



Extract No. 34

Sing we at pleasure

Thomas Weelkes

SUMMARY

Text and Context

- light, jolly, care-free, unsophisticated poetry with 'fa-la' refrain – ballett
- for casual performance by amateurs in the home for entertainment – not for professional performance in court, etc.
- syllabic setting – dance-like

Rhythm/Metre

- Sprightly, dance-like feel
 - Lively triple time
 - Dotted rhythms – ♩ · ♩ ♩ figure
 - Syncopation
 - e.g., alto in bars 7 and 12, tenor in bar 9
 - Strong syllables on weak beats, e.g. “dan-Cing” in bar 35 (soprano 1 and tenor)
 - Hemiola (articulating two groups of three as three groups of two)
 - e.g., bars 20-21

Texture

- Mainly five-part counterpoint
 - Highly imitative
 - “Sing we at pleasure”, bars 1-2: Soprano 1 and Soprano 2
 - “Content is our treasure”, bars 4³-6: Paired imitation between Soprano 2 + Tenor and Soprano 1 + Bass
 - “Fa-la-la”, bars 8³-12: Bass followed by Soprano 2 followed by Soprano 1 – pattern repeated nine times. Alto and tenor – free counterpoint.
 - “Whilst we his praises sound”, bars 25-28: Particular joyous cascade of entries through the texture – entries on successive beats – cross rhythms.
 - “Shall, dancing, ever sing”, bars 34³-41: Paired imitation between Soprano 1 + Tenor and Soprano 2 + Bass.
 - “Fa-la-la”, bars 43³-52: Strict canon between Soprano 1 and Soprano 2
 - other parts in free counterpoint
 - jagged bass line supplies the grounding of the many V-I harmonies
 - alto inner pedals (also at 28-31)
 - Some moments of homophony
 - e.g., bars 22-24, 30-34
 - Soprano parts exchange for the repeat of section B – crossing-parts – dialogue effect



Harmony/Key

- Demonstrates the evolution from modality to tonality
 - The madrigal is clearly in what we now recognise to be G major
 - clear cadences at bars 22, 31, 53, 62, 84, etc.
 - Soprano 1 at the beginning comprises the fifth, sixth and sharpened seventh of a G major scale.
 - Still remnants of the modal style:
 - F-natural in bar 16, soprano 1 (seventh degree of Mixolydian mode)
 - to modern ears, this gives the effect of a modulation to C major
 - F major triad in bar 15 particular modal – foreign to G major
- Almost entirely comprised of primary chords in root position or first inversion
 - e.g., first eight bars: I-V I-V I-IV Ib-IV Ib-II Ib-II Ib-VIIb I
- Almost entirely consonant harmony
 - Exceptions:
 - Suspensions, e.g., alto bars 7, 12, tenor bar 9, *et al.* – often combined with syncopation
 - First inversion seventh chords (tritone between outer parts) – Weelkes hallmark.
 - Consonant Fourth at bar 21.
 - Fourths were regarded as dissonances that should be prepared, but as part of a cadence, such as in bar 21, preparation by step was acceptable, hence the term 'consonant fourth'.
- Harmonic rhythm – always $\downarrow \downarrow$ (except at the hemiola in 21)

Melody

- Each part of text given its own melodic figure which is then usually used as a point of imitation
- Use of inversion, e.g. soprano 1, bar 39³-41 and 43³-46¹.

Structure

- Binary structure (as most balletts)
- Each section (couplets + refrain) is repeated
 - N.B. second section repeat – exchange soprano parts

Section	Bars	Text	Texture	Keys
A i	1-8	First couplet	Imitative counterpoint	G
ii	8-22	First refrain	Imitative counterpoint	D G C G
A	<i>Repeat of section A</i>			
B i	22-31	Second couplet	Homophony/imitation	G D C G
ii	31-43	Third couplet	Homophony/imitation	G
iii	43-53	Second refrain	Canon + free parts	C G
B	<i>Repeat of section B (with some part exchange)</i>			