

HKDSE Listening – Paper 1A

George Frideric Handel, Messiah HWV 56 (1741)

Brief Description

Year of composition:	1741
Composer:	George Frideric Handel
Librettist:	Charles Jennens
Genre:	Oratorio
Period:	Baroque
Premiere:	Dublin in 1742, London a year later
Instrumentation:	solo singers (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), choir (SATB), 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 trumpets, 2 violins, viola, cello, violone (double basses) and harpsichord

Meaning of “Messiah”

- Refers to the “Anointed One” a title for Jesus Christ in Christian theology, representing the savior of humankind.

Structure

- Part I: Predicts the coming of the Messiah; includes the Annunciation to the shepherds, based on biblical texts.
- Part II: Details Christ’s Passion, death, resurrection, and the spread of the Gospel; concludes with the powerful Hallelujah chorus.
- Part III: Focuses on redemption, the day of judgement, and the ultimate victory over sin and death; celebrates Christ’s triumph.

Reception

- Initially received modestly, Messiah gained popularity over time, becoming one of the most performed oratorios in Western music.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

Birth and Training

George Frideric Handel was born in 1685, in Halle, Germany. He received his musical training in Halle and later worked in Hamburg and Italy before moving to London in 1712.

Musical Legacy

Recognized as one of the greatest composers of the Baroque era, Handel is celebrated for his contributions to Italian opera, the English oratorio, church music, as well as orchestral work. The success of *Messiah* solidified Handel's reputation and contributed to the establishment of the oratorio as a significant musical genre in English culture, influencing future composers.

Transition to Oratorio

As public interest in Italian opera declined by the early 1730s, partly due to the success of English-language works like *The Beggar's Opera*, Handel began composing oratorios as alternatives to his staged operas.

Creation of Messiah

Composed in 1741, *Messiah* was a turning point in his career. Following its success, he never returned to composing Italian opera.

Other notable works by Handel

🎵 *Serse* (opera): One of Handel's most famous Italian operas, premiered in 1738. Notable for the aria "Ombra mai fu", a beautiful and lyrical piece that celebrates the shade of a beloved tree, showcasing Handel's melodic genius.

🎵 Water Music (orchestral suite): A set of dance-inspired movements to be performed during the king's entourage along the river Thames. Notable movements include:

- Overture – The overture is a music instrumental introduction. Overture in Handel's time, typically features a slow, majestic first section followed by a lively, fugal second section, capturing the magnificence and celebratory spirit of the suite.
- Air – By the 18th century, composers wrote airs for instrumental ensembles without a voice. These were song-like, lyrical pieces, often movements in a larger composition.

🎵 *Saul* (oratorio). One of Handel's many oratorios on a story from the Old Testament. The text deals with the relationship between Saul, King of Israel, and the young David.

🎵 *Rinaldo* (opera). Handel's first operatic hit premiered in London in 1711.

🎵 *Giulio Cesare* (opera). One of Handel’s most enduring operas, the tale of Caesar and Cleopatra in ancient Egypt.

🎵 *Alexander’s Feast* (ode). Set to a text by poet and playwright John Dryden, this work for soloists, chorus, and orchestra extols the power of music even over Alexander the Great, ruler of the world’s greatest empire in his day.

Oratorio as a Genre

A. Origin

The word **oratorio** (神劇/神曲) is the Italian word for “prayer hall,” which is where these works were performed in the seventeenth century.

The church forbade any production of operas during the penitential seasons of **Lent** 四旬期 (40 days in early spring before Easter) and **Advent** 降臨節 (30 days in the fall before Christmas), a period when the faithful were supposed to give up worldly pleasures and devote themselves to inward contemplation.

The genre soon spread across Europe and became a standard substitute for opera during the penitential seasons of Lent and Advent.

