



GCSE Music – Set Work 4 – Music for a While

A: Henry Purcell

- Henry Purcell was the most important English composer of his day. He started composing at a young age and was both a composer and an organist. Although he died young, he wrote a great deal of music in all genres. He was an important court composer in the first part of the English Restoration period (1660-c.1720).
- He became organist at Westminster Abbey in 1679.
- He helped restore the tradition of opera in England.
- He proved to be skilled in composing in different genres, including opera, church music, chamber music, keyboard and theatre music.
- His best known compositions include 'Dido and Aeneas' (1689), 'King Arthur' (1691) and 'The Fairy Queen' (1692). The last work is an adaptation of Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'
- Purcell wrote during the Baroque period of music, which lasted from c.1600-1750.

B: Background for Music for a While and Text.

- Composed in 1692.*
- The second of four movements from the incidental music for the play "Oedipus", by John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee.*
- The song comes from Act 1, Scene 3 of the play based on the legend.*
- The song plays a dramatic role in the play, rather than simply commenting on it.*

Section A
 Music for a while
 Shall all your cares beguile
 Wond'ring how your pains were eas'd
 And disdainng to be pleas'd
 Till Alecto free the dead
 From their eternal bands,

Section B
 Till the snakes drop from her head,
 And the whip from out her hands.

Section A I
 Music for a while
 Shall all your cares beguile

C: DR SMITTH

Dynamics	There are no dynamic markings.	Melody	The soprano line has a range or compass of a ninth (apart from the ornamental G in bar 36) from the lowest note of E just above middle C to F just over an octave higher. Much of the music is conjunct or stepwise. Passing notes are frequent. Any leaps are small and generally no greater than a perfect fourth . Rests are used to break up phrases. There are some descending sequences. There is extensive use of ornaments in both the soprano line and the right hand of the harpsichord.	Texture	The texture is melody and accompaniment/ melody-dominated homophony . The accompaniment is provided by the ground bass in the left hand of the harpsichord and the bass viol. The right hand of the harpsichord is an elaborate realisation and provides some counterpoint with the vocal line.
Rhythm	The metre is 4/4 quadruple time. The piece uses a wide variety of rhythms but quavers and semiquavers are the most predominant. Dotted rhythms are sometimes used in the vocal part but used more extensively in the right hand part of the harpsichord. There is only occasional syncopation and off-beat rhythms. The ground bass is presented entirely in quavers.	Instrumentation	'Music for a While' was written for voice (most usually a tenor) and continuo. This version is scored for soprano, harpsichord and bass viol . The vocal line is mainly syllabic following speech rhythms. There are melismatic moments. Many examples of word painting .	Tonality	This version has been transposed from the original key of C minor to A minor . The tonality, however, is sometimes ambiguous due to the chromatic and non-diatonic nature of the ground bass. The central section modulates to closely related keys. These include E minor, G major, C major, A major, E minor. The music returns to the tonic key of A minor in bar 28 until the end. Modulations are confirmed by perfect cadences.
Structure	This piece follows a ground bass structure. This is a short, recurring melodic pattern in the bass part that acts as the principal structural element, whilst melodic parts above change. Features of the ground bass in 'Music for a While' include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is three bars long. It consists entirely of quaver rhythms. Its melodic shape is arpeggio based. It makes use of semitone intervals. It has a rising line, starting on A then moving up to a B, C, D and E before falling at the end of the phrase. At the end of the ground there is a characteristic fall of an octave. The ground sounds incomplete as it ends with chord but a sense of a perfect cadence is achieved with chord I at the start of the next repetition of the ground bass. 	Tempo	There is no tempo indication but a slow tempo would be appropriate for this piece.	Harmony	Chords are frequently arpeggiated or spread rapidly from the lowest to highest note (e.g. bar 13). The left hand of the harpsichord plays the ground bass . Chords are diatonic and functional. Perfect cadences are achieved from the chord V at the end of the ground to the chord I at the start of the next playing of the ground bass. Suspensions are used very occasionally. Dissonances are infrequent but examples can be heard. Another type of dissonance used is false relation.