



**For Love Ev'ry Creature is Formed**  
from *King Arthur* (Z628)  
by Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

**Analysis**

**Broad Description/Type**

*For Love Ev'ry Creature* is in the second scene of the 4<sup>th</sup> act of Purcell's semi-opera, *King Arthur* (Z628). It is a passacaglia duet for soprano and bass, accompanied by a continuo part that uses a ground bass.

**Background Information**

*King Arthur*, also known as, *The British Worthy*, was first performed around May or June of 1691 and is a semi-opera (speaking and singing) in five acts with a libretto by John Dryden. It is based on King Arthur's battles between the Britons and Saxons, with added magical and supernatural appearances by Merlin, Cupid, Venus and a few Germanic Saxon gods.

As was common in early English dramatic operas, the main characters generally do not sing, but are mostly sung *to* by secondary characters—usually the supernatural ones. In act 4, it is the spirits of the trees that beckon Arthur and try to convince him that his beloved Emmeline is trapped within the trees, rather than in the castle of the evil Saxon King Oswald.

Momentarily, Arthur falls for the trap, tries to free Emmeline by cutting away at the tree and sees blood pouring out and fears that he may have inadvertently killed his love. Fortunately, Merlin steps in and clears the forest of the dark magic and Arthur realizes that she is not there after all and continues on to the castle. The whole opera is quite complicated, but it is this scene that is critical to understanding this duet.

The entire libretto was likely a political allegory about who would take the throne after the death of Charles II (who happened to be a huge arts patron for both Dryden and Purcell). Those who supported Charles' Catholic brother, James, were called "Tories" and the supporters of the illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth were called "Whigs". In the opera, King Arthur may represent Charles II, the Britons are the Tories and the Saxons are the Whigs. Oswald is the Duke of Monmouth and Emmeline represents "the national conscience," according to the literary analysis of Curtis Price.

The libretto draws inspiration from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with which there are many parallels. It also has been linked to several epic poems of the time. For example, the enchanted woods scene (where this duet is featured) was probably inspired by Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (a mythified version of the First Crusade).

The music of *King Arthur* is among Purcell's most lyrical and tuneful (the song "Fairest Isle" being one well-known example) and borrows heavily from the French rhythms and dances forms of the period.

**How this Background Information "Sold Me" on the Piece**

I love this particular duet text because on the surface, it appears to be two lovers singing to each other, when in reality it is actually two "spirits" (not really gender defined), involves dark magic, enchantment by an evil sorcerer and a despair-filled hero. So much more edgy than a simple girlfriend/boyfriend song! Even better, the context makes it an easy sell for groups of all boys, mixed voices, younger choirs or more mature ensembles. As I worked with a middle school boychoir on this piece, the background and context made it a

love song that all the boys could really buy in to. The themes of magic, struggle between good and evil and the complicated journey of King Arthur to free Emmeline are elements that have been attractive in literary works throughout history and the present time.

**Text:**

*For love ev'ry creature is form'd by his nature,  
No joyes are above the pleasures of love.*

## Elements of Music

### Melody

I often ask my young students, “Are the melodies that you know mostly steps or mostly skips?” They usually presume that melodies are predominantly skips, but on more careful study, they see that the vast majority of vocal lines have a greater percentage of steps by far. The opening of this duet is a huge exception! In 35 pitches, there is only stepwise motion between 5 pitches and the rest are skips (3rds, 4ths and 5ths). The result is a vocal line that sounds very “instrumental”—and less warm and human-like.

Going into the second phrase, the melody utilizes more stepwise motion and the text is set melismatically—a contrast to the syllabic setting of the first line. As a result, the first line comes off as a more removed observation: “For Love ev'ry creature was formed by his Nature” (emphasizing that we have no control over how we were put together), while the second line, “No Joyes are above the pleasures of Love” is more passionate, intimate and moving. You can almost hear the magic working as the song progresses.

The melismatic directions are also interesting to note. The word “Joyes” is always set with a bouncing (dotted rhythm) upward movement, while “pleasure” is set in a downward sweeping gesture that always leads to a phrase ending on the word “love.” Particularly interesting is one spot where the melody seems to stutter or stall, repeating the same two pitches in an urgent dotted rhythm (mm.27-28 in soprano, echoed by bass in 30-32).

