

# Sweelinck: *Pavana Lacrimae*

**Strand:** Western art music – Baroque instrumental music – Keyboard music

## 1. Composer background

[Accompanying PowerPoint provides illustrations]

The Dutch composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621) was a **renowned teacher** and as such was a key figure in the development of the German baroque style because he taught a number of German composers such as Samuel Scheidt and Heinrich Scheidemann. His influence can be traced through to the music of Bach.

A key point in understanding Sweelinck is his position as the **organist of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam** – a post he held for his entire career. Students may be familiar with the English Reformation and Henry VIII's break away from Roman Catholicism in the 1530s, but are less likely to be familiar with the Reformation in mainland Europe. The ideas of the reformist theologian Jean Calvin (1509-1564) active in Geneva were much more influential in the Low Countries and in Britain than those of Martin Luther. The Dutch Reformed Church was founded in 1571. In 1578 the Catholic governors of the city of Amsterdam were deposed by Protestants, mostly Calvinists. This action was part of a wider rebellion against the domination of the Catholic Phillip II of Spain. It was also the period in which Amsterdam was becoming a major centre of commerce, with an increasingly wealthy and influential middle class.

The new city governors altered the churches of Amsterdam from Catholic to Protestant, renamed them, and reformed religious practices. Church property was handed over to municipal authorities and maintained as secular buildings. Thus monasteries came under city control and were repurposed as hospitals, prisons or orphanages. The oldest church, St. Nicholas, became known as the Oude Kerk. Services were of course still held, but music was confined largely to unaccompanied psalm singing, rather than complex polyphonic mass settings. The organist of the Oude Kerk was essentially a municipal employee – the city organist. The city, like the princely courts of the past, used music as a symbol of status and established **daily public organ recitals**. The Dutch had a strong organ building tradition and their instruments were among the most advanced technically of the time. Sweelinck thus had a daily duty of performance in public and was one of the major figures in the development of the modern idea of a concert. A key aspect of performance at the keyboard was **improvisation**. The *Pavana lacrimae*, though written down, demonstrates underlying principles of improvisation.

The keyboard instrument for which the pavana was written is not explicit. At that time music for keyboards was fairly interchangeable between plucked keyboards such as harpsichord, spinet and virginals; struck keyboards such as the clavichord (note, not the piano) and the organ. Under normal circumstances, a dance form such as the pavana would not be played on a church organ, but could be played on a domestic chamber organ. Given that Sweelinck played the organ with a secular purpose, that is daily concerts for the city, and not church services, this piece may have also been played on the organ.

### Activity

Research the different types of keyboard instruments and how they worked.

These videos produced by the Open University's partner, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment may be useful.

- <https://oae.co.uk/introducing-the-harpsichord/>
- <https://oae.co.uk/introducing-the-clavichord/>

Websites from major instrument collections include:

- The National music museum, South Dakota <https://emuseum.nmmusd.org/>
- The Musical Instrument Museum, Brussels (large collection of harpsichords) <http://www.mim.be/en>
- Germanisches national Museum Nuremberg <https://www.gnm.de/en/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions/musical-instruments/>

## 2. Genre

A pavane is a stately processional dance, composed for the most part of walking steps, forward, sideways and backwards. The music is always in four, starting on the first beat of the bar (many dances start on an upbeat). The best way of understanding pavaues and their structure is to learn how to dance one. If modern dance uses ordinary actions like shrugging the shoulders or flicking the wrists, old dances use ordinary walking. In its early development it was used as a processional to display the attributes of status such as elaborate clothing. The pavane is easy to do in a classroom space as it is slow rhythmic walking. Students might for example 'dance' (i.e. walk) around the circumference of the space in single file, or between a line of desks.

### Activity

What is a pavane?

Counting a slow 4

Bar 1

1. Step forward left
2. Close
3. Step forward right
4. Close

Bar 2: 4 steps forward

Bar 3: repeats bar 1

Bar 4: repeats bar 2

Bars 4-8: repeat the sequence

This pattern can be repeated in various ways, stepping backwards, sideways or turning. Note though, the 8-bar pattern which fits the 8 bar **strains** of the music.

