

The moldau



Connie Ju | [The Moldau] Smetana | Year 11 Music 2 Musicology Essay |

Smetana's Moldau is a musical portrayal of the main river which runs through the countryside of Bohemia (present day Czech Republic). The piece begins with a sweet one bar theme that is played by two solo flutes, representing the trickle of a small creek. The soft melody played in piano and "lusingando", which means to be played in a coaxing style, convey the delicate and smoothness of the water.

The ascending semi-quavers accompanied with a slight crescendo at the beginning of the phrase as well as a two quaver rests at the end of the bar create a rippling effect, symbolising the slight waves of a stream. Furthermore, the lone plucked pizzicato quavers by the strings add small splashes of colour to decorate the continuously flowing melody of the airy flutes. The light, fluttering tone colour of the solo flutes and the thin texture portray the clear appearance of the water as it makes its way across the land.

Bar 1 -2 (solo flutes) Bar 1 -2 (accompanying strings) The first bar theme is repeated to become the basis of this extract, however there are also variations of the theme where the starting note is changed to indicate a different scenery or perhaps some animals, such as small fishes, that are swimming through the water that make the river full of life. Bar 5 (repeat of the theme) Bar 8 (variation of theme) Bar 10 (variation of theme)

The texture of this work begins as very thin as there are only solo flutes that play the melody that portray the simple and tiny stream accompanied with light pizzicato of strings that add to the tone colour. This means that the start of this piece is played in a thin homophonic texture. Bar 1 -4

(homophony) However, when the texture at bar 16 is compared to the first four bars, it is thicker as there is the addition of clarinets that play an alternate melody. This new melody is in a contrary motion to the existing flute melody and plucking strings which represent widening of the tiny creek so the water is moving a bit more wildly.

The polyphonic texture consists of two major layers and the randomly placed pizzicato chords which are a reminder of water's unpredictable motions. Bar 16 (flutes, clarinets, strings - polyphonic texture) The two small rivers that make up the larger Moldau meets at bar 28 where the clarinets stop for a bar and the violas begin their melody. This short bar acts as a bridge, the connection where the bodies of water finally merge to create a great river. The bigger river in bar 29 is conveyed by the three different layers, flutes, clarinets, and violas.

Continuous semi-quavers that rise and fall in pitch still represent the fluidity and continuity of the water but now the extra layer means that the river is wilder with bigger waves and other movements. Bar 28 (melodies played by flutes and strings) Bar 29-30 (flutes, clarinets, viola) Bar 36 sees even more layers as the strings begin to play the flowing melody of the river. The start of the larger body of water is indicated by a strong perfect cadence by the lower strings (bar 36). At the widest point of the river, bar 40, the whole orchestra plays.

All the instruments playing together expresses the notion that this is the climax of the river and it is wildest at this point. The wind instruments, however, play a slower melody of slurred crochets and quavers with a drawn out crescendo and the instruction of " dolce". The new melody presents the

idea that the river is experiencing different landscapes, such as quiet, peaceful pastoral lands or rolling hills in the distance. This polyphonic texture continues until the end of the excerpt. These additional tone colours further build upon the majestic nature of the river as well as its more powerful movements.

Bar 36-37 (increased layers) Bar 40 (different melodies, thick texture) The dynamics of this piece correspondingly represent the growth of the river. In both bars 1 and 2, there is a lone crescendo plus an accent, this is the river just starting out so it is not very dramatic compared to bar 20 and 21 where there is a crescendo and a decrescendo within one bar. Moreover, in bars 41-42, not only are there crescendos and decrescendos but the additional sforzando sign.

The “ p” for piano in the bar directly after (bar 43) simply adds to the tempestuous nature of the water as there are more dramatic things happening in a faster-flowing large river. Bar 1 (slight crescendo, “ lusingando”, accent, “ p”) Bar 20-21 (crescendo and descendo) Bars 41-43 (dramatic dynamics) The tone colour of the instruments also changes as the river grows. The solo flutes at the beginning create a sweet, airy, light sound of a stream but the orchestral playing altogether from bar 40 onwards makes a stormy sound much like the torrents of a wild river.

Having the lower strings playing the melody instead of the winds depicts the strength of the matured river compared to the higher pitched flutes that represented the fragility and daintiness of a stream. Bar 40 (full orchestra playing - polyphonic texture and extra tone colour) This musical program by Smetana artistically conveys the development of the iconic Moldau River

through the use of various techniques such as texture, structure, rhythm, tone colour, and dynamics. He is able to represent all the aspects of the constantly moving river, beginning with a delicate stream and finishing with a majestic river. Word Count: 940