



My Spirit Sang All Day

Gerald Finzi (1901-1956)

Poet: Robert Bridges (1844-1930)

Genre: Secular, English part-song

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Background Information

Introspective 20th century English composer Gerald Finzi lived through two World Wars; one during his youth, the other after he had retired to the country, prompting him to return temporarily to London to work for the war effort. In the span of ten years, he suffered the loss of his father, three brothers, and his musical mentor Ernst Farrar. “From this bleak beginning, the prospect of the fragility and preciousness of life permeated Finzi’s being and especially his compositional style to come.” (Dressler, 1997) He taught at the Royal Academy of Music (1930-33), associated with composers like Holst and Vaughn Williams, grew rare apple trees, lectured, and brought music to small country towns through the Newbury Sting Players, which he founded and his son continued.

My Spirit Sang All Day is the third song in *Seven Poems of Robert Bridges* (1937) finished after his marriage to Joyce Black, who would remain his constant source of inspiration and encouragement. Though *Seven Poems...* were completed after their marriage, it appears *My Spirit Sang All Day* was composed while the couple was still courting. Finzi believed that no fine text, however difficult, was incapable of being set to music. His greatest contribution to twentieth century music resides in his “sensitive response to the cadences of the English language.” (Russell, 1954). This unique marriage of words with pitch and rhythm forms the basis of his entire compositional approach. Decisions related to melody, harmony, texture, and form found their genesis in one question: how can each of these musical elements serve to better illustrate the meaning of the text? (Jensen, 2008)

Form

- The musical and poetic forms parallel each other, with each new poetic stanza receiving a new musical phrase. Thus the work is through composed. However, Finzi has employed melodic motives that unify individual sections into a cohesive whole.

Section	Lines	Measures	Subsections			
A	1-4	1-6	4-part homophony m.1	“O my joy” m.2	2-part voice pairing m.3-4	4-part homophony m.5-6
B	5-8	7-13	Alto solo m.7	“O my joy” m.8-9	3-part polyphony m.10-11	4-part homophony m.12-13
C	9-12	14-20	Tenor solo m. 14-15		“O my joy” m.16	3-part homophony m.17-20
D	13-16	21-27	4-part homophony m.21-22	“O my joy” m.23	2-part voice pairing m.24-26	4-part homophony m.26-27
E	17-20	28-35	4-part homophony m.28-29	“O my joy” m.30	4-part homophony m.31-32	2-part voice pairing m.33-35
F	21-24	36-44	4-part homophony m.36-44			

- Only two types of transitions between poetic stanza/musical phrase.
 - From section “A” to “B” and “B” to “C” – Finzi extends three voice parts to carry over their chord while the fourth part introduces the next section.
 - For every subsequent transition between sections there exists a clean break in the texture
- Regardless of the breaks or elisions between sections, each section clearly sets up the next, through rhythmic or harmonic parallels. This creates a seamless flow between sections, again propelling the listener forward toward the conclusion. There exists an energy as each section gives way to the next, as if each body part (tongue, heart, eyes, ears) is excited to add to the conversation.

Poetic Form

Line	Syllabic Count	Rhyme Scheme
1/5/9/17/21	6	A
2/6/10/14/18/22	3	B
3/7/11/15/19/23	6	A
4/8/12/16/20/24	4	B

- It is interesting to note the structure of the poetic syllables & rhyme schemes. Obviously, Bridges took great pains to craft his poem into a rigid structure, yet was able to remain expressive and vibrant, creating an internal drama that plays itself out as the song progresses. Finzi, likewise, mirrors the formal structure of Bridge's poem with a musical drama and climax of his own, thus creating a work of lasting impact. In the words of one biographer, Finzi's greatest contribution to twentieth-century music resides in his "sensitive response to the cadences of the English language. There is perhaps a more intimate marriage of these to the pitch and rhythm of the music than in the work of any other British composer." (John Russell)

Rhythm

- The chosen rhythms flow directly from the natural speech patterns of the English language.
 - Though the poetic syllable count remains the same, Finzi's genius lies in differentiating each phrase through rhythms that give prominence to the most important syllable of each phrase
 - By allowing the inherent characteristics of the text to generate each section's rhythmic content, Finzi creates a unique style of textural variation focused on rhythmic differentiation.
- Sections distinguished by rhythmic character rather than by polyphonic techniques (ie. the texture remains 'homophonic' throughout, but because of the above rhythmic variation, sections have enough individual character to remain distinct.
- The second line of each stanza - "O my joy" - is consistently set in an asymmetrical 5/4 meter, which lends the phrase notable musical emphasis, which in turn supports the poetic function.

