

**It Was a Lover and His Lass**  
**Thomas Morley arr. Norman Greyson**  
**Text by William Shakespeare**  
**For Unaccompanied SSA**  
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## **Analysis**

### **Broad Description/Type**

Three-part madrigal

### **Composer Bio**

Thomas Morley was an English composer, theorist, editor, and organist who lived during the Renaissance era. Born as the son of a brewer in Norwich, England around 1557, he was a singer in the local cathedral as a boy and became a master of choristers there at the age of 26. Morley has referred to the Elizabethan composer of sacred music, William Byrd, as his teacher, but the dates he studied with Byrd are not precisely known. Morley served as the master of choristers at his home church in 1583, and in 1588 he received a bachelor's degree from Oxford and then attained a job as an organist at St. Paul's in London.

Morley made his principal contribution to music history through his work in Italian madrigals with English text settings. His work shows a wider variety of emotion, form and technique than anything by most other composers of the period. His most well-known madrigals are typically light, cheerful, quick-moving and easily singable. Morley published canzonets ("little short songs") before he published his first set of twenty-two madrigals in 1594. In addition to his madrigals, Morley wrote for keyboard and for broken consort.

### **Internet resources for composer information**

1. <http://www.goldbergweb.com/en/history/composers/11588.php>
2. <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/Blair/Courses/MUSL242/f98/leiter.htm>
3. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/392460/Thomas-Morley>

### **Information on Composition**

English madrigals were written during the Renaissance as a sort of retreat from the typical monotonous song of earlier times. Many madrigals are written with poetry about love and emotions. They are generally light and springy sounding and have concise rhymed lines with love song themes that are generally not very deep. Madrigals place emphasis on the text of the work.

*It Was a Lover and His Lass* was a madrigal likely written in the late 1590's or early 1600's. It uses a love poem written by William Shakespeare from "As You Like It" Act V Scene III. The text from this work is intentionally simplistic and trivial, as it is meant to be playfully recited by the Bard of Avon.

Interestingly, some speculation exists about the relationship between Morley and Shakespeare himself. They may well have known each other, since they both lived in the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopgate in the late 1590's. Morley would also have had easy access to the theater community, and there was (as there is now) a strong connection between prominent actors and musicians.

### **Text/Translation (if applicable)**

It was a lover and his lass,  
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino  
That o'er the green cornfields did pass.  
In spring time, the only pretty ring time,  
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding;  
Sweet lovers love the spring.

Between the acres of the rye,  
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,  
These pretty country folks would lie,  
In spring time, the only pretty ring time,  
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding;  
Sweet lovers love the spring.

This carol they began that hour,  
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,  
How that a life was but a flower  
In spring time, the only pretty ring time,  
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding;  
Sweet lovers love the spring.

Then, pretty lovers, take the time  
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,  
For love is crownéd with the prime  
In spring time, the only pretty ring time,  
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding;  
Sweet lovers love the spring.

### **Recordings available**

Youtube Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkhF6ni5gw> (Valiera Mignaco & Alfonso Martin)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRMdudENPfe> (The Nashville Early Music Ensemble)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rsiYoGIGio> (Brighton Festival Youth Choir)

Audio Recording:

<http://www.crotchet.co.uk/0012452BC.html?id=a7XsNeBS>

## Elements of Music

**Form:** This piece moves back and forth between homophonic and polyphonic text settings. Each first and third line of the verse (mm. 1-2, mm. 9-11) is set in a chordal homophony, and the others are written in a weaving, playful polyphony with key words returning back to chords.

**Rhythm:** The piece is written in cut time with many dotted quarter notes and alternating quarter and eighth notes. A recurring theme of  happens throughout the piece and contributes to the dance-like feel. None of the rhythms are particularly difficult.

**Melody:** Moves mostly in stepwise and small intervallic jumps. It rises and falls to contribute to the dance-like feeling of the work.

**Harmony:** The work is written in G-major, but it occasionally deviates from the key signature by employing F-naturals, particularly at the top of a melodic climb. It begins and ends on the tonic of the key.

**Timbre:** This piece, when sung by an ensemble, is unaccompanied. The range of the first sopranos covers exactly one octave, from middle G to G'. Because the melody (when there is one) is always found in the top voice and because of the buoyant, bright nature of the song, timbre should favor a brighter sound rather than a dark one. Clarity of tone is also important to convey text clearly.

**Texture:** In the homophonic passages, the melody is always found in the upper voice. The second soprano and alto lines provide chordal accompaniment for these sections. The rest of the piece is comprised of polyphonic ascending and descending passages on the texts, with dotted quarter notes for emphasis on suspension and resolution.

**Expression:** This edition of the work contains multiple editorial dynamic markings, most of them coinciding with the rising and falling of each individual part's line. While many of them are great suggestions, they are only suggestions. Phrases are broken up according to lines of the poem with some lines being repeated or re-worded for a longer phrase.

**Heart:** This piece combines major tonality with dance rhythms and imitation to express a joyful text about a young couple in love.

## Introducing the Piece:

Play various instrumental Renaissance dance pieces as the students come in. As soon as class begins, read the text aloud in a Shakespearean performance style. Ask students to respond to what they've just heard – what is this text about? Who do you think wrote it?

