MORE THAN PLEASANT, MORE THAN DELIGHTFUL

I write this in the risk-taking spirit which this newsletter is partly intended to foster, in the hope that it may set others' ideas flowing. As a musicologist whose public appearance encompasses two more-or-less accepted areas: the analysis of recent 'difficult' music (the subject of my thesis) and writings on rock music (a book and various articles); I have recently begun trying to justify to myself the **intense** pleasure I have gained through participating in those musically low-grade events called, in folk club circles, 'singarounds' or 'come-all-yes' (as in the plural of 'come-all-ye'!). These are the occasions when everyone, no matter who, takes their turn to sing (often in a cold, bare room above a pub), frequently unaccompanied, frequently a chorus song, frequently with questionable tuning, timing and memory. My self-investigation is prompted by the realization that conventional explanations in terms of 'community', or Christopher Small's 'temporary creation of an ideal society' are woefully inadequate for these musical experiences, for **my** pleasure on such occasions is, at the least, intensely **musical** (although it is, also, communal). I want to explore this simply through consideration of one song, a song of leavetaking between a sailor and his love, commonly known as 'Pleasant and delightful'. This song is so widely known that it is usually only sung by inexperienced, 'beginner' singers, and seems to have been virtually 'banned' in some clubs. In trying to explore my own musical pleasure in this simple song, I have come to the conclusion that it is, at root, physical. I also have a growing suspicion that other musical pleasures have a far greater physical component than is normally admitted, and it is for this reason that I pursue the issue here.

According to Bert Lloyd (p.202), the song was 'ubiquitous' by the time Sharp, Broadwood and Kidson made their collections. I have not traced its subsequent history, but a widely-known version of it entered the club repertoire through the singing of the Shropshire farmworker Fred Jordan. It was commercially recorded by Shirley and Dolly Collins on the album *Anthems in Eden* in 1969 (with acknowledgement to Jordan), and it was certainly widely known when I began frequenting the clubs in the early 1970s. The song normally has about four verses: ex. 1 transcribes an entire first verse of the song, the melody from memory, the lyric from Shirley Collins' recording (I have an appalling memory for lyrics, and have never bothered to learn the song itself). That part preceding the asterisk is sung by the solo singer, the 'audience' joining in at the asterisk. This latter part acts as a refrain, although the words are always taken from the last line of the verse. It is, of course, only this portion which interests me here.

In ex.2, I have suggested an analysis of these last four phrases of the melody. Its key intervallic features are the falling third and

rising sixth. The falling third decorates a rising scale (A*b*-B*b*-C-D*b*-E*b*) which I shall call the line's 'essential motion'. Having reached its climax, this line is allowed to fall back to a prominent D*b*, without the falling third, and thence run home. The first rising sixth provides the impulse for what begins as a straight sequence, the second (occluded) sixth ensures that the essential motion is established while, the climax having been reached, the final rising sixth acts to close off this motion. The final phrase is, quite literally, a falling away. Note that the line's implied harmonies normally remain implicit (I have rarely, if ever, heard the song sung with accompaniment), sometimes acting as suggestions for improvised vocal harmonies, of which more later.

I am convinced that the thrice-repeated lyric is vital, but I am unable to account for its precise significance, other than to permit concentration on the upward linear motion. From memory, I would say that the chorus is frequently sung at crotchet ≈ 63, with a great deal of flexibility, allowing for a certain amount of rhythmic indulgence on the part of individual singers without losing the thread of the phrasing. This is important, because the actual effect is rather heterophonic, sounding not unlike the remnants of New England lining out (see e.g. Chase) or, so I understand, contemporary Hebridean hymnody. One is, then, bound up inside a texture whose points of demarcation are blurred, but through which all singers will travel. This is no less true of singers who add an improvised accompanying part. One part will frequently alternate between a third, fourth and sixth above the melody (and sometimes all three at once), depending on the harmonic sense of individual singers (I always hear this/these acting as a tenor line), a second will act as a rudimentary bass, particularly at phrase-end. Both these lines will share the same, flexible, rhythmic outline as the melody.

Each singer of the melody (myself included) traverses the motion from A*b* to E*b*. Entering on an implied IV on the downbeat, immediately after a 'Ic-V-I' has always seemed to me to provide a powerful impetus, a potential to be realised, and it is hard to enter with a timid voice. The vocal effort expended on reaching the B*b* from the lower sixth ensures that the ensuing downward run does run, and it is physically difficult to hold it back within the communal texture, although in the first verse, the syllables '-di-ous', with the mouth quite wide on the last syllable, put the brake on a little. The attainment first of C, and then of D*b*, requires an increasing level of air, and my experience is of pushing harder from the diaphragm and shoulders in order to reach each note in this essential motion. (I wonder whether this is related to the caricatured folk-singer swinging <u>his</u> glass of ale, from the shoulder, as an accompaniment to a song?) The E*b* requires the greatest effort, although it is only approached by step. It is impossible to sing this without the head thrown partly back and I find, in traversing the motion from A*b* to E*b*, that I have

also traversed the motion from head forward, shoulders slightly hunched, to head back, shoulders wide, and quite probably arm raised. Curiously, achieving the second *Eb* is far easier, despite its being approached by the leap of a sixth. This is surely partly due to its rhythmic placement, but also to the fact that the line has been effectively closed by that final rising sixth. A drawing-out, as the lower G is reached, is perhaps to be expected as physical poise is regained. I suppose it could be argued that all rising lines will require a similar effort, although the relative intricacies of this particular line make, I think, for a coherent and interesting sing.