Melody

- The contour of each phrase begins with an initial ascending motive, peaks in the middle, returns to its origin, and then finishes with an ascending idea.
 - Propels the listener forward, similar to a new actor excitedly entering a scene already in progress.
- Final phrase begins like the rest, but generally builds, dipping earlier, and then climaxing in the last 4 chords.
- Each vocal line, while containing many diatonic half/whole steps and a fair amount of chromatic movement, also features many large leaps. This contributes to the feeling of excitement and energy, as the audience hears these larger intervals and as the singers work to execute them correctly.

Harmony

- The changes in tonal centers at the end of each section are the aural equivalent of a series of "vignettes" – each moves the drama forward, lending a different character along the way.
- Each vignette or scene has its own harmonic character, paralleling the meaning of the text.
 - A ("spirit") – Opens firmly on G major ascending melodic motive, ends in E major. Not much dissonance, chords seem to flow out of voice leading.
 - Mostly major chords – joyous, declamatory
 - B ("heart")– Begins in E major and wanders through C#m and E#m tonalities before landing on G# major.
 - Mostly minor chords, one significant diminished chord – wondering, mysterious
 - C ("eyes")– Continued use of C#m, E#m and circle of 5ths progression (F#m – B – E) and returning to G#M.
 - Again, minor chords – introspective, inquisitive
 - D ("ears")– C#m acts a type of pedal for a while, eventually ending on F#7, which propels the listener to...
 - More minor chords, one significant dominant 7th – questioning, transitory
 - E ("she")– Bm opening, then successive Gm7 and Cm7 chords, resolving to D major, the dominant of...
 - Return of more major chords (albeit inverted) – hopeful, tentatively confident
 - F ("thou") – The return of the G major ascending motive leading to the climax on a G major chord.
 - Major chords, ending in root position tonic – completion, fulfillment

Timbre

- A primarily light, bright vocal tone should be employed throughout the work.
- Vocal tessitura for the men's parts is relatively small (with the exception being a few F#s for tenors and ending on a wonderful high G!).
- Vocal tessitura for the women's parts is relatively low (with the exception being one Soprano high G near the end).
 - The result of these lower, more speech like vocal ranges is that the singers are able to express the emotion of each unique section of text & music with precision and clarity, something they would be unable to do in the more extremes of their vocal ranges.
 - Furthermore, the lower tessitura for most of the work sets up the final 5 measures, which feature most voice parts widening their range (through steps or large leaps) thus increasing the drama.

Texture

- Finzi refused to add emphasis by mere repetition and instead constructed a texture in which imitation rather than duplication achieved the desired result.
- Variation is achieved through the alternation of three and four part homophony, two-part voice pairing, and solo sections set against static three-part accompaniment (see table under "Form")
 - In other words, it's entirely homophonic, but often sounds somewhat polyphonic because of the delayed rhythms of certain voice parts.
 - This creates interest, builds intensity, and often culminates in a homophonic declamation of the most important part of a phrase or stanza.
 - This also creates a sense of instability, reflecting the poet's inquiry into the source of his "joy."
 - Section F
 - Remains homophonic throughout – represents the conclusion of the poet's quest
 - Poet has found his "joy" – and Finzi too (He often called his wife Joyce by that name)

Expression

- The vivace (quarter = 144) tempo breathes life into the piece, propelling it forward.
- There are many subtle dynamic shifts, often occurring only over a measure or two.
 - m.5-6 *mf* < *f* > *pp* – signifying the change in text and mood
 - m.8-9 *p* < *mf* – to highlight the word "spake"
 - The only sustained dynamic shift occurs at m.36, the return of the initial motive, which begins *f* and *crescendos* to *ff* through the end of the work to create an exuberant, joyous conclusion.
- Though the tempo marking does not change, small liberties can be taken, especially between formal sections, and to emphasize important words of the poem.
 - Finzi does include one *ritardando* at m. 33 ("what is thy joy") and *a tempo* at m. 36 ("And I replied...") perhaps to signify the presence of the object of all of the searching throughout the poem. When the poet replies *a tempo*, a newfound energy (a spring in his step) takes over and drives us toward the end of the work.
- Although Finzi has carefully included dynamic and expressive markings and Bridges has taken much care to craft his poem with deliberate commas and line breaks, there still exist many questions regarding the musical phrasing. Many phrases are intentionally short, excited, and somewhat clipped, reflecting the aforementioned "drama" playing out between the members of the body. However, the standard choral practice of breathing at every comma, or performing with a sense of musical thesis as one nears a punctuation mark should not be employed indiscriminately, without first considering the poet's and composer's underlying meaning.