The Library of Congress have a series of videos on historic dance and includes a demonstration of the pavane: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B10z9b\\_PRXw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B10z9b_PRXw).

## 3. Analysis

The *Pavana lacrimae* is based on a lute song by Dowland, 'Flow my tears' (*Second book of songs or ayres*, 1600), which in turn Dowland based on his own 'Lacrimae'. The word 'lacrimae' means tears and is a multi-layered reference to the composer himself who was a self-declared melancholic, and to a tradition of 'word painting' in which conceits such as tears, lament and weeping were represented by falling melodic lines, or if more extreme emotions were intended, by descending chromatic passages.

The song consists of three 8-bar strains, each of which is repeated. Sweelinck's *Pavana lacrimae* retains this structure, with each repeat being embellished using the diminutional practices of the time. However, the notated score halves the note values, so each strain takes 16 bars. The structure of the dance rests on the repeated **strains** of music. Each step of the dance needs to take 2 crotchet beats (i.e. think in 4/2 not 4/4)

Note, the term **diminution** in this context, does not mean halving rhythmic values, but embellishing existing music with formulaic patterns that were learned and memorised as part of the instrumentalist's training. There were literally hundreds of patterns published in books such as Ganassi *Fontegara* (1535), Diruta *Il Transilvano* (1593, 1609), Bovicelli *Regole, passaggi di musica* (1594) and others. Patterns for each interval ascending and descending, approaches to cadences and ways of filling in time for long notes were all 'stock in trade'. Many such patterns fell 'under the hand', that is, within a span of five notes, or, if longer variants were needed, included parts that fell under the hand with another pattern that required hand movement. For performer composers such as Sweelinck, these patterns would have become part of their creative process and embedded into their style of composition, whether or not the piece was written down.

The **tonality** of this piece will require some careful explanation, especially if students are used to the modern modes of pop music. It looks like A minor with a shift to C major in the second strain. However, it is in a **mode** based on A, that is Mode 9 or the Aeolian mode. The harmonic features that are typically modal are chord progressions in which the root notes move by step, e.g. ii-i, and the appearance of both the major and the minor versions of the tonic and dominant chords. The leading note is not routinely raised and successive use of natural and raised forms can create false relations (see b. 10). The perfect cadences to the major triad may be called **tierce de picardie** though that term usually implies a more stable minor tonality. Note also the **'Phrygian' cadences** in this piece, where the bass note of chord iv in first inversion descends a semitone to end on chord V.

Bar number	Key point
1-16	Strain 1: 2 x 8 bar phrases. Phrase 1 divided 4+4 bars, both sub-phrases have dominant endings [i-vi-iv-V/i-III-vii-iv-V]. The harmonic structure of the second sub-phrase is typically modal, utilising triads on the third and seventh degrees which would normally include the raised leading note. Note the mobility of chordal thirds and root movement by step. The melody is in the upper voice, note diminutions at cadences in bars 8, 14, and especially the extended perfect cadence at 15.
17-32	Strain 1 embellished. Pattern in b.17 typical – sustained a' embellished by upward skip of a 5 <sup>th</sup> and 'filled in' with descending long-short-short rhythm to return to its start point, the original stepwise descending 4 <sup>th</sup> a'-e' generates an upward skip of a 4 <sup>th</sup> (a'-d'') followed by a 6-note descending scale. The pattern is then repeated in the bass, and again in RH treble part. B 23, the melodic descending 3 <sup>rd</sup> f'-d' is filled out with alternating notes a step apart, a descending scale past the target note to c' then stepping back up to the melody note. The pattern is repeated, crossing into the LH as the melody is taken back into the RH treble part.
33-48	Strain 2: harmonically moves to the secondary area of mode 9. In modern terms this appears to be C major, but there is no cadence which confirms C as a temporary tonic. Note the harmonic progressions are typically modal, using stepwise root movement. The cadence at the end of the strain is created by a semitone step downwards to the modal dominant (ivb-V). We can call this a Phrygian cadence.
49-64	Strain 2 embellished: The melodic pattern in b.49 (an offbeat ascending 4 <sup>th</sup> followed by a skip down and back and a stepwise descent) is a typical diminution pattern which occurs in keyboard music by many other composers including Frescobaldi. Here Sweelinck uses it to create a 3-part counterpoint. B. 55 has

