



Pearson

S Schwartz: ‘Defying Gravity’ (from the album of the cast recording of *Wicked*) (for component 3: Appraising)

Background information and performance circumstances

Stephen Schwartz is an American music theatre composer and lyricist. Born in 1948 in New York, he studied piano and composition at the Julliard School of Music while still at high school, and later graduated in drama from Carnegie Mellon University. It was in 1972 that he had his first success with the musical *Godspell*. In the 1990s he collaborated with the composer Alan Menkin on the scores of many Disney animated films such as *Pocahontas* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and wrote songs for Dreamwork’s first animated film, *The Prince of Egypt*. He returned to this collaboration with Menkin in 2007 to write the lyrics for the Disney hit film *Enchanted*. It was, however, in 2003 when he took on the role of both composer and lyricist for *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz*, a musical based on the novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. This is an alternative version of the *Wizard of Oz* and tells the story from the point of view of the witches, Elphaba (the Wicked Witch of the West) and Glinda, the Good Witch. Schwartz won a Grammy Award for his work as composer, lyricist and producer of *Wicked*.

‘**Defying Gravity**’ is the finale song for the first act, when Elphaba discovers that the Wizard of Oz is not the heroic figure she had originally believed him to be. Realising this, Elphaba vows to do everything in her power to fight the Wizard and his sinister plans. She sings of how she wants to live without limits, going against the rules that others have set for her. It was originally written in the key of D \flat major but has been transposed to D major in the Anthology.

Music theatre integrates songs, spoken dialogue, acting and dance within a popular idiom. Musicals are an extended piece of music theatre.

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Performing forces and their handling

'Defying Gravity' is a **duet** for the characters Elphaba and Glinda with some **spoken dialogue** in addition to the singing. The two characters either deliver their text spoken, half sung/spoken with music notated on the staff with crosses instead of note heads or entirely sung.

These two singers require extremely versatile voices with a large range of just under two octaves, from G below middle C to F.

Wicked uses a **large orchestra**: woodwind section (including additional instruments such as piccolo, bass clarinet and cor anglais), brass and string sections with a harp and three keyboards. It includes a wide variety of percussion instruments: drum kit, tubular bells and timpani. Electric guitars create a modern sound and in this song they are required with **over-drive**, a distortion effect.

The score in the anthology is a short score or orchestral reduction and the main instruments with solos are labelled. The orchestra is used to good dramatic effect.

- The brass section plays **homophonic chordal** music in an almost fanfare-like manner (e.g. bar 20).
- Strings use **tremolo** effect to add tension (e.g. bar 34).
- The closed hi-hat of the drum kit plays constant crotchet rhythms in bar 51 to add rhythmic momentum.
- There is a cymbal roll to add excitement as the piece moves into a key change (e.g. bar 122).
- The full band plays at the climax of the song at bar 135.
- Synthesisers and glockenspiel are used to good effect with the high magical-sounding repeated quaver accompaniment to the chorus.
- Tubular bells give an ethereal sonority at bar 147.

Melody

- The text setting is **syllabic** throughout with rhythms moving in a speech-like manner.
- There is **vocalisation** at the end in bar 175 to the word 'aah'.
- The melody starts in a **conjunct**/stepwise manner.
- Bars 6 and 7 show an ascending **sequence**.
- The verse and chorus combine conjunct and wide **angular** leaps in the melodic line.
- Leaps often feature a rising perfect fifth (e.g. bar 34). There are some exceptionally large leaps such as a compound perfect fourth (e.g. bars 39–40) and a compound perfect fifth (e.g. bars 140–141).

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Structure

There is a distinct **verse–chorus** form.

Verse: bar 34, bar 63, bar 135.

Chorus: bar 50, bar 79, bar 103, bar 151.

Within that structure this piece has multiple sections which are defined by tempo, contrasting moods and melodic material.