So, my physical pleasure in 'Pleasant and delightful' is at least twofold: firstly, the communal experience of all passing through the same hoop, but lingering or speeding slightly at points of our own choosing; secondly, the musical experience of a neatly articulated scalic motion successfully traversed. Indeed, it seems that my body perhaps less articulates the expression, than actively moulds it. Clearly this is only 'motion recollected in tranquility' (!): I should stress that I make these comments purely from a compound memory of many singings, and feelings, and I cannot vouch for their accuracy as perceived by other singers. But I am convinced that, for me, this song is more than pleasant, and far more than delightful: the experience of being caught up in singing it absorbs my entire mental/physical space, and it makes me sure that we misconstrue our de-somated analyses if we think they touch our experience.

-OGRAPHIES

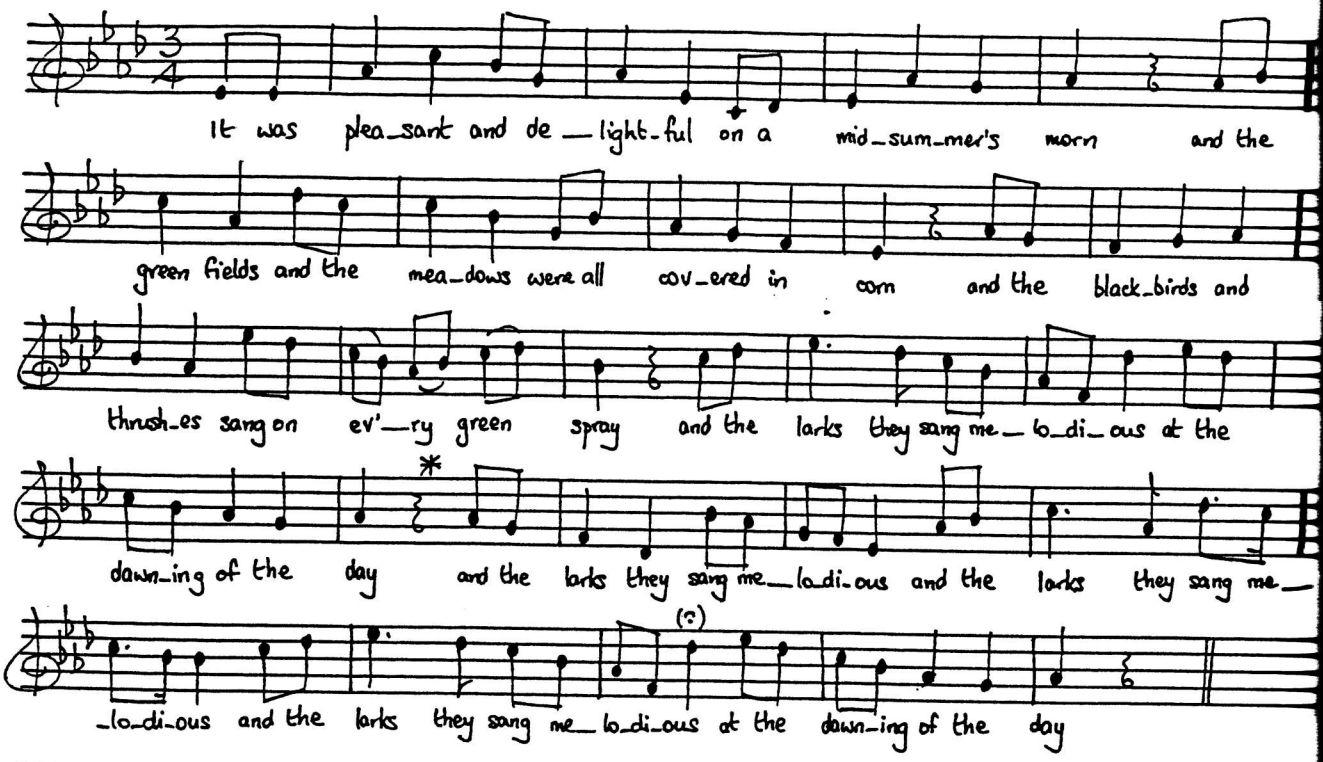
Gilbert Chase: *America's music (revised second edition)*; McGraw-Hill, 1966.
Shirley & Dolly Collins: *Anthems in Eden*; Harvest, 1969.
A.L.Lloyd: *Folk song in England*; Granada, 1975 (1967).
Christopher Small: *Music - Society - Education*; John Calder, 1977.
Fred Woods: *Folk revival*; Blandford, 1979.

Allan F. Moore 29ix93

MORE THAN MORE THAN

PLEASANT (AND) DELIGHTFUL

Ex1



Ex 2