

## 20. Sweelinck

### Pavana Lachrimae

(For Unit 6 Further Musical Understanding)

#### Background information and performance circumstances

Composition of popular music today sometimes involves collaboration between two or more people. With most 'classical' music, on the other hand, one composer is responsible, except where he or she deliberately borrows or adapts material from a pre-existing classical work or from the anonymous heritage of chorales, folk melodies, etc.

In *Pavana Lachrimae* Sweelinck at times does little more than transcribe for a different instrument material borrowed from John Dowland, elsewhere embellishing and elaborating the original after the fashion of variations. While it's natural to speak of Sweelinck as the composer, this is an exaggerated view of his contribution. He is essentially an arranger – in fact, people have been known to refer to Anthology no. 20 as the 'Dowland/Sweelinck Pavana Lachrimae'.

#### **The 'composer'**

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562(?)–1621) lived and worked in the Netherlands, chiefly in Amsterdam. He was born into a family of organists, and one of his sons carried on the tradition. He composed much vocal music, both sacred and secular, a little music for lute, and a good deal for keyboard. Some of his keyboard music shows the influence of English composers for the virginals – he apparently knew John Bull and Peter Philips – and his fantasias in particular point ahead to later German organ music, and in particular the work of J.S. Bach.

#### **Pavana Lachrimae**

Three of the six sections of *Pavana Lachrimae* are varied and embellished versions for keyboard of music by Sweelinck's almost exact contemporary, the Englishman John Dowland (1563–1626). Each of the others is a variation on one of the 'arranged' sections, with much more elaboration.

Users of the Edexcel anthology may assume that the model was Dowland's ayre *Flow my tears* for voice and lute (Anthology no. 33), but Sweelinck probably also knew the *Lachrimae pavan*, Dowland's own version for lute. He may well have worked from a kind of outline derived from both pre-existing pieces (see P. Dirksen, *The Keyboard Music of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck*, page 309). On the other hand, Sweelinck shows no knowledge of William Byrd's keyboard *Pavana Lachrimae*.

The date of Sweelinck's *Pavana* is not known: it is preserved, in keyboard tablature, in only one rather corrupt manuscript, which originated in the second half of the 17th century. The date of Dowland's *Flow my tears* is not known either, but it is likely to have been composed shortly before its publication in his *Second Booke of Songs and Ayres* (1600). Perhaps a date of 'circa 1600' is the best we can hope for in respect of Sweelinck's *Pavana Lachrimae*.

*It should be stressed that it is not necessary to study the precise relationship between Dowland's original(s) and Sweelinck's arrangement for the A2 examination.*

**Performance**

The performance of Sweelinck's *Pavana* on the anthology CD is for harpsichord, which suits the style and secular character of the music well, and is historically appropriate.

Nowadays the piece is sometimes played on the organ; this works particularly well in passages with long sustained notes (e.g. bars 65–66).

*Pavana Lachrimae* was probably intended for domestic or educational use (Sweelinck was a renowned teacher). The pavan (sometimes pavane) was a slow dance, but Sweelinck's piece, like Dowland's originals, is very unlikely to have been used for dancing. In fact, some 16th- and 17th-century sources refer to pavans being intended purely for listening rather than dancing.

**Performing forces and their handling**

*Pavana Lachrimae* was probably composed for single-manual harpsichord. (If it was ever played on the organ in Sweelinck's time, use of pedals was unnecessary and unlikely.)

The range is three octaves, from G (bottom line of bass stave) to G (an octave and a half above middle C). Contemporary Dutch harpsichords generally had a four-octave range, from C below the bass stave. Sweelinck used top G only once, in bar 96, with climactic intent in a passage featuring rising scalar passages that reach successively E (bar 94), F (bar 95) and G.

The limited range reflects the derivation of *Pavana Lachrimae* from original sources with limited range, and the need for a sometimes quite complex texture to be playable by one pair of hands. Comparison with Dowland's *Flow my tears* shows that Sweelinck's bass is sometimes an octave higher – notably in bars 39–42 and 44–48 (compare Anthology no. 33, bars 12–16). Sweelinck puts the borrowed melody in the octave above middle C (notes higher than 'top' C being embellishment) – this is an octave higher than it sounded in the lute transcription or the ayre if, as is highly likely, it was sung by a voice of baritone range.

