

1964

“Weep You No More, Sad Fountains” an Original Choral Work Displaying Certain Archaic Compositional Devices

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Johnson, Ray Bert, “Weep You No More, Sad Fountains” an Original Choral Work Displaying Certain Archaic Compositional Devices” (1964). *All Master's Theses*. Paper 406.

"WEEP YOU NO MORE, SAD FOUNTAINS"

AN ORIGINAL CHORAL WORK

DISPLAYING CERTAIN ARCHAIC COMPOSITIONAL DEVICES

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

by

Ray Bert Johnson

August 1964

LD
5771.3

J 6870



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer is grateful to Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Whitner for her guidance and assistance with the original composition and the accompanying paper. Appreciation should also be expressed to Dr. Wayne S. Hertz, Dr. Joseph S. Haruda, and the Central Washington State College choir for their constructive criticisms and invaluable reading of the original choral work.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED

I. THE PROBLEM

A study of selected contemporary choral music revealed that modern composers, seeking new sounds, frequently use archaic compositional devices. The problem for the writer became the composition of an original choral work utilizing archaic devices.

II. EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED

Archaic compositional devices. The term which indicates those compositional devices used before 1600.

Archaic text. The term which refers to those poems or verses written around or before 1600.

Free accent. A means of obtaining flexibility by omission of measure bars (unmeasured) or rapid meter changes.

Mode. A medieval scale which forms the basic tonal substance of a composition.

Modern choral works. Refers to compositions written after 1920.

Open harmonies. Refers to the spacing of voices separated by an interval of a fourth or fifth. In archaic

music; color tones such as thirds are omitted from the chordal harmony.

Organum. Refers to the earliest type of polyphonic music in which open harmonies are characteristic.

CHAPTER II

ARCHAIC COMPOSITIONAL DEVICES IN MODERN CHORAL MUSIC

Composers use many musical resources for their effects, qualities, leading tendencies, and general impressions. Some compositional devices have been dormant or obscured in usage and should be recognized and re-examined for their resource value to the modern composer.

In order to write music that sounds very new and different, the modern composer will often-times borrow ideas from the very old and distant past (15).

The specific archaic compositional devices discussed in the paper and illustrated by the original composition are: the modes, open harmonies, and free and unmeasured accent. Examples taken from three published modern choral works are used to illustrate these compositional devices.

MODES AS USED BY THE MODERN CHORAL COMPOSER

Apel's Harvard Dictionary of Music expands upon the definition of a mode as a medieval scale which forms the basic tonal substance of a composition by stating that the medieval church mode

... is an octave-segment of the diatonic (C major) scale, with one of its tones playing

the role of a tone center (comparable to the tone C of the C major scale) (1:145).

While listening to new compositions, especially songs of a folk-like nature, sounds that remind us of the distant past are quite often heard.

Examination of our great heritage of folk songs discloses a wealth of musical sound based on scales generally unfamiliar to us such as the Aeolian, Dorian, Lydian, Mixolydian, and Phrygian modes (12:11).

The modes referred to in this paper are those taken from Dallin's Techniques of Twentieth Century Composition (4:20).

Ex. 1 the untransposed modes

The image displays seven musical staves, each representing a different mode. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The notes are represented by circles on the staff lines. The modes shown are: Ionian (C-D-E-F-G-A-B), Dorian (C-D-E-F-G-A-B), Phrygian (C-D-E-F-G-A-B), Lydian (C-D-E-F#-G-A-B), Mixolydian (C-D-E-F-G-A-Bb), Aeolian (C-D-E-F-G-A-Bb), and Locrian (C-D-E-F-G-A-Bb). The modes are arranged in three rows: the first row contains Ionian, Dorian, and Phrygian; the second row contains Lydian, Mixolydian, and Aeolian; and the third row contains Locrian.

In addition to the untransposed modes, Dallin also offers a table showing the relationship of each mode to major or natural minor scales (4:21).

