The Songs of The Beggar's Opera

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THE SONGS OF

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

(TITLE)

BY

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THESIS

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DATE
The Beggar's Opera, by John Gay, is the most outstanding example of the ballad opera, a comic genre, which made its debut in eighteenth-century England. Comic scenes found their way into serious opera almost from the advent of opera in Europe in 1597. By 1639 independent comic operas appeared in Italy. The eighteenth century saw the development of national types of comic opera: the lively humorous opera buffa of Italy with its characteristic ensemble finale; the farcical opera comique of France with spoken dialogue and songs to familiar airs; the similar ballad opera of England; the singspiel of Germany modeled upon the French and English comic opera. The most apparent national characteristic of these comic operas was their language. In contrast, most serious opera of the eighteenth century was in one language: Italian. German and English composers used Italian opera as their model; hence, not only was the libretto Italian, but also the formal and stylistic elements of the music.

Before 1728—that is, before the first appearance of the The Beggar's Opera, there had been some English opera of a comic nature such as D'Urfeys Wonders in the Sun and The Two Queens of Brentford. Ramsey's The Gentle Shepherd, in which spoken words and familiar tunes were combined, had been printed in 1725. Similar to Ramsey's work was the pasticcio. (Pasticcio is Italian for pie or pastry.) This popular eighteenth-century musical form consisted of a medley of favorite airs from many operas worked into a new scheme with its own libretto.

Gay, for his opera, also wrote new words for all the melodies he used. These melodies were familiar ones such as Ramsey used and such as
were found in the pasticcio. Thus, The Beggar's Opera has structural relationships with various other musical forms of the century. At the same time, it is a specimen of a new form, the English ballad opera.

Probably Swift deserves some credit for the creation of Gay's opera. Feeling the time propitious for a satire on the romantic comedy of the day, such as Ramsey wrote, he suggested to Gay that he write a Newgate pastoral. Gay did just that—he wrote a burlesque using characters typical of Newgate, famous London prison.

The premier performance of Gay's opera occurred at Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, on January 29, 1728. Performances continued for sixty-two consecutive nights, a record for that age. The Beggar's Opera was performed more often than any other stage work of the eighteenth century. John Rich, impresario at Lincoln's Inn Fields, had hesitated to accept this new stage form which he considered quite a gamble. However, it was a tremendous success, making "Gay rich and Rich gay" as Londoners enjoyed saying. In 1750 the opera reached stages both in France and in America. During the latter eighteenth century it was in the repertory of every theatrical company in Britain and America, and during the nineteenth century the opera was still popular in England. Even in the twentieth century there have been revivals. In 1920 there were two: one in Greenwich Village Theatre in New York City and the other in Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith, England. The latter production ran for two and one-half years nightly and then went on tour.

Kurt Weill, twentieth-century German composer, wrote a work based on the opera entitled Die Dreigrösschenopfer (The Threepenny Opera). Berthold Brecht wrote the libretto. This opera was introduced in Berlin

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in 1928 and enjoyed a sensational success with over four thousand performances in approximately one hundred and twenty German theaters.¹ Britons, according to Percy Scholes, were not so favorably impressed with this jazz opera which "those who have seen it regard as a gross travesty of the original not merely as to plot which is greatly changed, but as to music where only one of the original airs remains."² It would seem that Scholes' attitude reflects a prejudiced British attitude. People tend to prefer that a favorite opera, story, landscape, or whatever, be kept exactly as it is. However Brecht and Weill did not modify The Beggar's Opera but wrote a new one which is related to the former work only in the general structure of the plot and in the use of one melody, Peachum's first air, which sounds very different in its jazz setting. Donald Grout, opera authority, states that Weill's opera is "unbearably monotonous now that the shine of novelty has worn off."³ This is one musician's opinion. Disillusioned post-war Berliners were magnetically drawn to this satirical work with its setting of jazz of the nineteen-twenties.

Benjamin Britten has also orchestrated The Beggar's Opera in the present century. He used the original song tunes but wrote an orchestral score which is not in the eighteenth-century tradition but has a characteristic Britten sound.⁴ His score was used at the Cheltenham Festival in 1948 and also at the Juillard School of Music a few years later. In 1953

⁴Blom, p. 597.
a film version of *The Beggar's Opera* edited by Christopher Fry and scored by Arthur Bliss appeared. Fry added dialogue freely to the original and even added some new lyrics. The musical score has a definitely nineteenth-century sound with a "ponderous funeral march which accompanies Captain Macheath on his roistering way to the gallows." Sir Lawrence Olivier played the part of Macheath and sang the songs written for the part. The actor playing Lockit also sang his part; however, all of the other actors had vocal counterparts.

Various university opera workshops have produced *The Beggar's Opera*. During the early run of the Brecht-Weill *Dreigroschenoper* in New York in 1954, Columbia University Workshop put on four performances of Gay's work orchestrated in an eighteenth-century style by Manfred Bukofzer, musicologist.1

Let us proceed to an examination of the airs in *The Beggar's Opera*. John Gay was known as a ballad writer before he wrote his opera and he was also a flutist. Thus, his musical knowledge enabled him to choose the airs he wanted for the verse he composed in *The Beggar's Opera*. The airs he chose were not all old ones, as might be mistakenly assumed from the term, ballad opera. Even W. E. Schultz speaks of "the good old-fashioned English music" of Gay's work, meaning it was old in the eighteenth century.2 He should have known that this was not so as he had made a detailed study of these airs. Almost all of the airs in Gay's opera were popular in England in 1728. Some were, indeed, modern offsprings of old folk songs; but quite a few were new songs.