**Texture**

Most of the piece is in four parts, and the texture is often similar to four-part vocal writing. But, as in much other keyboard music, the number of parts is not constant. Florid passages are sometimes in three parts, for practicality in playing. At the beginnings and ends of some sections a fifth part provides additional weight, but only with 'tonic' chords of A (minor and, with tierce de Picardie, major).

The melody borrowed from Dowland is in the top part, and for the most part the texture is essentially *homophonic*.

The following are brief comments on particular passages:

- In bars 1–4 the melody is supported by a bass in semibreves. The inner parts have some contrapuntal interest – notably where the higher of the two (the 'alto') echoes or anticipates the melody's descending quavers.

- At bar 17, where this material is varied, the melody is elaborated with a figure that uses quavers and semiquavers; this is taken up by the bass in bar 18, before returning to the top part in bar 19. The exchange between these two parts is not really imitation, which generally involves some overlapping of successive entries.
- There are further exchanges between parts in bars 23 and 24, and in bars 34–35.
- The variation of this passage in bars 48–50 is more genuinely imitative.
- In bars 39–41 pairs of parts in parallel 3rds or 6ths engage in rapid dialogue (again there is scarcely any audible overlap). This may invite comparison with Sweelinck's *echo* effects in pieces such as *Fantasia in echo* (in *Historical Anthology of Music*, ed. A. Davison and W. Apel (Cambridge, MA, 1946–49), vol. 1, pages 209–211).
- This dialogue subtly moves into imitation in bars 42–45 (Example 1, below).
- Bars 55–60 are broadly similar texturally to bars 39–44 (of which they are the variation). In bars 56–57 the dialogue between pairs of parts is more emphatic, not least because the bass abandons the dotted rhythm it had in bars 40 and 41, becoming rhythmically identical to the tenor.

Example 1



## Structure

The piece is in three sections, which we can conveniently label A, B and C, each of them repeated (compare other pavans, including Anthony Holborne's 'The Image of Melancholy', Anthology no. 13). Thomas Morley, writing in 1597, said that a section or 'strain' of a pavan normally had 'eight, twelve or sixteen semibreves' and was 'played or sung twice' (see *Thomas Morley: A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music*, ed. R.A. Harman (London, 1952), page 296).

Sweelinck, unlike Holborne (or Dowland in *Flow my tears*) provides a varied repeat of each section rather than being content with 'straight' repetition. In the table below, each varied repeat is marked <sup>v</sup>. (Incidentally, in his lute pavan, Dowland also introduces varied repeats, but Sweelinck chose to compose his own.).

	<b>Bars</b>	<b>Final cadence</b>
A	1–16	Perfect, closing in A with Tierce de Picardie.
A <sup>v</sup>	17–32	Perfect, closing in A with Tierce de Picardie.
B	33–48	A minor imperfect (Phrygian)
B <sup>v</sup>	49–64	A minor imperfect (Phrygian)
C	65–81	Perfect, closing in A with Tierce de Picardie.
C <sup>v</sup>	82–98	Perfect, closing in A with Tierce de Picardie.

Morley's semibreve (or bar) counts of eight, twelve or sixteen are all divisible by two and four, and therefore seem to imply some regularity of phrase lengths similar to later 'periodic phrasing', as might indeed befit a piece derived from the dance.

Sweelinck, like Dowland, began section A with a clearly-defined four-bar phrase. After this a balanced phrase structure based on multiples of two and four bars may underlie the structure, but we can claim nothing more. For example, the final chord of the cadence that ends section A starts in bar 15 rather than 16, as one might expect with fully 'regular' phrasing. In section B the third phrase begins in the seventh bar (39), while section C has 17 bars (not the 16 which is four times four). Its second phrase (69<sup>4</sup>–71), leading up to the most important internal cadence, is short, ending in the seventh bar. A more expansive phrase follows, in which contrapuntal writing in the lower parts anticipates the entry of the melody part at bar 73<sup>3</sup>.

## Tonality

Sweelinck lived before the major-minor key system with its 'functional' harmony had evolved, and it is not clear exactly how he and his contemporaries would have described the tonal and harmonic processes of their music.

The following three interpretations of the tonality of *Pavana Lachrimae* all have some justification, and will be accepted in examinations:

- We can speak of *A minor* – after all, the piece begins and ends on A, has no key signature, and mostly sounds minor – but this is anachronistic and not entirely satisfactory.
- We can think of the piece as *in A minor with some modal (Aeolian) elements*. G naturals (standard in the Aeolian scale of A–B–C–D–E–F–G–A) are more plentiful than in music which is genuinely in A minor with its regular use of G sharps.
- We can account for the G naturals simply by saying that the piece is *in the Aeolian mode*. The G sharps can then be explained as conventional chromatic alterations designed to provide smoother melodic outlines and E major chords in cadences.