### Harmony



These four notes are the ground bass line that is repeated ten times throughout the piece, except for two measures (24-25) and this drives the harmonic construct. Though the bass line is virtually unchanged,

Purcell does vary the harmony, and it is the variation that brings a real sense of motion and subtle unpredictability to the stable anchor of the ground bass. In Baroque tradition, the notated part is just bass line and harmonic figures. A suggested realization is given in my CPDL edition, but the accompanist is certainly free to improvise within the given figured bass. Typical of descending passacaglia ground bass lines, each 4-bar “cell” moves gradually toward the V chord, which generates forward motion and prevents the endless repetition from bogging down.

### Rhythm and Meter

The iambic short-long rhythm of the bass line in triple meter is the familiar passacaglia rhythm, used in other famous Baroque chaconnes and passacaglias like Purcell’s “Dido’s Lament” the Bach “Crucifixus” from the B minor Mass, and Bach’s famous Passacaglia and Fuge in C minor for organ.



As mentioned, the two lines of text are set in contrast, not only melodically but also rhythmically. The first line is striking for the almost “robotic” use of all quarter notes. This, combined with a melodic contour of nearly all skips, adds to its “robotic” non-human character.

The second line warms by breaking away from the syllabic text setting, intervallic skips and all quarter note rhythm by suddenly introducing strings of more rapturous melismas that feature dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythms on the word “Joyes” and shorter bursts of smooth eighth notes on the word “pleasure.”

We also see the vocal lines take on moments of the passacaglia rhythm—always on the word “no” (as in “No Joyes are above the pleasures of Love”). Repeating the word “no” in the passacaglia rhythm gives emphasis

to the text and to the metric pulse. The pairing of this with the other vocal line in more wild melismatic movement (or in hocket, like measure 35-36) creates an exciting, seductive frenzy that is a marked contrast to the more restrained feel of the first line. It is this contrast that makes the listener feel Osmond's magic working on King Arthur as he attempts to move through enchanted woods, struggling with whether to trust his head or his heart.

### **Form**

The form is a kind of two-part structure, based on the text, with a clear difference in rhythm and melody between the first line of text and the second. It follows the rhythmic and metric structures of a passacaglia over a ground bass line.

### **Texture**

The gamba (or modern cello), harpsichord, soprano and bass voice are the only instruments in the texture. Most of the textural changes come from contrasts in the vocal lines. The two vocal lines are set polyphonically until the end of each section, where the voices come together homophonically for a climax, giving the piece a sense of continuous motion.

### **The Heart**

Essential to *For Love Ev'ry Creature* is the pairing of the rational and predictable—as portrayed by the steady quarter notes and ground bass line—with the effusive and spontaneous, depicted by melismatic bursts of dotted and eighth note figures, illustrating the power of love (and magic) to overwhelm reason.

## **Skill Outcome**

**Students will sing melismatic passages with rhythmic clarity and uninterrupted tone.**

### **Strategies**

#### **• Create a Conversation**

Have students give improvised syllabic answers (one note per word) to conversational questions (sung by teacher first, then alternating) then melismatic answers, with focus given to extending the vowels in one or two words. This may seem like it is more about learning what a melisma IS, rather than the art of singing it, but the first step to singing with energy throughout a melisma, is realizing that you actually are singing one word. This recognition is easier for students when it is presented in their own words, in their own language.

#### **• Take a Picture**

Have students sing their very best “oh” (or whatever vowel you are working on). Take a camera and capture them mid vowel. Now, have them take out their imaginary cameras and “freeze” with their best, most open vowel. Continue singing after the camera “clicks” the next time—through a melisma, but keep the “picture perfect” vowel shape in place. You can take imaginary or real pictures throughout the melisma to check for shape consistency. (The point is to keep the tall vowel sensation the same. It doesn't really matter if they look the same in the picture, as long as the vowel isn't being closed or warped by changing pitches.)

#### **• Add a Letter**

Have students sing a given melisma by adding a hard consonant to the front of each note—like t or k for rhythmic clarity. Then try it with a softer frontal syllable (d, l, f) and finally “h”, while maintaining clarity and energy in the tone. Practice moving between with-h's and without-h's to distinguish what the line really sounds and feels like with no “interruption” of energy and sound (through glottal stops or extra air).

