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The English Madrigal School

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THE ENGLISH MADRIGAL SCHOOL

A Research Paper
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Wayne Delbert Hunziker
August 1962

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING THE PLAN 2
REQUIREMENT FOR THE COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH
PAPER.

Joseph S. Haruda
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Madrigal is a name for two different types of Italian vocal music, one of the fourteenth, the other of the sixteenth century. Two derivations of the name are given; namely, matricale, a poem in the mother tongue, or mandriale, from mandra, meaning flock, or pastoral song (1:417).

The English madrigal, derived from the Italian, displayed Italian influence shortly after 1550. Nevertheless, from its beginning, the English madrigal quickly adapted its own national characteristics.

It is helpful both to the performer and to the listener to know approximately the date to which a work belongs. The performer, especially, should be aware of the proper terminology, textual implications, and structure of the music.

I. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Many present day directors and performers show little stylistic understanding of original madrigalian literature. This music, with its Renaissance character, requires specific knowledge for correct performance. In view of this, a study of this nature seemed of value.

II. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to the historical development, characteristics, and style of performing English madrigals.

III. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Balletto. This is a vocal composition of c. 1600, dance-like in character, written in a simplified madrigal style, and frequently provided with a fa-la chorus which was probably danced (1:72).

Canzonet, canzonetta. This, the diminutive of canzona, denoted in the late sixteenth century short vocal pieces in light vein, much in the character of a dance song (1:120).

Pastorale. In the sixteenth century this was a dramatic performance based on an idyllic plot. It was among the most important forerunners of the opera (1:560).

Polyphonic, polyphony. This is music written as a combination of several simultaneous voices (parts) of a more or less pronounced individuality. Hence, the term polyphony is practically synonymous with counterpoint. It should be noted that the word "poly" must not be taken literally, since as few as two parts can make perfect polyphony, better, indeed, than six or eight (1:593).

Villanella. This is defined as "a sixteenth century type of vocal music which originated in Naples and which regarding text as well as musical styles forms a sharp contrast to--probably a reaction against--the refinements of the contemporary madrigals" (1:793).

CHAPTER II

THE ENGLISH MADRIGAL AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

The madrigal, like some other musical forms, came to England from Italy. As the Italian school dates from the second quarter of the sixteenth century, it seems strange that the English did not begin until some fifty years later. This condition prevailed because English musicians were chiefly pre-occupied by religious upheavals connected with the Reformation. Their energies were almost wholly concentrated in the production of church music for both the Latin and English rites (1:418).

I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Outside of Italy, the madrigal was cultivated chiefly in England. A few isolated pieces, such as Edward's In Going To My Naked Bed (composed not later than 1564), make it probable that the influence of the Italian madrigal was felt in England shortly after 1550. In 1588 Nicholas Yonge published a collection of Italian madrigals with English translation, entitled Musica Transalpina (Music from across the Alps). Previous to this time England's acquaintance with madrigals was only through private manuscripts and a few attempts of native composers to write in this same style.

William Byrd (1543-1623) appears to have been the first English composer to fully grasp the importance of the madrigal. He, with Thomas Morley (1557-c. 1603) represents the earlier period of the English madrigal, employing a style corresponding somewhat to the Classic Italian

madrigal. Nonetheless, due to the peculiarities of the English language, the madrigal soon became naturalized. From this time onward most reputable composers wrote madrigals. Their popularity brought about many published volumes and they became an accepted part of social life.

Although short lived, the English madrigal made a definite impact upon the music of England as well as other countries. E. H. Fellowes, in his book English Madrigal Composers, comments:

The coming of the English Madrigal was long delayed; but when once the idea was started, there followed immediately an amazing flow of such compositions. Yet the period of the English madrigal-composers was almost as remarkable for its brevity as for its brilliance, for by far the larger part of the output was issued within the limits of twenty-five years.

If their opportunity was a great one, it was certainly grasped to the very full, and they left behind them an imperishable and priceless inheritance for English musicians of all time (9:40-42).

II. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

English Madrigalists followed very much the same lines of design and construction as Flemish composers. They too dealt with the metrical structure of the words, line by line, phrase by phrase, thus often dividing up the work into well defined sections. Each short phrase within the section was usually repeated three times. This principle was one of the more distinctive features of the strict type of madrigal (9:52).

Rather than employing any conventional or formal design, various devices were employed for achieving specific effects. These include (1) the use of the major triad at all full closes of importance; (2) a keen sense of accurate verbal accentuation, with an appreciation for contemporary poetry; (3) variety of texture and rhythm; (4) expressive-

ness, joyful or sorrowful, through harmonic devices; and (5) symbolic word painting.

