

## 37. Haydn

### My mother bids me bind my hair

(for Unit 3: Developing Musical Understanding)

#### Background information and performance circumstances

By the time Haydn published this song in 1794, he was the most famous composer in Europe. He was on his second trip to England from his home city of Vienna, this time staying for a year and a half. He was treated like a superstar and his 'London' symphonies in particular were performed to triumphant acclaim. The 'public' style of these new works was a world away from the much more personal nervous tension of the *Sturm und Drang* works of the late 1760s, such as Symphony no. 26 in D minor (Anthology no. 2).

This second trip was even more of a success than the first, not least in financial terms. One of the most lucrative ventures was the writing of songs for the amateur market in England. Young ladies were expected to be able to sing as well as accompany themselves - and others - on the piano. They were in constant need of new material and publishers were prepared to pay handsomely for Haydn's name on the title page. The music would usually be performed at home rather than in a concert hall.

This song comes from the first set of six *canzonettas* (short songs). As well as a second set a year later, Haydn went on to arrange no fewer than 450 British folk songs, many of them after his return to Vienna (though it is thought that his pupils may well have written many of these). 'My mother bids me bind my hair' was so popular, particularly in the 19th century, that it achieved the status of a treasured national folk song. The text was given to Haydn by its author, the English poetess, Anne Hunter, the widow of the celebrated Scottish surgeon, John Hunter. In return, Haydn dedicated the set of songs to her.

Many features of the song are typical of the High Classical 'public' style:

- Predominantly in the *major* key (A major in this case)
- 'Periodic phrasing' – that is, the use of carefully balanced phrases in multiples of two and four bars. The vocal melody begins with an antecedent - a four-bar phrase ending on the dominant with an imperfect cadence. It is answered by another four bar phrase – the consequent. Interestingly, this ends with a perfect cadence in the dominant key (E major), instead of staying in the tonic
- Mainly simple diatonic music (further, see 'Tonality' and 'Melody')

- Modulations to closely related keys (see 'Tonality')
- Use of the new *fortepiano*. In the second half of the 18th century the piano had rapidly supplanted the harpsichord to become the instrument well-off families had to have in their home. Its volume could easily be adapted by pressure of touch
- Melody-dominated homophony (see 'Texture')
- The type of cadence at the end of the piano introduction, with the chord progression I<sub>c</sub>-V<sup>7</sup>-I.

## Performing forces and their handling

- Both the piano part and the vocal part were designed to be playable by amateur performers. In fact, often the same person would perform both
- The voice part has a narrow range (only an octave), to suit the limited technique of an amateur. The top note is only E, a 10th above middle C.
- The text is often sung syllabically (that is, with one note per syllable), but occasionally a syllable carries two or even three notes. There are no extended melismas
- The vocal part is kept simple by moving mainly in conjunct (stepwise) motion or outlining simple chords (e.g. the first bar of the vocal part)
- The only passage likely to present any difficulty for the singer is the tuning of the brief chromatic section at bar 23
- The right hand of the piano part mainly doubles the voice part, to add support to the amateur singer. Exceptions occur in passages for solo piano in the introduction and between vocal phrases, and here the keyboard writing is more elaborate. Bar 3, for instance, has a more complex rhythm, including demisemiquavers, and is melodically more adventurous than the equivalent music in the vocal sections e.g. the chromatic D sharp passing note in bar 3
- There are occasional moments of heterophony, when the piano has a more elaborate version of the soprano music, e.g. on the word 'sleeves' in bar 18, and in bars 23–26
- See the notes on texture for more information about the piano music style.

## Texture

- Where the vocal part is active, the texture is basically melody-dominated homophony (the voice providing the melody, and the piano the accompaniment)
- The texture of the piano part is actually quite varied
- As mentioned earlier, the right hand part doubles the voice for most of the time, with occasional moments of heterophony (see above)

- Simple melody-dominated homophony (as at the very beginning) is comparatively rare
- Sometimes there is four-part texture, almost in the manner of a string quartet (again at the beginning of the song, and in bars 9–16).
- However, the density (number of notes) in the piano varies throughout the song
- Occasionally the left hand has simple alternating broken-chord notes, chiefly in bars 5–6. Sometimes there are broken chords in the right hand (e.g. bar 23).
- Further textures in the piano part include octaves (bars 24–6 – with a broken chord in 26) and 3rds (bar 12, right hand).