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3Schultz, p. 162.
There were many collections of current popular songs, two of the most popular being D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy* and Playford's *English Dancing Master*. Many editions of these two works had been published. The *Dancing Master* was first printed in 1650. Various authors, among them William Chappell, have carried on research involving the airs which Gay used in his opera. Schultz used the material of Chappell as a basis for still further study. Most of the songs of *The Beggar's Opera* are to be found in song collections of the 1720's. Many of these same songs are also in earlier volumes (which, of course, indicates they existed at the earlier date). Often there are different words for the same tune in an earlier volume. Some of the verse Schultz gives goes back as far as 1584. Bukofzer mentions that some of the tunes in *The Beggar's Opera* were variations of famous grounds: the romanesca, the *folia*, and the *passamezzo antico*.

These grounds were all originally dance melodies which may be found in Spanish lute books of the mid-sixteenth century.

In his opera, Gay gives titles to each of the airs, not according to the words he has written for them, but by the name under which he knew or found each of them. Most of these titles have been found in eighteenth-century collections. There are two songs for which Gay gives no title. One of these, "Cease Your Funning," may have been composed "expressly for the opera by a lady, a friend of the poet." Or, it may have been an old ballad tune unidentified by Gay. The other borrowed song to which Gay does not attach a title is the air Ophelia sings in *Hamlet*. Since

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3 Schultz, p. 325.
Gay uses current titles on the whole, it appears that he did not search for old ballads, that he was either familiar with most of the tunes he used or found them in the song books of his day.

A study of the genealogy of the tunes and verses in The Beggar's Opera presents some interesting relationships. Approximately two-thirds of the songs have no known composers; however, it is not their antiquity which has obscured authorship in all cases. In two instances there appears the title: "Song to a New Play-House Tune,"¹ (Air VIII Act I and Air LV Act III); and in two other instances "To a New Tune."² One song is labeled "To a New Court Tune."³ (Nicholas Rowe⁵ and Sir Charles Sedley,⁶ eighteenth-century authors, wrote words for two of these anonymous tunes just mentioned.) After the title of a South Sea ballad are the words: "Set by a Lady." Obviously, the lady did not wish to divulge her name. South Sea ballads were popular in the 1720's as the South Sea Company formed in 1711 was a speculative business of the time attracting much attention.

Several of the songs without indications of authorship are of Scotch origin: that is, the subject matter is Scotch.⁷ William Chappell

¹All of the airs listed in this paper are by number and act as listed in the volume, Eighteenth Century Plays, ed. Ricardo Quintana, (New York: Random House, 1952). Schults gives their origins in Appendix II.

²Airs XXIV and XXV Act II.

³Air XV Act II.

⁴Air XLII Act III.

⁵Air VIII Act I.

⁶Air XXV Act II.

⁷Airs III, IX, XVIII Act I; XL Act II; LVII Act III.
suggests that this Scotch verse was written to tunes composed in England; however, "Over the hills and far away" is thought to be Scotch in both verse and tune.¹ Gay employs four tunes of French origin.² One of these which was a drinking song Gay kept as such, writing new words, however, as he did for all of the songs in his opera.

Some of the tunes of unknown authorship were quite old in Gay's time. Of Elizabethan vintage is the famous Chevy Chase air to which many authors wrote verse. Even today (1966) this tune is found in elementary school song books. It is the only tune used twice by Gay in his opera. In the first act, Polly sings "O ponder well! be not severe" to this air. Toward the end of the third act, in the condemned hold, Macheath sings two lines to this tune. (These are omitted in the recording used for analysis in the latter part of this paper.)³ From the same period comes the lively ballad "To old Sir Simon the King"⁴ and Ophelia's song from Hamlet.⁵ The three old grounds previously mentioned were set to verse by many authors. "Joy to Great Caesar" is set to the folia ground. Many composers have written variations based on this ground tune: Corelli, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff among them. The romanesca ground was the setting for the popular "Greensleeves," a religious ballad of the Reformation.⁶ Shakespeare refers to "Greensleeves" in The Merry Wives

¹Air XVI Act I.
²Airs XIII and XIV Act I.
⁴Air LXII Act III.
⁵Air XXXII Act II.
of Windsor and elsewhere. This modal melody is sung today as a Christmas
carol. (Both the *follia* and *romanesca* tunes are omitted in the Austin
arrangement.) The *passamezzo antico* ground was known in the eighteenth
century as the tune for "Lumps of Pudding." Gay used this ground for
his final air and dance entitled "Thus I stand like a Turk."

