

Angela Conway – GCSE Music June 2005.

Performance Appraisal.

All three pieces were written in the Romantic Period of music, at the end of the nineteenth to the start of the early twentieth century. By this time, the pianoforte was a well established instrument.

The piece I performed is Etude in F by Stephen Heller, which is the most contrasting piece I studied. As such, it requires a wide range of dynamics – the whole piece is made up of very similar phrases, which sometimes only vary by dynamics, such as the melody in bars one and two which is piano and the same melodic phrase of three notes which is played sounding mezzo forte in bars nine and ten. Lied by Lévy, also explores the dynamics of the piano as it ranges from piano to forte. Whereas Chant de L'alouette by Pytor Ilyich Tchaikovsky only ranges from pianissimo to piano using a total of seven crescendos and four diminuendos, thus showing that it uses the gradual change of dynamics to change the mood of the piece in different places. There are no crescendos or diminuendos in Lied as it changes mood more suddenly than Chant de L'alouette. Lied is generally a lot less flowing and more staccato than Chant de L'alouette and so these sudden changes are a reflection on the piece as a whole.

The main melody in Chant de L'alouette and Etude in F is played in the right hand with accompanying chords, arpeggios and harmonies played by the left hand. Whereas Levy's Lied has the main melody mostly played in the left hand, with accompanying staccato chords in the right. This changes in bar eleven as the hands swap and the right plays the main melody, then changes back again in bar nineteen. In Etude in F, the accompaniment helps the piece to sound flowing and smooth with the arpeggio-style patterns filling in any gaps in the music. Lied, on the other hand, uses the accompaniment to give a more staccato and tense feel to the music, with many seventh chords which sound unfinished, like they need to lead into another chord to finish the phrase. Also there is the strict crotchet pattern which is followed by the accompaniment throughout the piece. In Chant de L'alouette, the accompaniment is used to give a fuller, happier sound as it is in a major key.

The pieces that I studied are not typical of their period as they do not have any pedal markings, but the pedal on the pianoforte by the end of the nineteenth century was being used. However, this does not mean that the pedal cannot be used

at the player's discretion, but simply that the composer has not suggested any suitable places for the pedal to be used.

Etude in F has the most constant dynamic changes of the three, which requires the player to maintain control over the part they are playing. For example, piano has to be quiet enough for there to be a noticeable change between piano and forte, but not as quiet as so they cannot get any quieter to play a pianissimo part. The player must be careful to keep their playing at the right volume so that they can get louder and quieter as the piece requires. The left hand needs a steady rhythm on the broken chords to keep the piece flowing and together, therefore a small error would be very noticeable.

When I performed the piece I achieved the andantino feel well as I played it quite slowly. There was a change in dynamics when indicated to change from piano to pianissimo but I feel this could have been made more recognisable. My dynamic changes were better later on, especially from bars eleven to eighteen when I managed to successfully change from forte to piano, back to forte, back to piano, to mezzo forte then diminuendo to pianissimo.

I managed to maintain the tempo all the way through and never hit a wrong note. I feel I played the notes and the phrase rhythms accurately. There were no stops or faults in tempo and I was happy with the overall mood I created when playing the piece – I feel it was how Heller intended it to be played.

I managed to still sound all notes when I played the pianissimo passages which was quite hard considering I had to play them very quietly in order to contrast with piano passages.

To improve my playing, I think I could have used the pedal, even though there were no pedal markings. It might have sounded good to use the pedal in the last section, putting a greater emphasis on the legato phrases. I also could have perhaps put even more expression into the places where 'express.' was marked on the music.

Overall, I was very happy with my playing of this piece, there were only a few minor errors I would have changed.

Composition Brief.

The composition is to be a piece for piano, in the style of the romantic period of music (around 1820 – 1900) influenced by Etude in F by Heller, Lied by Lévy and Chant de L'alouette by Tchaikovsky. The piece will start in the key of F major and then modulate to the key of D minor, and then modulate back to the key of F major. I have chosen not to use pedal, as all three pieces that I studied did not use pedal.

I will use a range of different dynamics to give the piece an expressive feel, as I want the first section to sound joyful and dolce in the major key and therefore it will be mezzo-forte. In the middle section I wish to create a forlorn feel using a minor key, and finally back to a major key for the last mezzo-forte section. I chose mezzo-forte rather than forte or fortissimo as in some parts of the major key sections I wish to get even louder for extra feel, using crescendo and diminuendo at certain points. The main tempo of the piece will be moderately fast but there will be quite a few rallentandos, again for effect.

I wish to explore different arpeggios and see what feel they give the piece and take different ideas from my pieces such as the melody line in Etude in F, when it starts with a single note melody line and then goes into thirds and goes down in steps. Other ideas I will take from my pieces include the same melody being played an octave up from Etude in F, the rallentando at the end with repeated chords from Lied with the left hand going in a downwards arpeggio pattern, the hands crossing over to change between melody and accompaniment from Lied, and also the moderato tempo from Chant de L'alouette.

Composition Evaluation.

I was very happy with my composition – I feel it achieved the effect I was aiming for and showed many elements of a piece composed in the Romantic Period of music. I feel it was a very expressive piece portraying a range of emotions.

At the beginning, the piece started off being one page long, with all chord arpeggios being in their original inversion. The tempo was quite fast, like Chant de L'alouette, as specified in my composition brief – and I decided the piece was animato as well as moderato. The melody line was quite simple with repetition of the same idea, as heard in the pieces I studied.

I then began to develop the piece further, using different chord inversions for the first section and increasing to a two-octave pattern in some places, instead of just one (for example in the middle of the piece, when the D minor broken chord in the

left hand uses the notes 'DFADADA FD' up and down the two octaves). I believe that this gave the composition a more flowing smooth texture in this particular part of the music. I liked the broken chord that I used, so I then transferred the idea to the F major scale for the final part of the piece, now using 'FACFCFC AF'.

I developed the duration diversity by having some staccato and some legato notes but most of the piece was legato. The staccato notes I used were in the middle of phrases.

I enhanced some of the repeated phrases by adding in small changes like ornaments to make the melodic line more interesting. In the minor section, the second time I played the melody an octave higher, I changed a couple of the notes to hold the listener's attention.

Once I had finished composing my piece, it was twice as long as when I started!

The weakness of my piece was that I did not use the pedal. Although I did this for a reason, I felt it restricted the legato feel I could achieve as I often had to move my hands to get the next note played and so when I played my piece I could not hold onto some notes and chords for as long as I would like.

Despite this, I was very happy with my piece and feel it fitted the criteria well.