



Claudio Monteverdi in 1640 by Bernardo Strozzi



Claudio Monteverdi

(1567-1643)

DOLCISSIMO USCIGNOLO

per cinque voci (*for five voices*) – SSATB and continuo

Universal Edition UE14362

[special order with JW Pepper; includes a realized continuo part]

Also available on www.cpd.org, but without the realized continuo

ANALYSIS

Broad Description Italian Continuo Madrigal (early Baroque)

Background Information

Source: *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi (Madrigals of war and love)*

Libro ottavo (*Book 8*), Venice 1638

from *Canti Amorosi (Songs of Love)*

Edition: The Universal Edition is the work of the Venetian composer Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882-1973) and his complete edition of Monteverdi was published in sixteen volumes between 1926-1942. He retained the original keys of the madrigals, but used modern clefs. Also retained are the original designations of the vocal parts ("canto," "quinto"). He refrained from tampering with the harmonies, but the tempi, phrasing, dynamics, basso continuo realization and footnotes that appear were supplied by him and need not be binding on modern performers. [Dover score]

- Claudio Giovanni Antonio Monteverdi (15 May 1567 (baptized) – 29 November 1643) was an Italian composer, gambist, and singer. Monteverdi's work, often regarded as revolutionary, marked the transition from the Renaissance style of music to that of the Baroque period. He developed two individual styles of composition: the new basso continuo technique of the Baroque and the heritage of Renaissance polyphony. Enjoying fame in his lifetime, he wrote one of the earliest operas, *L'Orfeo*, which is still regularly performed.
- Until the age of forty, Monteverdi worked primarily on madrigals, composing a total of nine books. As a whole, the first eight books of madrigals show the enormous development from Renaissance polyphonic music to the style typical of Baroque music.
- The Fifth Book of Madrigals shows the shift from the Renaissance style of music to the Baroque. Published in 1605, *Quinto Libro* was at the heart of the controversy between Monteverdi and Giovanni Artusi – Artusi attacked the "crudities" and "license" of the modern style of composing. Monteverdi made his reply in the introduction to the fifth book, with a proposal of the division of musical practice into two streams, which he called *prima prattica*, and *seconda prattica*. *Prima prattica* was described as the previous polyphonic ideal of the sixteenth century, with flowing strict counterpoint, prepared dissonance, and equality of voices. *Seconda prattica* used much freer counterpoint with an increasing hierarchy of voices, emphasizing soprano and bass. In *Prima Prattica* the harmony controls the words. In *Seconda Prattica* the words should be in control of the harmonies. This represented a move towards the new style of monody. The introduction of

continuo in many of the madrigals was a further self-consciously modern feature. In addition, the fifth book showed the beginnings of conscious functional tonality.

- The *Ottavo Libro*, published in 1638, includes the so-called *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi* which many consider to be the perfection of the madrigal form. The eighth is the largest of Monteverdi's Madrigal Books, containing works written over a thirty-year period. It was dedicated to members of the Austrian Royal Family.
- *Dolcissimo usignolo*, perhaps the least "dramatic" in the collection, this madrigal has a distinctively beautiful melodic style and the now-standard basso continuo accompaniment. Attention to musical depiction of the text, a consistent concern of Monteverdi, is especially evident in the bird-like agitated call of the nightingale to its soul mate, "vieni, vieni anima mia" (Come, come my beloved).

Text

Giovanni Battista Guarini (1538-1612)

Dolcissimo uscignolo,	<i>Sweetest nightingale,</i>
tu chiami la tua cara compagnia,	<i>you summon your loved companion</i>
cantando: "vieni, vieni, anima mia."	<i>singing: "Come, come, my beloved!"</i>
A me canto non vale,	<i>To me song is of no avail,</i>
e non ho come tu da volar ale.	<i>nor do I have wings to fly like you.</i>
O felice augelletto,	<i>O happy little bird,</i>
come nel tuo diletto	<i>how for your delight,</i>
ti ricompensa ben l'alma natura:	<i>kindly Nature compensates you well:</i>
se ti negò saper, ti diè ventura.	<i>if she denied you understanding, she gave you joy.</i>

