Area of Study 2: Vocal Music

Purcell: ‘Music for a While’
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Glossary

**Trio sonata**: a piece for Baroque ensemble comprising two violins, cello and harpsichord (or organ).

**Dance suite**: in Baroque music the suite comprised a series of dance movements. By the time of Purcell, suites were composed of four main movements called the allemande, courante, sarabande and gigue. These movements are based on dance forms from different countries. Optional extra movements include the air, bourrée, gavotte, minuet and prelude.

**Stile italiano**: Purcell was influenced by the Italian style, which was characterised by the concertato style (as seen in the Brandenburg concerto set work), the trio sonata, double-dotted notes, dramatic recitatives and *da capo* arias.

Getting started

- Purcell’s song ‘Music for a While’ tells part of the Oedipus story, an ancient Greek legend. Find a story that interests you from the world of fantasy and myth and try to set some of the words to music. A scene from *Harry Potter or The Lord of the Rings* might be a good starting point.
- The song uses music for its calming influence. Discuss how music can generate different emotional responses in the listener. How are moods such as anger, sadness, tranquillity and love captured in music? Find examples to illustrate your points.

Learning objectives

In the study of this set work you will learn about:
- the life and works of Henry Purcell
- the background to ‘Music for a While’
- ground bass form in vocal music of the Baroque era
- how to analyse the song
- the key musical features of the song.

The life and works of Henry Purcell (1659–95)

Henry Purcell is one of the greatest composers of the Baroque period and one of the greatest English composers of any time. His father was in charge of the choristers of Westminster Abbey but died when his son was only five. Later, as a teenager, Henry obtained a court position as ‘composer in ordinary for the violins’. A little later he became organist at Westminster Abbey and after that, at the Chapel Royal.

Much of Purcell’s music, like Bach’s, was commissioned by wealthy patrons. The royal family commissioned him to write ceremonial music for royal events. Purcell also wrote *trio sonatas* and *dance suites* in the *stile italiano* as well as songs (in English), including ‘Music for a While’. His most famous work is the opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), composed for a girls’ boarding school in Chelsea. He also worked with the ultra-successful poet John Dryden on *King Arthur* (1691). This ‘semi-opera’ is a combination of play and opera, not unlike a modern musical. ‘Music for a While’ is also based on a text by Dryden. Other music for the stage included another successful semi-opera, *The Fairy Queen* (1692). His last work of this kind, *The Indian Queen*, was incomplete when he died in his mid-thirties. He is buried in Westminster Abbey, next to the organ he once played.
Musical contexts

Vocal music

Vocal music is one of the oldest forms of music, since it does not require any instrument except the voice. All musical traditions and cultures have some form of vocal music going back over centuries. For example, in medieval times, wandering singers called troubadours would often entertain at court, singing courtly love songs. In the Renaissance period, vocal music flourished, particularly in the church. Opera, too, started its evolution, with Claudio Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* (1607) acknowledged to be the first great masterpiece in this form. In the Baroque era, Bach, Handel, Vivaldi and others wrote songs for solo voice. Large-scale works such as cantatas, oratorios (sacred and secular) and operas all featured the solo voice.

Purcell and the music of the Restoration period (1660–c.1720)

For a century before the Restoration period, the Tudor monarchs had valued music and indeed aspired to be cultivated musicians themselves. In the 17th century, however, King Charles I seemed only interested in music from Italy or France, rather than encouraging British composers. It was Charles II who, returning in 1660 from exile in France, brought with him a new enthusiasm for a more cosmopolitan approach to music.

In an attempt to improve church music, string orchestras were used to accompany verse anthems, and Charles II formed a band of 24 violins for just this purpose. At the same time, Purcell and another composer, John Blow, restored the tradition of opera in England as well as the popular masque – a spoken type of entertainment interspersed with dances, ballet and songs.