Of songs by known composers, Gay borrowed the most heavily from
Purcell. Three songs are from Purcell operas. For an aria from
Dioclesian, Gay wrote Polly's "Virgins are like the fair flower."\(^1\)
According to Burney (*General History of Music*, III, 500), this became
the most popular air in the opera and was still popular when Burney wrote
his history one hundred and fifty years later. Lucy's song "When young
at the bar"\(^2\) came from *The Fairy Queen* of Purcell's. (The plot for this
opera was that of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.) A tune from a third Purcell
opera *Bonduca*, which was probably a trumpet melody, became so popular it
ranked with such songs as "God Save the King." Instead of the familiar
words "Britons, strike home," the audience was greeted with the words of
Macheath, "Since I must swing,"\(^3\) which surely must have aroused laughter
among those knowing the song. Purcell wrote or adapted the music for a
political ballad "Lillibulero" which became famous. The author of the
words, Lord Wharton, boasted that his song "sang James out of three
kingdoms."\(^4\) Macheath also sings this tune as a political satire, "The

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\(^{1}\)Air VI Act I.

\(^{2}\)Air LI Act III.

\(^{3}\)Air LX Act III.

\(^{4}\)Schultz, p. 329.
modes of the court so common are grown. Another Purcell song is sung by Locke: "What gudgeons are we men." 

Gay uses a number of tunes of Handel's. One is a march tune from his first opera *Rinaldo* produced in London in 1711. The London Life Guard adopted this regimental number because of its great popularity. Gay employed this popular march tune for his highwaymen's chorus. The gang load their pistols, shove them under their belts, and march off singing this number. Handel also wrote the music for an early farce of Gay's, an air of which was later incorporated into *The Beggar's Opera*.

The Italian composer Buononcini is represented with music for which was written words of an English ballad. Gay wrote new words: "If love the virgin's heart invade." It is interesting to note that this Italian tune became so popular in Gay's opera that new verse was composed for it at still a later date: "When Daphne o'er the meadows fled."

A popular tune of the day known as "Walpole" was written by a Mr. Burkhead. It is used in the overture of *The Beggar's Opera* and later Lucy sings it: "I'm like a skiff." Walpole was Prime Minister at this time in England. On the opening night he diplomatically stood and applauded when he heard the tune "Walpole." This was not the only satirical reference in the opera which the audience thought referred to Walpole. Later the Prime Minister showed his resentment by taking away Gay's Whitehall apartments. "Salley in our Alley" with words and music written

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1 Air XLIV Act III.
2 Air XLV Act III.
3 Air XX Act II.
4 Air XXVIII Act II.
5 Air XLVII Act III.
6 Schultz, p. 188.
by Henry Carey was a very popular song also in Gay's day. For Carey's
words, "Of all the girls that are so smart," Gay substituted for Macheath,
"Of all the friends in time of grief" etc.

Among songs with known authors are some found in stage works such
as Mr. Eccles' tune written for Congreve's Love for Love and entitled "A
Soldier and a Sailor." Peachum sings this tune to the words, "A fox may
steal your hens, sir." Mr. Leveridge wrote verse for the song which
Mr. Wilks sang in Farquhar's comedy Recruiting Officer. Macheath sings
this tune to the words, "My heart was so free." Then there is an early
Tudor tune written by Thomas Paggington, a musician in the court of
Henry VII, which was recorded in Elizabeth's virginal book. Later
Ben Jonson wrote words for this air in his play Bartholomew Fair. Various
ballads flourished to this same air including one by Gay, himself, written
before his opera. In The Beggar's Opera we find this tune with the words
"Thus gamesters united in friendship are found."

In contrast to the tune so popular that many authors have written
verse to it is verse so popular that many composers have set it to music.
Carey, Haydon, Leveridge, and Sandoni wrote tunes to the appealing Gay
ballad "Sweet William's Farewell to Blackeyed Susan." For his opera Gay
wrote verse with meaning similar to "Sweet William" for Polly to sing.

D'Urfey, whose collection of songs, Pills to Purge Melancholy, has
been mentioned, was himself a writer of song verse. He wrote words to

1 Air LIX Act III.
2 Air XI Act I.
3 Air XV Act I.
4 Air XLIII Act III.
5 Air XXXIV Act II.
three tunes which Gay used in his opera. Gay, it is to be understood, wrote new words.

This genealogy of tunes and verses indicates there is great diversity in source material. There are tunes from opera; tunes from plays; popular tunes of Scotch, French, and Italian derivation; and very old dance tunes called grounds. Those from opera are graceful arias. The folk-song type have variety in flavor due to various national sources, and according to the type of song, realistic or romantic. There are verses of religious significance, of political significance, verses linked with Scotland, and verses describing England. The diversity of tunes which Gay used and verse on which he often modeled his own verse is of historical interest to the student of The Beggar's Opera.

For the audience of Gay's time, diversity of tunes may have added space to the opera; however, there was a factor of much greater importance than diversity, the influence of associations which well-known tunes and verses had on Gay's songs. Each song already had a meaning for those who knew it. Superimposed was the new meaning of Gay's verse. The result was a genuine complex of associations leading to a variety of political and social implications. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss all of these. Those social implications which resulted from a parody of Italian opera will be considered in detail.