The Heart

The heart of My Spirit Sang All Day is the unfolding mini-drama created through shifting harmonies and homophonic text declarations. New scenes are 'painted' by ever wandering tonal centers; new 'actors' are given life by variations within a homophonic texture. When combined, they bring to life a drama of inquiry, fulfillment and joy that is altogether satisfying to hear and sing.

Introducing the Piece

1. Abbot & Costello – Who's on First – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTcRRaXV-fg> (start at 1:30)
2. Jimmy Fallon – The Sequel – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOJg7pvVzKk>

Skill Outcome

Students will sing with a rich, forward-placed tone and unified enunciation.

Strategies

1. “What is tone quality? How can you create a beautiful tone?” – Think, Pair, Share with running list on board
 - a. Page 19 in portfolio – Definition of Beautiful Tone
 - b. Keep running list visually present and refer to it throughout rehearsal
2. Placement Imagery (in vocal warm-ups and in rehearsal)
 - a. Placement (First: define the term, practice forward & back placement with curved palm, do it right, do it wrong, vocally model sliding scale, main idea = “point & dome”)
 - i. Imagine a large egg in your mouth. Palate must remain high and jaw released so you don’t break the egg.
 - ii. Lift the cheekbones as if you’re about to sneeze (an *ah* place above the “shelf” as if it’s *ah* part of “ah-choo”)
 - iii. Singing vs. speaking
 1. Think of vocal folds being above the roof of the mouth. All sound is created and resonated in the head.
 2. Envision the tone to come from the forehead (unicorn’s horn). “Cone-of-tone” – beautiful, resonant, ringing, and highly focused
 - iv. Think of the “oo” vowel as a wrapped “oh”
 - v. Shape your lips as you imagine a fish’s mouth. Sing a bright, focused “ee.” Think an “oh” behind it (ee). Sing it through the eyes.
 1. The Choral Warm-Up – Teaching and Rehearsal Cards (J. Jordan) #49, 51, 52, 69
3. Enunciation (First: define the term, discuss speaking vs. singing, “Singlish” idea)
 - a. Edie Copley’s “Recipe for Diction”
 - i. Gently crack apart each word and separate the vowels from the consonants. Pronounce all the sounds of each word aloud
 - ii. Roll out the vowel – shape/sustain each vowel
 - iii. Experiment with vowels in the right container (space), color, and shape
 - iv. Thinly slice consonants rhythmically and place them in each vocal line (index finger through stream of water, garden hose idea)
 - v. Determine word stress, dynamic phrase shaping, and any foreign vowel issues

Assessments

1. Informal – class discussion of placement, enunciation concepts
2. Formal – student journal about the most important concepts behind good tone
3. Formal – iPod search – Of all the music you listen to, can you find the singer with the worst vocal tone? What specifically makes the tone bad? Can you put your finger on it? How is this singer able to compensate (i.e. how are they still an effective performer?) (Worksheet attached)
4. “Place the Placement in the Right Place” – Aurally listen to 6 tone qualities and put them in order from back/dark to front/bright (use VoiceCare network continuum for guide)
5. 2 separate sections on Digital Voice Recorders, specifically focusing on diction & tone (Worksheet attached)

Knowledge Outcome

Students will analyze poetry and song structures in order to make informed phrasing choices.

Strategies:

1. Day 1 – *Unzipping of Teacher Brain* - Students will watch a conversation between Music/English teachers as they discuss the poetic devices and structure of a “mentor poem” (a poem, different than the one we’re studying, that has similar devices, structure, and meaning, in this case – Robert Frost’s “A Telephone”).
2. Day 2 – *Unlocking the Student Brain* – using the same note taking worksheet with different roles for discussion (Conversation Roundtable – attached) students will analyze and discuss “My Spirit Sang All Day” by Robert Bridges
 - a. Academic vocabulary (already previously discussed/defined) available on sheet
 - b. Student Roles in Small Group
 - i. Structure of Overall Poem
 - ii. Structure of Individual Sentences

