

The World Feels Dusty  
Aaron Copland

The World Feels Dusty is a harmonically ambiguous piece. Despite its ambiguity, the vocal part is not very difficult to sing. The vocal part is in DIA+2 throughout with the exception of three A# notes. Copland creates the ambiguity with the piano. In fact, the piano does most of the heavy lifting in this piece. This is a good example of how to write well for voice.

The piano creates ambiguity from the beginning of the piece. The key signature is D major, but the piano introduces note G# in measure 1. In fact, the piano is in DIA+3 from measures 1-8, while the voice is in DIA+2 in measure 1-8. This means that Copland uses two different collections at the same time. He avoids making this an issue for the vocalist by not using note G or G# in the vocal part. Also the piano is in DIA+3, but note E, the fifth, is missing.

This avoidance of the fifth within the diatonic collection occurs each time the DIA collection is established. For instance, the piano moves to DIA+2 in measures 13-19. Note A is missing, the fifth. This also happens in the last three measures. There is a sudden change to DIA-2. Note F is missing, the fifth. This creates a sense of ambiguity because the fifth is often used to establish a key and create a sense of resolution.

Copland creates ambiguity in the vocal part by avoiding any sense of centricity. Notes D, A, and the relative minor B are not emphasized. No single note is held or emphasized with register or rhythmic accent. It is very difficult to get an idea of which key the pieces is in from the vocal. This makes the vocal part feel like it is floating. Is it floating in a dusty wind?

The piano does most of the work in this piece. It moves to the next key before the voice does in most cases. For example, in measure 13 it drops the G# and establishes DIA+2. Interestingly, measures 13-19 are the only part of the piece in which the voice and piano are in the same diatonic collection.

Measures 21 to the end of the piece, the piano moves through a quick succession of diatonic collections. It is in DIA +4, then DIA +2, DIA+3, and finally DIA-2. The left hand moves first in measure 23. It introduces notes D and A in direction contrast to notes D# and A# in the previous measure and what is happening in the right hand and the vocal part. The right hand and vocal part follow suite in the next part.

The A# in the voice at the very is interesting. It is an enharmonic spelling of the motion to Bb in the piano part. This movement was established in measure 21 when the voice went to A#. This prepared the motion to Bb at the end of the piece.

Approach:

Type in each of the things that we should look for and structure your paper to match them.