

Unit 2 Composition Appraisal

Q1. What areas of study did you chose and what is your focus of your composition within the given strand?

Genre

As the strand was “world music”, I decided to compose a film score. I chose this genre as I feel that due to the increased availability of films and TV series online, and the fact a film would be my preferred choice in media, I would have a good understanding of what makes up a good film score. Also, I feel that making the score Christmas-y in its nature would allow me to experiment with a variety of classical techniques I have learned through time playing in an orchestra.

The two areas of study I have chosen are:

AoS3 Texture and Melody- I chose to focus on this area of study as film scores need a memorable and recognisable melody to identify with the film. This melody would often be reused and often completely changed to suit the mood of the plot of the film. The melody will also impact the feel and atmosphere of a given section eg. If a section is in a major key, the feel will be happy compared to a minor piece that would sound sad. Texture is also vital in creating atmosphere as by having great depth to a score could indicate a ceremony of sorts or a victory in battle.

AoS5 Structure and Form- This was a key one to focus on as in many films, different scenes will have a different feel to them, meaning a piece and its melody has to grow and evolve throughout the score to suit the change in feel.

Link to the strand of “world music”: oodhia

Q2. Why did you choose these areas of study and the particular focus within the given strand?

The first area of study links to my piece because there is a clear opening melody that would be associated with the film. Bars 5 and 6 contain the first main melodic idea of the piece, so much so that I repeated it into bars 7 and 8 before leading into the rest of the melody; I did this to solidify the fact that this melody sets the general tone of the whole score while making it more memorable as it will have been heard more. This idea then changes dramatically throughout the piece to help the listener feel as though they have been on a journey and are listening to what may seem like a different piece of music. This is most apparent in after bar 25 where most of the instruments drop out leaving just the piano playing a small scale changing the feel of the piece from what it once was. Also my piece fits the chosen area of study as there is use of texture to build up the piece. To name an

example, at bar 38 I used a homophonic texture, almost in unison, to create the feeling of excitement and discovery.

The second area of study links to my composition as I have used a chain form to convey different atmospheres and feelings. The structure emphasises the contrast in feel between the first and last parts of my piece. I have used call and response during the second section to further emphasise the feel of that section.

Q3. How did you go about composing your music and how was the final recording achieved?

Firstly, I had to ask what genre of film music I was composing for. Due to the fact the winter season was fast approaching and in turn Christmas, festive media was becoming more and more apparent. In turn, I decided to write a score for a Christmas film as it was all around me at the time. I began to think about the plot of the film and thought about an appropriate scenario for a protagonist. It occurred to me that Christmas is most exciting as a child so I decided that the film would be about a child's Christmas and the thrilling and potentially mischievous experience of it. I decided to use a rondo-like form for the score as would allow for clear changes in atmosphere while still giving the piece a memorable and recognisable theme to it.

I started the composition process by first creating an appropriate melody (not the intro-this came later on) on my piano that I inputted to Sibelius 7; I knew I was going to add and change other instruments later on. I wanted create a festive mood for this part of the melody as though the child was living a few days before Christmas day. I decided to use G major and tried to keep a fairly mid/high level register as I knew I would most likely want to change the instrument the melody is played on to one that is more natural to play in a higher pitch. I used grace notes in order to try and create a bit of excitement for the festivity that the child is experiencing.

The next section I knew was going to be the child going to sleep on Christmas Eve. For this, I used a less complicated series of notes in order for the section to sound like a lullaby, sending the child off to sleep. As with the first section, I knew that I would change the instrument playing this melody to a glockenspiel as seen in "go to sleep little baby", the very common lullaby. I also wanted it to appear as though the child was having a dream. This would add to the feeling that the piece is going somewhere and telling a story. I also decided to change the key here to G major add the effect that the child is dreaming more intensely now. This also adds the idea that what they are dreaming about is happier and more festive. I chose to move into D due to the fact it is the dominant of G major so it seemed like a logical move.

The third section I decided was going to be the child waking up in the middle of the night and creeping downstairs to see the presents beneath the tree. Here I decided to focus on a bassline first as it gave me a better idea of what mood to compose in. I chose a simple bassline, oscillating between two D notes as quavers, each an octave apart. This instantly made this section seem livelier in its nature. I then began playing around with various melodic ideas for the piano. After much experimentation, decided on an overall idea for the section and began to alter it slightly to keep the scene interesting. I also included a small section of the famous Christmas song "Silent Night" to keep the relation to Christmas; I based this idea off of what Alan Silvestri did in his score for "The Polar

Express", using "O Christmas Tree". I found that it fit very well after deciding on a more punchy rhythm for this melody. I finished the basic melody by going through two notes and a chord. The notes include the IV of D (F#) and the V, also of D, (C#) finishing on the root chord D major. This gave a strong sense of the piece finishing whilst keeping the Christmas-y feel.

Now that the basic melody had been completed, it was time for me to add some accompaniment to the melody as well as shift various parts around. The first thing I did to do this was move the main melody on to a clarinet. This made the melody sound more festive, partly due to the higher pitch of the instrument. I then decided to add a glockenspiel part for the first section. I decided that this instrument would back up the melody by repeating it a few beats later. This helped support the magical Christmas feeling I was after especially as the glockenspiel is widely regarded as an instrument to use in festive songs. To give this section of the piece depth and texture, I added a chordal strings part. I chose the chord pattern by flowing between different set-ups of the G major chord and the dominant D major chord. I found this basic idea to complement the melody nicely. However, I found that this idea too basic on its own and added a more interesting piano accompaniment still based off of the G and D of the strings but with a bassline that jumps around to make the section more interesting.

