

Music Symbolism in Stuart Pageantry

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Music is one of the basic components of most seventeenth-century courtly entertainments. Since its origins in the Tudor festivals till its definition in the Stuart period, the masque was the genre where music, text and scenery interacted and coexisted in variable equilibrium. In spite of its transcendence, the recurrence of musical commentaries in the written versions of these works, and the involvement of some of the famous masque-writers was scarce. As usual, those arts whose existence is dependent of time, witness their ephemerality at the very end of the performance, leaving no other trace of their being but in the score. But scores are poor testimonies of the performance and they seldom accompany the edition of the masques. Regardless of the authorial implication and the theatrical circumstances stated above, the function of music exceeded its incidental nature in the revels and measures, the common social dances of every masque, and became primarily symbolic.

Music symbolism was not an exclusive courtly issue. In connection with poetry, or standing on its own in instrumental pieces, music embodied an allegorical and symbolic status for Renaissance and Baroque composers. The Renaissance interest in fusing the arts underwent a certain degree of perfection in the close relationship they found between music and rhetoric. By considering the melody a particular kind of discourse, musicians found an appropriate tool to depict poetical texts in musical notes. At the beginning of the seventeenth-century the expressive means of music changed. In the previous century, which will be called Renaissance henceforth, the composers' concern was the enhancement of individual words within the sentence with the help of musical devices. This attitude evolved towards the establishment of musical-rhetorical tools to depict whole sentences. As Monteverdi put it, "l'orazione" should be the mistress of the music. In this way, Baroque composers achieved an affective style with the depiction of individual passions stemming from the global framework of the poetic text.

In instrumental pieces, which are not composed on a textual basis, a different kind of symbolism is achieved. On the one hand, the title of the piece (the only linguistic element it has) may prove a useful means to develop an expressive style, and this is, undoubtedly, the case of many of the extant scores of masque music. The dramatic context of the melody may also indicate, on the other hand, a suitable effect.

The symbolism of instrumental music lacks the wide attention paid to songs. In the poor literature of the masque, the specific analyses of the symbolic function of dances other than those of the revels or measures are scarce if not inexistent. Since pure melodies, without any linguistic support, are dark hieroglyphics when considered in isolation, it is necessary to find out to what extent this music helped to build the complex symbolism of the masque in performance. This paper aims at analysing some of the devices used by the composers to

achieve simple musical effects that fuse with poetic and scenic ones in the production of the masque.

First the contexts where these musical pieces appear will be dealt with; and finally, a classification of instruments will be outlined according to their particular function. Because of the intellectual quarrels underlying the production of masques, the written text, edited by the poet, does not generally offer but a slight and incomplete account of both the stagecraft and the music. More ample information on these topics appears only when the entertainment is designed by the architect, as in the case of the last Stuart masques produced by Inigo Jones; or the musician, as in some of Thomas Campion's works. In both cases either the poetic text is subservient to the visual construction, or as essential as music. The authorial implications, translated into the world of masque production as emphasis on a single formal constituent, pose several problems. There is no contemporary edition that pays equal attention to text, music and scenery, so that scattered or lost designs and scores are hard to find and connect to the known entertainments. This is the reason why other sources are needed to get as complete a glimpse to the original production as may help discern the function of music in the performance.

Apart from the short annotations that Ben Jonson, writer of most Stuart masques, and other masque-writers introduce in their editions, there are two valuable documents from the period which offer an unbiased description of two different performances. The first is Orazio Busino's account of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, an entertainment written by Ben Jonson and presented in January 1618. Both the original Italian version and its translation into English are available in several editions of Jonson's works. Thomas Campion offers the second source in his *The Description of a Masque presented before the King's Majesty at Whitehall on the Twelfth Night last, in honour of the Lord Hayes, and his Bride*. This detailed description is printed before the text of this 1607 work, known as *Lord Hay's Masque*.

Orazio Busino was chaplain to the Venetian Ambassador, invited to the masque, and wrote this long account in which information is given not only of the performance, but also of the atmosphere previous to it:

About 6 o'clock the king and his retinue made their appearance in the masquing room. At his entry the shawms and sackbuts to the number of fifteen or twenty began to play very well a consort of contrapuntal fantasy (...) Next followed twelve extravagant antimasquers (...) They danced a while to the sound of shawms and sackbutts, performing various and extravagant antics (...) Mercury then appeared before the King and made a speech. After him came a theorbo player in a gown, who sang rather oddly in his throat, accompanying himself on his instrument (...) When they (masquers) reached the ground the violins, to the number of twenty-five or thirty, began to play their airs. (Sabot: 544-5)

The account clearly distinguishes three kinds of musical pieces, each accompanying a determined moment of the performance: the royal entry, the antimasque and main masque music. This could be completed with a few more details appearing in Jonson's text and which, strikingly enough, provide interesting information: "to a wild music of cymbals, flutes and tabors, is brought forth Comus".

The second document is more musicological in nature because it is written by a

musician. If Busino's account may at times be misleading because of his lack of knowledge of music, Campion's description is more complete as far as technical accuracy is concerned.

