

Study notes for 'Flow my Tears' by John Dowland

*Flow, my tears, fall from your springs!
Exiled for ever, let me mourn;
Where night's black bird her sad infamy sings,
There let me live forlorn.
Down vain lights, shine you no more!
No nights are dark enough for those
That in despair their lost fortunes deplore.
Light doth but shame disclose.
Never may my woes be relieved,
Since pity is fled;*

*And tears and sighs and groans my weary days
Of all joys have deprived.
From the highest spire of contentment
My fortune is thrown;
And fear and grief and pain for my deserts
Are my hopes, since hope is gone.
Hark! you shadows that in darkness dwell,
Learn to contemn light
Happy, happy they that in hell
Feel not the world's despite.*

Background

'Flow my Tears' also known as 'Lachrimae' (Latin for 'tear') is a lute song and an instrumental work by the renowned Elizabethan lutenist and composer John Dowland.

It was perhaps the single most popular and widely distributed musical work of the late sixteenth/early seventeenth centuries. It occurs in about a hundred manuscripts and prints from England, Scotland, The Netherlands, France, Germany Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Italy.

Lachrimae was Dowland's most famous composition and it became his signature song, literally as well as metaphorically: he would occasionally sign his name "Jo. Dolandi de Lachrimae".

The 'tear' motif

The piece opens with a famous descending 4 note 'tear' motif. This is followed by another 4 note descending passage a third higher. This motif is skilfully woven throughout the piece in the other 'voice' parts as well.

As you study the solo, look out for this motif and see how it is used in the composition. This will greatly enhance your interpretation and enjoyment of the piece.

Published versions by Dowland

Dowland published three main arrangements of his composition.

- 1) A solo lute version with elaborate variations, published in 1596 called 'Lachrimae Pavane'.
- 2) A version for voice and lute, as well as a four-part voice version, published in 1600 called 'Flow my Tears'.
- 3) A version for a consort of viols and lute published in 1604 called 'Lachrimae Antiquae'.

The many other versions

There is no 'definitive' version of this or other pieces from the sixteenth century (as we might expect for a piece by Beethoven or Chopin).

These days, so-called 'classical' works tend to be 'set in stone' and classical performers don't deviate from the written score. In the renaissance the approach to performing music was quite different.

Dowland and his contemporaries would have played their own pieces in a semi-improvised manner in much the same way as jazz musicians do today.

In those days, it was the norm for other composers or professional performers to make their own arrangements of a popular tune like Lachrimae. They did this to suit particular circumstances - intended audience, personal taste, technique or simply changing fashion - just as you find many 'cover' versions of a popular song today with each arranger / performer adding their own ideas to the original. It was a living art.

This arrangement for guitar

With its beautifully expressive vocal line, the song version 'Flow my Tears' is my favourite. Because of this, I have based my arrangement for guitar on this, rather than the original lute solo version.

EDITORIAL NOTE: Bars 41 to 43: Because I wanted my arrangement to make it easy to sustain the notes of the soprano and bass lines for their full value (not possible in the original solo lute arrangement) I have re-written the bass line an octave higher than the original and added some extra notes to give more continuity to this line

Flow my Tears (Lachrimae) John Dowland – Arranged Don King © 2011

Tune string 4 to F# *Cantabile et espressione* ♩ = c. 69 - 76 mm

Musical notation for measures 1-4. The piece is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first measure starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is shown at the end of the first system.

Musical notation for measures 5-8. Measure 5 is marked with *mf*. Above the staff, there are fingering instructions: *B III* (for measure 6) and $\frac{1}{2}$ *B I* (for measure 7). The tempo marking *poco rit. a tempo* is written above the staff. A dynamic marking of *p* is shown at the end of the system, followed by *mf*.

Musical notation for measures 9-12. Measure 9 is marked with *mp*. The notation includes various fingerings and dynamic markings of *mf* and *mp* throughout the system.

Musical notation for measures 13-16. Measure 13 is marked with *p*. Above the staff, there is a fingering instruction *(4)* for measure 15. The tempo marking *poco rit.* is written above the staff. The system ends with a repeat sign.

Musical notation for measures 17-20. Measure 17 is marked with *mf* and the tempo marking *a tempo*. The notation includes various fingerings and a dynamic marking of *mp* at the end of the system.

Musical notation for measures 21-24. Measure 21 is marked with *mf*. The notation includes various fingerings and dynamic markings of *mf* and *mp* throughout the system.

25

29

poco rit.

33

a tempo

37

41

I Pos.

45

49

2. (4) *ad lib. ritardando*

slow arpeggio