B. Characteristics

Musically, an oratorio is virtually identical to an opera: it includes **recitatives**, **arias**, and **choruses**, and the singing can be quite elaborate. But unlike opera, an oratorio is not staged—there are no costumes, no stage design or scenery, no acting—and is based on a **sacred** topic, such as stories from the Bible.

Unlike a typical mass or cantata, oratorio often involves a plot and several characters (except the central figure of Christ, the impersonation of which was deemed offensive). While masses and cantatas are performed in churches and serve **liturgical** (禮拜儀式) functions (as part of the worshipping ritual), oratorios are performed in concert halls or in patrons’ residences. This led some people to describe the oratorio as a kind of “sacred entertainment”.

Handel brought elements that are foreign to Italian opera into his oratorios, taken from French classical drama, ancient Greek tragedy, the German Passion, and especially the English **anthem** (贊美詩).

C. Differences from Opera

- Theatrical elements: Oratorios have **minimal staging** compared to operas, which involve elaborate sets, props, and costumes.
- Subject: Oratorio texts often focus on **sacred (religious) subjects**, making them suitable for church performance. Operas can cover a wide range of themes, including history, romance and mythology, etc.
- The role of chorus: In opera, the **chorus** typically has a minor role, but in oratorio, it assumes a much more significant position.

Musical Components of Oratorios

A. Recitative

Recitatives is a style of delivery that mimics the rhythms and accents of spoken language, focusing more on communication than on melody or musical motifs.

- sung by soloist
- delivered in a manner similar to speech
- each syllable is articulated with the appropriate length and emphasis
- emphasizes the clarity of the text
- lyrics serve to establish the context and propel the narrative
- as a connection between arias and choruses

Types of Recitatives

(1) **Secco recitatives** (dry/simple recitatives)

- A type of recitative accompanied only by the **basso continuo** (cello and harpsichord), which provides harmonic support to the singer's **declamatory** line
- The vocal line is more improvisatory.
- The accompaniment is more sparse and discontinuous, only punctuating the vocal line during the breaks between the phrases

(2) Accompanied recitatives

- A type of recitative accompanied by several instruments or the entire orchestra
- It is often reserved for dramatic situations where the character's emotions are intense
- Less improvisational and declamatory than secco recitatives

B. Aria

A song for a solo singer with instrumental accompaniment.

- sung by a soloist
- usually follow the recitatives
- music becomes the primary element
- involved fewer words
- melodies are more lyrical and dramatic compared to recitatives
- as an opportunity for the character to express his/her emotions

C. Chorus

An ensemble singing involving the choir and the orchestra.

- sung by a choir
- used to represent the voices of the congregation or humanity in general
- the chorus is often the high point within an oratorio (such as the "Halleluia" chorus in Act 2)

Stylistic Features in Baroque Period

Figured bass

A notation system with numerals and symbols placed near a bass note to indicate intervals, chords, and non-chord tones for musicians. Commonly used by harpsichordists, organists, and lute players, it is linked to basso continuo, an improvised accompaniment typical of the Baroque period.

Ornamentations and Improvisation

Trills and other embellishments are frequently used throughout the music.

When singers repeat a melody, they often add passing notes, neighbouring notes (also known as auxiliary notes), or other ornamentations to enhance the original melody.

Polyphonic texture

Frequent use of counterpoint, where multiple independent melodies are woven together, creating complex texture.

Homophonic texture

Even though polyphonic texture played a crucial role during the Baroque period, homophonic texture also held significant importance. In Handel's *Messiah* and other Baroque compositions, homophonic sections provide a striking contrast to the complex and busy contrapuntal movements.

Functional harmony

Use of major and minor tonalities with clear harmonic progressions and cadences, establishing a sense of key.

Rhythmic drive

A strong, consistent rhythm that propels the music forward, often utilizing repeated patterns.

Contrast

Strong contrasts in dynamics (loud and soft) are prominent.

Word painting

The Baroque era in music was characterized by a significant interest in word painting, a technique that depicts the meaning of words through music. For instance, dissonance is often used to represent "pain".