Bars 1–19	Free tempo (colla voce) recitative-like	Duet between Glinda and Elphaba with a combination of spoken dialogue and singing. Orchestral chord stabs at start with sparse monophonic moments, accompaniment becomes chordal and sustained
Bars 20–48	Andante Verse bar 34	Homophonic chordal opening moving through different major keys. Legato , conjunct melody. The verse contains tremolo strings with dissonant harmony for accompaniment
Bar 49–87	Allegro Chorus bar 50 Verse bar 63 Chorus bar 79	The title hook leaping melody is sung over broken chord accompaniment and driving hi-hat rhythms. Next Glinda sings a crotchet triplet -based melody before Elphaba takes over with a syncopated version of the verse, which leads into the chorus
Bar 88–102	Moderato	A contrasting section in the new key of G major with both characters singing a new melody in unison over semiquaver accompaniment
Bar 103–110	Allegro Chorus bar 103	Return to D major for the chorus sung by both characters, opening in unison with strong piano accompaniment
Bar 111–128	Andante	Homophonic chordal music from earlier which leads into the recitative-like music of the opening
Bar 129–161	Allegro Verse bar 135 Chorus bar 151	Climax of the song with full orchestra and loud dynamic. Opens with the homophonic chordal music which leads into an extended version of the verse at a higher register and with developed melodic and rhythmic ideas. There is a reprise of the chorus
Bar 162–177	Andante to Maestoso	Build up to full tutti finale, in B minor at bar 168 with Elphaba, Glinda, ensemble chorus and orchestra in counterpoint with different musical lines and lyrics.

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Texture

- The opening shows a sparse texture with punctuating instrumental chord stabs (e.g. bar 1) with some monophonic unaccompanied bars (e.g. bar 3).
- In the verses there is a melody and accompaniment or **melody-dominated homophony** texture where the singer is accompanied by chords in the orchestra.
- There are homophonic chordal moments (e.g. bar 132).
- Ostinato accompaniment at bar 88 with repeated semiquavers.
- Elphaba and Glinda usually sing separately but sometimes sing together in unison (e.g. bar 101) or in harmony such as thirds (e.g. bar 127).
- The ending is **contrapuntal** with three different musical ideas with different lyrics (e.g. bar 168).

Tonality

- In the opening the tonality is ambiguous with **chromatic** movement and unrelated chord progressions.
- It is in D major.
- At bar 20 it is in B major for two bars before arriving in F major at bar 22. At bar 32 it arrives in the tonic key of D major for the verse. It remains in D major until bar 88 when it moves to G major. In bar 103 it returns to D major. At bar 115 it returns to the chromatic melody of the opening. At bar 132 it returns to the tonic key of D major. For the final Maestoso section, bar 168 it is in B minor until we finish on a chord of D major.

Harmony

- Chords are in root position.
- Chord progressions are often unrelated and in the opening we can see shifts downwards in parallel semitones. For example, a D chord to a C# minor chord to a C major chord.
- There is some use of dissonance (e.g. bar 30).
- At the end there is a **pedal** at bar 168.

Tempo, metre and rhythm

There are numerous tempo changes through this song and they are important to the overall structure.

Bar 1	Free tempo
Bar 20	Andante
Bar 49	Allegro
Bar 88	Moderato
Bar 103	Allegro
Bar 111	Andante
Bar 129	Allegro
Bar 162	Andante
Bar 168	Maestoso

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- There are **rallentandos** used particularly at the end of sections to go from Allegro to Andante. Sometimes there are ralls followed by an a tempo. There is also a rall used at the end of the piece.
- The time signature changes from 3/2 **triple time** to 2/2 **duple time** in the opening section and remains there until bar 88 where it changes to 4/4 **quadruple time**. At bar 115 it returns to 2/2 duple time.
- Syncopation is frequent throughout (e.g. bars 67–70).
- Dotted rhythms are used throughout. For example, in bar 82 on the word ‘gra-vi-ty’.
- Triplets are used. These are both quaver triplets (e.g. bar 96) and crotchet triplets (e.g. bar 60).
- Rhythms are predominantly crotchet and quaver based, although there are some notes of longer duration particularly at the ends of phrases.
- Rests are often used to break up phrases.
- Each phrase starts with an off-beat entry after a crotchet rest (e.g. bar 15).
- Pause marks or fermatas are used to lengthen and give freedom to longer rhythms, for example at the end (e.g. bars 174 and 176).

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