## Structure

- The song is in simple strophic form. That is, the two verses have exactly the same music. (In fact, Anne Hunter's original text had *four* short stanzas, but Haydn has combined the first and the second, and the third and the fourth, to make two longer verses)
- This makes life easy for the composer and the performers; however, it should be noted that the chromatic music in bars 23–25 is much more appropriate for the words of the first stanza than for those of the second
- There is an eight-bar piano introduction, which begins with an elaborate statement of the opening four-bar vocal phrase, before moving to a second phrase which foreshadows the chromaticism later in the song
- The vocal phrase structure starts with simple balanced four-bar phrases, modulating to the dominant in the second, but from then the phrase lengths become more uneven
- Each of Haydn's verses modulates to the dominant in the middle and then returns to the tonic.

## Tonality

- Haydn uses functional tonality with only one modulation, moving to the dominant, A major, at the end of the second vocal phrase (bar 16). The middle section of the song is in the dominant, before a clear return to the tonic at the words 'Alas! I scarce can go or creep'
- Having only one modulation is hardly surprising in such a short, relatively simple piece. In longer works, such as string quartets and symphonies, Haydn was more adventurous

- Much of the music is diatonic in the major key – the first vocal phrase and its piano accompaniment contain no notes foreign to the home key
- There are occasional moments of chromaticism which cloud the key. See particularly:
  - The middle section of the song at 'For why, she cries'
  - The second phrase of the introduction (bars 5-6) within the elaborated chromatic descent in the piano part (left hand)
  - The G naturals in bar 29 – not enough to qualify as a modulation to D major
- The key is emphasised by tonic and dominant pedal points, as in bars 1–2 and 3–4 respectively.

## Harmony

- The functional harmony emphasises tonic and dominant chords, mainly using root-position and first-inversion chords. Perfect cadences, such as the one at the end of the piano introduction referred to above, tend to include the second inversion of chord I (Ic) as a preparation for chord V or V<sup>7</sup> (dominant 7th chord in root position)
- For the most part the harmony is simple and diatonic, but some suspensions provide dissonance (e.g. the 4–3 suspension over the tonic chord in the second half of bar 2)...
- ...as do occasional appoggiaturas and double appoggiaturas (e.g. at the beginning of bar 10)...
- ...and there is dissonance associated with tonic and dominant pedals. A pedal is a long held note, or a succession of notes of the same pitch, usually in the bass, over which the harmony changes, often thereby producing dissonance. There is a good example at the start of bar 23, where a dominant 7th chord in E major (B–D sharp–F sharp–A) is superimposed on a pedal note E
- The rare chromatic chords include the outline of a diminished 7th (D sharp–F sharp–A–C) at the beginning of bar 6.

## Melody

Note in particular:

- The simple diatonic style of much of the melody (e.g. the first phrase)
- Occasional chromaticism (notably at 'For why, she cries, sit still and weep')
- Frequent stepwise (conjunct) movement ('Alas! I scarce can go or creep'), and the outlining of chords, e.g. tonic at the beginning.
- Ornaments, including acciaccaturas and *gruppetti* (groups of grace notes) – e.g. both at the end of the second vocal phrase

## Rhythm and Metre

- The metre is compound duple
- Phrases regularly begin with a quaver upbeat (or 'anacrusis')
- Most of the rhythm consists of simple groupings of quavers and semiquavers with the occasional dotted rhythm (e.g. second vocal note)
- There is a passage of triplets, then demisemiquavers at the end of the piano introduction.
- Short rests are used to illustrate weeping ('For why, she cries') – or perhaps just being out-of-breath at 'Alas! I scarce can go or creep' in verse 1. (These rests are hardly appropriate in verse 2!)

## Text Setting

Most of the following points have been made in earlier sections, but it is useful to gather them together under the heading 'text setting':

- The song is strophic – both verses have the same music
- There is some word painting in the first verse, with chromatic music at the words 'For why, she cries, sit still and weep', and also a use of short rests to represent tearfulness
- The strophic setting works less well for the second verse than for the first. The words 'and sigh, and sigh where none can hear' from verse 2 are sung to light-hearted music and 'while I spin my flaxen thread' to inappropriately mournful chromatic music
- The vocal part is mainly syllabic, but some syllables are set to slurred pairs of notes.