One important new development from about 1672 was the establishment of public concerts, whose content the public even had a say in deciding. Purcell devoted many years of his short life to writing music to commissions which might be considered today to be far below what he was capable of. In the society of his time, it was difficult to find opportunities to realise his true potential as a composer. Even a generation later, George Frideric Handel (1685–1759), like Purcell, discovered that London, and indeed England, had no appetite for grand operas, unlike in other parts of Europe. However, Purcell was content with the modest commissions he did receive, and these resulted in some great works, such as *Dido and Aeneas*. Despite the poor resources and lack of support for English composers at the end of 17th century, Purcell showed himself to be a great composer in many diverse genres, including opera, church music, chamber music, keyboard music and music for the theatre.
Area of Study 2: Vocal Music

The Theatre Royal

Purcell’s talent and skill as a composer for the stage was therefore somewhat restricted by a lack of public opera in London during his lifetime. Most of his theatre music consists of instrumental music and songs mixed with spoken rather than sung drama, though occasionally there were opportunities for more extended musical scenes.

During Purcell’s lifetime, the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, London was in decline despite the joining together of the King’s and Duke’s companies in 1682 to form the United Company. The theatre in this decade was a place for political satire and social unrest. But Purcell wanted to avoid any controversy and instead wrote theatre pieces that tried not to offend anyone.

The countertenor

Purcell wrote a significant amount of music for a higher male voice called a countertenor. This is a type of male voice whose range is equivalent to that of the mezzo-soprano, a lower female voice. The term first came into use in England during the mid-17th century and was in wide use by the time Purcell was composing his music. However, the popularity of this type of voice was short-lived. Within a few years of Purcell’s death, the young Handel was being influenced by the Italian style of singing in *opera seria* (serious opera) and the countertenor was soon replaced by the female soprano.

Background to ‘Music for a While’ by Henry Purcell

The song ‘Music for a While’, composed in 1692, is the second of four movements from the incidental music to the play *Oedipus* by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee. Originally scored for voice and basso continuo, the piece exists in many other arrangements.

The text is divided up in the music as follows:

(Section A)

*Music for a while*

*Shall all your cares beguile.*

*Wond’ring how your pains were eas’d*

*And disdaining to be pleas’d*

*Till Alecto free the dead*

*From their eternal bands,*

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Did you know?

Countertenor Alfred Deller’s performances in the 1940s led to a rediscovery of the countertenor voice and sparked a renewed interest in Purcell’s vocal music. You could investigate Alfred Deller’s life to find out more.

Purcell’s opera *King Arthur* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London
(Section B)
*Till the snakes drop from her head,*
*And the whip from out her hands.*

(Section A1)
*Music for a while*
*Shall all your cares beguile.*

*Oedipus* is one of the most powerful of all Greek legends. Oedipus accidentally kills his father and, without realising it, marries his own mother. When he discovers the horror of what has happened, he plucks out his eyes and then commits suicide.

The song comes from Act 1, Scene 3 of the play based on the legend. At this point in the drama, Tiresias, a blind seer (someone who can foretell the future), and two priests summon the ghost of King Laius to discover the identity of his murderer. The first three bars of the song are played as the first priest enters. The rising pitch of the ground bass in the first three bars signifies the first priest attempting to raise King Laius from the dead by singing ‘Music for a While’. The soloist sings to one of the Furies, Alecto, who is able to ‘free the dead from their eternal bands’. Alecto has snakes for hair and blood dripping from her eyes. Her role in the story is to taunt and persecute Oedipus for killing his father. The effect of the music in the middle section of the song is to calm or ‘beguile’ Alecto – that is, to bewitch her – so that the snakes ‘drop from her head’ and the whip falls from her hands. So the song itself plays a dramatic role in the play rather than simply commenting on it.

**Ground bass form in vocal music of the Baroque era**

Ground bass, also known as basso ostinato, was used widely in both instrumental and vocal music in the Baroque era. It is a style in which the music is written above a repeating pattern of bass notes. In instrumental music, this often features a set of variations over this bass ‘ground’.

One of the best-known ground bass variations is Pachelbel’s Canon. Listen to this piece and hear how the ground bass is repeated over and over throughout the work.

