

4b Kate Bush Hounds of Love Analysis

Recommended Essay Structure

Very brief contextual introduction

Paragraph 1: Element of Music 1

a) Sentences 1-2: Describe and contextualise

Describe: using musical vocabulary identify/describe the feature relating to the element of music

Contextualise: comment ‘...which is typical/atypical/advanced/conservative for that period/genre/style’

b) Sentences 2-3: Effect

Comment ‘The effect of this is to...’ Describe the effect / composer’s intended effect of this feature on the music.

c) Sentences 2-3: Comparison

Comment ‘This is similar to/different from X (composer & title) composed earlier/later/during the same/Baroque/Classical/Romantic period in which...’.

For each element of music, to complete the paragraph, follow steps (a)-(c) at least four times, identifying at least four features relating to that element, spending no more than 12 minutes.

Paragraph 2: Element of Music 2

Follow steps (a)-(c) at least four times, identifying at least four features relating to that element, spending no more than 12 minutes.

Paragraph 3: Element of Music 3

Follow steps (a)-(c) at least four times, identifying at least four features relating to that element, spending no more than 12 minutes.

Context

*Kate Bush (b.1958), whose first album was released in 1978, created a unique sound through musical experimentation using the newly available digital technology of the 1980s, specifically the Fairlight CMI: a combined sampler, synthesiser and sequencer (one of the earliest DAWs) using MIDI technology.

*Her fifth studio album, performed and produced predominantly by Kate Bush herself using multi-track recording, synthesising and overdubbing, is named ‘Hounds of Love’, released in 1985. Whilst the A side includes more conventional uptempo pop genre songs (including Cloudbusting) the B side is a mini concept album (an album of songs linked by a theme or narrative, which saw an explosion in popularity in the 1980s) named by Kate Bush ‘the ninth wave’, containing more experimental, introspective songs (including And Dream of Sheep and Under Ice).

Sonority

*Kate Bush was at the forefront of musical movements in the 1980s which rejected traditional acoustic and/or amplified rock and pop instruments (electric guitars, basses and drums), instead embracing synthesised and electronically manipulated sounds (relying heavily on studio effects) made possible by the digital sampling, synthesising and sequencing technology of digital audio workstations such as the Fairlight CMI (replacing earlier analogue equivalents). These movements include new wave, new romanticism and electronic dance music such as house leading to techno and trance.

*The effect was to create new, interesting sounds never previously heard in popular music. In comparison, the Beatles working in the 1960s relied far more heavily on traditional instruments: guitars, bass and drums, performing much of their music live and, for their studio albums, having access only to analogue technology in songs such as Hey Jude.

*Kate Bush's distinctive vocals to which studio effects including very heavy reverb (And Dream of Sheep) and extreme overdubbing and chorus effects (Under Ice) creating dissonance are added form the centre of each song. This lead vocal is accompanied by a wide range of sounds. In Cloudbusting Kate Bush creates contrasting string sounds in three different ways: with a string sextet playing as live, with sampled string notes retriggered to create detached chords (similar to the Beatles Eleanor Rigby) and with entirely synthesised strings playing riffs, countermelodies and an instrumental solo.

*The effect is to emphasise the introspective nature of the songs. In comparison Berlioz in his Symphonie Fantastique uses a similarly wide and challenging range of instruments for the time (expanding the symphony orchestra to its largest size yet) to express similar introspective and fantastical ideas.

*Like Cloudbusting, Under Ice also relies mainly on detached string riffs but, more obviously than in Cloudbusting, the strings are entirely synthesised with effects applied to the sound making them less natural still. In contrast, And Dream of Sheep uses a much more conventional ballad / lullabye like accompaniment of acoustic piano but heavily modified with a long decay reverb.

*The use of almost entirely synthesised sounds in Under Ice create the effect of otherworldliness, emphasising the lyrics. The pop-ballad genre imitated in And Dream of Sheep is a common one: arpeggiated piano accompaniments with few other instruments can be heard in many similar pop ballads such as Elton John's Your Song.

*Whilst synth strings and piano form the centre of Kate Bush's song accompaniments, she achieves a wide and experimental range of timbres with a number of other acoustic folk instruments and sampled sounds (which may be described as music concrete or found sounds). The folk instruments used include the Balalaika (Eastern European stringed instrument) playing brief fills in Cloudbusting,

and Bouzouki (similar celtic stringed instrument) and low whistles playing short sparse instrumental solos in And Dream of Sheep.

*Mixing synthesised and unusually traditional folk instrument sounds was a particularly novel effect for the 1980s. The use of folk in mainstream music has been especially important in the 20th century in works such as The Rite of Spring by Stravinsky in which Russian folk melodies are used to seem exotic to a Parisian audience.

*The Fairlight CMI lent itself brilliantly to using environmental or 'found' sounds (which may be called 'music concrete') because it could digitally sample, apply effects to, retrigger and sequence these sounds, overdubbing them to the existing conventional music tracks. For example, a distorted radio shipping forecast sampled and overdubbed during the instrumental solos in And Dream of Sheep, the effect of which connects the song to falling a sleep late at night as well as being at sea. Similarly, the steam engine sound (complementing chorused snare drums) at the end of Cloudbusting (representing the cloudbusting machine itself).

