

Kate Bush- Performing forces, structure and tonality

Kate Bush's revolutionary concept album 'Hounds of Love' utilised cutting-edge technology, restrained structure and instrumentation and grounding modality to break away from the pop idiom. Bush had unprecedented control of the album, as it featured her as a composer, performer and producer. Bush's songs are inspired by literary or historical sources and her musical roots and inspirations are similarly eclectic, ranging through progressive rock, folk, ethnic styles, electronica and classical forms.

Bush utilises cutting-edge technology in her song 'Cloudbusting'- a song based on the relationship between a psychoanalyst/ inventor, and his son. The use of the Fairlight CMI to sample and reproduce sounds is for auxiliary purposes- adding new timbres and characteristics to the piece, transporting the listener on this journey Bush is portraying in this fantasy story setting. The treated vocal sample is used as a backing ostinato and two sampled tracks are used as the melody and accompanying chords for the instrumental section. The use of electronic effects within popular music at the time was not common, but rather forward thinking and Bush utilises it to create a unique atmosphere within her song, much like the rock band Queen. In the song 'A Kind Of Magic' processed vocal samples are used, like 'Cloudbusting' this is done to help portray the message behind the song; in Queens' song they are portraying the idea of magic and in Bush's she is portray a fantasy story. Bush also uses a sampled steam engine sound at the end of her piece, this is different to any other use of electronics, as it does not play a musical role, it rather covers the final chord and is there purely for its sound effect.

All three songs contain familiar ingredients of popular song structure; however, the aesthetic here is far from the highly formalised 3-minute pop song of the 1980s. It is closer to the pretensions of progressive rock and in other to the narrative forms of musical theatre. This is true of most features within Bush's music; she has taken the skeleton of the standard pop song and really stripped it back to the essentials and added in lots of things to make it her own. An example of this is 'And Dream of Sheep', Bush chooses to have a lack of an introduction- in fact there isn't one (it's just a single crotchet before the vocal comes in). This is because a introduction is like a landing zone for the listener, giving them time to prepare for what is to come. Therefore, removing the introduction effectively removes the comfort from the song and is more of a shock for the listener, this ties in with the theme of the song of drifting out at sea awaiting rescue.

Another unconventional feature is that there is no chorus. This is because Bush has presented a very restrained version of the pop song and it is another feature used to remove the comfort from a conventional pop song. A revolutionary example is Radiohead's 'Pyramid Song'. Pyramid Song's unsettling rhythm combines with a slurred melody, and lyrics that change very slightly, but not enough to really notice. To add a comforting chorus to the track would have diminished its impact – there can be nothing familiar here. This has the same intentions as Bush's song, as it is another technique used to take the listener on a journey- there is no comfort and certainty drifting around at sea awaiting rescue, so why would this song have a conventional, comforting chorus.

Bush's musical language is tonal, but straightforwardly diatonic and functional. The tonality is always clear but is often modally infected in the choice of chords and progressions. The use of mode is for its unique sound given- it is far from conventional within popular music and this is why Bush exploits it. Modality also transports the listener to a different place, as often modes are inspired and used by

non-Western music. An example where modes are used to transport the listener is Vaughan Williams' 'On Wenlock Edge'. This is similar to Bush in many ways and Williams is not being revolutionary by using it within the context of his music, but Bush is really utilising the effect it has by using it unordinary in her songs.

Another reason I believe Bush uses modality is because they generally give neither a major or minor sound (often they are a combination of the two), leading the listener being suspended in between. This ambiguity links to Bush's themes of being lost and drifting at sea. In both 'Cloudbusting' and 'Under Ice' there are no key changes, this is because Bush wanted to have no progression or forward movement within the piece, unlike a conventional pop song. Michael Jackson's 'Man In The Mirror' goes up a key at the final chorus in order to add forward movement and leave the listener feeling that they have gone somewhere with the piece. These two techniques ground Bush's pieces and so effectively present the message behind Bush's music (being trapped and drifting uncontrollably). Neither of these techniques are particular revolutionary, it is only within the context of which they are used that makes them quite special.

Overall, Bush's eclectic musical inspirations mean that techniques, often not found within the popular genre, are utilised to transport the listener away from their normal lives and on a journey into these fantasy worlds. Her utilisation of performing forces, structure and tonality in a way not previously used within the pop idiom are all essential to making these pieces so effective.