Ionian. like major
 Dorian. like minor with sharp six
 Phrygian. like minor with flat two
 Lydian. like major with sharp four
 Mixolydian. like major with flat seven
 Locrian like minor with flat two and five

The English composer, Benjamin Britten, uses modal resources to emphasize an archaic mood in The Little Sweep. Modal qualities used here have a unique appeal in themselves, and they unify by relating modern music to the music of the past.

Re-created modality serves as a strong bridge between the diatonicism of the past and the anti-diatonicism of the present and of the present future (9:343).

In the third song of Britten's opera, The Little Sweep, there is a strong usage of the transposed Phrygian mode built on G (9:56). The folk-like nature of the text in the following example easily lends itself to the modal setting.

Ex. 2

The owl, wide winging through the sky, In search of mice and
 les-ser fry, Re-peats his long un-hap-py cry — etc.

· Let Us Make Man In Our Image by Undine Smith Moore has a section in which the transposed Phrygian mode built on A is used to advantage in imitative and homophonic textures (10:4-5).

Ex. 3

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system contains four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The second system contains four staves: Treble (T), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The music is in a transposed Phrygian mode on A. The lyrics are: "He form'd thee Ad-am, He form'd thee O-man, Dust of the ground, Dust of the ground. etc." The piano accompaniment features imitative textures between the hands.

S
He form'd thee Ad-am, He form'd thee O-

A

T
He form'd- thee Ad-am, He

B

T
man, Dust of the ground, Dust of the ground.

A
Dust - etc.

T
form'd thee, Dust -

B
Dust -

Modes were eminently suited to the single melodic line of the plainsong. When harmony was added to modally-oriented melodies, the result was not satisfying to the ear because the chords did not resolve completely. This is the prime reason why extended, modal passages are not found in polyphonic music. Many modern composers use the modes only as subtle glimpses of musical color, often overlooked in the total impression of the music. "...The modes are fond of hiding their artificiality by just dropping in for a moment or two" (9:343).

OPEN HARMONIES FOR ARCHAIC EFFECTS

The practice of using open harmonies goes back to the earliest homophonic and polyphonic music, particularly to organum, the forerunner of polyphony. The vocal lines were linear in concept, and the resultant harmonies were incidental to the style. Fourths and fifths, the characteristic open harmonies, are, like the modes, used sparingly for their special quality in modern choral works.

Moore in Let Us Make Man In Our Image makes use of open fourths and fifths for their stark quality in the following piano condensation of the vocal parts (10:6).

Ex. 4

The image shows a musical score for Example 4. It consists of two staves, a treble clef on the top and a bass clef on the bottom. The music is written in a style that uses various note values and rests, with some notes beamed together. The piece ends with the word 'etc.' written in a cursive font.

Discretion is an important element in composition, especially when showcase devices are used to obtain a particular mood or feeling. When used judiciously, open harmonies can enhance a modern work with an impression of the past.

FREE AND UNMEASURED ACCENT IN MODERN CHORAL MUSIC

Plainsong style is identified by the lack of measure bars and irregularity of accent.

The ensemble (vocal) music bar-line was not introduced until toward the end of the sixteenth century, when notation in simple parts gave way to notation in score arrangement (1:76).

Both the absence and the rapid change of meter signatures are additional evidences of free accent in modern music. Let Us Make Man In Our Image shows a clear return to the style of the chant in that it is monophonic, unaccompanied, and in free rhythm (10:7).

Ex. 5 (solo tenor) (♩ = c. 96)

In His own im-age He cre-a-ted thee. etc.

In John Garrish's choral work, The Falcon, of which only the soprano part is shown in the following example, rapid changes of meter signatures achieve the freedom necessary to match the text. In this work the meter is basically $\frac{3}{4}$ with a contrasting section making use of $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$, and $\frac{5}{8}$ meters (5:6).

Ex. 6

And she weep-eth night and day. And by that bed there
stond-eth a stone, — 'Cor-pus Chri-sti' writ-ten there-on.