In 1885, nearly 200 years later, than ‘Music for a While’ the Late Romantic composer Johannes Brahms used a type of ground bass (though not just in the bass) for the last movement of his Symphony No. 4 in E minor. See if you can keep track of it in this much more complex movement.
In vocal music of the Baroque period, the use of a ground bass was also quite common, and Purcell wrote several fine examples in his opera *Dido and Aeneas* (1689). The most touching of these are ‘Ah, Belinda’ and Dido’s lament, ‘When I am laid in earth’, sung as she says farewell to life.

Features of a ground bass are usually:

- a minor key
- a straightforward rhythm made up of quavers, crotchets and minims
- a slow and stately tempo
- ending with a perfect cadence
- a fairly solemn mood
- the use of chromatic notes to give the bass part melodic interest in its own right.

Look at the opening three bars to ‘Music for a While’. You will see that all these points all apply. However, in one respect it is unusual. The ground bass was usually one, two, four or eight bars long, but in ‘Music for a While’ the bass is three bars long.

**Basso continuo**

As we saw in the section on the Bach Brandenburg Concerto movement, the accompaniment is known as the *basso continuo* or simply the continuo. In Purcell’s song, the harpsichord, bass viol and lute provide this part to accompany the solo voice. For more information on the basso continuo, see X.X.

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**Close analysis of ‘Music for a While’ by Henry Purcell**

This piece demonstrates many of the hallmarks of Baroque style. Turn back to the section on Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto which explains these features in detail, before looking further at the analysis which follows.

**Instrumentation**

Solo voice accompanied by harpsichord, lute and bass viol. Our recording sounds a semitone lower than the written pitch of A minor, as it was made using Baroque instruments tuned to Baroque pitch.

**Dynamics and tempo markings**

As was traditional practice in the Baroque era, these markings are not given in the score. Clearly, however, the tempo is fairly slow and the music must start softly.

**Structure of the set work**

The piece is structured as a ground bass in ternary (ABA) form, as follows:

- introduction (bars 1–3)
- section A (bars 4–21)
- section B (bars 22–28)

The structure with a shortened repeat of section A can also be considered to be Rounded Binary Form.
Commentary of Introduction (bar 1 to bar 3)

The ground bass is played in the left hand of the harpsichord, doubled by the bass viol. The first chord is A minor, which suggests that this might be the key. Look at the perfect cadence at the next repetition of the ground bass, bar 3 beat 4 to bar 4 beat 1. This confirms the key of A minor.

Characteristics of the ground bass

In this section, the ground bass has these characteristics:

- three bars long
- all equal quavers
- slow tempo.

Each set of four quavers rises in pitch (apart from the last two beats of bar 3), perhaps imitating the rise of King Laius from the dead.

It uses chromatic notes (F#, C#), providing tonal ambiguity, unsettling the listener.

The last four quavers (D–F–E–E) are the bass notes of the progression to the perfect cadence (chords IV, IVb, Ic, V).

The right hand is a melodic part. Purcell would originally have provided just a figured bass, so each performance would have varied in terms of how the right-hand part was ‘realised’ by the harpsichordist. This set work is a transcription (written-down copy) of the musicians’ performance on the Anthology CD. Notice the use of ornaments, for example, a lower mordent (bar 1) and an appoggiatura (bar 2) in this interpretation.

Parts of the melody imitate parts of the vocal line. Compare the falling three-note figure at the start of bar 3 (G#–F#–E) to the first three notes in bar 7 (guile) and bar 9 (all) and so on. The same applies to beat 3 of bar 3 (F–E–D–C–B) and bar 5 beat 4 to bar 6 beat 1 (for a-while) and bar 9 beats 3 to 4 (all your cares). See if you can find other examples in the score for yourself. The use of dotted rhythms in the right-hand part shows the influence of the stile italiano on Purcell.

Glossary

**Figured bass**: a type of musical shorthand for the keyboard player used in the Baroque era. The figures indicate the chord to be played above the bass note and whether this is in root position, first or second inversion. For a fuller description see xxx.

**Ornament**: these are notes that decorate a melody. They are shown by small notes (grace notes) immediately before the main note or symbols above it.

