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Martin Adams. *Henry Purcell: The Origins and Development of His Musical Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. xii, 388 pp. ISBN 0-521-43159-x (hardcover)

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Martin Adams. *Henry Purcell: The Origins and Development of His Musical Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. xii, 388 pp. ISBN 0-521-43159-x (hardcover).

It is indeed exciting for the scholar, performer, and music lover alike, to witness the new wave of critical attention given to Purcell's music to mark the tercentenary of his death in 1995. Although a substantial amount of work has been done on Purcell's music in the context of its time, and focusing on particular genres, critical studies based on theoretical observations have not typically been in the forefront of research endeavors. Articles and studies dealing with Purcell's output have seldom tried to grapple with the compositional processes of this fascinating composer and the development of his individual musical voice.

Martin Adams in, *Henry Purcell: The Origins and Development of His Musical Style*, is the first to attempt to deal with the composer's style in its entirety, and is unique in that Adams approaches the topic from an analytical point of view—a daunting task considering the composer's prolific output, ranging over three different monarchies and very quickly-changing public tastes. Adams's study encompasses all genres—instrumental and vocal chamber music, sacred music, odes and welcome songs, and music for the theatre—and tries to come to an understanding of Purcell's style as it evolved from 1680 to his death in 1695. Paramount in his observations are the prominence of certain compositional features throughout Purcell's oeuvre. In particular, Adams is concerned with how Purcell grew as a composer as he reconciled foreign influences with his own distinctive English voice.

Although primarily analytical, the book does not confine itself solely to theoretical discussions of Purcell's music, and Adams does not neglect the importance of placing this music in its context. The book is divided into two sections. Part One, "Stylistic development and influences," gives a chronological "walk" through Purcell's works with pertinent comments on his life and the development of his style. It is divided into five stages: (1) "Early years at court and home: developments to c. 1680," (2) "Years of experiment: c. 1680 to c. 1685," (3) "Consolidation: c. 1685 to c. 1688," (4) "Public recognition: c. 1689 to c. 1691," and (5) "'Meaning motion fans fresh our wits with wonder': c. 1692 to 1695." The first section has many strengths. It is particularly valuable in bringing together and summarizing both the longstanding and most current research on Purcell's life and music. As well, many of the suggestions made as to possible influences, both English and continental, are persuasive. This is a typically frustrating area in Purcell scholarship in that it necessitates painstaking documentation of what music was performed in Purcell's London, be it in public, at court, or at informal concerts and gatherings of musically-inclined amateurs. Although documentation does exist for the court and theatre, collections of chamber music in private collections that may provide possible links nevertheless fall short; there is no proof that Purcell actually heard them. This frustrating lack of evidence

concerning what music Purcell knew has typically led to a reliance on anecdotes and isolated comments for clues.¹

In recent years, this area has received a good deal of critical attention by Peter Holman and others, and Adams continues this work in proposing specific pieces of music which may have had an influence on Purcell who, despite his conservatism, did much to popularize continental styles of music by seeking to emulate them in his own music.

There is little criticism that can be offered of the first section. It is written in an engaging and lucid manner, and demonstrates a perception of the composer and his music that is often quite penetrating. It is obvious to the reader that Adams understands the composer and is excited by the music.

Stylistic observations throughout the book are approached from the usual standpoints of form, harmonic motion, the use of counterpoint, and motivic/melodic writing, and the author is particularly perceptive in offering many interesting comments on the metric juxtapositions so prominent in Purcell's music, and the sources of its rhythmic energy and drive. For example, Adams's discourse on instrumental music in the odes, anthems, and stage music discusses some of the metric irregularities and their functions in Purcell's first Ode for Charles II, *Welcome, Vicegerent of the Mighty King* (Z. 340) (pp. 118–21), written in 1680, and the interesting metric juxtaposition of motivic groupings in the 1682 Welcome Song "What Shall Be Done on Behalf of the Man" (Z. 341). Adams's diagram (p. 120) of the telescoping of rhythmic groupings in the opening symphony of the former piece that contradict the metre, and the reconciliation of these conflicting groups into a release of tension makes for a convincing argument, as does that for the latter piece (p. 125), where he shows without a doubt how these turns of phrase have been accomplished.

Also interesting and useful is Adams's approach in offering an enlightening and in-depth discussion of the tonal and pitch relationships in Purcell's opera, *Dido and Aeneas*. His quasi-Schenkerian rendering of the tonal relationships in the final scene (Ex. 126, p. 280) is quite clear. Adams discusses the dramatic implications of the pitch relationships within the scene and as such imbues the pitches G and D with dramatic weight. Given that the scene is in G minor, assigning specific dramatic frames of mind to the tonic and dominant may be risky, but his argument is compelling.

The second section, "Analytical and generic studies," is the corollary of the first, and seeks to delve into the music already introduced, but by genre, with analytical tools and an eye for dissection. This section is sometimes problematic. Although the first section places Purcell's music in its context and is laden with intelligent information on Purcell's musical style, his possible influences, and his probable concerns, the analysis in the second section can be quite daunting even for the musical professional if the reader is not versed in

¹For example, that of Purcell in Playford's *Introduction to the Skill of Music*, 12th ed., where he states: "Of this sort, there are some Fuges used by several Authors in Sonata's; a short one I shall here insert of the famous Lelio Calista, an Italian." From W. Barclay Squire, "Purcell as Theorist", *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* 6 (1904–1905): 557.