- iii. Diction
 - iv. Point of view
 - c. Each group – come up with 1-2 best takeaways to share with the class
3. Day 3 – Classroom discussion based on the group’s “takeaways.”
 - a. Essential Questions: How does this knowledge impact our phrasing choices? Which phrases should be broken apart? Which should be joined? Which is the most important (climax)?
4. Day 4 (& 5, & 6, & 7, etc!) - return to “Take Away” class list (based on each of the small group’s conversation), make informed decisions about choices throughout rehearsal

Assessments:

1. Formal – Individual “Conversation Roundtable” sheets from each student (both their notes on teacher discussion and their notes on their own group discussion – 2 sides)
2. Informal – classroom discussion of phrasing choices (strategies #3 and #4)
3. Formal - “One of These Things is Not Like the Other” – comparison of two professional recordings of *My Spirit Sang All Day*
 - a. Venn Diagram of phrasing choices and effect on the overall performance (worksheet attached)

Affective Outcome

Students will explore the idea of a derivative work and assess the merits of altering a pre-existing product.

Strategies

1. Read excerpts from “Photographs of Public Artwork by Anish Kapoor and Christo & Jeanne-Claude: Copyright Infringement?”
 - a. Introduce the idea of a derivative work
 - b. Class discussion – Can we list some flaws in the arguments of the lawyers quoted in this article?
 - c. http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag05/may_05/webspecs/grant.shtml
2. “Getting to Know You” – For two weeks each, students will focus on a specific work of art with daily interaction and conversation the original work, the derivative work, and the relationship between them.
 - a. Moses Hogan’s Arrangement of “Battle of Jericho” - AND -
 - b. Alvin Ailey’s “Revelations”– “I’ve Been ‘Buked” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SoXwSEof7c&list=PLTo_DzoyuPWQ6HP771C6f2Y-w3-8E-21-
 - c. Class Discussion Questions
 - What specific elements have been added to the pre-existing work?
 - Do you feel these elements enhance or detract, and how?
 - Does the newer artist remain true to the pre-existing work’s message
3. Harry Potter Books vs. Movies
 - a. Scene read aloud from book vs. movie – Which do you prefer? Why? What specific elements of the derivative work do you feel added or detracted most from the original?
 - b. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/07/how-the-harry-potter-movies-succeeded-where-the-books-failed/241884/>
 - c. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VG32Wog8sAk>
4. Journal – Do you think Robert Bridges would be pleased with Gerald Finzi’s derivative work? Justify your conclusion with specific reasons.

Assessment

(choose one of the following or create your own idea)

1. Create a derivative short work and describe (in a few short paragraphs) what you have done to “add your own viewpoint.”
 - a. Go here to get an idea: <http://www.publicdomainsherpa.com/public-domain-music.html>
2. Prepare a short YouTube presentation in which you examine the relationship between a pre-existing work and a derivative work. Include audio, video, and/or pictures as well as your own narration to support your argument.
 - a. Possible examples: Wizard of Oz book/movie, Sherlock Holmes character/movies, parody songs (Weird Al’s “Mandatory Fun” or 2 Live Crew’s case: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campbell_v._Acuff-Rose_Music,_Inc.)
3. With a partner, video yourselves debating the merits of a derivative work, with each person taking a separate side. Use well-reasoned, thoughtful evidence to support your claim.

4. In essay or vlog form, analyze the relationship of Gerald Finzi's music to Robert Bridges' text and the effectiveness of "My Spirit Sang All Day."

Music Selection

- historically significant English composer & poem by Poet Laureate of England
- unique marriage of text and tune that is so intertwined, almost no other composer has chosen to set this text afterward
- opportunities to explore the unique and lasting ways in which an artist expresses inner thoughts

Source Material:

John Russell, "Gerald Finzi: An English Composer." *Tempo* 33, (Autumn 1954).

Stephen Banfield, "Gerald Finzi: An English Composer." Faber and Faber, 2008.

John C. Dressler, "Gerald Finzi: A Bio-Bibliography." Greenwood Press, 1997.

Andrew Jensen, "A Comparative Analysis of Poetic Structure as the Primary Determinant of Musical Form in Selected A Cappella Choral Works of Gerald Finzi and Benjamin Britten." D.M.A. dissertation, University of So. Mississippi, 2008.

Lani Johnson, "Teaching Music Through Performance in Choir," Vol. 1 -My Spirit Sang All Day.