Compositional Background of Handel's *Messiah*

Handel composed two oratorios during his stay in Italy (1706–10): *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* ("The Triumph of Time and Truth") and *La Resurrezione* ("The Resurrection"), both were written and performed in Italian.

Handel's first English oratorio is *Esther*, performed in his opera theatre (Haymarket theatre) in 1732. This work bears witness to Handel's grand "anthem" style (the style of the coronation anthems that he composed for the English royalty).

Handel's next major oratorios are *Saul* (1739) and *Israel in Egypt* (1739). The former work displays an unprecedented musical coherence and dramatic characterization, while the latter work uses excerpts from the Bible as the libretto (also the case for *Messiah*).

In 1741 Handel received an invitation to produce a concert season in **Dublin** (都柏林), Ireland. He began composing the oratorio **Messiah** (彌賽亞) in a little over three weeks during the summer of 1741, and the work received its premiere (首演) in **1742** as part of a subscription concert series at the Great Music Hall in Fishamble Street.

Handel's Musical Style

A. Heavy use of chorus

- Influenced by the English choral tradition, Handel makes heavy use of chorus in the *Messiah*, often used as a culminating climax to the preceding recitative-aria-chorus sequence.
- Choruses perform a variety of roles, such as participating in the action, narrating the story, or commenting on the story's events (like the chorus in Greek tragedy).
- A chorus often encompasses a wide variety of textures (monophonic, polyphonic, homophonic, and chordal) and instrumentation (solo voices, chorus, and orchestra).
- Handel's choruses are less contrapuntal than Bach's, but they are more dramatic and display a greater musical variety in terms of texture, rhythm and orchestration.

B. Limited use of recitative

- Recitatives are few and short, though they fulfill an essential function by introducing new topics that become the subjects of the succeeding arias.

C. Colorful orchestration

- The orchestra includes trumpets and drums, evoking a majestic and ceremonial atmosphere.

Libretto

The libretto, provided for Handel by **Charles Jennen**, was taken from the **Old and New Testaments** (舊約和新約) of the Bible.

The subject of the oratorio is God's redemption of mankind through the Messiah, and the conflicts involved are viewed from cosmic and eternal perspectives.

The three-part design of *Messiah* is carried over from the three acts of a typical Italian opera.

Three-part structure of Handel's *Messiah*

1. Part One: prophecies concerning the Saviour, and their fulfilment in his incarnation
 - I. Isaiah's prophecy of Salvation: the Gospel or 'good news'
 - II. The judgement that will accompany the appearance of the Saviour
 - III. The specific prophecy of Christ's birth
 - IV. The Incarnation, announced to the shepherds near Bethlehem
 - V. The redemption and healing brought by the Saviour

2. Part Two: events from Christ's passion to the final triumph of his second coming
 - I. Christ's passion, scourging and crucifixion
 - II. Christ's death and resurrection
 - III. Christ's ascension
 - IV. Christ's reception in Heaven
 - V. Whitsun, and the subsequent preaching of the Gospel
 - VI. The world's hostile reception to the Gospel
 - VII. God's ultimate victory

3. Part Three: an extended commentary on Christ's role as Saviour
 - I. The promise of eternal life and the triumph over Original Sin, through Christ's victory
 - II. The general resurrection that will accompany the Day of Judgement
 - III. The final conquest over sin
 - IV. Acclamation of the Messiah

Recitative (alto) – Behold, a virgin shall conceive

Meter:	4/4
Tonality:	D major
Tempo:	Free tempo that reflects the natural rhythms of the words
Style:	Recitative (secco recitative)
Instrumentation:	Alto, basso continuo (harpsichord and cello)

(Libretto)

Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his Name
Emmanuel, GOD WITH US.
(Isaiah 7,14; Matthew 1,23)

(Translation)

