was composed during the Romantic period, a time at which programme music was popular.

The piece is performed by a large symphony orchestra typical of the late Romantic period and of programme music popular at this time. Like Mahler's *Symphony No. 2*, composed at a similar time, in orchestras of this size, the brass and percussion sections play increasingly important roles as the century continues, expanding, in the case of Mahler to a 40 piece choir alongside the orchestra. Also typical of this period, the sections of the orchestra behave independently of each other: in the opening bars the main melodic material is passed between the strings, then woodwind, then brass, punctuated by solo timpani at the end of the phrase. In contrast *Symphony No. 40* by Mozart, composed during the classical period, relies principally on strings to perform the melodic material, with wind and limited brass section either doubling the string lines, playing chordal accompaniments or adding colour in other similar ways. In this work, the composer creates contrast between homophonic, homorhythmic sections, such as the fanfares including prominent brass instruments, and sections which include elements of counterpoint, in which contrasting instruments and sections of the orchestra play independent lines sometimes in

dialogue and sometimes simultaneously. A wide range of timbres is achieved from the standard romantic symphony orchestra, for example the use of high woodwind (especially flute) countermelodies, paired with divisi violins played spiccato at similarly high pitch creating a dream like effect appropriate to programme music. This is by no means the limit of the range of sounds achievable by orchestral instruments as shown in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (for example the shocking bassoon timbre of the opening high pitched solo) and Saariaho's *Petals* (in which not only the fundamentals but also the upper partials / harmonics / overtones of the instrument are explored in an example of spectralism).

The melodies, typical of the romantic period, are often chromatic and include expressive leaps, with the greatest disjunct movement at moments of grandeur. Sometimes regarded as one of the most moving and expressive melodies of the period, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* theme is similarly filled with disjunct movement to unexpected chromatic notes, like this work. The many short, ascending motifs (especially the ascending violin motifs which herald the beginning of many longer phrases) help to give this work its heroic and hopeful atmosphere. In contrast, Schumann's *Piano Trio in G minor Mvt. I* relies on mainly descending motifs which, along with the minor key, lead to a more reflective and sombre mood. The triumphant heroic character of this music is portrayed through many arpeggiated, fanfare like motifs, which descend then ascend through the notes of a broken chord, often ending triumphantly on the highest note of the phrase. Later composers continued to imitate similar motifs (associated with the limited number of notes available to early valved brass martial bugles and the like) to signify victory in battle, composers such as John Williams in his *Star Wars* soundtrack. The many short motifs in this movement are expanded to longer musical lines through a variety of techniques including sequences (especially rising chromatic sequences, increasing the intensity and emotion), rhythmic augmentation and diminution and foreshortening of motifs towards the ends of phrases (achieving the same effect). Film composers in addition John Williams, including Danny Elfman, also borrow from the 19th century romantic tradition using techniques such as these, including the rhythmic augmentation found in 'Birth of a Penguin' from the *Batman Returns* soundtrack. The sudden mood changes, typical of this genre of programme music, are achieved through many musical elements, especially melody and orchestration, as the next line of the story is told. In the middle of the extract, the reflective mood is achieved with gentle anacrusis and dotted rhythms (played by upper strings and flute) and lyrical triplets.

The elements which most clearly place this work in its context at the end of the 19th / beginning of the 20th century, as an example of high romanticism, are harmony

and tonality. The music is constantly modulating, often to distantly related keys, including many tertiary relationships, indicating a more modern approach to tonality. To achieve this, the composer continually uses chromaticism, sometimes repeating the same progressions raised or lowered by precisely a semitone, blurring the sense of key and tonal centre. The free use of chromaticism can also be heard in the form of dissonances, especially extended and added note chords, sometimes but not always functional progressions. This is a development of similar features found in programme music of the early 19th century, such as Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*, in which Berlioz forms the majority of his development section from unconventional unison chromatic scales (making this section unusually tonally mobile). Harmony is also important in creating the contrasting middle section of this extract.