Adams's analytical method. It is a serious drawback that the author offers no explanation of his methodology, or any justification for his analytical choices. The analyses he presents tend to be cumbersome, complex in the extreme, and sometimes even confusing. The author often engages in a highly complex dialogue to describe very simple, and even unexceptional, events. It takes an inordinate amount of time to glean just what he is trying to say, and to sort through his analytical decisions.

Adams uses a melodic line analysis that appears to be drawn from Schenkerian practices and draws upon its vocabulary, but does not follow through with its methodology. The author seems to take from Schenker what is necessary to prove his point, but combines Schenker with an assortment of other analytic tools; thus, one must constantly "change tracks" to follow his reasoning. Some of his decisions about musical functions and relationships are unsupported and appear to be unjustified.

The analysis of an early Purcell work, the *Stairre Case Overture* from 1675 (pp. 89–91) is a case in point. The author states on page 89: "But the implications of x, with its prominent B[flat] and G (b[ars] 3 and 4), produce stress on A rather than the potentially more stable F, and together with the violin motion, this drives on through the V–I of b[ar] 5 and into the minor mode inflexion of b[ars] 6–10." The author, in this statement, neglects to say that the long-range melodic motion is B[-flat]–G–C–B[-flat]–A, highlighted in his own analysis, but does not explain the importance of the high C, the highest note obtained as yet in the piece, and the dominant of the key. As well, in discussing the "minor mode inflexion" of mm. 6–10, he fails to note that the addition of A-flat in his example (m. 6) is not an inflection of the minor mode, but a tonal excursion to the subdominant, E-flat Major throughout mm. 6–7. His statement that the "minor mode of the dominant [is] fully effected by violin I's E natural in b[ar] 7 and by the following D[-flat] in the bass" is misleading, as this melodic E natural (the last sixteenth-note of the bar) provides a cross-relation with the bass E[-flat] which then resolves to D[-flat] (flat–VI). The move to the dominant minor, F minor, is in progress at this point, but is not confirmed until m. 9.

In the same analysis, Adams describes the bass line of mm. 5–10 as two different melodic strands, ("the complementary lines m and n") but offers no justification for this decision. There is little evidence to support his contention that the bass line is engaged in expressing a compound melody, or that a combination of musical lines is present. These decisions may be justified by the eye, as it would be tempting to observe the bass line moving from F down to D and then passing through E to resolve on F at the cadence, while the higher "complimentary line" descends to F in contrary motion to it (F–E-flat–D–B-flat–E-flat–D-flat–C–F), but this is not confirmed by the ear. Octave repetition does not make a compound melody, and the division of the line described by Adams relies on pitches repeated in weak metric positions.

This kind of analysis is equally cumbersome for the vocal music, where simple events are explained with extreme complexity. The analysis of the song "Sylvia. Now Your Scorn Give Over" (Z. 420) (pp. 197–98) describes no less

that seven linear melodic/motivic elements in the space of eight bars. Five of these motivic elements are very obviously variants of the filling out of a third as Adams states, but giving five different labels (x, a, b, c, and d) to the different rhythmic and melodic combinations of a single motive adds needless complication. The linear analysis, as in most of the pieces discussed, shows the large-scale articulation of ascent and descent. However, in supporting his argument, the author often incorporates pitches in metrically weak and obviously neighbouring functions (for example the E of m. 8, p. 198) and leaves out others which appear to be important (the first A of m. 4). His last statement in discussing this piece is that it “takes two and a half bars to articulate the F–G–C move” (described as line g, p. 198). In actuality, Adams has neglected the metrically-accented, motivically-engaged supertonic between the F and the G he points out. The harmonic movement is clearly IV–ii–V–I, but the author gives no justification for his omission of the D.

It would have been of benefit had the author offered a chapter summarizing his analytical findings, bringing together the most important features gleaned through his examination of these works, and putting forth those observations that he considers to be the most significant trends in Purcell’s *oeuvre*. One is often left with sweeping statements about the music which, in passing, are interesting and even intriguing, but do not form satisfactory conclusions in the wider scope.

It is, of course, beyond the scope of this review to discuss all of the analysis presented. Moreover, it would be unjust to imply that all of the analysis in this valuable book is awkward. His comments on many of the pieces covered are extremely insightful. Despite the difficulties, the reader is often led to look at Purcell’s music in a way that although cumbersome, affords a closer scrutiny and a re-examination of the underlying melodic and rhythmic currents governing it, whether or not one agrees with his conclusions.

One of the great strengths of this study is Adams’s constant awareness of the different compositional streams Purcell was influenced by, and his constant attempts to reconcile the compositional practice of his early fantasias and sonatas with new continental trends that did not give value to “brazen” feats of contrapuntal complexity. The common thread that runs through this book, and one of which the reader is constantly aware, is Purcell’s grappling with that very problem. The author’s observations on this reconciliation acts as a convincing context for the discussion of his later works. The point that Purcell was essentially a conservative composer, seen in his constant striving for the integration of counterpoint with later stylistic trends, is argued throughout the book most effectively. It is commendable that Adams does not render his discussions in a contextual vacuum.

It is in the area of stylistic observation that this study deserves recognition. Throughout the book, Adams offers insightful information placing the music in the context of its time, but also going a step further in supporting it with a penetrating critical commentary. It is unfortunate that the analytical sections are problematic, but given the whole, this is a welcome contribution to Purcell studies.

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