說：必有童女懷孕生子；人要稱他的名為以馬內利（神與我們同在）。

（以賽亞書 第七章 9；馬太福音 第一章 23）

The rhythm of the melody reflects the prosody of the words (accented syllables fall on stronger metrical position)

Recitative

Be-hold, a vir-gin shall con-ceive,
Denn sieh, eine Jung-frau wird ge-bür'n

5 3 7 4 2

figured bass
(short-hand for labelling chords)

homophonic texture
- a single melodic line
- harmonic accompaniment

A very short (six bars in total) **recitative** sung by the alto. It is accompanied by the **basso continuo** only, which is made up of a bass instrument (cello, performing the bass line) and a keyboard instrument (cembalo, filling out the chords). This simple setting is often referred to as a **recitativo secco** (dry recitative) or a **recitativo semplice** (simple recitative), in contrast to the

more elaborate **recitativo accompagnato** (accompanied recitative), as will be the case for the later recitative (“For behold, darkness shall cover the earth”).

Texture

The texture is **homophonic** throughout, consisting of a single melodic line (alto voice) supported by harmonic accompaniment (basso continuo).

Text setting

The text setting is **syllabic** throughout (singing one note per syllable). This declamatory-style singing ensures clear articulation of the words. The basso continuo punctuates the vocal line between the phrases.

The singing style is **declamatory** and **speech-like**, as if the singer is making an announcement to the audience. The registral range is narrow (from B3 to A4), and the rhythm mainly consists of a succession of quavers and crotchets.

Handel observes closely the **prosody** (the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables) in the biblical text, thereby placing the stressed syllable on the stronger beats in the bar.

Harmony

The recitative begins in D major (bars 1–3). **Modulation** occurs in bar 4, with the introduction of the accidental note G[♭] (the leading tone of the dominant key, A major). The recitative ends with a **perfect cadence** in A major, performed by the basso continuo.

Word painting

The final words “God with us” are subtly highlighted by a **pause/rest** after “Emmanuel.” This rest is longer than previous ones, effectively building anticipation and drawing the listener’s focus to the concluding phrase.

Compositional device

Use of the **pedal point**: The use of a tonic pedal point creates a sustained note that underpins the harmony, establishing a sense of tension and anticipation. By maintaining a constant pitch while the harmonies above it change, the pedal point emphasizes specific words or phrases in the text.

Aria (alto) & Chorus – O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion

Meter:	6/8
Tonality:	D major
Tempo:	Andante
Style:	Aria and Chorus
Instrumentation:	Alto, basso continuo (harpsichord and cello), bassoon, violins, cello and violone

(Libretto)

O thou that tellest good Tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high Mountain:

O thou that tellest good Tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy Voice with Strength;

lift it up, be not afraid: Say unto the Cities of Judah, Behold your God.

O thou that tellest good Tidings to Zion

Arise, shine, for thy Light is come, and the Glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

(Isaiah 40,9; Isaiah 60,1)

(Translation)

報好信息給錫安的啊，你要登高山；報好信息給耶路撒冷的啊，你要極力揚聲。

揚聲不要懼怕，對猶大的城邑說：看哪，你們的神！

興起，發光！因為你的光已經來到！耶和華的榮耀發現照耀你。

（以賽亞書 第四十章 9； 第六十章 1）

Combined with the previous recitative, this aria forms a larger **recitative-aria-chorus** sequence. The aria leads directly (*attacca*) to the chorus, which shares with the former the same melodic content and motivic materials that is first presented in the instrumental introduction (this phrase returns after the end of the chorus).

Call and Response

The alto solo and the violins feature a dialogue-like interaction, where the violins respond to the soloist's phrases. This call-and-response creates a dynamic interplay that enriches the texture, further emphasizing the message and enhancing the overall sense of engagement.