It was now time to move on to adding to the second section to give it texture and more depth. I found that I could leave quite a bit of this section rather empty of instruments due to the fact that during this time, a child is meant to be falling asleep and the score is supposed to represent one that of a lullaby which, more often than not, are kept very simple. I then decided that as the piece goes on, the child would descend further and further into a grand and overall happy dream about the day to come. To symbolise this, I used call and response of a guitar and xylophone. I also added a repeating glockenspiel accompaniment to further emphasise the idea of being in a dream. As the melody varied, the call and response followed. At each stage of response, I added more instruments in unison to show that we are diving deeper and deeper into a dream. The increase of instruments also shows that the dream is becoming more intense as well as becoming grander, showing the child's excitement for the presents under the tree. It was at this point the key was changed. This involved me changing the notes accordingly so that they remained in unison. The section end abruptly as the child wakes in the middle of the night and begins the search for presents.

As this section is all about being quiet and sneaky with lots of dexterity, quite a large portion can be left rather simple. As I knew that this section was going to be built up to represent the child seeing the light of the tree and in the end the presents underneath it. I first added a few notes and trill on the strings and xylophone to show the child's excitement as a rush of adrenalin. I also included small chunks of glockenspiel action to show the excitement slowly building. Also at this time I had the guitar begin running down a small repeated scale, again to show this excitement. As the end, and thus the climax, of the piece was fast approaching, I began to include most of the other instruments. I had the glockenspiel do a similar scale as to what the guitar had been doing. This added to the effect of building and excitement. At the end, I had the clarinet play a very fast scale, before having all the instruments finish either on the root chord or note: D.

After playing the piece back several times, I occurred to me that the score was missing a key rhythm element. As a result, I added some sleigh bells that play on most of the beats throughout the piece, only stopping during section 2 to emphasise the silence. I also found that everything started at once;

there was no build-up of atmosphere. I decided to take inspiration from Alan Silvestri's score from "The Polar Express". It has a strings playing in a tremolo with a glockenspiel or xylophone playing a simple scale pattern. I decided to use the string of my piece to hold a G note, which was the root note of the section, for four bars with the glockenspiel in my piece playing a simple pattern, leading into the main melody on the clarinet.

Q4. What difficulties did you encounter during the task and how did you overcome them?

Whilst I was composing, I found that there was not enough variation within the piece, which caused the piece not to flow as well as I desired. To overcome this, at bar 25 and 46 I changed the tempo of the piece. The first time going from 100bpm down to 80bpm to get a stronger feel of relaxation and relaxation; and the second going up slightly to 90 bpm. This gave the piece more variation and thus became more interesting as a whole.

I also found that in the first section, having the more interesting chord pattern on the piano sounded too basic for my liking. To change this, I decided to move the pattern on the treble clef on to a cello using the pizzicato technique, and the bass clef on to the strings. However, the strings were playing a chord pattern already, so I decided to move said chord pattern to the guitar, which gave a different sound but kept the effect I was after. As the cello was now in the score, I decided to give it an accompaniment to give the piece further depth and texture.

Finally, I saw that each section lacks in a transition. I decided to have wind chimes play at the end/beginning of a section to show a change in feel. I chose wind chimes as they have a very magical sound that I felt linked very well with the type of film score I was composing.

Q5. What makes your composition successful in relation to the Areas of Study and the focus chosen within the given strand?

My piece is successful as a film score as it fully utilises various musical techniques to change the atmosphere and feel of it when needed. As an example, the opening bars generate the main principle for the whole piece. Also the change in feel between sections is very apparent, especially at bar 45 where the score goes from being very grand in sound, to what could be described as the exact opposite; a very quiet and, for lack of a better term, bouncy baseline.

I feel that my piece links well the Areas of Studies focused on (AoS 3-texture and harmony +AoS 5-structure and form).

Firstly, AoS 3, in my piece I have focused the score around a melody that changes to fit the required mood (as in a professional film score). For this melody I used a major G key to keep the mood light and festive. I changed the key up to D to signify a change in emotion from the character I based the score off of. I have used texture to convey different emotions as well. This is notably apparent in section three where there is little depth with few instruments playing to show a quieter, tenser situation. This then builds up to become a grand finish with many of the instruments having faster note values as well as playing at the same time.

Secondly, AoS 5, there is a clear structure to my piece. It starts out with a festive atmosphere of a family at home with friends and family. The piece then continues to symbolise a child going to bed and dreaming about the day to come. Finally, the piece ends with the child sneaking downstairs in the middle of the night to open his presents as the score becomes more intense and faster notes to show excitement.

Q6. What is the relationship of your composition to its context?

The piece I have composed is a Christmas inspired film piece that tells the story of a child and their experience of Christmas. In making the score, I was inspired greatly by Alan Silvestri's "The Polar Express" piece. It gave me the idea for the opening bars to create the atmosphere of the whole score, which without the piece would be left rather bland. In addition, Silvestri's score gave me the idea to include a section from a famous Christmas carol. This was a nice touch that my piece defiantly needed to give it some direction and sense of wholeness.