**Mordent**: there are two types of mordent: ‘upper’ and ‘lower’. The upper mordent is made up of the main note, the note above the note and the main note again, all played as quickly as possible. The lower mordent again goes from the main note to the note below and back to the main note again.

**Appoggiatura**: this ornament is often referred to as a ‘leaning in’ note. The appoggiatura leans on the main note, commonly taking half of its value and starting a semitone or tone higher. For example, if the main note is a crotchet and the smaller grace note a quaver, then the player plays two equal quavers.
Area of Study 2: Vocal Music

Commentary of Section A (bar 4 to bar 21)

The solo voice enters at bar 4 with the main melody set to the words *music for a while shall all your cares beguile*. The harpsichord adopts a more basic accompanying role and the focus is on the soprano melody.

The key word *music* is sung on the tonic note A then reinforced by repetition a fifth higher on the dominant note E at bar 5. Purcell also draws attention to the word by setting it *syllabically* and with a long note on the first syllable 'mu' (dotted crochet first time and a minim tied to a quaver the second time). This is called *word-painting* and was a favourite Baroque technique. There are many other examples of this practice that we shall identify in the song. Notice too how, in the performance on our CD, the second statement of *music* has a crescendo throughout the long note – for expressive purposes. As was the convention of the time, Baroque music did not have any dynamic markings on the score. It was left to performers to interpret the music as they saw fit.

Most of the setting of the first few bars has been syllabic. As the song progresses, there are more examples of the use of a *melisma*, meaning more than one note per syllable.

Purcell tends to use these to depict the key words of the text, such as the long setting of the word *eternal* at bars 19–21, another example of word-painting.

Notice how the harpsichord also imitates the vocal line at times. Look at the singer’s part at bar 5 beat 4, followed by the harpsichord at bar 6 beat 2.

At bar 4 the ground bass and the singer start together. But Purcell chose an *odd* number of bars for the ground bass, whereas the vocal line stretches over mostly even numbers of bars. So, from now on, phrases do not align.

At bar 7, the ground bass starts again but the singer is still in mid-phrase. The singer finishes at bar 10 beat 1 as the ground bass starts again – and then the singer starts again on the third beat of that bar – and so on.

This pattern continues in much the same way until the very last chord, when singer and ground bass finally synchronise.

Purcell wanted the song to sound like a continuous stream of music.

The melody of bars 7–10 stresses the word *all* by the use of a short quaver on *shall* followed by a long on-beat crotchet on *all*. The repetition of the first *shall all up* a tone matches the ascending bass pattern and adds to the emphasis of *all*. The quaver rest that follows the first three of these phrases also makes the words stand out clearly. Purcell even repeats the word *all* twice on the last quaver of bar 8 and the first beat of bar 9 for further emphasis. This repetition has an almost hypnotic effect in beguiling the Fury into forgetting her mission. Purcell later develops this idea of repetition effectively with the words *eas’d* (starting at bar 13) and *drop* (starting at bar 23).

Glossary

*Syllabic word-setting:* one note per syllable of a word

*Word-painting:* depicting a word in music to imitate its meaning
Notice also how the harpsichord is playing in a narrow register in bars 7–9 to keep clear of the vocal line above it. A perfect cadence in A minor concludes the text at bar 9 beat 4 to bar 10 beat 1.

The new melody set to the word *wond’ring* at bars 10 and 11 is a melisma. This phrase is repeated in an ascending sequence alternating between voice and harpsichord. The first setting starts on D (bar 10 beat 3), then a note higher in bar 11 in the harpsichord, starting on E and finally on F in the vocal part again (bar 11 beat 3).}

Laments

Many vocal pieces using ground bass were laments – songs displaying sorrowful feelings. It was traditional for laments to have:

- falling phrases
- minor keys
- slow tempo.

‘Music for a While’ has all these features.

Look at the falling phrases just discussed to set the word *wond’ring*, or the setting of *drop* (bars 23–26).

The opening bars in the harpsichord also feature falling phrases (see bar 1). See how many other examples of such phrases you can find in the song.