Beginning

A B C

Violino I, II

Alto

Fagotto

Violoncello, Violone, Cembalo

(ascending)

D G

(ascending 2nd sequence)

Middle End

sequence / sequential repetition fragmentation cadential idea

6

E A F# B

(descending)

(parallel tenths) (applied chord)

A1

12

A

Imitation (echo)

(extension of A)

O thou that tell-est good ti-dings to Zi-on,
O du, der uns fro-he Bot-schaft ver-kün-det,

get thee up in-to the high
steig em - por zur Hö-he der

IV $\overset{6-5}{V} \overset{4-3}{I}$ perfect cadence (in D major)

The musical score is divided into three main sections: Beginning, Middle, and End. The Beginning section features a Violino I, II part with two phrases, A and B, highlighted in red and green boxes respectively. The Alto part is silent. The Fagotto and Violoncello/Violone/Cembalo parts play a continuous ascending sequence, with an orange arrow indicating the 'ascending' nature. The Middle section shows a sequence of chords (E, A, F#, B) and a descending line in the Fagotto part, with an orange arrow indicating the 'descending' nature. The End section features a vocal line with lyrics, a red box highlighting a phrase, and a red arrow indicating an 'Imitation (echo)'. The score concludes with a perfect cadence in D major, labeled as IV V 6-5 4-3 I.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for the aria is rather minimal, employing only the **violins** (acting as a **countermelody** to the vocal line) and **bassoon** (reinforcing the basso continuo). The overall

timbre is rather stark, involving only three textural layers: the voice, the violins, and the basso continuo.

Meter

The aria introduces a lively compound duple metre that evokes a sense of movement and joy. This reflects the excitement and urgency of spreading the good news.

Tonality

D major is introduced by Handel as the most significant key in Messiah, representing themes of **triumph** and **celebration** (including the Halleluia chorus). Eleven movements are written in D major, making it the most frequently used key in the oratorio.

In this piece, despite modulations to other keys (such as A major and G major), the frequent returns to D major highlight its centrality and reinforce the celebratory nature of the text.

Texture

The texture is **homophonic**, allowing the solo singer to project the words with great clarity.

Structure

After the instrumental introduction, the aria consists of three sections, corresponding to the three-part structure of the libretto (each line beginning with “O thou that tellest good Tidings”). Each section makes use of the materials from the introduction, expanding and elaborating them into different formal proportions.

Text setting

In contrast to the syllabic setting of the recitative, this aria includes some elaborate **melismatic** setting (one syllable performed over multiple notes) of certain words, such as “mountain” in bars 30–5 and “glory” in bars 85–7.

Long notes for divine references: the words “God” and “Lord” are set to longer notes, allowing them to resonate and impart weight. This rhythmic choice conveys solemnity, underscoring the importance of these divine figures in the context of the text.

60

Be - hold your God, be-hold your God, be-hold your God!
Der Herr ist da, der Herr ist da, der Herr ist da!

Handel makes use of **word painting** (or **tone painting**) to reflect the meaning of certain words in the libretto.

- (1) **Ascending melodic contour:** the motion of “is arisen” and “get thee up into the high Mountain” is imitated by an ascending melodic line, whose sinuous motion gradually rises up step by step

“arisen” (bars 93-6)

is ris - en, is ris - en up - on thee, is ris - en,
die Herr-lich - keit des Herrn er - scheint, die

“high mountain” (bars 30-5)

up in - to the high moun - tain;
por zur Hö - he der Ber - ge!

- (2) **Upward leap + Melodic sequence:** the ascending leap of a fourth mirrors the words “lift up”, sounding like a call to action and evoking a sense of elevation and hope. The ascending sequence also captures the meaning of ascent and elevation.

“arisen” (bars 93-6)

is ris - en, is ris - en up - on thee, is ris - en,
die Herr-lich - keit des Herrn er - scheint, die

- (3) Triumphant **melisma** on key words: melisma is the singing of a single syllable of text while moving between several different notes in succession. The use of melisma and coloratura on words like “mountain” and “glory” captures the essence of victory, and rejoicing.