Although Gay does parody Italian opera, that he did so with negative intent should not be assumed. Gay was a friend of Handel, who was writing Italian opera in London from 1709 to 1737. Italian opera

\(^\text{1}\) Airs III and IX Act I, and Air LXIII Act III.
held sway over Europe during this period. To write an opera with English words would not have been à la mode, so to speak. The musical style of opera was characteristically Italian in that it had a long history of development by Italian composers. Handel, who had acquired a taste for Italian opera during his visits in Italy, employed Italian stylistic elements. These were in popular favor not only for Italian audiences, but for audiences all over Europe. Handel could have written in the English opera tradition of Purcell; but, it must be remembered that Handel was not an Englishman by birth. It happens that Purcell, too, in his time, had been influenced considerably by his Italian contemporaries. It was natural for Handel to write what can accurately be called "Italian" opera. He may have surmised, and rightly so, that his Italian operas would be popular among the English. Gay had no intention of ruining Handel's popularity as an opera composer. According to musicologist Bukofzer, Gay's "musical parodies seem mild and good-humored and designed to appeal to friends rather than enemies of opera seria."

In order to understand this parody, we must make some investigation of opera seria in London at this time. There were two rival commercial companies both producing Italian opera. Handel, the manager of one of them, produced opera for twenty-eight years. Although commercially produced, they were all modeled on the court opera. The scenery and costumes were lavish and costly. The salaries of singers was also a large budgetary item. Most of the singers with solo parts were imported from Italy, which held a monopoly on the training of operatic singers in Europe. These singers demanded and received high salaries. For the most part they were

1Bukofzer, p. 332.
trained in conservatories run by the clergy as boarding schools for poor children. While the education of the children was insufficient, consisting as it did of music only, it was excellent as musical training. The instruction lasted eight hours a day for eight years.

During the Renaissance women did not sing in public; however, during the seventeenth century some women did appear as soloists and became famous. They could not perform in churches because of the time-honored injunction, "Mulier tacet in ecclesia." The priests, desirous for a showy type of singing in high ranges, promoted the singing of castrati singers. The castrato voice did have a very large range as well as elasticity which the developed male voice lacks. Musical Europe simply went wild over the castrato singer. The public of that day was as devoted to the castrato as the public of today to the Beatles. There was some incidental negative comment to the effect that the castrato voice sounded like a cackling hen; however, most people took an adulatory view. The prestige of castrati stars was very great. The natural development of many a boy was sacrificed in the hope he would become a great castrato singer. Such singers received many special privileges, and, inevitably, many became most conceited.¹

In the London opera of Handel with its court characters, the hero was representative of the English monarch; hence, it was imperative for opera to have a happy ending. It is to this custom that Gay's player refers near the end of the opera. "The catastrophe is manifestly wrong, for an opera must end happily." Courtly figures were characteristic of

¹Bukofzer, p. 399.
Italian opera. Handel's company also imported Italian singers and produced opera sung in Italian. Among the nobility of that period, there were many who spoke at least one foreign tongue with some facility. This language, for most, was French. Probably few could understand these operas in Italian. Addison, a representative of the middle class, politely ridicules them. He also tells us that prior to opera sung in Italian a curious crossbreed had been in vogue. The leads imported from Italy sang in Italian and a chorus of English singers answered in English. Fortunately, from the standpoint of art, this state of affairs existed only for a short while.

There is one more Italian characteristic to be considered, that of the music. Baroque music of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth century in Europe, influenced so greatly by Italian composers, is ornamental in character. (Some musicologists even refer to it as artificial.) There were two ways of achieving this character in vocal music. One was to follow the custom of keeping to what was known as an affection throughout a composition. Baroque composers felt that an affection or mood was established and held if a patterned bass was adhered to faithfully throughout a composition; however, the patterned bass was not employed in The Beggar's Opera. The second method of ornamentation used in this period was that of musical illustration for some specific idea in the composition or even for an individual word. Since J. S. Bach was using this method of ornamentation at this time, for an understanding of the technique we will examine a few examples briefly.

1None of the drama sources I read mentioned this point. The Italian-style music was suggested as the only objection of the English.

Just the year after the premier performance of *The Beggar's Opera*, Bach presented the *St. Matthew Passion* in Leipzig. (This first performance was an utter failure; it was not performed again until Mendelssohn discovered it almost one hundred years later. Today it is considered one of the greatest sacred musical compositions of all time.) In this Passion there is heard a musical imitation of a cock crowing on the words "cock crew" in the phrase "and immediately the cock—crew—." On the words "My time is at hand," the voice imitates a trumpet call. Christ's words are accompanied by a string quartet "whose shimmering tones symbolize the halo of Divinity."¹ Christ is represented as temporarily losing awareness of his divinity when he asks God why He has forsaken him. At this point the quartet does not accompany. Bach's musical representation of words is probably more obvious. For example, the musical line descends abruptly for a word such as death. This is a simple matter of technique which Gay was able to employ effectively.

For Bach, the most valid basis for ornamentation in music lay in his belief that the greater the ornamental quality, the more he was honoring God.² Bach remained faithful to this conception all of his life. The fact that ornamentation was abused in opera suggests to me that when used as an end in itself it became more liable to defect. The general availability of coloratura singers during the baroque period makes it clear why opera was at this time more ornamental than it ever has been since then.