Important words where the meanings are perhaps not apparent above:

anima mia – *soul/being my; my soul; meaning beloved*
 non vale – *no worth*
 come tu – *like you; volar – fly; ale – wings*
 nego saper – *deny knowledge/understanding*
 ventura – *good fortune/luck; joy*

The Nightingale:

- Mostly sings at night; "Singer of the Night" is the literal translation of the scientific name
- Only the male nightingale can sing, though many poets adopt the female as the singer
- The song of this bird is often referred to as a melancholy song
- Many varied tones – improvisatory
- The markings of the male and female are so nearly the same as to render them indistinguishable
- Though often regarded as an English bird, it is also found in Spain, Portugal, Austria, upper Hungary, Persia, Arabia, and Africa, where it spends its winters.
- Several nightingale bird song recordings can be found online:
<http://www.freesound.org/samplesViewSingle.php?id=17185>

ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

Form

- Four large sections; each beginning with the lonely 1st soprano voice
 A (m. 1-22); B (m. 23-39); C* (m.40-59); C* (m.60-83)
 * m. 40-57 and m.60-77 are identical (repeat); but each of the C sections end differently, with the final ending being more extended. [One could consider the A & B listed above as one section and then we would have a more typical madrigal form: ABB]

- Although the two lines of text beginning "o felice" are used first in the B section, they are repeated in the C section and the poetry continues from there.

Rhythm

- Common-time meter
- ♪ ♫ are the most common movement with most phrases ending with a ◊
- ♪ are used as special bird-like ornaments, mostly in the soprano voice
- The "o felice" motive is used or varied often: ♪♪♪♪♪

Melody

- Found in 1st soprano throughout (the new monody)
- Minor/modal in quality – with changing accidentals – melancholy in nature and angst filled
- Melody changes in expressive quality dependant upon the text – madrigalisms:
 - Sweet, primarily step-wise melody with long melisma "dolcissimo uscignolo"
 - "Vieni" section (m. 17-22) – bird-like calling/invitation to beloved
 - m. 29-32 – soprano soars on a long high G, with rising 8ths and 16ths to ornament and depict wings and flying
 - Melancholy rise/fall on "o felice" (o happy) – contrasts bird's to poet's emotional state

Harmony

- The harmony is not as traditional/functional as it will become in the later Baroque – it feels at once "old" and "appropriate to the affect" in our 21st century ears.
- It begins with d minor-like harmony – with some raised 6th degrees (B/Bb)
- It ends with Picardy thirds – with D major chords
- Phrase & section cadences have suspensions (usually 4/3)
- Changing accidentals give harmonic (and melodic) interest and make some parts tricky for singers – B/Bb, C/C#, F/F#, G/G#
- First three phrases end with the voices in open 5ths – the only third is in the continuo
- Frequent use of the Picardy third
- The phrase that speaks of "kindly nature" is all in major and greatly extended in register (low register in bass, high in soprano) – all encompassing (m. 47-50 or 67-70)
- The harmonic movement in the form
 - Section A: begins d minor and ends D major (interesting cadence to C major at m. 16)
 - Section B: begins d minor and ends with a cadence to F major
 - Section C¹: begins a minor, passes through C major, G major, a minor, cadences in G major in m. 57, with a short ending that cadences in C major
 - Section C²: begins a minor, passes through C major, G major, a minor, cadences in G major in m. 77, then moves to g minor with a cadence to D major, continuing in d minor, with an extended suspension cadence to D major

Timbre

- The timbre is dominated by the two high soprano parts
- The continuo (harmony and bass instruments) gives a particular color to the music of this era. I prefer harpsichord and cello for the continuo instruments in this piece, though my favorite professional recording uses a lute for the harmony instrument. This instrumental color contrasts with the otherwise vocal timbres in this work and is the unique distinguishing color of music in the Baroque era (17th Century and into the 18th)

- The delay of the entrance of the bass voice until m. 17 in section A and m. 29 of section B gives contrast in color within the voices. First setting up the quote of the bird "come, come my beloved!" and the second bemoaning the poet's lack of wings to fly.
- Contrast in color and texture is set up often with the single voice part singing a phrase and additional voices adding in subsequent phrases – setting apart the lonely "one"
- Experimentation with non-vibrato on final chords of phrase is recommended

