

Prelude in D^b Major

Frederic Chopin

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- Born in 1810, near Warsaw, Poland
- Played piano concertos from the age of 8
- Studied at the Warsaw Conservatoire of Music to become a composer and performer
- Moved to Paris in 1832, becoming a teacher and performer
- Had a nine-year relationship with Aurore Dudevant (Georges Sand)
- Travelled to Majorca in an attempt to cure tuberculosis in 1838
- Forced to leave by local inhabitants afraid of getting TB, and was exiled to a monastery in Valldemossa
- Died in October 1849, in Paris

Romanticism

- Between 1800 and 1900
- Started in Europe
- Focused on nature and intense emotions such as love, grief, joy etc.
- Features:
 - Long, developed melodies
 - Free structure and form
 - Use of extended chords- dominant 13th, diminished 7th etc.
 - Harmony is frequently chromatic and discordant
 - Varied dynamics
 - Required virtuosic performers to play the pieces
 - Featured expanded orchestras, and the piano was developed
 - Featured a rise in Nationalism (e.g. Chopin's Polish folk melodies) and programme music

The Piano

The piano changed significantly over the course of the Romantic era, in the following ways:

- The instrument was reshaped and enlarged for a greater sound
- The pitch range increased to 7 octaves
- Leather on the hammers was replaced by felt for a fuller, more rounded tone
- Strings were longer, stronger and under greater tension
- The body of the piano was made of metal instead of wood to cope with increased tensions
- The soft and sustaining pedals were developed.

Romanticism

Composer
Ludwig Van Beethoven
Richard Wagner
Richard Strauss

24 Preludes (Op. 28)

- Published in 1839
- A set of 24 preludes, where each of the twelve notes had a major and minor piece written for it, arranged in a circle of fifths
- Each was written to convey a specific emotion
- Criticised for lack of recognisable structure
- Preludes should be followed by a fugue in the same key, but this is not the case in Op. 28

Prelude in D^b Major

- Published in 1839
- No. 15 in the 24 preludes
- Known as the 'raindrop' prelude, on account of the continuous pedal notes on A^b/G# and the 'raindrop' arpeggio at the beginning
- Written during a storm in Majorca

Key Musical Elements

- Use of tempo rubato
- *Cantabile legato* playing
- Expressive use of pedals
- Range of dynamics used
- Changes in time signature and tempo
- Loose, unbalanced form (emphasis on melody)

Dynamics

- Wide range of dynamics (pp to ff)
- Starts softly
- Uses many crescendos and diminuendos
- SECTION A- Soft throughout
- SECTION B- Starts softly, with the RH playing *sotto voce* (in an undertone), crescendos to fortissimo. Louder than other sections
- Smorzando (dying away) towards the end

Structure and Melody

- In ternary form (ABA + Coda)
- Very long B section
- A₁ is very short (6 bars)
- Melody is played *cantabile*
- Uses a falling arpeggio motif
- Regular/periodic phrases
- Melody is in the right hand in Section A
- Section A has a very ornamented melody, using acciaccatura and turns
- The melody starts in the left hand in Section B, playing a chorale-like melody, then moves to the right hand
- Uses rubato

Texture

- Mainly melody-dominated homophony, with some monophony in the coda
- The loud and soft pedals are used expressively
- Section A features a broken chordal accompaniment
- Section B has a chordal accompaniment, and the right hand plays in octaves

Harmony and Tonality

- Section A is mainly in Db major, with a change to Bb minor (relative minor)
- Section B is in C# minor (the enharmonic minor), with some changes to G#m and F#m
- Section A₁ and the coda are in Db major
- Mainly diatonic harmony, with some chromaticism
- Regular cadences are used to define keys
- Uses 7th and 9th chords
- Suspensions in Section B
- In Section B, the pedal note is inverted
- Section B ends on a G# pivot note
- Ends on a perfect cadence

Rhythm, Metre and Tempo

- In 4/4 time
- Played *sostenuto* (sustained)
- Tempo rubato is used
- There is a ritardando at the end