

MELODY

The main melody is sung by a **soprano singer**
The word setting is mostly **syllabic** (each syllable of the text given its own note), with some **melismatic** sections (like the word "eternal").

Word painting is used to make the music reflect the meaning of the

Most of the melody notes **move in steps**, with lots of passing notes (the notes in between chord notes)

There are lots of uses of **ornaments** (common to Baroque music) in the right hand of the harpsichord and the soprano line, such as trills, appoggiaturas, grace notes and mordents.

Some of the text has been repeated, such as the word "drop"

There are some **descending sequences**, such as in bar 20

Rests are used to break up melodic phrases

The stepwise movement of the melody means it can be described as a "**conjunct**" melody

TONALITY

The main tonality for the piece is **A minor**

This reflects the **sombre, sad** nature of the lyrics

During the middle (B) section the piece **modulates** through several related keys—**E major** (the dominant key—bar 15 & 28), **G major** in the middle of bar 18, **C major** (relative major—in bar 22), **A major** (the tonic major—middle of bar 23) and finally back to **A minor** in bar 29

DYNAMICS

There are **no dynamic markings** on the

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This piece was written in the **Baroque** era. It was composed in around **1692**. It was written for a play telling the Greek myth of **Oedipus**.

This is the second of four movements Purcell wrote for the play as "incidental music" performed between the dramatic parts of the play

KEY

3 Grade 5 Grade 8 Grade

WORD PAINTING

The (mostly) **minor key** is appropriate for the **serious, sad** mood of the text
The word "**eternal**" (bar 20) is sung as a **long melisma**
The word "**drop**" (bar 23) is repeated in a **descending pattern** (going down) representing the snakes dropping from Alecta's head

The phrase "**free the dead**" (bars 16-17) is set to a triumphant section in the **bright key of G major**.

The word "**wondering**" (bar 10) uses a wandering, descending **legato (smooth) melismatic melody**

The phrase "pains were eased" (bars 12-13) features a **dissonance and resolution**

RHYTHM and METRE

4/4 metre

The ground bass uses **repeated quaver rhythms**

There are a wide variety of rhythms, but **quavers** and **semiquavers** are the most common in this piece

There are some **dotted rhythms** in the vocal part
There is occasional **syncopation**



PURCELL - MUSIC FOR A WHILE

INSTRUMENTS

This piece uses a **soprano singer, harpsichord and bass viol**.

The harpsichord and bass viol act as the **basso continuo**, providing accompaniment for the singer.

The left hand of the harpsichord and the bass viol play the **ground bass**—a repeating bass pattern that acts as an accompaniment.

The right hand of the harpsichord plays a "**realisation**" (which would have been improvised at the time), which fills out the chords of the piece.



A Bass Viol

TEMPO

There is no tempo marking on the score, but a **slow tempo** would be appropriate

HARMONY

The accompaniment is provided by the **ground bass** played by the bass viol and the left hand of the harpsichord
Chords are **diatonic**

There are **perfect cadences** throughout the piece (as the ground bass ends with a V chord, then repeats again with a I chord)

There are a couple of **dissonances** used for word painting, such as the word "pains"

Another type of dissonance used is a "**false relation**", like in bar 1 with the ground bass playing F sharp while the right hand plays F natural.

Suspensions are used very occasionally. For example, there is a 4–3 suspension in bar 3 beat 4 1/2 in the harpsichord part.

The right hand of the harpsichord plays an elaborate **realisation**, which has been interpreted from the original **figured bass**

THE GROUND BASS

The ground bass is a **3 bar loop**
It consists entirely of **quaver rhythms**
It has a **rising pattern**

The first 4 sets of 4 quavers use an **ascending sequence**, starting one note higher each time
At the end of the ground bass there is a **fall of an octave**
It uses intervals of **semitones**

After 4 and a half repeats of the ground bass it begins to **modulate into different keys**. In the final A section (bar 29) it returns to the repeating pattern from the start of the piece.

TEXTURE

The texture is **homophonic** - one main melody and an accompaniment.

The accompaniment is provided by the ground bass

The elaborate **realisation** played by the right hand of the harpsichord makes the texture feel polyphonic at times