Purcell often uses *dissonant intervals* between the bass and melody to add feelings of anguish or pain to the music. A good example is the word *pains* at bar 12 beat 3. The soprano sings the note E above a D minor chord. The E is not part of the chord and clashes noticeably with the F in the chord. This E begins a four-note melisma which places further stress on the word *pains*.

The setting of *eas’d* (eased) at bars 13 and 14 has been referred to already. The ‘easing’ is further emphasised by the descending pitch in three short sequences. There are also dissonances between the melody and bass, especially melody note C above bass note B (bar 13 beat 3) and

Glossary

**Dissonant intervals**: the intervals that are dissonant (clashing) are the minor and major second, the minor and major seventh and the tritone (augmented fourth or diminished fifth).
melody note B above bass note C (bar 14 beat 1). These minor ninth and major seventh dissonances add to the anguish of the music. The two-bar passage at bars 13–14 starts to modulate to E minor (the dominant key) through the addition of D#s in the harpsichord part. Notice how the ground bass is altered at bar 14 to allow for this modulation. The melody and basso continuo resolve together on the word pleas’d in bar 15 with a perfect cadence in E minor. The progression of chords from beat 2 to beat 3 in bar 15 is Ic–V–I.

Following the cadence, the music moves to G major as the text focuses on the Fury Alecto. The ground bass at bars 16–17 follows the basic pattern of the original, but starts a minor third lower on F#. The bass is altered in the third bar (bar 18) to modulate to G major – the relative major key of E minor. The whole vocal phrase has the feel of a more optimistic major key. The melody rises in pitch with each short phrase, from G on Till (bar 15), to B on free, to C on dead. Following a long dominant D note on lec, the melody descends in step to the tonic note G and a perfect cadence in that key, again through the chords Ic–V–I. The rising ground bass adds to the general optimism at this point.

The original form of the ground bass returns at bar 19 as the singer sings long melismas to word-paint eternity. This setting of the word eternity is a written out ornament. The first of these centres around the note G and the second starts a major sixth higher. There is some deliberate dissonance between the vocal part and the continuo in bars 19–21 in the form of suspensions, which add to the expressive power of the music. The second eternal at bars 20–21 is essentially a simple pattern of notes, i.e. bar 20 beat 3, the note E, to bar 20 beat 4, note D, then bar 21 beat 2 to note C, then note D on beat 3, and on beat 4 the notes E–D–C. The bass is altered in bar 21 so that we have a modulation, this time to C major, the relative key of A minor. Again a Ic–V–I progression is used from bar 21 beat 4 to bar 22 beat 1. There are some striking interjections (swapped phrases) between the voice and harpsichord in these bars. Look at all these features in the bars below:

Glossary

**Suspensions**: prolonging a note to create a dissonance with the next chord.
Commentary of Section B (bar 22 to bar 28)

Bar 22 is the start of Section B and we are in the relative major key of C. This short middle section of only eight bars starts with one bar of harpsichord link. This link bar helps to separate Sections A and B, and also gives the singer a chance to take a breath. The bass is similar to the shape of the ground bass, and at the end of bar 22 we have another perfect cadence, this time in C major (the relative major key of A minor). This only lasts for one beat as there is then a perfect cadence back into the key of A minor between the second and third beat of bar 23. Notice the sharpened third at this point on the word snakes to create a major rather than minor chord. This is called a Tierce de Picardie and highlights the dramatic first use of the word snakes. It is another example of word-painting in music.

At this point the original form of the ground bass is heard, this time starting halfway through the bar rather than at the start. The voice comes in slightly before this so that, again, we do not have both parts starting or ending together. This creates a sense of tension and is slightly disturbing.

The music and lyrics in the B section are persuading Alecto to drop the snakes from her head and the whip from her hand. The dropping of both of these is word-painted as the melodic line ‘drops’ in a sequential pattern of three notes. The rest between each drop is equally dramatic, the drama heightened by the fact that Purcell places this short onomatopoeic word on the off-beat. Meanwhile the continuo carries on unperturbed in the lower register. Notice how the harpsichord melody features dotted rhythms and lower mordents. Another recurring feature is the descending four-semiquaver patterns (for example, bar 22 beat 2 or bar 25 beat 4). These are derived from the melody of bar 5 on the words for a while.