The rapid changes of meter signature in the foregoing example are a means of maintaining the rhythmic

flexibility necessary to express the text. It should be understood in examples of this kind that measure bars and meter signatures are only reading aids to the performer, and the device itself serves the same purpose as no meter at all.

CHAPTER III

THE ARCHAIC TEXT AND ITS MUSICAL REALIZATION

In vocal music, the selection of text is one of the prime concerns of the modern composer.

It may also be noted that modern composers have been very careful in the selection of poetic texts for their songs, choosing only poems of outstanding literary value (1:740).

In the realization of a text, the composer must consider the accentuation of words in themselves as well as their importance to the literary phrases. Of more subtle concern are the musical mood and techniques essential to proper setting of the text. It is often in good taste to borrow compositional ideas from the period in which the text was written or to which the text refers. The archaic text is best realized by use of archaic compositional devices.

Richard de Castre's Prayer to Jesus by R. R. Terry realizes an archaic text by unison passages in the Dorian mode. Examination of the following excerpt shows how Terry used simple musical material in a modal flavor to accentuate a simple archaic text (13:2).

Ex. 7 (Carol A.D. 1430)

The - su, - Lord, that - ma - dest me, - etc.

Such textual examples as "thy woundee smerte", "meek and low of herte", and "on the roode tree" are typical of the Old English used in Richard de Castre's Prayer to Jesus. Obvious spelling changes have occurred since the text was written. Sometimes less obvious changes in the meanings of words or phrases have also taken place, which means the composer must carefully study any text before setting it to music.

Unique in vocal music is its power to enhance and convey the meaning of words. The text, then, must be set to music in such a way as to allow the listener the greatest possible understanding and appreciation of it. The composer should have at his disposal all the musical materials and devices from the past to the present to realize the archaic text in the most aesthetically meaningful way possible.

CHAPTER IV

ORIGINAL COMPOSITION

"WEEP YOU NO MORE, SAD FOUNTAINS"

WEEP YOU NO MORE, SAD FOUNTAINS

Rubato

No. 82 John Dowland (1603)

By Ray Bert Johnson

First system of musical notation for 'Weep You No More, Sad Fountains'. It features four staves: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 5/4. The lyrics are: 'Weep you no more, sad Fountains; what need you'. Dynamics include *p* and *mp*. The tempo is marked 'Rubato'.

Second system of musical notation, continuing the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. It includes the same four staves as the first system. The lyrics continue: 'Weep you no more sad Fountains; what need you'. Dynamics include *p* and *mp*. The tempo is marked 'Rubato'.

Third system of musical notation, continuing the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. It includes the same four staves. The lyrics are: 'Flow so fast? look how the snow-y moun-tains Heav-en's'. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*. There are performance markings such as 'div.' and '2^a'. The tempo is marked 'Rubato'.

Fourth system of musical notation, continuing the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. It includes the same four staves. The lyrics are: 'Flow so fast? look how the snow-y moun-tains Heav-en's'. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*. There are performance markings such as 'div.' and '2^a'. The tempo is marked 'Rubato'.

(B) a tempo

sun doth gen-tly waste! But my sun's heav-en-ly

sun doth gen-tly waste! But my sun's heav-en-ly

sun doth gen-tly waste! But my sun's heav-en-ly

sun doth gen-tly waste! But my sun's heav-en-ly

rit... p

(C)

eyes View not your weep-ing that now lies

eyes View not your weep-ing that now lies

eyes View not your weep-ing that now lies

eyes View not your weep-ing that now lies

rit... ff p

① *a tempo*

sleep ing soft ly, now soft-ly lies sleep-ing.
rit...

sleep ing soft ly now soft-ly lies sleep-ing.

sleep ing soft ly now soft-ly lies sleep-ing. Oh

sleep ing soft ly now soft-ly lies sleep-ing Oh

rit...