“glory” (bars 85-8)



Chorus

The chorus begins with **imitative entries** among the three of the four voices (first soprano, then bass and tenor). This imitation in close succession—with an interval of one bar between entries—is similar to a **stretto**. The imitative opening is repeated in bars 6–9 with the subject transposed up a perfect fifth (starting with E–A instead of A–D).

Change of Texture

The chorus begins with a **polyphonic** (or **contrapuntal**) texture, with each voice of the chorus entering separately with the same opening idea. The texture changes to **chordal** (or **homophonic**) starting in bar 10, where all the voices sing together with the same rhythm over the words “say unto the cities of Judah”, thereby creating a powerful, unified expression.

The chorus consists of two sections, with the second beginning in bar 20 (with an upbeat). The first section ends with a perfect cadence in the dominant key (A major), and the second section closes with a perfect cadence in the tonic key (D major). The chorus concludes with a restatement of the opening introduction from the previous aria.

The musical score is for a chorus in D major, 6/8 time. It features the following parts and annotations:

- Oboe I, II:** oboes and violins double the soprano.
- Violino I & II:** Violin I and viola double the tenor.
- Viola:** (part of the doubling for the tenor).
- Soprano:**
 - Lyrics: *O thou that tell-est good ti-dings to Zi-on, good ti - dings to Je - ru - sa - lem,*
 - German: *O du, der uns fro-he Botschaft ver-kündet, ver - kün - det in Je - ru - sa - lem,*
 - Annotations: *f*, *senza rip.*, *tutti* (bar 1-19), *f* (bar 20-24).
- Alto:**
 - Lyrics: *on thee.*
 - German: *dir —.*
 - Annotation: *solo* (bar 1-19).
- Tenore:**
 - Lyrics: *O thou that tell-est good ti-dings to Zi-on,*
 - German: *O du, der uns fro-he Botschaft ver-kündet,*
 - Annotations: *f* (bar 20-24), *imitative entries* (red arrows from Soprano and Bass parts).
- Basso:**
 - Lyrics: *O thou that tell-est good ti-dings to Zi-on, good ti - dings to Je -*
 - German: *O du, der uns fro-he Botschaft ver-kündet, ver - kün - det in Je -*
 - Annotations: *f* (bar 20-24).
- Bassi (Violoncello, Violone, Fagotto, Cembalo):**
 - Annotations: *Vc., Cemb.*, *tutti* (bar 1-19), *f* (bar 20-24), *basso continuo doubles the bass*.

Red boxes highlight the first section (bars 1-19) and the second section (bars 20-24). Red 'A' marks indicate the end of the first section and the beginning of the second section.

Recitative (bass) – For behold, darkness shall cover the earth

Meter:	4/4
Tonality:	B minor
Tempo:	Andante larghetto
Style:	Recitative (accompanied recitative)
Instrumentation:	Bass, basso continuo (bassoon and harpsichord), strings

(Libretto)

For behold, Darkness shall cover the Earth, and gross Darkness the People: but
the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his Glory shall be seen upon thee. And the
Gentiles shall come to thy Light, and Kings to the Brightness of thy Rising.

(Isaiah 60, 2–3)

(Translation)

看哪，黑暗遮蓋大地，幽暗遮蓋萬民，耶和華卻要顯現照耀你；他的榮耀要現在
你身上。萬國要來就你的光，君王要來就你發現的光輝。

（以賽亞書 第六十章 2 - 3）

This is a **recitativo accompagnato** (accompanied recitative). Instead of being accompanied only by the basso continuo, this recitative also relies on both the violins and violas to provide accompanying figurations to the vocal part.

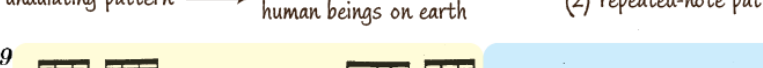
Similar to the previous **recitative-aria-chorus sequence**, this recitative is closely related to the following aria (“The people that walked in darkness,” performed also by the bass), which reaches the climax in the final chorus (“For unto us a child is born”).

