

Listening Guide

Handel: *Messiah*, Nos. 1, 14–18, 44

DATE OF WORK: 1742

GENRE: Oratorio, in 3 parts

PARTS: I—Christmas section
II—Easter section
III—Redemption section

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Opening orchestral overture, in 2 parts (French style): slow with dotted rhythms, then fast and imitative.
Alternation of unaccompanied (free) and accompanied recitative (in time), telling the birth of Christ.
Chorus (“Glory to God”), in alternating textures (homorhythmic vs. imitative).
Lyrical soprano aria (“Rejoice greatly”), with long melismas on “re-**joice**”; set in 3-part form (**A-B-A'**), with shortened last section.
Famous chorus (“Hallelujah”), set in contrasting textures with interjections of “Hallelujah.”

(Shorter recordings include Nos. 18 and 44 only.)

PART I: CHRISTMAS SECTION

1. Overture

Form: French overture, 2 parts (slow-fast), the first part repeated (**A-A-B**)

A section—Grave, E minor, played twice; stately, dotted rhythms:



B section—Allegro moderato, E minor, imitative polyphony in 3 voices; opening subject introduced by oboes and first violins:



TEXT

DESCRIPTION

14a. Recitative (secco)

There were shepherds abiding in the field,
keeping watch over their flock by night.

Sustained chords in harpsichord.

14b. Recitative (accompagnato)

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon
them, and the glory of the Lord shone round
about them, and they were sore afraid.

String accompaniment, with arpeggiated
chords.

15. Recitative (secco)

And the angel said unto them, fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Sustained chords.

16. Recitative (accompagnato)

And suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying:

Allegro, with rippling string figure.

17. Chorus

Glory to God in the highest
and peace on earth,
good-will toward men.

4-voices, homorhythmic, with moving string accompaniment.
Tenors and basses alone, descending octave leap in basses, homophonic.
Imitative, polyphonic treatment; fugue built from lowest to highest voice; antiphonal exchange of "good-will."

(All text lines repeated.)

Orchestral closing.

18. Soprano aria (A-B-A')

A
Rejoice greatly,
O daughter of Zion
shout, O daughter of Jerusalem,
behold, thy King cometh unto thee.

Instrumental ritornello, vocal theme presented in violins in B^b major.

B
He is the righteous Saviour and he shall
speak peace unto the heathen.

Disjunct rising line, melismas on "rejoice"; melody exchanged between soprano and violin.
Syncopated, choppy melody, ends in F major.
Instrumental ritornello.

A'
Rejoice greatly . . .

Begins in G minor, slower and lyrical; modulates to B^b major.

Abridged instrumental ritornello; new melodic elaborations; longer melismas on "rejoice."

Extended melisma on "rejoice" from last section:



PART II: EASTER SECTION

44. Chorus

TEXT

Hallelujah!
For the Lord God
omnipotent reigneth.

The kingdom of this world
is become the Kingdom of our Lord
and of His Christ;
and He shall reign for ever and ever.

King of Kings
and Lord of Lords.
Hallelujah!

DESCRIPTION

Short instrumental introduction.
4 voices, homorhythmic at opening.
Textural reductions, leading to imitation and
overlapping of text, builds in complexity,
imitative entries.
Homorhythmic treatment, simple
accompaniment.

Imitative polyphony, voices build from lowest
to highest.
Women's voices introduce the text,
punctuated by "Hallelujah"; closes in homo-
rhythmic setting with trumpets and timpani.

Opening of chorus, in homorhythmic style:

Soprano *f* *etc.*

Alto Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

Tenor Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!

Bass *f* Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah! Hal - le - lu - jah!