The great hall received this division and order: The upper part where the cloth and chair of State were placed, had scaffolds and seats on either side continued to the screen; right before it was made a partition for the dancing place; on the right hand whereof were consorted ten Musicians, with Bass and Meane Lutes, a Bandora, a double Sack-Butt, and a Harpsichord, with two treble Violins; on the other side somewhat nearer the screen were placed nine Violins and three Lutes, and to answer both the Consorts (as it were in a triangle) six Cornets, and six Chapel voices were seated almost right against them, in a place higher in respect of the piercing sound of those Instruments (...) As soon as the King was entered the great Hall, the Hoboys entertained the time till his Majesty and his train were placed, and then after a little expectation the consort of ten began to play an Ayre (...) They came down in this order: Four Silvans in green taffeta, and wreaths, two bearing mean Lutes, the third a bass Lute, and the fourth a deep Bandora (...) While this Chorus was repeated twice over, the nine Maskers in their green habits solemnly descended to the dancing place, in such order as they were to begin their dance; and as soon as the Chorus ended, the violins, or consort of twelve began to play the second new dance, which was taken in form of an Echo by the cornets, and then catched in like manner by the consort of ten, sometimes they mingled two musics together. (Campion, *passim*)

This description is far more useful for the purpose of this analysis, although the division of musical pieces extracted from Busino's account does not operate in Campion's. The antimasque only appeared as an outstanding ingredient in 1610 with Jonson's *The Masque of Queens*, but by comparing these two sources and the minor accretions collected from the editions of the masques, an operative musical-symbolic framework could be worked out.

The antimasque stands for the extravagant arena of the entertainments. All the characters and situations that do not point towards the praising and flattery of the main masque, are suitable for the antimasque. The antagonistic enactment of virtue is symbolised both visually and musically. The witches in Jonson's *Queens*, appear "with a kind of hollow and infernal musique...All with spindles, timbrels, rattles, or other venefical instruments, making a confused noise, with strange gestures". In *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* a sphinx comes forth dancing to "a strange musique of wilde instruments".

The musical term associated to these entries of antimasquers is that of "wild music". The sound of rattles, cymbals and drums do certainly create a tonal colour in accordance to the evil nature of the antimasque characters. However, as Andrew Sabol puts it, this "wild music" could also be the piercing sound of hautboys or sackbutts, which usually accompany the royal train. Then, it is obviously the particular dramatic context that defines the quality of the music regardless of its use in opposing situations.

The antimasque world is too narrow a space as to be considered an exception to the common uses of the time. In Busino's account, the hautboys entertain the awaiting audience and

announce the entrance of the king, and similar explanations can be found in many masques. Playing the hautboy in the antimasque is not indecorous in so far as the melody fits the scene. Some contrastive effects might be used, however, when typical main masque sounds are heard in the antimasque.

In Jonson's *Oberon*, the satyrs dance to the violins, which play a melody full of changes and musical devices convenient to their wanton nature. The Prince's dances from the masque proper are accompanied by a consort of twenty-two lutes, in clear contrast to the violins. Nevertheless, as it is collected from Campion, certain ensembles or consorts of instruments were organised according to the characters they accompanied. The so-called "broken consort" was a mixture of bowed and plucked string instruments together with some others, normally woodwind instruments, used to add more tonal colouring. It seems that unbroken consorts accompany royalty, this is groups of instruments from similar families, either lutes, violins or viols; a broken consort should be generally avoided.

Solo singers used to accompany themselves, like in the public theatre, with portable instruments such as lutes, or viols, so that the voices were not silenced by the too loud a music of more numerous consorts. This "loud music" was a necessary device, though, to soften the noise of the machinery used for spectacular stage transformations, such as *machina versatilis*, moving clouds or flats. It was played by broken consorts with at least sack-butts or cornets.

The paradramatic circumstances of the performances became serious drawbacks and obstacles for the musicians as well. Noisy crowds of courtiers, with slight interest in the symbolic challenges of masques, and anxious for the revels and measures, compelled the composers to arrange and adapt their scores to the poor ballroom acoustics. The strident woodwind instruments served quite well this purpose, and they customarily accompanied the choirs and the social dances.

The economic situation of the court was also a deciding factor in the annual productions of masques, because not always big expenses were afforded. Some masques were performed with a few musicians, although it seems that their arrangement resembled that of more costly entertainments with tens of participants. In any case, a decreased number of performers does not preclude the masque from gaining its symbolic complexity.

Baroque instruments and their diverse arrangements seem to play an essential role in the creation of the symbolic message of Stuart pageantry. As a general rule, ideophones or anomalous ensembles, such as viol, drum and pipe, are used in the antimasque to depict the unruly behaviour of its characters. In the more harmonious ambitus of the masque proper, the louder bowed string instruments accompany the social dances or some of the main dances. The latter becoming more majestic to the sound of homogenous ensembles, such as one of plucked string instruments.

In this way, the symbolism of music, which depends on dramatic and paradramatic factors, can only be discerned in analyses of individual masques. Nevertheless, these generalisations might help consider instrumental music as a meaningful and essential component in the production and understanding of Stuart entertainments.

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