



Fine Knacks for Ladies

Dowland's "Fine Knacks for Ladies," a witty, spirited madrigal is in the form of a street-seller's song. The piece is divided into three main sections and made up of three verses. A homorhythmic texture dominates the entire piece. However, Dowland uses offset entrances, particularly in the soprano line of the third section to create a contrast to the first and second segments and to emphasize the importance of the text. The music itself is energetic and simple while the expression of the text's meaning is more challenging.

The text, written by Dowland, deals with human characteristics and the worth of worldly things. The main human attribute that is dealt with is love. The underlying theme is that love remains true in the heart no matter the value or amount of one's possessions. Each verse conveys this theme and each section has a unique purpose. The first section deals with materialism and the value of objects. A transition occurs in the second section and conveys the idea that material belongings may not be all that important. Dowland incorporated altered pitches in the middle section to highlight the text of each verse, thus bringing out the afore mentioned idea. The third and final segment depicts one's realization that no matter what a person owns or does not own, love remains constant and true.

Each verse portrays a slightly different perspective of the theme. Within the first section of each of the three verses, material objects are acquired. The verses speak of ladies' knick knacks, money, gifts, trifles, lace, gloves, and toys. The second segment depicts the realization that material things are not all they seem to be. Dowland illustrates this best in verse two which states, "It is a precious jewell to be plain: Sometimes in shell the orient pearls we find." In other words, one may have great gifts or material possessions, and seek far greater, but the most precious (orient) goods may be found in something as simple, as obvious, as a shell (the heart). Dowland's transition into the final portion of the third verse masterfully communicates the realization of love's constancy. He uses the text, "Turtles and twins, court's brood a heav'nly pair." The turtles refer to two turtle doves. The twins, which are a heav'nly pair, indicates Gemini, the twin star constellation symbolizing a celestial union. These words portray the image that love abounds when two find each other for life and that their love will be constant.

This "true of heart" love is expressed in the joy of the closing words, "Happy the heart that thinks of no removes." Dowland exquisitely merges music and text to show that love is found in the heart rather than in trinkets and toys, and that love will remain simple and true when it is rooted in the heart. Performer and audience alike will enjoy this simple, yet delightful madrigal by John Dowland.

written by TJ
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