① *a tempo*

②

Sleep , Sleep

Sleep is a re-con-cil-

Sleep , Sleep

Sleep is a re-con-cil-

Sleep , Sleep

Sleep is a re-con-cil-

Sleep , Sleep

Sleep is a re-con-cil-

②

ing, A rest that peace be gets; Doth not the sun rise *div.* **F** *ff*

ing, A rest that peace be gets; Doth not the sun rise *ff*

ing, A rest that peace be gets; Doth not the sun rise *ff*

ing, A rest that peace be gets; Doth not the sun rise *ff*

smil- ling when fair at e- ven he sets? *rit...* **G** *a tempo* Rest you then, *p*

smil- ling when fair at e- ven he sets? Rest you then, *p*

smil- ling when fair at e- ven he sets? *rit...* Rest you then, *p*

smil- ling when fair at e- ven he sets? Rest you then, *p*

rest, sad eyes! Melt not in weeping, While she lies

rest, sad eyes! Melt not in weeping, While she lies

rest, sad eyes! Melt not in weeping, While she lies

rest, sad eyes! Melt not in weeping, While she lies

sleeping, softly, now softly lies sleeping. rit... pp

sleeping, softly, now softly lies sleeping #ing.

sleeping, softly, now softly lies sleeping. rit... pp

sleeping, softly, now softly lies sleeping.

rit... pp

CHAPTER V

AN ANALYSIS OF "WEEP YOU NO MORE, SAD FOUNTAINS"

This work employs all the compositional devices described in the preceding chapters, namely: modally-oriented melody and harmony; free accent for flexible interpretation; open harmonies for archaic effects; and the use of an archaic text.

The Phrygian mode was selected for realization of the text because it has qualities of brightness and somberness expressed by the words of the text. The opening section from the beginning to rehearsal letter B is in the Phrygian mode built on F sharp. This transposition of the original Phrygian mode built on E offers additional brightness in the soprano and tenor parts.

The section from B to D is Phrygian also, but ends on a cadence in B Phrygian. At letter B a modulation begins through the Ionian mode (major) built on F sharp leading to a cadence suggesting B Phrygian, which becomes clearly defined in section C. Section D is a modulatory section leading back to F sharp Phrygian, at letter E where a return is implied to the original melody for the second verse.

After a cadence in F sharp Phrygian at letter G, key center and tonality fluctuate, bringing harmonic tension to the final cadence in B Phrygian.

Free accent is apparent in this work in that twenty-seven meter changes occur in fifty-three measures of music, thus allowing for additional musical weight or accent to important words or phrases of the text. Where the text reads "...snowy mountains Heaven's sun doth gently waste!" between letters A and B, the composer wanted to bring out the words "snowy", "mountains", "Heaven's" and "sun", so different meters were used for each word. The dramatic use of silence as an accent just before letter C resolves a climactic chord built of fifths.

Open harmonies lend an archaic quality to the cadences before letters B and G. Parallel fifths are used between the tenor and bass parts (as in organum) at the cadence before letter D and the final cadence at the end.

The text, taken from John Dowland's Third and Last Book of Airs written in 1603, has overtones of sadness and also of faith. If these overtones are to be realized in madrigal style, they must be "...tempered with a certain emotional restraint" (11:4). For this reason severe dissonances and disjunct melodic skips were avoided in this setting.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

The terse and economical style of this paper required critical self-discipline and the weighing of each word, thus resulting in improved use of the language. The investigation of the compositional devices brought forth in the study led to improved techniques of library research and musical analysis.

The study also refined the writer's judgment in selecting and performing contemporary choral music. This background opened an avenue for gaining and maintaining student interest in the classroom.

While investigating archaic compositional devices, the writer discovered that the modes are used more extensively than open harmonies or free and unmeasured accent as a means of obtaining archaic qualities in modern choral works.

The practical necessity of composing an original choral work within well defined limitations, and at the same time bringing about a unification of several compositional techniques, called upon all aspects of the writer's training and critical insight. The relating of each note and phrase to the total composition, musically and aesthetically, improved the writer's ability to use musical material conservatively.

Most inspiring of all was the sense of personal growth and self-enlightenment as the music took shape and direction from its beginning in March, 1963, to its completion in August, 1964.

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