The form of the recitative is **through-composed**, with no clear repetition of phrases.

The recitative has two different accompanimental patterns: an **undulating pattern** of two slurred notes a second apart (bars 1–10) and a series of **repeated notes** (bars 10 onward). The undulating two-note pattern depicts people aimlessly wandering in the darkness.

(1) undulating pattern → aimless wandering of human beings on earth

(2) repeated-note pattern



Modality

The brightness evoked in the previous aria (“thy Light is come”) **contrasts** with the darkness of this recitative (“darkness shall cover the earth”). This opposition between light and dark is reflected in the change of mode from **major** (D major) to its **relative minor** (B minor).

Internal to the recitative, the mode changes from F` minor to D major in bar 10, when the singer announces the arrival of the Lord (“the Lord shall arise upon thee”) and the related idea of “Light” and “Brightness” in the last line. The music reverts to the minor mode in bar 20 till the end.

[illegible]

Word painting

This recitative uses **word painting** occasionally to highlight certain words:

- (1) “gross darkness” in bars 9–10 is portrayed with a **descending diminished seventh interval**
- (2) “arise” in bars 12–13 is sung with an **ascending melodic motion**

- (3) “glory” in bar 15 & 18 is emphasized with **melisma**

melismatic text setting,
emphaizing the word “glory”

on thee, and His glo - - - ry shall be seen up - on thee,
vor dir, sei-ne Herr- - - lich-keit er-schei-net vor dir,

The image shows a musical score snippet for two staves. The top staff is a bass line with a melisma on the word 'glory' (glo - - - ry) in bar 15 and 18. The bottom staff contains the lyrics in English and German. The word 'glory' is highlighted in yellow.

- (4) depiction of darkness is represented by a **disjunct melodic line** with wide skips and leaps

- (5) the word “darkness” in bar 8 is depicted by a **diminished seventh chord**

disjunct melodic line
(dark and cold)

diminished
seventh chord
D#-F#-A-C

For be-hold, dark - ness shall cov - er the earth, and gross dark - ness the
Schaum - her! Dun - kel be - dek - ket die Welt, finst-re Nacht al - le

The image shows a musical score snippet for four staves. The top two staves are piano accompaniment. The bottom two staves are vocal lines. A disjunct melodic line is highlighted in blue in the vocal line, and a diminished seventh chord (D#-F#-A-C) is highlighted in red in the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in English and German.

Aria (bass) – The people that walked in darkness

Meter:	4/4
Tonality:	B minor
Tempo:	Larghetto
Style:	Aria
Instrumentation:	Bass, basso continuo (bassoon and harpsichord), strings

(Libretto)

The People that walked in Darkness have seen a great Light; And they that dwell
in the Land of the Shadow of Death, upon them hath the Light shined.

(Isaiah 9,2)

(Translation)

在黑暗中行走的百姓看見了大光，住在死蔭之地的人有光照耀他們。

(以賽亞書 第九章 2)

10. Air
Larghetto
senza rip.

Violino I, II
Viola^{vo}
Basso
Bassi
(Violoncello, Violone, Fagotto, Cembalo)

chromatic notes
dissonant leaps
the bass enters with the same melody
monophonic texture
The peo-ple that walk-ed in
Das Volk, das da wand-elt im

One of the distinctive characteristics of this aria is its **monophonic** texture. The instrumental introduction consists of three instrumental parts (violins, viola, and the basso continuo), each playing the same melody in their appropriate registers. The monophonic texture persists when the bass voice enters at the end of bar 4, singing the same melody as the instrumental ensemble. The hollow sonority of the monophonic texture reflects the loneliness of the people wandering in darkness.