Elizabethans were somewhat indiscriminate in applying titles to various secular songs. In addition to the term "madrigal," such titles as "Canzonet," "Pastoral," "Song," and "Air" seem to defy exact definition. The "Ballet," a most distinctive title, is a composition of regular rhythm in which a fa-la refrain was indispensable, thus making this title distinctive.

The following general characteristics are typical of English Madrigalists:

1. From four to six voice parts.
2. The use of the fa-la chorus.
3. Nonsense syllables were employed in a recurrent chorus or refrain, a practice probably borrowed from the Italian balletto or villanella.
4. Frequent changes of meter.
5. In contrast to the Italian chromaticism, most English compositions are diatonic.
6. English madrigals are more chordal and rhythmic than the Italian.
7. Intended for solo voices singing in small groups.
8. Excellence of English verse.
9. No dynamic or phrase markings.
10. Integrity and unity of melodic line.

It should be remembered that at this time there were no public performances, concerts, or theatres. Madrigals were written primarily for use in the home by small groups, usually seated around a table, and performed after completing dinner.

CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTICS OF STYLE

It is primarily the madrigal that is associated with music of the Elizabethan age. Although England is indebted for the madrigal to Italy, she developed it in an original and completely independent manner. Traditionally English music has distinguished itself by a tendency toward the popular folk song type. The madrigal came as a natural form of self expression. It belonged to an epoch in which rapid and drastic musical changes were taking place. Major and minor modes, replacing older types, made available many new chords and harmonies.

I. MELODY AND HARMONY

From the first stages of development, English madrigalists recognized that certain combinations of sound were pleasant while others were less pleasing. In this manner a few fundamental principles were established and regarded as rules. The principal of treating each voice part as an independent melody continued even when five, six, eight, or more parts were written. This practice was continued through the sixteenth century and until the development of new harmonic devices and chords. The employment of chromatic chords, dominant sevenths and their inversions, resulted from the experimentation prevalent during the Renaissance era. Such devices, based on vertical harmonic principles, led to the breakdown of modal tonality.

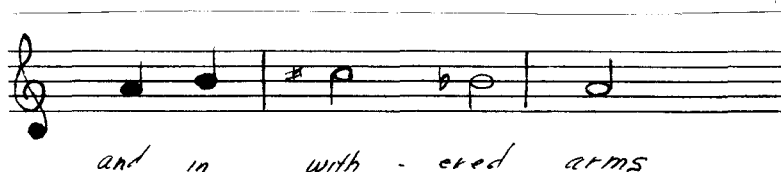
Melodic progressions were conspicuous in their intervallic freedom, many intervals breaking traditional concepts. For example the

interval from F sharp to B flat was quite frequently employed (9:118):



Some manuscripts contained augmented seconds with accidental markings:

Bateson, Thomas: Live Not Poor Bloom (Set II, No. 7) (19:118).



Madrigalists also employed use of parallel fifths and octaves, a practice forbidden by modern harmonic rules.

But as regards "hidden fifths," and pairs of consecutive fifths or octaves on strong beats, the madrigalists appear to have felt no sort of restriction; for throughout the madrigal literature there are numberless instances of such progressions as (9:117):



Such harmonic construction did not seem to interfere with the

success of madrigal compositions. Madrigalists simply put down on paper what sounded good to them, regardless of form or rules.

Harmonic innovations were frequent. Byrd, for example, used the major and minor thirds simultaneously as well as introducing the minor third while the fourth was held in suspension, to be resolved to the major third. Byrd made more use of particular devices than any madrigalist who succeeded him, although some conflicts of the major and minor third are found in the works of Wilbye, Weelkes, and Kirbye. Morley occasionally wrote the major and minor third simultaneously but almost always when a new phrase opened with a minor third preceded by a major cadence. Similar examples occur throughout madrigal literature. The sudden contradiction of the major and minor triads, later times regarded as an elementary form of error, was a device all the madrigalists handled frequently.

Byrd's use of the dominant seventh, especially where the seventh appears as a free passing tone, was a characteristic innovation. None of his successors utilized this cadence more than Gibbons, although frequently it was employed by Weelkes, as in his Morley elegy (9:114):

Weelkes, Thomas: Morley Elegy.



Although the period was one of drastic change, the composers still avoided wide intervals. If used at all, they proceeded stepwise in the opposite direction. Note the alto line in the following (13:9):

And in Psalms let us make joy

and in Psalms

let us make joy to Him

let us make joy

Madrigalists, in attempting to make certain melodic material remembered, frequently repeated this material throughout the composition in various parts. The following example illustrates this device between soprano and alto (4:42):

Morley, Thomas: Arise! Awake!

a - rise, a - wake, a - wake, a - wake, you sil - ly shep-herds sleep - u

a - wake, a - wake, you sil - ly shep-herds sleep -

Composers quickly adopted a chordal style of writing, the solo

voice with accompaniment disappearing. Many compositions display smooth melodic line with chordal structure (4:41):

Benet, John: All Creatures Now Are Merry Minded.