Rhythm, Metre and Tempo

*Kate Bush's approach to rhythm, metre and tempo is unconventional and progressive for pop music of the 1980s, taking cues from experimental prog rock of the 1970s such as Pink Floyd's The Dark Side of The Moon (songs including Money, Time etc.). Whilst the pulse of Kate Bush's songs remains generally constant (perhaps reflecting the use of technology, the Fairlight CMI sequencer, to create each track) the perceived metre of many parts of her songs is constantly changing, and often blurred by cross-rhythms, including hemiolas, the effect of which is to portray the unsettling mood especially of the Ninth Wave. For example, in Under Ice, the bass part initially repeats in multiples of 4 or 8 beats, whereas the cross-rhythmic synth riff repeats in a 3 beat then 2 beat repeating pattern (3+3+2).

*Retaining a steady pulse, but with unexpected metre changes, is a long established device for creating interest and variety in musical structure. For example, it can be heard in a wide range of English Folk ballads such as Boys of Bedlam, in a 5+4 metre pattern.

*In Cloudbusting, the constantly changing sense of metre is dictated by the free, speech like rhythms in the vocal line, also leading to uneven, unpredictable, dream-like phrase lengths. The metre becomes more conventional in the chorus, when the vocal line becomes syncopated against a more predictable, conventional 4/4 metre.

*Although, typical of electronic pop music, the pulse of all three songs remains constant for the most part, the exception is Under Ice, which begins from a very slow tempo, with a dramatic accelerando, ending with a similarly dramatic ritardando, the

effect of which is to make the on beat synth sound like an analogue machine starting up and slowing down.

*The tempo changes heard in live, non-electronic music are likely to be less prescribed than those produced by the Fairlight CMI: in Romantic music like Debussy's *Reverie*, the player typically subtly changes tempo all of the time, creating *rubato*, and would typically end with a final *rit.*

*Kate Bush links not only sections within songs but also different songs with common accompanying rhythmic devices, especially the anapest rhythm ($\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ 1 beat) which persists throughout *Under Ice* and through most of *Cloudbusting*, often rhythmically displaced creating cross-rhythms (syncopation), becoming increasingly insistent in the chorused snare drum at the end of *Cloudbusting*, developed through rhythmic diminution, fragmentation and variation (creating both anapest and dactyl rhythms).

2022 Analysis

Context

*Kate Bush is a British pop performer, composer, producer and dancer, born in 1958, who rose to fame during the 1970s and 80s with songs such as Wuthering Heights.

*Hounds of Love is a studio album released in 1985. As was common in the 1970s and 80s, this is a concept album: an album in which the songs are linked by a common theme or narrative.

*Also typical of this, the first era of vinyl, the album's A side includes more up-tempo, pop influenced songs (including Cloudbusting), and the B side more experimental and eclectic songs (including And Dream of Sheep and Under Ice). The B side has the strongest concept, named 'The Ninth Wave' by the artist.

Use of Instruments and Technology

*Hounds of Love is set apart from many rock and roll albums of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as Hard Rock and Metal albums of the 1980s and 1990s in that it is a studio album: the songs contained within were never intended to be performed live, the arrangements and effects could be created only in the studio.

*A new era of music sampling, sequencing and synthesising was made possible with digital studio equipment such as the Fairlight CMI. Although extraordinarily expensive at the time, Kate Bush used this to record and produce Hounds of Love in her home studio.

*The Fairlight CMI and the album's studio nature means that Kate Bush could use an unconventional and diverse collection of musical instruments (borrowed from classical and a range of European folk musics) such as a string sextet and balalaika (Cloudbusting), bouzouki and whistle (And Dream of Sheep), and uilleann pipes in other songs of the album. The effect is to enhance the narrative of the songs' unusual subject matter and expand the soundscape.

*Using instruments found conventionally in other genres, such as classical music, became important in the 1960s with songs such as the Beatles' Eleanor Rigby, in which a double string quartet is the only accompaniment.

*In Cloudbusting Kate Bush sometimes records longer sections of string sextet music and sometimes samples shorter sections which are retriggered as single notes or as short loops.

*The Fairlight CMI allowed Kate Bush to sample with great ease, leading her even to sample non-musical (environmental) sounds in a technique known as musique concrete, for example the shipping forecast in And Dream of Sheep, a steam engine sound at the end of Cloudbusting (the cloudbusting machine) and similar samples including treated vocals (such as the wail at the end of Under Ice) and the string like sound achieved by the vocals in Cloudbusting.

*Use of environmental or 'found' sounds in music became known as *musique concrete*, a technique pioneered by Pierre Schaeffer in his 1948 work coincidentally also sampling steam engines.