#### **• Make It To the Finish Line**

Teacher moves from one side of the room to the other, stopping if you hear a break in the melisma. The students' goal is to sing the melisma and make it all the way to the “finish line” with no stopping. After they are starting to distinguish a good melismatic line from one with extra breath or inconsistent vowel shapes, have a student be the “mover/stopper”.

- **Scale/Sightread in Melisma**

Sing a scale on neutral syllables (ta, da, etc.) with 2, then 4, then 8 notes per syllable, focusing on connecting the vowel sound and keeping a consistent shape. After sightreading a new melody (teacher or class generated, on the board) on solfège, turn the exercise into a melisma. Let the students group the notes into melismas. Use combinations of dotted and even eighth note melismas as well.

## **Assessment**

- **Partner Sing (Peer Assessment)**

Students sing a melismatic passage to a partner. The listener raises a hand if they hear an “interruption” in tone. Students can confer, define what the interruption was (less energy, different vowel, air, etc...) and then switch singers.

- **Chain Singing (Teacher Assessment)**

Establish a pattern (like D,M,R,F,M,S,F,R,D) that can be repeated and quickly continued throughout the whole room without interruption. Have each student (or groups of two) sing the pattern. One group starts on ‘Do’ as the other group is ending. (This can be a graded or ungraded assessment.)

- **True Confession (Self Assessment)**

Ask students to self identify if they hear an interruption or break in their own melismatic line. Encourage them to be honest by sincerely complimenting their ability to distinguish this subtle difference in their own singing. Until they can hear it on their own, it won’t be consistently correct.

## **Knowledge Outcome**

**Students will recognize the ground bass and demonstrate its harmonic implications and possibilities.**

### **Strategies**

- **Lotsa Osta (Ostinato)**

After the piece is established note-wise, have four students play the four descending ground bass pitches on the tone chimes. After the ground bass is established, cue the students in to sing “For Love Every Creature” and let them be surprised that it fit. Reflect on *how* it fit. Did the harmony stay the same? Take a look at the music and count how many times the pattern is repeated (10). Does the pattern ever break? If so, where?

- **Heart-and-Soul-Palooza**

The normally banned piece is allowed in the choir room for this one and only special event! See how many students can play this piece. (Wow! Everyone!) Ask for a few volunteers in duets and see how many “variations” there are on this piece. Discuss what is different about the way people play it and whether there is any common element. Hopefully, they all play the same bass line. Introduce the concept of a bass line that repeats throughout a piece and the term “ground bass.”

- **A Square is a Rectangle, but a Rectangle Isn’t Always a Square!**

So, the ground bass looks a lot like an ostinato on the surface, but there are some differences. Mainly, it is the implication of a bass line to drive the harmony. That, and the fact that an ostinato doesn’t have to involve pitch. These are things that 8<sup>th</sup> graders can figure out, so what is the Ground Bass...Rectangle or Square?

- **Déjà vu All Over Again**

Now that we’ve hear the ubiquitous Heart and Soul ground bass and we are learning a new Baroque piece that uses a ground bass, it seems like they are everywhere! In fact, they do occur in popular music. Have students hunt for ground basses in pieces that they hear outside of class, as well as in other music that they

might know from choir (orchestra or band). Pachelbel's *Canon in D* and Purcell's *Sound the Trumpet* are two examples that my students knew.

### •Who is Driving This Thing?

When the bass line is set, this has implications for the melody and harmony. Review basic triad construction and then give a little puzzle: If I have the note "C", what are the possible triads that it could belong to? Listen to the possibilities with tone chimes (or piano) and determine that there are different color possibilities (major, minor, etc...). (Discussing 7<sup>th</sup> chords is a possibility, if the class is advanced enough.) Now that we can see, understand and intellectually know that a bass line drives the harmony and melody, let's go for a ride...

### • Stand By Me

Here is a bass line that students will find familiar, or at least catch on to, right away. Have all of them sing the Stand By Me bass line on "dum," being sure to show how the last and first measures are the same and could be confusing. Then, invite them to improvise harmony using long tones over the top of a group of students on the bass part. They should move notes as little as possible at first and overtime, begin to use different rhythms and faster moving pitches. Have the students analyze and discuss why certain pitches fit, how it can be fun to "not fit in" for a short time and how even though they are "improvising", there are still certain choices that make more sense than others. Transfer this discussion into how the melody of *For Love Ev'ry Creature* is constructed, as well as the job of the keyboard player in accompanying when only a figured bass line is given. Try the improvisation activity with *For Love Ev'ry Creature*!