II. RHYTHM

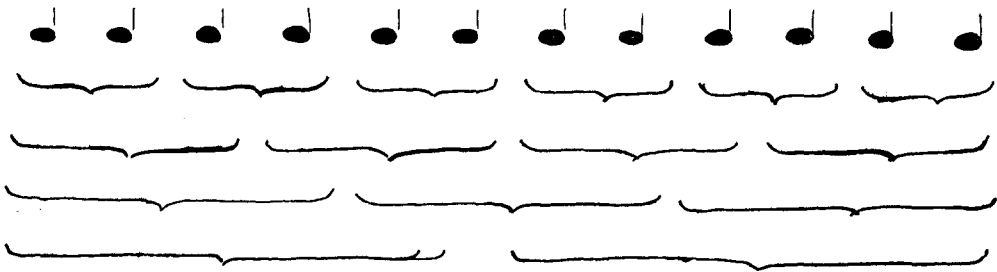
Polyphonic music was literally free in every rhythmic respect. Composers knew of no convention demanding that the accentuation should conform to any regular pulsation of alternate beats. There were no measure bars in the original madrigals, providing freedom of recitation:

Morley, Thomas: Hard By A Crystal Fountain (8:55).

Rhythm frequently changes in all parts. Even when it may seem to be following a regular duple pulsation, a stronger accent may frequently be found on the second pulse rather than on the first. On the other hand, definite rhythmic patterns are frequently found in passages of long sustained notes.

It cannot be too often repeated that no bars at all were printed in the original part-books; their insertion in modern printed scores is only intended to give guidance to the eye, and they must not be regarded as invariably controlling the rhythmic outline.

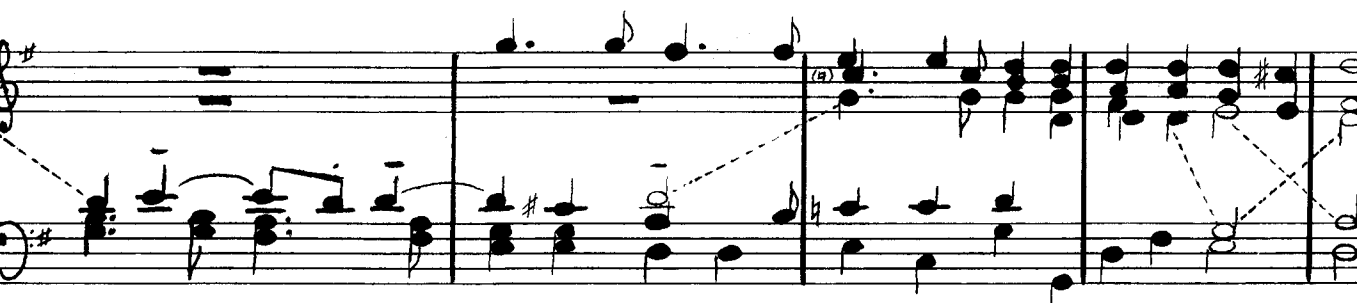
As already stated, it was possible for each voice part to follow an independent rhythmic outline regardless of what any other voice may have been doing. The system of introducing complex and overlapping rhythms may most simply be explained by a chart showing the variety of grouping into which a sequence of twelve equal notes may be divided (8:56):



The Ballet madrigal, with its fa-la refrain, has very distinctive rhythmic characteristics. While some sections move together, others show rhythmic independence. Morley's ballet My Bonny Lass in the first eight measures shows the contrasting rhythms. The first four measures are rhythmically exact, the last four measures show rhythmic independence (3:16):

Morley, Thomas: My Bonny Lass.

My Bonny Lass *Morley*



With the addition of measure bars in some publications, the juxtaposition between words and rhythmic patterns are sometimes changed. Whether rhythms are simple or complex, they should always be given careful consideration.

III. TEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

While madrigal composers frequently wrote their own text, many were written by prominent literary figures such as Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Spencer. Madrigal publications did not print the poet's name, but sources have suggested that many of these verses were written by Elizabethan poets, perhaps even by Shakespeare himself (4:39-40).

English madrigalists did not confine themselves to pastoral subjects. Their poems were of various subject matter: they were cheerful as well as sad; they treated ethical and religious subjects; they could express the feelings of passionate emotion; and also the light-heartedness of nymphs and shepherds or of cruel Amaryllis and her rejected suitor. An example of religious text may be quoted from Byrd's

Psalms, Sonets, and Songs of Sadness and Pietie (No. 31) (9:144):

Care for thy soul as thing of greatest price,
 Made to the end to taste of power divine,
 Devoid of guilt, abhorring sin and vice,
 Apt by God's grace to virtue to incline.
 Care for it so as by thy retchless train
 It be not brought to taste eternal pain.