Texture

- Monody – Italian solo song with instrumental accompaniment that flourished during the first half of the 17th century...and even a type of madrigal which features a largely homophonic texture and concentration of melodic interest in the uppermost voice (Randel: New Harvard Dictionary of Music)
- Continuo – bass and harmony instruments that accompany the melodic material throughout. This is the distinguishing characteristic of texture for the baroque era and it is present in this continuo madrigal
- The "thin" texture of the 1st soprano voice *alone* with the continuo is contrasted with different numbers of voices in every section of the piece.
- Most of the texture is homophonic – melody with accompaniment.
- There are a few points of imitation or polyphonic treatment that provide contrast:
 - The rising 8ths in the soprano voices followed by the tenor/bass voices in the "flying" phrase m. 29-32.
 - The "o felice" phrases m. 40-43 and 60-63 (o happy little bird)
 - The "come nel tuo diletto" phrases m. 37-39, 44-46, and m. 64-66 (how for your delight)

Expression

- The dynamics are the editors and need not be observed as written – can develop own levels
- Phrases rise and fall dynamically with the text – with some emphasis on the penultimate syllable of the text (usually also the suspension) ex: can-TAN-do, VIE-ni, MI-a, etc.
- Special care and relaxation of the tempo can be made at the cadence that completes the first C section (m. 58-59) before beginning the returning "o felice"
- The long opening melismas on "uscignolo" depicting the nightingale need shaping
- Particulars of Italian diction and word stress (accented syllables) affect the phrasing:
 - Dental "t" – "fat t"
 - Pure vowels, closed and open "e," glides and diphthongs
 - Eliding some words/syllables
 - Penultimate syllable stress (nearly every multi-syllable Italian word) – and unstressed final syllable.

Heart

The heart of *Dolcissimo Uscignolo* is its melancholy melody as well as the use of direct and subtle text painting throughout the piece to depict the meaning of the poem.

Introducing the Piece

1. Journal Activity: As silly as this may sound, I'd like you to think about birds for a moment. Think about what it would be like to be a bird. What might delight you? Or can you think of anything you envy in a bird? Jot a few of those ideas down.
2. Have a few students share their ideas
3. Pass out the poem/translation sheet. Have a couple people read the poem in translation.
4. Discuss or journal some of the following
 - a. What does the person in the poem (the "me") envy of the nightingale?

- b. What is the emotional state of the person in the poem?
- c. Imagine what kinds of musical ideas a composer might use to express this poem. Jot down some ideas.
- d. Share some nightingale facts: male sings, countries, varied song – improvisatory, favorite of a number of poets

SKILL OUTCOME

Students will demonstrate proper Italian pronunciation and word stress.

Strategies

1. "Vieni, vieni anima mia" – speak with proper/improper word stress, in translation, use gesture, and introduce the "glide" versus the "2 syllable" double vowel, then apply to m. 17-22
2. Work through pronunciation, word stress, meaning in poem – reviewing general Italian pronunciation rules
3. Use phrases in warm-up exercises – always emphasizing word stress and difficult pronunciations – particularly the "fat" t and rolled r ("tu chiami" phrase through cantando). [Do Re Do]
4. Use "of felice" phrases reinforce the unaccented final syllable and to introduce the elision of syllables, as well as the diphthong-like double vowel

Assessment

1. At every point in the process, the teacher is assess the pronunciation and word stress that the choir is producing while speaking and singing the Italian
2. Students can assess various sections on particular pronunciation issues, creating a class rubric to measure and assess. Examples: American r or rolled r; dental or "fat" t or explosive American t; e & o with American diphthong or without; accented or unaccented final syllables (word stress)
3. Students mark accented/unaccented syllables in score or on poem sheets for collection

KNOWLEDGE OUTCOME

Students will recognize characteristics of early Baroque music and its differences from Renaissance music.

Strategies

1. Explain the concept of "continuo" – the unique baroque texture and timbre, look at it in the score, listen to it.
2. Have students determine where the melody occurs – in which voice(s). Note the new melody dominant texture in the Baroque era.
3. Have the students determine the primary texture (homophony) by looking homophonic/polyphonic treatments. Review terms. Note the dominance of homophony – melody with accompaniment – in the early 17th Century.
4. Compare/Contrast a Renaissance choral work the choir has performed or is learning with this work. Find similarities in another (perhaps later) Baroque piece that the choir has performed or is learning. [continuo, melody, homophony, polyphony, instrumental use (designated instruments), discuss opera beginnings]
5. Compare an early Monteverdi madrigal, *Ecco mormorar l'onde* (Book 2), with this piece from book 8. The same composer creating in the style of Renaissance polyphony earlier in his life and later in his life in the Baroque style. Make a list of the differences and any similarities. Introduce the important role that Monteverdi played in the development of the new style of composing (second practice).