²This was a firm belief of Russell Miles, former music professor at the University of Illinois and life-time student of the music of J. S. Bach.
A considerable amount of invective language was hurled against Italian opera in London, part of it undeserved. The middle class as a whole had little understanding or appreciation of ornamentation in music; however, they grew to appreciate it in Handel's oratorios which were written after his operas. Schultz in reference to *The Beggar's Opera* speaks of true English music asserting itself over foreign music. Foreign music, particularly Handel's opera, was not the inferior product implied by Schultz in this statement. Nor did Gay's opera consist of English music only. That popular music in England of the 1720's did gain special favor is true. However, the criticism of Italian opera was not due to the quality of the music, but to the courtly characters, their behavior, the importation of foreign artists, and above all, to opera in a language not understood by the middle class in England, which was beginning to attend events that had formerly been exclusively patronized by the upper classes.

The artistic merit of some of Handel's opera arias has withstood the test of time. These arias are admired today for their beautiful, formal style. Two of the best known are "Largo" from *Serse* and "Where'er you Walk" from *Semele*. Those operas of Handel's which have been preserved would probably enjoy performance today as do his oratorios except for the fact that it is almost impossible to perform them due to the disappearance of the castrato.

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1Schultz, p. 137.

2*Serse* was a comic opera in which Handel employed burlesque. It is seldom realized today that "Largo" was written as a comic number. Regardless of its intended effect in the opera, however, the song is both beautiful and formal.

Handel's Italian opera was not so severely crippled by the advent of The Beggar's Opera as Schultz indicates.\textsuperscript{1} When Gay's opera appeared, Handel was having difficulty with his two leading female singers, Cuzzoni and Faustina. (Gay's prison scene squabble between Polly and Lucy is said to represent the bickering of the two Italian artists; in the opera Alessandro, Handel was careful to write the same number of arias for each.) Due to personal cast problems and also to the tremendous success of The Beggar's Opera, Handel did desist from opera production for a few years. Yet, the most brilliant period of London opera seria came after 1728 when Gay's opera was still enjoying great success.\textsuperscript{2}

The fact that Handel turned to the writing of oratorios and wrote no more operas after 1737 does not prove that the operas were deficient inherently. The failure of opera in London was a social phenomenon.\textsuperscript{3} The middle class, who could have supported opera seria, was uninterested in a type of entertainment that transcended the limits of their comprehension. The two opera companies in London were supported by the nobility which, weakened by the rising affluence of the middle class, was unable, or at least unwilling, to sustain the cost of this expensive institution.

The way was open for the acceptance of a new form of entertainment. Instead of kings, queens, lords, and attendants on the stage, Gay placed there pickpockets, bawds, and jailbirds. Replacing aria, arioso, and recitative of opera were the sixty-nine songs and the spoken dialogue of Gay's opera. Nonetheless, we are reminded of opera seria, for this opera is a parody of it. The characters who are a sorry contrast to royalty

\textsuperscript{1}Schultz, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{2}Bukofzer, p. 332.
\textsuperscript{3}Bukofzer, p. 331.
are much concerned, if not with royalty, with the upper class and, in particular, its fashions. They call each other gentlemen and in superficial ways attempt to imitate their social superiors. They have been referred to as the "Newgate gentry."

Before making a detailed analysis of Gay's songs, there is a question to be answered: "What record do we have of the music of this opera?" John Pepusch was the musical director of Lincoln's Inn Fields at the time Gay wrote his opera. Pepusch was a German organist and teacher of composition who came to London from Berlin in 1688. Some historians have mistakenly assumed that Pepusch chose the airs for The Beggar's Opera; however, it has been quite well established that Gay, a musician and ballad writer, was able to and did choose the airs himself. The name Pepusch was not even printed on the first edition of the opera, but appeared on the second. Two editions were published by John Watts in 1728 and one in 1733. The first was a quarto edition with the music which had been engraved on copper plates inserted at the end. ¹ The second edition had the airs cut in wood and inserted with the songs. The third edition of Watts' was in quarto with "the music beautifully engraved in copper."² The term "airs" of the second edition refers to melodies without accompaniment. Schultz says that for many years only the vocal score of the opera was printed.³ Originally, it seems, no accompaniment was planned for the songs. Not until the final rehearsals was an overture written and were airs arranged.⁴

¹In an examination of the original edition, I found it was quarto size. Blom on page 597 of Groves' Dictionary of Music and Musicians states that the first edition was an octavo one and that the music was "crudely" engraved. My observation was that the printing of the music in the first three editions was similar, clear in all three, not crude.
²Blom, p. 597.
³Schultz, p. 159.
⁴Ricardo Quintana, ed., Eighteenth Century Plays, xix. By "arranged" it is assumed Quintana means orchestrated.
The dialogue of The Beggar's Opera has been quite closely adhered to in the many editions, some of them in translation. The twentieth-century film score is an exception. Why is it that the musical score has been rearranged so frequently? Pepusch is said to have written only one overture and the figured basses for the songs. Figured basses were commonly used for keyboard parts during the baroque period. Chordal accompaniment is thus indicated in a short-hand number system. The harpsichordist was expected to choose rhythmic patterns and to embellish the music as he saw fit. This opera may have been performed with only a harpsichord for accompaniment in the early eighteenth century. Eric Blom speaks of the "very slender musical material in the original." Was he judging from the figured basses, and did he assume that no orchestral parts were written?