## **Primary Skill Outcome**

**Students will perform with artistic sensitivity to homophony and polyphony.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Explain the difference between polyphony and homophony. Examine prefixes (poly- and homo-) to remember each style of writing.
2. Have students look through the piece and mark each polyphonic and homophonic section.
  - a. Small-group or part-sharing: break students into groups and compare markings.
  - b. Large-group questions: if there are questions or disagreements, have a group representative present both sides of the argument as discussed in the small group.
3. Comparative Singing:
  - a. Sing entire song with equal weight on all parts throughout.
  - b. Sing entire song with assigned weights to each part as directed by conductor
4. Ask students how to better separate the two styles – try suggestions.
5. Rhythmic part walking: have students walk in tempo to the song. When a student's part is most prominent, she stands erect. When a student's part is less prominent, she bends or crouches.
6. Each part sings independently as the other parts listen. (Encourages awareness of other parts not sung by students.)
7. Hand students a photocopy of the piece. Ask them to highlight or color-code a) polyphony vs. homophony b) prominent parts.
8. Have students perform in sextets and ask listening students to evaluate.

### **Assessment:**

1. In-class discussion
2. Teacher observation
3. Peer evaluation/small-ensemble singing
4. Viewing students' marked scores

## **Knowledge Outcome**

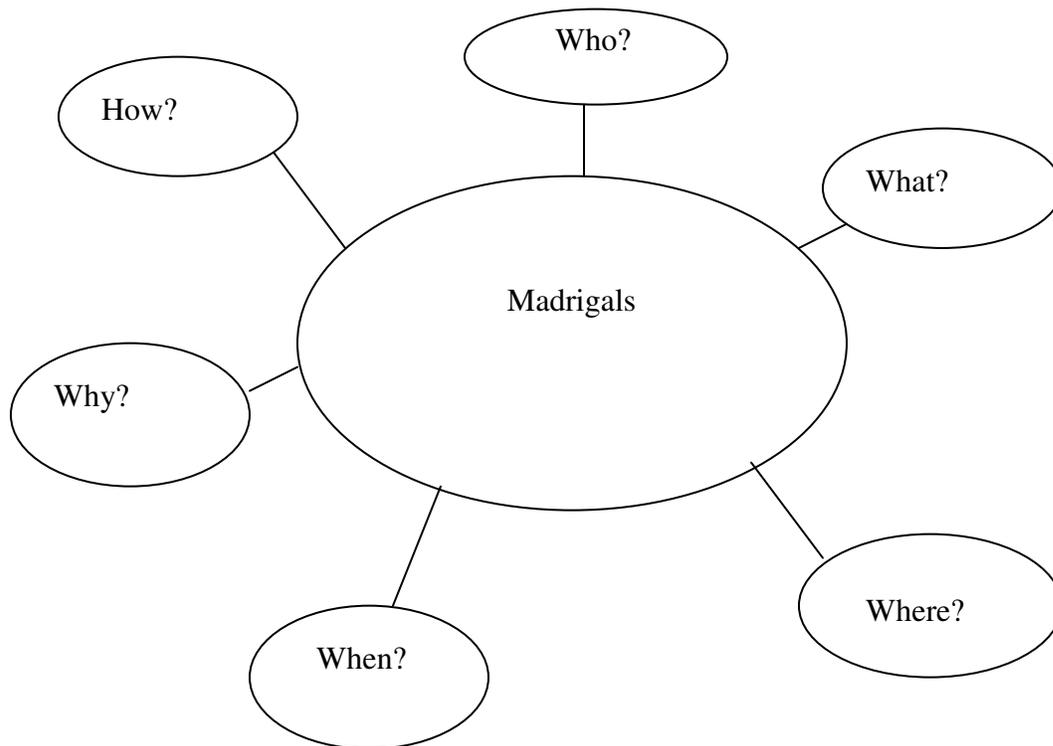
**Students will understand the place of the madrigal in Renaissance society.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Ask students what comes to mind when they hear the word "madrigal". Make a concept web on a whiteboard.
2. Explain the performance style of the madrigal: semi-circular dinnertime sight-reading.
3. Gather the class in a semi-circular formation and practice in this arrangement, asking students to sing in like friends who have just finished a hearty meal and are in high spirits.
4. Perform the work in this semi-circular arrangement.

### **Assessment:**

1. Concept web created during brainstorming about madrigals:



2. Classroom discussion
3. Teacher observation
4. Performance in semi-circular formation

### **Affective Outcome**

**Students will explore the musical concepts which make the piece feel merry.**

### **Strategies:**

1. Tell students to think of a song from their own lives which leaves them feeling positive. Ask what about the song leaves them feeling that way. Have students journal their findings.
2. Share in small groups the name of the song and the elements contributing to its pleasing feelings.
3. Share with the larger group some examples of songs and elements within them.
4. Connect elements from students' songs to *It Was a Lover and His Lass*
  - a. Tempo: cut-time and an Allegretto tempo marking make the song high-energy.
  - b. Key: the song is in G-major with mixolydian tendencies (F-natural)
  - c. "Singability" or "catchiness": Morley's pieces were written in such a way that they stuck in the listener's mind.
  - d. Lyrics: the song is about new love, singing, and Springtime (it may be worthwhile to read the Shakespearean text as a poem again.)

**Assessment:**

1. Journaling
2. Large-group sharing
3. Teacher observation during performance

**Selection**

In many American choral classrooms, contemporary literature becomes the focus in order to keep students' attention. But choral programs which offer only contemporary repertoire and nothing more do a disservice to students by leaving them unexposed to different musical styles. Pieces such as this one offer substantial musical content, rich historical context, and a fun, memorable performance experience. *It Was a Lover and His Lass* Additionally, Thomas Morley's work in madrigals was substantial and his name is one worth knowing.