

Influence of humanism during the renaissance period music essay



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The influence of Humanism during the Renaissance period gave an enormous impact on the development of western music, where the revival in the study of Greek and Latin literature took place that result in new styles of music composed. The word Humanism is derived from the fifteenth century Italian term called 'umanista', which may be referred to as a scholar or teacher. This includes professions in all divisions such as poetry and philosophy, and thus the gaining of those intellectual properties and knowledge was the main focus of the humanities studies. This intellectual expansion in culture and secular ideologies was the humanism influence that covered vast aspects of people's perspectives towards their lives during the Renaissance. One of the areas that were certainly affected by Humanism was music, where towards the sixteenth century more and more composers saw music as artistic works rather than mathematics equations, and they should be consisted of individual expression and delight senses. These ideas were supported by humanists and scholars such as Pietro Bembo, who stood as a vital figure on explaining how important the use of sonority in words and also words within the whole phrase was. This greatly affected the way Renaissance composers chose the amount of balance between music and words and the way they interact with each other. Therefore this influence brought up a new dimension in music writing that resulted in a new vocal style, the madrigal. It was one of the most popular music styles of non-religious music in the sixteenth century, and it certainly depicted what the heart of humanism was. The poems that were taken into the use of composing madrigals were secular material that demonstrated human nature, such as love poems. Also the quality of life, living fully and human interests, which were all, part of the secular attitudes that dominated this

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genre of music. There are plenty of examples from the composers in the sixteenth century that wrote music in the style.

One of the most famous madrigal composers was Lucy Marenzio from Italy, and most of his madrigals were about secular topics such as desire and love. In his 'Hor pien d'altro desio' composed in 1582, it tells us the love and affection of the Italian poet Luigi Alamanni towards a female called Amaranta. Marenzio cleverly used music to support the individual words and lines to highlight the emotion. For example in this five voices madrigal, the Tenor part begins with a perfect consonant with the Canto part, then falls down a semitone to the F sharp where the word " Pien" (full) is stressed, in addition it also acts as the leading tone to G. The next word " d'al-tro" meaning (of another) is held for twice the value so that even each of the syllables length varies. Moreover, the frequent use of imitation where every voice enters at different times but similar motif as the composer thought suitable.

The use of repetition can also be found when the woman's name Amaranta is sung as " va-ga, A-ma-ran-ta" (vague (beauty) Amaranta) which is also almost like a sequence in terms of the melodic contour.

At measure 24, all parts arrived on the third line " Che dolce suona e canta" (Who sweetly sings and plays), which this fulfilment in the texture unleashes the power of vocal harmony completely. Interestingly, when the top voice reaches the word " Can-ta" (sing), the two syllables spread across three bars are where the running quavers emerge, and plus the F sharp to G figure reappears. As a result, it portrays the beautiful melismatic singing by

Amaranta that the poet could die for. This is a great example of showing how effective the use of music on only a single word could give nice additional flavours to the entire line.

Next to the end, at line "if my dying would increase her life" is also another similar example on the word "mio" (life), which both the Canto and Basso parts are extended over three bars on the tied semibreves suggesting the wish of a "longer" life.

The composer successfully achieved and enhanced the meaning of the poem, whereby using techniques to organise the melodic lines working both vertically and horizontally. This level of intellectual and practical manipulation on composing was extremely exceptional and really showed how humanism influenced composers on the way they approached madrigal writings.

The second example is from a later date in 1592 by Claudio Monteverdi in his third book of Madrigal called "O come è gran martire", a poem written by Giovanni Battista Guarini. He was one of the most well known poets during the Renaissance, due to the effectiveness of words in his texts that madrigal composers loved to use. In this five voices madrigal starts off at Canto with a long note valued the entire bar on the higher E followed by a short rest, then falls right down to a G sharp. This diminished 6th interval almost paints an actual image of a person saying "Oh, how great the suffering is to hold desire" on both the first two words as well as the entire line. The word "Mar-ti-re" (martyr) is also stretched out the longest in the line to emphasize the

state of suffering. Furthermore, Monteverdi uses a canon like effect with consecutive entries from the first voice down to the third voice.