The following is a typical ethical text (9:144):

Happy, O happy he, who not affecting
 The endless toils attending worldly cares,
 With mind reposed, all discontents rejecting,
 In silent peace his way to heaven prepares,
 Deeming his life a Scene, the world a Stage
 Whereon man acts his weary Pilgrimage.

Other serious types took the form of an elegy or emotional madrigal. The most greatly used, however, was the Ballet. The following poem is typical of the Ballet madrigals of Thomas Morley (3:12):

Now Is The Month of Maying

- 1) Now is the month of Maying,
 When merry lads are playing,
 Fa la la la la la la la la,
 Fa la la la la la la la.
 Each with his bonny lass,
 A dancing on the grass.
 Fa la la la la la la la la,
 Fa la la la la la la la.
- 2) The Spring, alas all in gladness,
 Doth laugh at Winter's sadness,
 Fa la la la la la la la la,
 Fa la la la la la la la.
 And to the bagpipes' sound,
 The nymphs tread out the ground.
 Fa la la la la la la la la,
 Fa la la la la la la la.
- 3) Fie, then, why sit we musing,
 Youth's sweet delight refusing?
 Fa la la la la la la la la,
 Fa la la la la la la la.
 Say, Daintly nymphs, and speak,
 Shall we play barley break?
 Fa la la la la la la la la,
 Fa la la la la la la la.

The fa-la refrain, actually no part of the lyrics, was added by the composer, who employed it somewhat like an instrumental interlude between clearly defined sections of the text. The greater part of madrigal literature is bright and gay. An example of the Ballet without the fa-la refrain follows (9146):

In pride of May
The fields are gay,
The birds do sweetly sing;
So Nature would
That all things should
With joy begin the Spring.

Then, Lady dear,
Do you appear
In beauty like the Spring;
I well dare say
The birds that day
More cheerfully will sing.

A characteristic feature was the method of handling single words or ideas to emphasize their meaning either by some unusual or unexpected chord or by some suitable musical figure. Such words as "joy," "sing," or "fly" were usually set to phrases of rapid notes. The curve of the notes in itself could illustrate the flight of a bird:



No time was so rich in poetry as the reign of Elizabeth I. Poets, as well as musicians, loved to make the Queen the subject of their verse. Of all the poetry or madrigals ever written the most famous collection is probably The Triumphs of Oriana (Oriana representing Queen Elizabeth). Such collections led to still greater

creative freedom and established this period as one of England's greatest musical epochs (4:39).

CHAPTER IV

STYLE OF PERFORMANCE

In keeping with traditional style of English madrigal singing, the ensemble should consist of not more than 20 voices. No definite number of voices need be apparent, an uneven number being as acceptable as a definite "coupled" group. Either is permissible; however, from 13 to 16 voices were most commonly used.

The ensemble should be seated around a rectangular table. The front side is left open so that the audience may see the group. The ensemble may either be in traditional Renaissance costume or in formal attire.

To complete the feeling of "Old English Sophistication" the table may be decorated. For example, the use of candles has become traditional with madrigal groups. Nowadays, the use of a linen table cloth, set of candle-holders, and a vase or floral arrangement is considered appropriate.

In actual performance the madrigalists must adhere to the intimate stylistic traits peculiar to their time. Liquidity of sound; a supple, continuous flow; perfection of legato, although it may be staccato; and lyric vocal character require skillful execution.

The intimacy between words and music should imply grace and beauty of text, with emphasis on poetic-dramatic concepts rather than melodic contours. From the musical standpoint, a legato style must be stressed. Even staccato phrasing must be sung with a certain legato spirit (13:50-51).

A clear understanding of terminology is required to develop a proper madrigal performance. It is imperative, therefore, that the interpreter devote his first attention to a careful study of the text and the relationships between it and the musical structure.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The English madrigal, derived from the Italian, is one of the most expressive types of vocal music. It was naturalized to the English idiom with compositions of leading English composers in the Renaissance era.

This investigation has revealed that (1) the music was written to fit the text rather than the text being written for the music; (2) the music is intended to express the content of the text; (3) individual voices are treated as equals and are all engaged in the declamation of the text; and (4) the texture may be polyphonic or chordal and syllabic, utilizing various imitative devices. Whatever devices are employed, their purpose is to better illustrate the text.

The singer of English madrigals, knowing the style and characteristics of these compositions, is much more effective in performance. The director, with this knowledge, is also educationally equipped to disperse musical information of this era.

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