

Jason V. Barabba

Jiddling:

Considered as One of the Exact Sciences

Taken from the Essay by Edgar Allan Poe
for Baritone and Piano

Diddling: Considered as One of the Exact Sciences

Movements

1. Done
2. Variations – “Hey Diddle, Diddle.”
3. Coda

Duration - Approximately 14 Minutes

...a clarification from dictionary.com

did-dle –verb (used with object),-dled, -dling.

Informal. to cheat; swindle; hoax.

Edgar Allan Poe must have been cheated or swindled by someone good because only that can explain the existence of this angry little essay. In it he rails against the dark hearts of men who seek out to steal or cheat from others. If you're getting some sort of double entendre from his now largely extinct use of the term diddling ... well ... you've got a dirty mind and I have no idea what you're talking about.

One of the things that struck me about this text is Poe's rather remarkable grasp of history, and his penchant for using what seem like somewhat obscure historical references to make his point. These include:

Dick Turpin – An 18th Century British highway robber

Lady Bury – A 19th Century British high society author

Baiae – An Italian town where the super rich of the Roman Empire went to let loose.

Called “a harbor of vice” by Seneca the Younger.

“Ut canis a corio nunquam absterrebitur uncto” A quotation from Horace roughly translating as “A dog who has once become accustomed to gnaw leather will never forget the habit.”

I have a history of choosing to work with ... let's call them “unexpected” texts in my vocal writing. Things that no sane composer would think “Oh, yes...there's a song in there.” And, yes I'll admit to a certain amount of childish snickering at the title of the work. But, the more I dove into this text, the more I started to see the somewhat personal look into an aspect of Poe that perhaps not everyone spends time thinking about. The actual man as a member of his society. And, he certainly didn't like everything he saw.

Scott Graff and I worked together to choose the excerpts from the original essay to use in this song cycle. If I had tried to set it all, it would be a 3-hour mega opera (though, I think probably an interesting one!). We elected to focus on his more general attitudes towards people, and less on the specific examples of “diddling” that make up most of the essay.

Musically, the idiom is fairly straightforward. I couldn't resist using the folk-tune for “Hey Diddle, Diddle” as the theme of the backwards variations in the second movement. But, that's the only element of outside reference in the score. I tried to create a sound world that echoed the slightly angry and odd nature of Poe's original intent.

Text adapted from the essay by Edgar Allan Poe

1. Done

Diddling- or the abstract idea conveyed by the verb to diddle- is sufficiently well understood. Yet the fact, the deed, the thing diddling, is somewhat difficult to define. We may get at a tolerably distinct conception of the matter in hand, by defining-not the thing, diddling, in itself- but man, as an animal that diddles. Had Plato but hit upon this, he would have been spared the affront of the picked chicken.

Very pertinently it was demanded of Plato, why a picked chicken, which was clearly “a biped without feathers,” was not, according to his own definition, a man? But I am not to be bothered by any similar query. Man is an animal that diddles, and there is no animal that diddles but man. It will take an entire hen-coop of picked chickens to get over that.

What constitutes the principle of diddling is peculiar to the class of creatures that wear coats and pantaloons. A crow thievs; a fox cheats; a weasel outwits; a man diddles. “Man was made to

mourn," says the poet. But not so:- he was made to diddle. This is his aim - his object - his end. And when a man's diddled we say he's "done."

2. Variations and a Theme

Diddling, rightly considered, is a compound, of which the ingredients are minuteness, interest, perseverance, ingenuity, audacity, nonchalance, originality, impertinence, and grin.

Your diddler is audacious. He is a bold man. He carries the war into Africa. With a little more prudence Dick Turpin would have made a good diddler; with a pound or two more brains Charles the Twelfth.

He is cool as a cucumber. "Calm as a smile from Lady Bury." He is easy- easy as an old glove, or the damsels of ancient Baiae.

Your diddler is impertinent. He swaggers. He sets his arms a-kimbo. He thrusts his hands in his trousers. He sneers in your face. He treads on your corns. He eats your dinner, he drinks your wine, he borrows your money, he pulls your nose, he kicks your poodle, and he kisses your wife.

Your diddler perseveres. Ut canis a corio nunquam absterrebitur uncto.

Your diddler is ingenious. He invents and circumvents. Were he not Alexander he would be Diogenes. Were he not a diddler, he would be a maker of patent rat-traps or an angler for trout.