The uncertainty over tonality arises chiefly because G sharps and G naturals are mixed in a manner alien to most music with major and minor keys and functional harmony. The prominent G naturals in bar 6, for example, come soon after the emphatic G sharps in bar 4 and not long before the reiterated G sharps of bar 8.

Sometimes there are *false relations*, where two different chromatic forms of the same note (here G sharp and G natural) occur

- simultaneously, as at bar 96<sup>3</sup>, or
- successively in different parts, as in bar 10<sup>1-3</sup>.

The G sharps and G naturals in bars 66-67<sup>1</sup> and 77<sup>1-3</sup> are not successive, but are close and there are no changes of chord in between. Many listeners are likely still to hear a false relation.

The music stays very largely in the original minor key, as befits the 'tears' of the title (and the very dark text of Dowland's ayre). There is some tonal contrast, however.

- This occurs principally in the B section which, in modern parlance, begins in C major. This excursion into the major does not, however, reflect more cheerful content in Dowland's text – even the 'highest spire of contentment' at the repeat is the place from which 'My fortune is throwne': the tonal change appears to be intended purely to create musical contrast.
- Present-day ears may hear the bass C sharp in bar 38, along with the preceding and following D minor chords, as signifying D minor. However, this note is best thought of just as a matching answer to the G sharp in the top part of the previous bar (Example 2, below).
- Bars 39–44, initially with chords rising by 3rds, is somewhat ambiguous tonally, but provides continuing contrast and relief.

Example 2

## Harmony

Most chords are 5/3s or 6/3s (triads in root position or first inversion).

Non-chord notes include passing notes and auxiliary notes (especially in rapid scalar passages) and occasional suspensions. The handling of dissonance is not aggressive, but non-chord notes are much more in evidence than for example in Weelkes's *Sing we at pleasure*, a light madrigal (or *ballett*) contemporary with Dowland's original (and a set work for Unit 3 in 2014). But whereas Weelkes's *ballett* is uniformly cheerful, the theme for Sweelinck and Dowland is 'tears'.

The following annotated passage (Example 3) and the commentary that follows will demonstrate a few details of Sweelinck's handling of non-chord notes more clearly than extended verbal description.

Example 3

C: I      Ib      VIIb      I      III

Unmarked notes are chord (harmony) notes

P = passing note

A = auxiliary note

(1) The A might appear to imply VIb, but is better heard as part of a 6–5 movement over a continuing chord I, the 6th ‘resolving’ to the chord’s 5<sup>th</sup> note. Such 6–5 ‘mild dissonances’ were common in Renaissance music (compare the E flat–D over G and D–C over F in bars 15–16 of Taverner’s *O Wilhelme, pastor bone* (Anthology no. 26)).

(2) This A resolves to G rather as did the A at (1) above: beat 1 is not therefore a true 6/4 chord of A minor.

(3) This quaver B shows the true moment of the suspension’s resolution, each step in the suspension process lasting essentially for a minim. The first B in bar 35 anticipates the resolution, thereby (along with the tie between bars 34 and 35) minimising the dissonant effect of the suspension.

Cadences are imperfect and perfect. At the ends of sections, the final chord of a cadence is extended over two bars and considerably embellished.

Section A (in A minor) has three imperfect cadences (bars 3–4, 7<sup>3</sup>–8 and 11–12) before the final perfect cadence (14–15/16).

- The perfect cadence ends with a Tierce de Picardie (chord I having a *major* not minor 3rd above the bass). In Sweelinck’s time this was customary in minor keys, a final minor chord being considered somewhat too rough and sour.
- The imperfect cadences are all *phrygian*, chord V being preceded by IVb.
  - Phrygian cadences were originally associated with the Phrygian mode (whose scale was E–F–G–A–B–C–D–E). There they served as substitute perfect cadences, but it should be stressed that it is now conventional to consider such endings as imperfect cadences in Aeolian A minor.