The ground bass finishes at beat 3 of bar 26 and then there are just two and a half bars left of the section. The bass of these bars follows the shape of the original bass with a brief modulation to E minor at bar 28, although by beat 4 of the same bar we have a perfect cadence back to the tonic key of A minor, the home key, for the final shortened version of Section A, which we call A1. There is another Tierce de Picardie at bar 28 with an E major chord: the third (G) has been sharpened to a G#. 

Glossary

Tierce de Picardie: this refers to a sharpened third in the tonic chord in music in a minor key.

Onomatopoeic: the music setting sounds like the word, for example, drop.
**Glossary**

**Da capo aria**: ABA or ternary form. Often the repeated A section would be ornamented by the singer. Da capo means ‘from the beginning again’.

**Arpeggiated**: the chord is spread, normally from the bottom note to the top.

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**Commentary of Section A1 (bar 29 to bar 38)**

The shortened repeat uses the first two lines of text, *Music for a while shall all your cares beguile*.

This forms a conclusion to and summary of the whole song. The ten-bar section has three statements of the three-bar ground bass in its original form, followed by a final A minor chord.

From bar 29 to bar 35 beat 1, the music of the vocal and bass line is the same as in bars 4–10, except that in our recording the soprano has ornamented her part in places for variety. It was traditional practice to do this in da capo arias where, on the repeat of the A section, the singer would embellish the vocal line. This would vary from singer to singer and would not be written down. However, in the anthology, the version sung by Catherine Sampson has been notated for you to see her changes.

These can be seen at the following places:
- Bar 31 between *shall* and *all*
- Bar 33 on *all*
- Bar 35 on *all*
- Bar 36 on *all* (beats 1 and 3)
- Bar 37 on *be of beguile*

Bars 35 to the end at bar 38 are really just an extension of the previous setting in bars 32–35, rather like a reprise (repeat). The final *shall all your cares beguile* is melodically similar to the previous setting at bar 34.

The final chord is a spread arpeggiated chord. The harpsichord, as mentioned elsewhere, cannot sustain long chords because each keystroke decays so rapidly, so the slow spreading of the chord helps to sustain it for the length of the semibreve.

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**Exam style question**

Describe two ways in which Purcell gives emphasis to individual words or syllables in this set work.

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**Exam tip**

Firstly, remember to make two different points. Secondly, use musical terminology and avoid vagueness. In this question, you should refer to word-painting through syllabic and melismatic setting of words. For example, there is a melisma on the word *eternity* to make the word last a long time, albeit not for eternity!
The three Handel arias and the arias from Bach’s *Wedding Cantata* listed below make interesting comparisons to ‘Music for a While’. The arias are based on religious texts and come from the oratorio *Messiah*. It is not compulsory to study these but making comparisons between different pieces will help you to appraise unfamiliar music in your exam.

**G.F. Handel: ‘The trumpet shall sound’, ‘Rejoice greatly’ and ‘Every valley’ from Messiah**

‘The trumpet shall sound’ is a da capo aria for bass soloist with an *obbligato* solo part for trumpet. The string orchestra and continuo provide the accompaniment. The opening A section is uplifting and positive, matching the words *the trumpet shall sound*. However, the B section is much more reflective of the text *for this corruptible must put on incorruption*. As with the Purcell the music is in a minor key, in this case B minor. In the same way as ‘Rejoice greatly’, the bass soloist would freely ornament the reprise of section A. In Baroque music, only one prevailing ‘affection’ (mood) is expressed in any one movement. As two-thirds of this da capo aria is in D major, the mood is positive, echoing the words *the dead shall be raised incorruptible*. This contrasts with the mood in Purcell’s ‘Music for a While’.