## Assessment

### • Compose Your Own

Have students write their own ground bass, at least 4 measure in length, but no more than 8. They must supply one possible harmonization for their ground bass. For more advanced students, they can opt to write a melodic line that fits with their composed ground bass.

### •New Pieces, Same Idea

Give the students scores to a few different works and have them figure out which one has a ground bass. Have them show how many measures the ground bass is, how many times it repeats and whether it ever breaks out of the pattern or not.

(Many of the strategies listed above also have assessment components.)

## **Affective Outcome**

**Students will explore and analyze  
the human attraction to myths, magic, and the supernatural.**

## Strategies

### • Acting Up

Read the text to "For Love Ev'ry Creature and have students write a short description of what the scene might be about in the opera that it comes from (don't tell the name of the opera).

Tell a simplified version of the story of King Arthur that focuses on Act 4, where our piece takes place. Use students in the class to represent the different characters. It helps kids remember the story and follow the complicated details. They can do a little acting and even have a small costume or prop.

How did their guess compare with the actual opera scene? Discuss why they might have been thrown off by the text and what surprised them about the story.

### • Modern Magic

What books or movies can you think of that involve some type of supernatural, magical or mythological elements? Why do you think these elements are so popular—especially in modern times? (Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, etc.) Have students reflect on these questions in a journal entry and invite them to share

their ideas in a class discussion focused on what makes magic still a compelling and popular theme, in a day when few people actually believe in magic.

### • **Music Magic**

Sing through the piece with the focus on the difference in feeling between the first and second sections of the song. Have small groups study both halves of *For Love* and list as many words as they can to describe each section—if possible, give musical reasons for the way it feels. Have them speculate how the magic that is happening in the story might be reflected by Henry Purcell in the construction of the music.

Have a person walk across the room in a “hypnotic trance”, like they are being controlled by something else. Then have them move across the room like the person that they love more than anything else, depends on their efforts to save them. (If they seem like they don’t care, their loved one is toast.) Which part of the song is which movement? What makes the first part trance-like and the second part more passionate or wild?

### **Assessment**

Have the students in pairs, sing the duet, as if the context was Romeo singing to Juliet (or Juliet to Juliet, depending on the number of boys/girls). Now have them sing it again, as if they were two tree spirits conspiring because of dark magic to trap the poor, unsuspecting hero of the story.

In writing, have the students reflect on the difference that the supernatural context made on their own feeling performing the piece. Why do you think that people who are beyond the age of actually believing in magic can still be drawn to fictional stories that involve it?

## **Music Selection**

As I stated in the beginning, I was drawn to this piece by the context as much as, if not more than, the actual music and text. *For Love Ev’ry Creature* is a well crafted example of two part polyphony that is within the grasp of an older MS or HS choir and it highlights several forms that are worthy of study—specifically the passacaglia (of which there are not that many vocal examples—especially not for this age) and the ground bass. It is not easy, but because it is so short in length, it is not an overwhelming challenge for a young choir and the way the polyphonic lines overlap make it very rewarding to sing and learn in small chunks. Still, if it were a duet sung between two lovers, I would not find it as compelling—at least with students who sometimes act as though they believe cooties actually exist and are lost in embarrassed laughter with the mention of the word “lover.” Of course, the song is still about love, passion and romance, but the fact that it is sung *to* the main character (by trees, no less) and that it is part of an evil magical plot to keep King Arthur from discovering a secret hidden castle adds just the right amount of imaginative, magical interest to the story to keep the “love thing” from being a distraction.

It turned out that this was one of the most popular pieces of the last few years in a boychoir where there were many excellent and well-liked pieces. The way that the boys really loved singing and performing this selection was beyond what I had hoped.

### **Introducing the piece**

If a young choir sees this piece and then simply picks it up and starts reading through it, the major friction point will be the love-themed text, archaic language and rather difficult melodic line. The way to eliminate this friction before it heats up negative student attitudes is to sell the drama and excitement of the story and its strange magical scene. For that reason, I chose to use the affective strategy “Acting Up” to first expose my students to *For Love Ev’ry Creature Was Form’d*.