	another common pattern in which a rising 3 <sup>rd</sup> (d'-f') is presented with halved note values then repeated with an additional passing note to fill-in the gap
65-81	Strain 3: The repetition of the triad of the modal dominant in the first 4 bars drives this section towards the final cadence.
82-98	Strain 3 embellished. The running scale passages extending for an octave in one direction followed by an octave or more in the opposite direction are typical of a diminution called a <i>tirata</i> . The flourishes display the player's ability and create a sense of climax as the piece comes to a close.

### Activity

Listen to Dowland's 'Flow my tears', first to get familiar with the melody. Then listen a second time following the score of the *Pavana lacrimae*. Focusing on the first strain and its repetition, identify the melody notes within the keyboard texture in bb. 1-16 and then identify those notes within the diminutions in bb. 17-32.

Compositional activity: Using whatever instruments are available, give students two or three intervals and ask them to find ways to embellish them to make them fit 2 beats, 3 beats or 4 beats, but retaining the two original notes in such a way that they can still be heard.

## 4. Related repertory

Sweelinck was significantly influenced by English composers. As already noted, Dowland's song 'Flow my tears' and his instrumental versions of it are crucial to the understanding of the *Pavana lacrimae*. The collection of music and variety of composers represented in the Fitzwilliam Virginal book is another good point of reference. Thomas Tomkins *Sad pavan in these distracted times* is both another pavane and also another lament. More distant in genre but using the descending melodic pattern to illustrate tears or lament, Dido's lament from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* or Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* are useful comparisons.

Sweelinck's compositional techniques influenced Schiedt, Scheideman and north German composers who followed them. Scheidt's chorale variations such as those found in his *Tabulatura nova* (1624) for example, 'Wir glauben all an einen Gott' demonstrate further development of Sweelinck's 'improvisational' diminutions. The music of Frescobaldi (1583-1643) uses similar variation techniques in his partitas for keyboard. It is likely that he encountered Sweelinck's music while travelling to Antwerp around 1607-8. The *Partita sopra l'aria della Romanesca* (1615) or the *Aria detto Balletto* (1627) are good examples to listen to for comparison.

## 5. Teaching points

[addressing BLM/gender issues]

An important point to be aware of is that Dutch commercial success was built on colonisation and conquest.

The western classical tradition prioritises notated music, but there are long standing unwritten traditions that underpin instrumental music. Other musics from around the world have no such emphasis and remain entirely unwritten oral/aural. Written music is different music not better music.

### Questions for consideration or research

- Were there female musicians at this time? Yes, but often confined to performing in convents or in private. E.g Maddalena Casulana, (the first woman composer to have music printed and published in 1568) Barbara Strozzi, Margherita Cozzolani.

- Were there black musicians at this time? Yes, we know from paintings that there were black musicians in Europe. Sadly we know almost nothing about them. A lot of research is needed in this field.

## 6. Curriculum links

Design/Technology – how an organ / harpsichord / clavichord) works

History & Religious studies – the Protestant Reformation, Calvinism

## 7. Bibliography/further reading

Naomi J. Barker 'The Italian keyboard toccata c.1615-1650: A repository for oral compositional practices' *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* volume 50, 2019, 1-28

Howard Mayer Brown, *Embellishing 16<sup>th</sup>-century music*, (Oxford, OUP, 1976)

Massimiliano Guido (ed) *Studies in historical improvisation*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2017)

Frits Noske, *Sweelinck* (Oxford & New York, 1988)

Alexander Silbiger (ed), *Keyboard music before 1700*, (New York & London, Routledge, 2004 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1995))

Peter Williams, 'Sweelinck and the Dutch school' *Musical Times*, 110 (1969) 1286-88