The musical scores of most baroque operas were never printed. These works were written with the assumption that they would be performed for only a season. Almost all of the music of the period was written for specific occasions. If music was written in honor of a wealthy patron, this gentleman might see fit to have the music printed for his own prestige or vanity. Much of the music of the period is lost, as its permanent value was never envisioned.

From the literature, I assume that the manuscript harpsichord part for the original production of The Beggar's Opera may be in existence. The fact that no orchestra parts may exist does not prove that none were.

1Blom, p. 596.
2Ibid., p. 597.
ever written. In the script Gay calls for bells, drums, and trumpets. If these less common instruments were used, it is conceivable that the more common strings and woodwinds may also have been used. A set of playing cards were printed in 1728 each with a song from Gay's opera. On some of the cards, in addition to the air, there was a flute part. This is no proof of an orchestral score but is suggestive of one. Also, when Bukofzer wrote his twentieth-century score, he is said to have modeled it on the original.

The Columbia Workshop production of 1954 had a baroque orchestra including harpsichord, two violins, viola, cello, string bass, flute, oboe, and trumpets. This is approximately the instrumentation of the Frederic Austin score which was used for the recording on which the present musical analysis has been based. For this Victor recording a double cast of singers and actors was employed. The actors were from the Old Vic Company. Malcolm Sargent conducted the Pro Arts Orchestra and singers. In the Austin score viola d'amore is sometimes substituted for the violin and viol da gamba for the cello; otherwise the instrumentation is identical with the Bukofzer score.

My analysis of the songs has been influenced unavoidable by the sound of the orchestral accompaniment. However, I have mainly noted

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1I have been unable to find in the accounts available to me any mention of the original instrumental accompaniment for this opera.

2Schultz, p. 19.


4I must admit that I did not recognize at any time the softer tones of the viola d'amore and the viol da gamba; however, since the Victor recording professes to be based on the Austin score, these rare stringed instruments should have been used as Austin specifies.
melodic detail. Even harmonic effect could be accounted for in a harpichord accompaniment. The songs form an integral part of the play. They do not intrude artificially. Usually the action of the play stops with a song, as is the case with opera seria of the time. Sometimes the songs further the action of the play. For instance, Peachum tells his daughter he will soon know by Macheath's coming if she is married. She then admits in song that she is married. Sometimes the idea of the song continues in the following dialogue without even a full new sentence. Polly sings "What I did, you must have done." Her mother continues in spoken dialogue, "Not with a highwayman.—You sorry slut!"¹

In general tone, the verse is appropriate to the air. Tune and words of a song are not always artistically paired by the person combining them, whether he be a musician or a writer of verse. More and less artistic partnership of verse and tune can be illustrated with the "Greensleeve" melody which has quite a lengthy, illustrious history. Probably no tune in The Beggar's Opera has been coupled with a greater variety of sentiment than that of "Greensleeves." Tracing the history of this lovely modal melody, Schultz found that it was used during the Reformation as a religious ballad.² In Shakespeare's day the love ballad entitled "Greensleeves" was sung to this same melody. Later the Cavaliers employed the tune for a party song.³ Today in England the tune is still

¹Eighteenth Century Plays, p. 192.
²Schultz, p. 340.
known as "Greensleeves," also with some seventeenth-century verse celebrating the New Year, and thirdly with the Christmas carol title: "What Child Is This?"¹

If there is such a measure as appropriateness of verse to tune, obviously these various verses cannot all be appropriate. The "Greensleeves" verse fits the tune admirably in my estimation. The dejected lover cannot forget Lady Greensleeve, who has rejected him. In keeping with this sentiment, the melody is haunting. Although written as a modal tune, it can be considered as minor, because the particular mode used is identical with one of the minor scales. In addition to the minor quality, there is an appeal in the simple melody which rises step-wise for a few notes and then descends step-wise, rising and falling regularly.

This melody under the title of "The Blacksmith" was popular among the Cavaliers; however, due to the nature of the melody, it seems doubtful that it spontaneously aroused much patriotic feeling. Also, it is difficult to conjecture Englishmen today celebrating the New Year with this melody. That fact that some do would seem to indicate that these persons have little sensitivity for appropriateness of a melody for a particular use. Songs for the New Year are not all bright and cheerful; but, "Auld Lang Syne," for example, is at least in major tonality. With enough "swing" the haunting quality of the tune could be lost; that is, any melody may be butchered. As for the carol "What Child Is This?" the words bear little relationship to the tune. It is hardly fitting to sing "The Kind of Kings Salvation Brings" to a melody which lacks assertive-

¹Simon, p. 51.
ness. A Victorian hymn writer and insurance executive, William Chatterton Dix, wrote the words of this setting. It has received popular acclaim; but, nevertheless, words and melody are not in accord. Macheath sings of the injustice of the poor being subjected to punishment which the rich may escape with a bribe of money; he philosophically accepts this state of affairs. The melody seems appropriate for such sentiment and mood.1

The words Gay used in his verse fit the music note by note quite satisfactorily for the most part. There are two songs where an artificial and inartistic effect is obtained. Probably Gay intended a humorous effect, especially since it is found in two songs; or, he could have created this effect unknowingly; but probably not, since he was usually quite masterful in combining words and music. In Polly's air "Virgins are like the fair flower in its lustre" (which was the most popular song in the opera according to reports), there is an awkwardness due to the use of unimportant words coming on accented syllables, that is, on the first beats of measures. In Purcell's song, the model, the same effect occurs, but not so many times. The fact that these first beats often come on the highest note of the phrase aggravates the problem. The result is most inartistic.