The origin of the diddle is referable to the infancy of the Human Race. Perhaps the first diddler was Adam.

3. Coda

But there is really no end to diddling, so, were I even to hint at half the variations of this science there would be no end to this essay. I must bring this paper, perforce, to a conclusion.

Diddling is registered with ASCAP.
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www.jasonbarabba.com - jason@jasonbarabba.com
(323) 668-0662

Didling:

Excerpted from the Essay by
Edgar Allan Poe

Considered as One of the Exact Sciences

Jason V. Barabba
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1. Done

♩=84 - Sneaky

f

Baritone

Did-dl-ing

♩=84 - Sneaky

Light and Airy

Piano

mp *f* *mp* *mf*

4 *mf* *f* *mp*

or the ab - stract i - dea con - veyed by the word to did - dle

f *mp* *f* *p*

8 *<f* *mp* *mf* *ff*

Is su - ffi - cien - tly well un - der - stood Yet the fact the deed the thing

The musical score is written for Baritone and Piano. It begins with a tempo marking of ♩=84 and a mood of 'Sneaky'. The Baritone part starts with a forte (f) dynamic and the lyrics 'Did-dl-ing'. The Piano accompaniment features a 'Light and Airy' character with dynamics ranging from mezzo-piano (mp) to mezzo-forte (mf). The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 4 and 8 indicated. The lyrics are: 'or the ab - stract i - dea con - veyed by the word to did - dle' and 'Is su - ffi - cien - tly well un - der - stood Yet the fact the deed the thing'. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings like <f, mp, mf, f, and ff.

12 *mp* *mf* *f* *mf*

did-dl-ing ³ng ng is some-what di-ffi-cult to de - fine

16 *mf* *f* *mp*

We may get at a

19 *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

tol - er - a - bly dis - tinct con - cep - tion of the mat-ter at hand by

22 *f* *mp* *p*

— de-fin-ing not the thing did - dl - ing in it self

26 *f*

but man _____ as an an - i - mal that did - dles had Pla-to but hit up-on this

29 *mp* *f* *mp* *mf* *p*

he would have been spared the af-front of the picked chick-en Ver - y pert-i-nent-ly _____

35 *espress.* *mf* *p* *mf* *f*

It was de - man-ded of Pla-to _____ why _____ A picked chick-en

40 *mf*

which was clear - ly a bi - ped with - out

43 *f* *mf*

fea - - - thers _____ was _____ not a -

46 *mf*

ccor - ding to his own de - fi - ni - tion _____ a man _____ But, I am not to

50 *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *f*

be bo - thered by an - y si - mi - lar - que - ry _____ Man is an

56 *ff* *mf*

an - i - mal that did - dles _____ and there is _____ no an - i - mal that did - dles but man _____

2. Variations - "Hey Diddle, Diddle"

Variation 6 - "Introduction"

Allegro (Approx ♩ = 120)

mf

f

Bar.

Pno.

Avoid accenting any beats in this variation.

116 *mp*

mf *f*

Pno.

119 *mp*

Pno.

122 *mf*

mf

Pno.

126 *f* *mf*

mi - - - nute - ness in - ter - est

130 *f* *mf* *f*

per - se - ver - ence in - gen - u - i - ty au - - -

134 *ff* *mp* *mp*

- da - ci - ty non - cha - lance

138 *f*

o - ri - gi - nal - i - ty

142

mf

im - per - ti - nence

145 *mp*

and

148 *f*

grin

Variation 5 "Audacity"

152 Prestissimo (Approx. ♩=176)

Freely

Your did-dler is ³ au-

160 *ff* *f*

da-cious he is a bold man he car - ries the war in - to A fri-ca

168 *mp* *mf p* *mf mp*

with a lit-tle more pru-dence Dick Tur pin

176 *f* *f* *ff* *mp* *p*

would havemade a good did dl-er with a pound or two more brains

Variation 4 - "Non-chalance"

Grave (Approx ♩=50) - Icy

183

mf *mp* *p*
Charles the twelfth

Grave (Approx ♩=50) - Icy

190

mp *mf*
He is cool as a cu-cum-ber "calm as a smile from la-dy Bu-ry"

196

p *p* *f* *p*
he is ea - sy ea - sy as an old_ glove

Wait for the piano resonance to settle a bit.