*Treating sounds with effects to modify their timbre is a key feature of digital music from the 1980s on. Kate Bush uses effects such as phaser (a type of filtering, EQ change) in the pedal note ending *Under Ice*, as well as panning of the vocal wail and use of heavy reverb at the same time. And *Dream of Sheep* also uses heavy reverb throughout, especially to amplify the low sub-bass percussive/rumble sound illustrating 'engines'. Vocal sounds, especially at the end of *Cloudbusting* are treated with filters and also chorus effect, adding to the technique of multi-tracking and overdubbing.

*Before the development of digital effects like these, artists relied on much simpler analogue equipment. Examples include the spinning loudspeaker found in a Leslie cabinet used to create vibrato and distortion in songs such as *Tomorrow Never Knows* by the Beatles.

Melody

*Typical of pop music, many of the melodies in Kate Bush's *Hounds of Love* album are relatively conjunct, diatonic and reliant on distinctive, repeating motifs. Compared with other pop songs however, Kate Bush also uses a greater number of disjunct intervals to create distinctive hooks. The effect of this is to create contrast between songs on the album and between melodies within each song, making each more memorable.

*Many pop songs have achieved great success with far more limited pitch ranges and varieties, more typical of the genre, for example The Killers' *Mr Brightside* of the 2000s and Oasis' *Wonderwall* of the 90s.

*An example of a comparatively disjunct pop melody in *Hounds of Love* can be found in the opening hook of *Cloudbusting*: the arpeggiatic movement outlining the tonic minor 7th chord (C#m7) ascends by a minor 3rd then immediately falls by a fifth and a further minor 3rd. The song's other significant hook, which is stated three times in repetition, signifying the chorus, begins with a dramatic upward leap of a 5th.

*Outlining the tonic chord in this way (albeit a dissonant, extended chord in the case of *Cloudbusting*) is a very common way to establish the tonality and ground the melody within the key, examples include Schumann's *Piano Trio in G minor* first subject and Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* *idée fixe*, but also great popular songs such as Elvis Presley's *Can't Help Falling In Love*.

*And *Dream of Sheep* begins with two upward leaps of a fifth, with a descent of an octave in between creating a descending sequence and disjunct movement similar to *Cloudbusting*. Upward fifth leaps such as these are often associated with a call to

attention, such as the fanfares heard at the beginning of John Williams Star Wars theme, and other prominent brass melodies such as the Last Post.

Tonality

*Typical of pop music all three songs can be described as diatonic although, also like many pop songs, they are predominantly in the natural minor mode (unlike classical music which would more typically use the harmonic and melodic minor forms). The effect is to include in this key all the notes of the pentatonic minor scale.

*Whilst Under Ice is in A natural minor (using G natural, flattened 7th), Schumann's Piano Trio in G minor, from the western classical tradition, uses predominantly F#s (the G harmonic and melodic minor scales) whilst in the tonic key.

*Also typical of pop music, each song remains in the same key throughout or, at most, passes through the relative major. Because moving from the natural minor to the relative major does not require chromaticism (both keys use the same 7 notes), these modulations are questionable. The effect of using the natural minor encourages these seamless transitions in pop music.

*Whilst western classical music relies on modulation for its many extended structures, for example the sonata form found in Beethoven Pathétique Sonata Mvt. I, pop songs like those of Kate Bush, which have much much shorter structures, can be created successfully without this modulation.

*This limited use of modulation also reflects Kate Bush's role in the New Wave movement: reacting against the more structurally and tonally complex music of 70s prog rock and similar styles.

*The tonality of Under Ice can be described as A natural minor or A Aeolian mode. This is reinforced by predominance of the tonic and subdominant notes in the bass: repeatedly returning to 'A' throughout the song, confirming the tonality.

Rhythm, Metre and Tempo

*In all three songs, the metre changes very frequently and unexpectedly, leading to irregular phrase lengths, perhaps influenced by the natural rhythms of speech. For example, the phrase 'I can't be left to my imagination' in Dream of Sheep is extended with an additional 2 beat bar in an otherwise 4/4 time signature. The effect is to build tension through unexpected changes, and to make the voice more expressive through naturalism.

*While Kate Bush uses these metre changes to achieve more natural rhythms in the voice, conversely Stravinsky in his Rite of Spring aims to unsettle the viewer by creating unnatural dance rhythms through metre changes, reflected in Nijinsky's shocking choreography.

*Other features relating to speech rhythms include phrases across barlines, many syncopated and anacrusic (off beat and upbeat) phrase beginnings (reflecting the

weak syllable on which many vocal phrases begin), and non-repetitive rhythms: although the melodic motifs are repeated many times, the rhythms are much more variable, reflecting the words.

*These complex, non-repetitive rhythms in Kate Bush's work make the structure of each song more difficult to determine, unlike songs by the Beatles such as Eleanor Rigby in which, each time a verse or chorus returns, the rhythmic motifs remain identical.

*These complex vocal rhythms are contrasted by regular repetitive rhythms in the accompaniment, especially the constant on-beat pulse created by the strings (sampled/synth) almost throughout Cloudbusting and Under Ice.