Assessment

1. Collect writings from strategy 5 above.
2. Using the Moodle online course, post a number of excerpts of Renaissance and Baroque recordings. Include a page or two of the score for each in pdf form. Students are to respond to each example determining if the piece belongs in the Renaissance or Baroque and list what characteristics they heard/saw that caused them to come to their conclusion.

AFFECTIVE OUTCOME

Students will explore the compositional techniques used to express and illustrate meaning in a poem.

Strategies

1. Begin with the "vieni" section when the notes are learned. Sing it. Discover together any examples of text painting or (musical representations of the text) within these phrases (21-22 – Picardy for "my beloved" – first third sung in a final chord; improvisatory-like/bird-like 16ths with changing accidentals on the "call"; first use of the bass voice). Encourage students to communicate these understandings in their singing.
2. Discover the form of the piece – four large sections ABC¹C². Mark in score and refer to sections this way in the future. How is each section set apart? (single voice texture) Why? Write and discuss ideas.
3. Ask students to look for points of imitation/moments of polyphonic texture. Discuss musical relationship with text. What affect/feeling does each create?
 - a. Measures 29-32: rising 8ths in pairs; soaring extended high G (flying/wings)
 - b. Measures 40-43 (or 60-63): mournful, minor sigh-like motive on the "o happy" first introduced in m. 32 is treated polyphonically here. Contrast of personal/bird emotional state
4. Ask students to look for other musical examples of text painting or general depiction of the meaning of the poem. Have them write their ideas and then share. (extended melisma on "uscignolo"; broad register in voices – high to low – when singing of "kindly nature," also all in major; others?)

Assessment

1. Assessment is done throughout classroom discussions and journal writing regarding meaning of the poem and compositional choices.
2. Collect written ideas from Strategy 4 above
3. The final assessment comes in the student's ability to express that understanding in performance.

MUSIC SELECTION

Monteverdi is a major composer whose significance is studied in every music history course. Monteverdi's books of madrigals chronicle the development of a new style of composition that moves us from the Renaissance to the Baroque. This madrigal from his 8th book is a great example of early Baroque style – it includes continuo, is melody-centric, and is imaginative in its text depiction. The poetry, which contrasts the freedom of the nightingale and the ease to which love comes to him with the angst of unrequited love in the poet, is well suited for the high school choir.

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Poet: Giovanni Battista Guarini (1538-1612)

Composer: Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)



Dolcissimo uscignolo,
tu chiami la tua cara compagnia,
cantando: "vieni, vieni, anima mia."
A me canto non vale,
e non ho come tu da volar ale.
O felice augelletto,
come nel tuo diletto
ti ricompensa ben l'alma natura:
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*Sweetest nightingale,
you summon your loved companion
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To me song is of no avail,
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nego saper – *deny knowledge/understanding*

ventura – *good fortune/luck; joy*

Quick primer in Italian pronunciation for this piece

Vowels: Single vowels do not have the diphthong endings found in American English (ay, Ohoo)

Some double vowels glide (vieni); some are pronounced as diphthong (augelletto); others as two syllables (mia).

a = ah (as in father)

e = ay (as in eight) or if followed by 2 consonants eh (as in red)

i = ee (as in see)

o = oh (as in open)

u = oo (as in boot)

ci in "dolcissimo" and ce in "felice" = is "soft" -- chee or chay (though not as hard as in English)

chi in "chiami" = is "hard" -- kee

sci in "uscignolo" = shee as in she – though the more modern spelling is usignolo, so you will hear some choirs sing "si" (see)

ge in "augelletto" = is "soft" -- jeh as in jello

go in "nego" = is "hard" -- goh as in go

gn is pronounced like in lasagna (kind of ny)

t = is dental and "fat" – not explosive as in English

h is not pronounced (ho = o)

r = always rolled or flipped

Other consonant in this piece are pronounced as in English