Music through the Microscope



Claudio Monteverdi

Ohimè, se tanto amate

A musical analysis

Music through the Microscope Volume 3

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Introduction

This document is a detailed analysis of Claudio Monteverdi's five part madrigal *Ohimè*, se tanto amate. The purpose of this analysis is to aid the study of the work by isolating aspects of structure, melody and melodic development, harmony, orchestration techniques, texture, rhythm, etc.

This study is not a critique of the composer and does not seek to explore the cultural, contextual or historical aspects of the music.

If some of the illustrations appear too small then a free copy of the illustrations can be downloaded as a PDF file from:

http://www.nickredfern.co.uk/Cloud Factory Publications.htm

Sources & acknowledgement

The primary source of this analysis and illustrations are from the open score version by publisher **Daniel Van Gilst** made available under Creative Contributions Attribution 4.0. The score is public domain and available at IMSLP:

http://burrito.whatbox.ca:15263/imglnks/usimg/1/1e/IMSLP3184

59-PMLP514827-Monteverdi C - Ohim se tanto amate
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I offer my very sincere thanks to the publisher for this most valuable resource. Further versions of the score for Monteverdi's Fourth Book of Madrigals, including the First Edition, are available at IMSLP at http://imslp.org/wiki/Madrigals, Book 4, SV 75%E2%80%9393 (

Monteverdi, Claudio). Reductions of the score in short score format are notated using Sibelius and available at

http://www.nickredfern.co.uk/Cloud Factory Publications.htm

Nick Redfern

Claudio Monteverdi

An Italian composer (1567 to 1643), Monteverdi was one of the most influential and innovatory composers of the late Renaissance and early Baroque. He was important for developing the new style of homophonic music, where harmony itself, rather than polyphonic texture, was the chief means for musical expression (see Prima Prattica and Seconda Prattica). The preoccupation with animating the text in vocal music lead to the development of a style of music which was overtly dramatic, of which *Ohimè*, se tanto amate is a prime example. It is not surprising that Monteverdi was the composer of one of the earliest operas.

He was a prolific composer of madrigals, publishing nine books.

Ohimè, se tanto amate

From Monteverdi's Fourth Book of Madrigals published in 1603.

Text

Ohimè, se tanto amate

Di sentir 'ohimè', deh perchè fate

Chi dice 'ohimè' morire?

S'io moror, un sol potrete

Languido e doloroso 'ohimè' sentire.

Ma se, cor mio, volete

Che vita habbia da voi,

© Dr Nick Redfern 2015 6 Cloud Factory Publications Limited E voi a me havrete

Mill' e mille dolc' 'ohimè'

Translation

Alas, if you so love

To hear 'Alas' why do you make those

Who say 'Alas' die?

If I die just one

Languid and painful 'Alas' you will hear.

But if, my heart, you want

Me to receive life from you

And you will receive from me

Thousand and thousand sweet 'Alas'

Translating this text is problematic in terms of achieving a balance between

the dramatic and poetic intentions of the original with the narrative setting.

Some versions have sought to over embellish the translation and so the

meaning of the text has been compromised and the relationship to the

setting changed. This version is by the author and is intended merely as a

simple insight into the text.

Style

Prima Prattica & Seconda Prattica

Prima Prattica refers to an early style of vocal composition where the words

were deemed to be of a lesser importance than the music. The style

required the adherence to strict rules which governed the use of polyphonic

textures and the employment of harmony. Dissonance had to be prepared,

executed and released in a linear manner and vocal settings did not make

overt painting of the texts, which was often set in an extensively melismatic

manner. Melisma is where a syllable of the text could be spread over a

melodic phrase.

Seconda Prattica refers to a later style of vocal composition where the words,

the narrative and emotional implications within the text are deemed to be an

important factor of a composition. So the style was freer in its use of

textures and dissonance and could be regarded as being more spontaneous,

more dramatic and more representative of the inherent emotions of the text.

Unprepared dissonance and the employment of tritones (augmented fourths

or diminished fifths) in part movement is not uncommon. Settings are

largely syllabic, where each syllable of the text is given its own note, making

the text more audible. Settings were therefore more naturalistic, being

based on natural speech patterns.

Voices

Five parts: Canto, Quinto, Alto, Tenor and Bass.

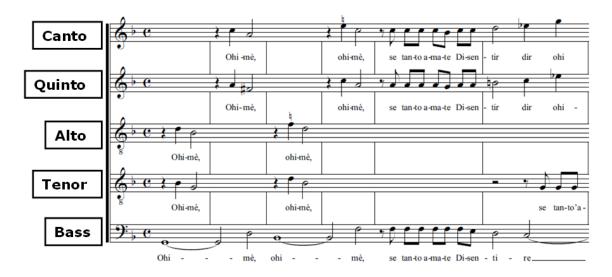


Figure 1 Vocal parts

Where the score appears in full, open score then the parts will always refer to this order but will not be labelled. Please note that in the open score the Alto and Tenor sound an octave lower than written. In the short score upper stave the voices are Alto, tails down, and above Quinto and Canto, tails up; in the lower stave is the Bass, tails down, and the Tenor, tails up. All parts are written as they sound.



Figure 2 Voice order in short score

Setting & texture

The setting is almost entirely syllabic and there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the necessity for clarity of text and the employment of natural speech patterns or rhythms are inherent in the style. The overtly homophonic texture is an extremely effective vehicle for syllabic setting.





Figure 3 Syllabic setting & homophonic texture bar 44 to 61

Rhythm

As described in **Setting & texture** the rhythm of the spoken word is highly influential on the setting and rhythm of the text.