## **Melody**

### **(Including reference to variation technique)**

Although *Pavana Lachrimae* is instrumental, Sweelinck’s melodic writing is frequently vocal in character, with much stepwise (conjunct) writing. Occasional leaps in the melody are all the more effective, given this restraint. The rising minor 6th in bar 2 is very striking, especially after the initial stepwise descent of a perfect 4th A–G–F–E, and before a similar descent C–B–A–G sharp in bars 3–4.

The distinctive quality of the falling 4th A–G–F–E, representing tears, had done much to make Dowland’s original widely known. Falling 4th figures were used more extensively in Sweelinck’s opening five bars than by Dowland himself, and are most effective in underlining and intensifying the melancholy mood.

The top part is predominantly conjunct even in the variation sections, and most florid passages cover quite a small range. Some passages are similar to trills starting on the upper note and ending with a lower auxiliary note, as in section A at bar 14 and (at twice the speed) in A<sup>v</sup> at bar 30. The figuration generally may have been influenced by contemporary fingering practice, which was different from present-day systems, and more limiting; in particular, longer fingers often passed over shorter ones, and the thumb

was little used (especially in the right hand).

Sweelinck sometimes repeated short patterns in sequence. In bar 17, at the start of A<sup>v</sup>, for instance, there is sequential treatment of a three-note descending scalic figure, beginning E–D–C, C–B–A. There are two statements of a longer (eight-semiquaver) figure in bar 23. The boldest use of sequence comes near the end of section C<sup>v</sup>, with climactic effect. In bars 95–96 ascents, each of a 10th, followed by shorter balancing descents, appear with dazzling effect.

Despite the examples just given, systematic melodic patterning is not widespread in the way that it frequently was in late Baroque keyboard music, or in Classical writing such as Mozart's in Anthology no. 22 (Sonata in B flat, K.333: movement I).

Sweelinck's variation technique is essentially melodic – he retains the harmony of sections A, B and C in the varied sections A<sup>v</sup>, B<sup>v</sup> and C<sup>v</sup> while embellishing (sometimes quite intensively) the melody borrowed from Dowland and the lower parts.

Variation technique may include:

- Inserting additional notes between pairs of notes borrowed from Dowland's melody:
  - On a small scale, note the insertion of D and C passing notes in bar 91 between the E and B derived from bar 74.
  - On a more ambitious scale, note how the F and D minims in bar 7 have been embellished with semiquaver runs in bar 23 (the pitches F F and D D still standing out at the start of each crotchet beat).
  - 'Insertions' may involve rhythmic changes such as we find when the G–F quavers at the end of bar 1 are replaced by the G–F semiquavers at the end of bar 17.
- More substantial changes:
  - Such as the substitution of a distinctive new quaver pattern in bar 49 in place of the dotted minim (C) and crotchet (B) from bar 33.
  - The addition to the three-note scalic ascents in bars 39–41 of preliminary upbeats (D–E–F becoming F–D–E–F in bar 55, for example).

In some places, a melodic passage is repeated unvaried in order that embellishment may be added in a lower part – compare for example bars 37–38 and 53–54.

## Rhythm and metre

There is much rhythmic diversity in *Pavana Lachrimae*. Passages and sections generally begin with semibreves, minims, crotchets and a few quavers. (Where numerous long notes are used, tone could not be sustained on a harpsichord – perhaps chords were spread or additional ornamentation was improvised.) Elsewhere, especially in the variation sections, there are often continuous semiquavers in one part (not always the highest) for display and decoration with slower supporting parts. Cadential 'trills' involving eight demisemiquavers occur twice, in bars 30 and 45 (as in Example 1 above).

*NB: All note values referred to above are those actually written by Sweelinck, whose signature was C. In Dowland's Flow my tears (Anthology, no. 33) the note values have been halved editorially.*

The metre is simple quadruple. Syncopation is not very widespread, but note the prominent minim A that generates a suspension in bar 37 and the corresponding bass D in bar 38 (Example 2 above). Compare the corresponding bars in the variation, 53–54, where the

minim A is retained, but the bass line is decorated and the suspension is eliminated.

**Further reading**

The items on the following list, though of considerable interest, are not to be regarded as essential reading.

*The New Grove (2001)*, available by subscription online, provides more on Sweelinck's biography.

P. Dirksen, *The Keyboard Music of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck: Its Style, Significance and Influence* (Utrecht, 1997).

D. Poulton, *John Dowland* (London, 2/1982).

For Dowland's Pavan, see *The Collected Lute Music of John Dowland*, ed. D. Poulton and B. Lam (London, 3/1981), page 67.