Virgins are like the fair flower in its lustre,
Which in the garden enamels the ground;
Near it the bees in play flutter and cluster,
And gaudy butterflies frolic around.

I have underlined the words awkwardly emphasized in this partial quotation. This same effect occurs in another song Polly sings, "All in the Downs."2

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1 The Victor recording omits this song. A judgement based on an actual hearing would be desirable.
2 Air XXXIV Act II.
Again the earlier song was more artistic. In this case it was Gay's own ballad "Black-eyed Susan."

Often Gay echoes the original song. Mrs. Peachum and Polly sing a song on the subject of sex. The original was a similar dialogue on the same subject; thus the tune already had a meaning which Gay kept. (An audience hearing this song today might react differently, because this same tune is now a well-known lullaby "Golden Slumbers Kiss Your Eyes.")

Surely the most common method of fitting words and music is to set happy words to a fast tune in the major mode and sad words to a slow tune in the minor mode. It may be observed, however, that some kinds of happiness may be expressed more fittingly in a slow tempo. The above pattern is only a first step in the tailoring of words to music, or vice versa. A few examples will be considered. Macheath, who throughout the opera seems somewhat removed from the tragedy hanging over him, heartily sings a jolly tune in a major key: "My heart was so free,/ It roved like the bee." After Lucy and Polly have been fighting tooth and nail over Macheath, he is still quite happy in spite of words to the contrary as he sings in a brisk 9/8 rhythm in f major:

How happy could I be with either
Were t'other dear charmer away!

In contrast, Polly, whose parents feel they have invested too much money in their daughter to lose her by marriage, sings an andante in a minor key sadly admitting she has married Macheath. This is "mock" sadness as

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1Air IX Act I.
2Air XV Act I.
3Air XXXV Act II.
4Air VIII Act I.
is all the sadness in The Beggar's Opera.

Let us see how realistic verse can be set to appropriate music. Jenny Diver sings "Before the barn-door crowing," and a cock is heard crowing. This simple verse has the simplest of melodies. Because of its simplicity, it is used today as a first-grade song with the old words, not Gay's, which were years ago incorporated into Mother Goose.

"With 'how d'you do?' and 'how d'you do?' and 'How d'you do? again." This is one of Lucy's lines. She also sings realistic verse set simply. In "Thus when a good huswife sees a rat," there is realistic representation of words. On the word "shaken," the melodic line shakes back and forth between two notes eight times. On the word "throw" there is a fast scale-wise descent of a fifth. Macheath's dramatic "The charge is prepar'd" gains its realistic quality in a different way. It appropriately sounds more like a recitative than a song. This is due to lack of lyrical quality—a deficiency which is just what is needed at this point in the play.

Most of the songs in The Beggar's Opera involve irony and mock pathos. In these songs the common technique is to choose words with a double meaning and airs which will reinforce the false meaning. It is in this category that ornamentation plays a major role. Other musical devices for obtaining humor or irony are: extreme ritard, octave jump, lush orchestration, rhythm.

Ornamentation is used most extensively in Polly's songs. In her aria "Virgins are like the fair flower," there is a trill on the word "enamel" which in this context means decorate. There is also a trill on

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1Air XXVII Act II.

2Air LVII Act III.
the word "frolic." Undoubtedly, these trills were considered by Gay as a means of poking fun at Italian opera. In another aria Polly sings "Paired in death as paired in love." The verbal comparison is highlighted by a descending scale-wise passage on the second "paired," accenting the melodramatic content of the phrase. Ritards in music have an association with sentiment. The extreme ritard at the end of these lines of Polly's which follow suggest mock tragedy:

For on the rope that hangs, my dear,
Depends poor Polly's life.

When Polly sings of the "fatal cart," the ornamentation of these words creates a mock heroic effect, as it also does in the following lines where practically every syllable is sung to two different musical notes:

Thus I tear thee from my bleeding heart!
Fly hence, and let me leave thee.

On the final word "thee," Polly drops a full octave which is most melodramatic. The all-string orchestra adds to the lush, sentimental effect. In a duet Polly and Macheath sing, when Polly holds the word "sighs," the flute plays a descending passage. On the word "flutter" in the same aria, the vocal line flutters.

In an aria sung by Mrs. Peachum, there is mention of all the clothes a daughter must have: "scarfs and stays and gloves and lace." For these words, there is a descriptive fussy accompaniment of fast, staccato eighth notes.