It is not until third line "O soave mio ardore" when all voices joins up exposing the "ardour" feeling from the poet. Also the sense of cadences and starting points are a lot more obvious throughout the piece comparing to Marenzio's example, such as at the repetition point in the third line and at the end of that line.

Another remarkable point in this madrigal is the call and response that happens on the fifth line between all voices that divides into two parts with Alto alternating between the upper and lower half for over fifteen bars. The fifth line is divided into two parts as "s'ognun ama il suo core" and "e voi sete il cor mio" so that the lower half usually follows what the upper half just sung. This compositional device is rather convincing when it comes to the appearance of the lines over and over again that deeply prints the poet's emotion onto the music.

The entire madrigal is fulfilled with Monteverdi's thoughtful ideas to further embellish the poem, and it has a stronger sense of homophonic texture than Marenzio's example. However both composers' utilisation of word-painting, imitation and through-composed form, were undoubtedly a revolutionary style that all madrigal composers strived for and 'This original experience begins early in the madrigals, where it is consciously at work trying to build up a musical style which should be the emotional counterpart of the poetic expression', and truly this collective knowledge is a critical component of what the intention of Humanism was, which of 'Those who earnestly desire

and seek after these are most highly humanized.’ This movement greatly impacts not only on madrigals, but also the overall development of music as well as the Renaissance society on the whole.

The success of madrigal brought its popularity even further, when the advance in music printing took off that drastically increased the speed of music spread, and as a result many international style appeared in their vernacular, and the English madrigals were one of the most directly influenced examples. Thomas Weelkes was among the greatest English madrigal composer around the sixteenth century and in his ‘Lady your Spotless Feature’, it seeks to satisfy his perfect image of the lady. The text of this madrigal is derived from the madrigal “Donna, il vostro bel viso” of another famous Italian madrigal composer named Salamone Rossi. This shows how close the link is between Italian and English madrigalism where Thomas Weelkes was able to interpret the lines into English smoothly and re-through-compose the entire music to suit the local taste.

This madrigal is set for five voices with two sopranos, tenors and a bass, starting with a homophonic texture, where the first top three parts form a triadic chord and this gives a strong sense of tonic. When the word “feature” is sung at the end of the first line, it divides into a descending scale like pattern quavers in thirds with soprano II. This sighing like effect shows how the composer is fascinated by the beauty of the lady. Following that immediately is a short motif based on a crochet, two quavers then four crotchets, distributed at different times on different voices to create the polyphonic texture that contrasts with the first line. This imitative device

easily creates an impression into our mind which again reinforces the image of the lady.

The strong sense in the use between polyphony and block harmony also appears on the last two lines, where the second last line moves mostly in crotchets aligned with the words building up vertical harmony. Then similarly, the last line creates an eight crotchet notes figure that repeats in various parts of every voice.

Surprisingly, at the end of every polyphonic variation, the bass rhythm is always augmented until the start of the next homophonic part, which is almost like a basso continuo used at the end to strengthen the dominant to tonic feel, which in this example is the long sustained A to D.

Comparing to the previous madrigals mentioned, this piece has a stronger systematic gesture where the structure is defined not only by the text but also the texture in music especially. The poem itself is also more of a light-hearted and delightful musical setting, which is a fairly popular taste amongst the English madrigal composers. ' This style of secular composition, which was sometimes set to words of a light and humorous character, found a good deal of favour with many of the most prominent English composers', although serious and pastoral works often appeared also in Weelkes' madrigals.

Nevertheless, knowing the contrapuntal parts in relation with one another, and also seeing the underlying harmony is the complex but crucial elements in madrigal writings and astonishingly, all three madrigal composers have not only managed to write music for the words but also stretching the <https://assignbuster.com/influence-of-humanism-during-the-renaissance-period-music-essay/>

meaning of them by exploring the possibilities that suited this genre. This cultivation of secular vocal music was in no doubt, a phenomenal musical development during the sixteenth century.

Therefore, the influence of Humanism on madrigal was aimed to uplift the level of emotion and meaning derived from literal materials, and from a teleological perspective it did not only fulfilled its purpose but also set a model for many vocal music genres that came later in the music history such as opera. For that reason the madrigal is undeniably the quintessential humanist musical genre in the sixteenth century.