‘Rejoice greatly’ is a soprano aria. The structure is ternary form (ABA). The repeat of the A section is different and the soloist would freely ornament the reprise of the first section when this is repeated. This is similar to the Purcell work where the solo singer ornaments the repeat of the opening section. The aria is scored for strings and continuo. The melody is far more ornate than the Purcell, reflecting the rejoicing nature of the words, but the middle section is quieter and more restrained. Again, like the Purcell, Handel writes descriptively, using rapid runs and sequences to bring the text to life.

‘Every valley’ is in *binary form* and is scored for tenor voice and strings. The melody is based on two short figures to the words *every valley* and also the *crooked plain*. As in the Purcell song, Handel takes opportunities to word-paint colourful words such as *exaltation*. The continuo, as in the Purcell song, provides the bass line and supporting harmonies.

**J.S. Bach: The Wedding Cantata BWV202**

It is not known for sure for which occasion the *Wedding Cantata* was written. The *librettist*, the person who wrote the words, is also a mystery. There is some speculation that it might have been for Bach’s own wedding in 1721 to Anna Magdalena, who may even have sung it herself at the ceremony. The *cantata* was composed during Bach’s years in Cöthen, where he composed most of his instrumental music.

To judge by the text, the cantata was designed to be performed at springtime, and is one of Bach’s most uplifting works. It is written for a solo soprano supported by oboe, strings and continuo, and consists of five arias separated by four short recitatives.

Aria: ‘Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten’, Away, sorrowful shadows, is the first aria and depicts in music a portrait of a cold winter scene in gentle string
Glossary

**Gavotte**: this is a medium-paced French dance in \( \frac{4}{4} \) time beginning on the third beat of the bar. It was popular in the 18th century.

arppegios with an oboe melody in dialogue with the soprano. The tempo, as in ‘Music for a While’, is slow (adagio) although it increases to andante as the text invokes the awakening of spring to the words *Flora’s mirth will our breast naught but merry joy now furnish.*

Aria: ‘Sehet in Zufriedenheit’, Look in satisfaction, is the last movement of the cantata and takes the form of a **gavotte** dance scored for soprano, oboe, violins, viola and continuo. The gavotte is first played on the instruments, then sung, with accompanying figuration passing from instrument to instrument before being finally played by the whole orchestra.

**Checkpoint**

**Strengthen**

S1 How does Purcell bring this expressive text to life in this song? Can you give one example?
S2 What mood do you think Purcell is trying to achieve in this song? How does Purcell achieve this mood in the music?
S3 In your own words, describe what the words ‘syllabic’ and ‘melismatic’ mean.

**Extend**

C1 Describe the state of music in England during Purcell’s lifetime.
C2 Explain what a ground bass is and how it works in this song.
C3 Name **two** features of the song that show it was written in the Baroque era.

How confident do you feel about your answers to these questions? If you’re not sure you answered them well, try the following:

- Re-read the section on the analysis of the song.
- Listen to the set work regularly and practise spotting the features of harmony, melody and so on that you need to learn.
- Try to make connections between what you are learning about the set works and any music you have played or know well. Asking yourself questions about things that are similar or different between two pieces of music can help you to gain a deeper understanding of the set work.

**Summary of the key musical features**

**Key points to remember:**

**The play *Oedipus***

- The song first accompanies a priest trying to raise the ghost of King Laius.
- Later the song attempts to ‘beguile’ the Fury Alecto into forgetting her mission.

**Style**

- lament
- Italian style.

**Instrumentation**

- solo voice (soprano in our CD)
- basso continuo (harpsichord, lute and bass viol in our CD).

**Structure**

- ground bass (basso ostinato); three bars long
- ternary form with third section shortened

- main keys: outer sections in A minor; central section in its relative major, C major
- sequences.

**Harmony**

- figured bass
- harmonic progressions such as I–V–I
- a few modulations away from A minor and C major
- dissonance
- suspensions
- tierce de Picardie.

**Word-painting**

- dissonance, along with melismatic and syllabic word-setting.

**Baroque ornamentation used in the song**

- mordents, appoggiaturas, grace notes, arpeggiation.