1 Air XII Act I.
2 Air XII Act I.
3 Air XVII Act I.
4 Air XIV Act I.
5 Air VII Act I.
When Lucy holds out the drink of ratsbane for Polly to drink, she sings a deceptive song. The music emphasizes the literal, false meaning of the words:

\[ \text{Come sweet lass} \\
\text{Let's banish sorrow.} \]

This sweet melody has a pure, pastoral quality which the woodwind accompaniment gives to it. Lucy sings the word "banish" to four tones which occur on a final cadence giving even greater prominence to the words. With the addition of a ritard, the effect is indeed comical. When Lucy sings "I'm like a skiff... with her rudder broke, and her anchor lost," she means it. There is no double meaning here. However, the music does not sound like the desperate wail of a ship-wrecked victim, but, with its rollicking dotted rhythms, like a jolly sailing song. As a result, we laugh at Lucy. She sings to the then well-known tune "Walpole." The Prime Minister was the first to stand and clap his hands when he heard this tune, probably avoiding more ridicule than might otherwise have been the case.

The "March in Rinaldo" used for the highwaymen is in a brisk march tempo. Trumpet tone is psychologically linked with bravery in a march. The presentation of these characters as heroic is superb in the idiom of burlesque.

In Act II Macheath and "the ladies of fame" dance a cotillion, a formal dance for aristocracy. In \textit{The Beggar's Opera} the characters are fond of putting on airs of the upper class. They would see nothing

\[ ^1 \text{Air LI Act III.} \]
\[ ^2 \text{Air XLVII Act III.} \]
\[ ^3 \text{Air XX Act II.} \]
\[ ^4 \text{Air XXII Act II.} \]
ludicrous in their use of this "genteel" dance form. The music is rather formal; that is, it contains no tripping notes and proceeds at a moderate tempo. It resembles a hymn in its short simple phrases. These are balanced phrases; balanced structure is characteristic of dance music. While Macheath and the ladies perform this "proper" dance, they sing frankly about drink and sport, supposedly completely unaware of the incongruous effect of doing so. The audience is treated to some capital burlesque.

Macheath's air, "If the heart of a man is depressed with cares," fairly drips with sentimentality. The violins trill on "sweetly." The overly-sentimental verse is reinforced by the sweetness of a flute following the vocal line. The technique of the octave leap is again employed—touching! In contrast, there is Macheath's fast-moving song "At the tree I shall suffer with pleasure." We laugh at Macheath as we did at Lucy, because the fast dotted rhythm belies the words he is singing. This type of fast, strongly accented song was used by Gilbert and Sullivan in their English comic operas written a century and a half later. Macheath sings one slow, minor tune, "Man may escape from rope and gun." The triple use of the word "woman," each time at a lower pitch, represents musically (actually quite unmusically) Macheath's defeat by this low creature, woman. He is dragged down, down, down—and one more score is made against Italian opera.

When Macheath appears before Polly and Lucy in handcuffs, we have the ridiculous situation of each woman claiming him for her husband. True love is admitted with all three members of the triangle present.

1 Air XXI Act II.
2 Air XXV Act II.
3 Air XXVI Act II.
There might be an element of pathos if we felt the characters were admirable, or perhaps even if we cared at all about their fates. Throughout the opera we have recognized them as comic figures. At this point we hear one of the loveliest melodies of the opera commencing "Hither, dear husband, turn your eyes," a poignant air of Scotch derivation. The all-string orchestra reinforces the tender love claims of the script. And what is the purpose? Mock pathos.

The burlesque continues in the condemned hold where an entire scene is sung by Macheath, parts of one song after another, with a drink between most of the fragments to separate them. In the popular "Salley in our Alley" tune, on the word "death" the vocal line descends; then, on the second syllable of "grimmer" for a comic effect the melody ascends a full octave. On the first syllable of the word "busses" six notes are sung. This is indeed a parody of coloratura.

Again we have a short scene with the three lovers. Polly and Lucy sing the beautiful Scotch air in dialogue form. This time Macheath enters in the singing dialogue. As in the duet of Amahl and his mother in the last scene of Menotti's opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, a romantic effect is created with much use of thirds and sixths and slowly descending passages where one voice takes over from the next. Chimes add to the romantic effect in Gay's opera. The situation in the two operas is, however, quite different. In *Amahl* there is genuine love between mother and son; in *The Beggar's Opera* there is again mock pathos. Once more there is literal representation of words. When Macheath sings that his courage is out, meaning that his bottle is empty, the melody drops.

\(^1\)Air LII Act III.
After the player revamps this opera in the Italian style of the time with the happy ending, Macheath declaims, "Let us give this day to mirth." Schultz speaks of the "jolly 'Lumps of Pudding'" which follows. This tune is in d minor! Macheath escapes from death into problems. Knowing him well by this time, we don't see his situation as very desperate. Instead we are convulsed with the mock pathos in the new turn of events. Macheath's complications are mirrored literally in the music. This is the only number in the opera with a counter-melody. There are actually six vocal parts in the concluding lines. Of course, we do not know with certainty whether the opera was originally concluded with this arrangement of "Thus I stand like a Turk." If so, it is quite possible that Gay and Pepusch had in mind the complexity of the situation with the appearance of so many wives.

It is hoped that the history of the songs and the explanation of opera seria of the time has made the detailed analysis of the songs meaningful. With the tune "Thus I stand like a Turk" in our minds, let us take leave of The Beggar's Opera.

1Schultz, p. 161.
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