The melody uses many **chromatic notes** and **dissonant leaps** to portray the misery and agony of the people on earth. The sinuous melodic line, which seems to move around in random directions, also projects a sense of **aimlessness**.

The rhythm is **monotonous** and devoid of variety, consisting predominantly of a consistent series of quaver notes, whereas longer note values are used only at phrase endings. This rhythmic monotony corresponds to the state of the people in darkness, who are burdened with tiresome and tedious chores.

Contrast between darkness and light

The aria comprises four similar sections, each divided into three phrases (except for the last section): the first two phrases are in minor mode, while the last phrase modulates to the relative major, with the depiction of the word “great light” in the libretto.

1–10	11–13	14–19	20–27	28–34	35–46	47–49	50–63
B minor	D major	G major	E minor	A major	F# minor	D major	B minor

Minor: The use of minor tonality often evokes feelings of sadness or foreboding. Phrases like “the people that walked in darkness” and “they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death” align with this somber emotional quality, enhancing the text’s themes of struggle and despair.

Major: The shift to major tonality with phrases like “great light” signifies a transformation or hope. The contrast highlights the transition from darkness, the shadow effect of a world to the brightness of the coming salvation.

Low register + descending contour: The lower vocal register and descending melodic contours effectively evokes a sense of heaviness and despair.

High register + ascending contour: In contrast, when the text shifts to themes of “light” the melody rises into a higher register. This upward movement symbolizes elevation and hope. Higher vocal register associated with “light” reflect clarity and brightness.

"Darkness": minor mode + descending contour

5

The peo-ple that walk-ed in dark - ness, that walk-ed in dark - ness,
 Das Volk, das da wan-delt im Dun - kel, das wan-delt im Dun - kel,

"Light": major mode + ascending contour

10

the peo-ple that walk-ed, that walk-ed in dark-ness have seen a great light,
 das Volk, das da wan-delt, das wan-delt im Dun-kel, es sieht ein gro-ßes Licht,

Word painting

- (1) **Irregular phrasing:** Handel uses irregular phrasing throughout to create the uneven steps of the people as they walk into this foreboding darkness. This adds to the sense of uncertainty and struggle, deepening the emotional impact of the text.
- (2) **Strange leaps:** An ascending melodic line, embellished with unprepared nonharmonic tones that are approached by leaps, over the word "death" and "shadow" create an eerie 怪異 sounding quality and help illustrate the looming presence of darkness.

An eerie sounding line on the word "shadow" (bars 37-9)

shad - - - - ow of death _____,
 Schat - - - - ten des Tods _____,

An eerie sounding line on the word "shadow" (bars 52-3)

shad - - - - ow of death,
 Schat - - - - ten des Tods,

An eerie sounding line played by the instruments over a sustained note by the bass (bars 38–40)

- ow of death _____,
- ten des Tods _____,

An eerie sounding line played by the instruments over a sustained note by the bass (bars 43–6)

dwell in the land of the shad-ow of death _____,
woh-nen im Lan-de der Schat-ten des Tods _____,

Chorus – For unto us a child is born

Meter:	4/4
Tonality:	G major
Tempo:	Andante allegro
Style:	Chorus
Instrumentation:	SATB choir, oboes, strings, basso continuo (bassoon and harpsichord)

(Libretto)

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;
and the Government shall be upon his Shoulder; and His Name shall be called
Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of
Peace.

(Isaiah 9,6)

(Translation)

因有一嬰孩為我們而生；有一子賜給我們。
政權必擔在他的肩頭上；他名稱為
奇妙策士、全能的神、永在的父、和平的君。
(以賽亞書 第九章 6)

The chorus is the climax of Scene 3, announcing the coming birth of God's son. Handel divided the biblical text into three parts, each set to different music:

Part 1

- **Part 1** ("For unto us a child is born") begins as a fugal exposition. The **subject** (bars 7–12) is first presented in one voice (soprano) and afterwards the same melody is repeated in another voice (tenor) in the form of an **imitation**. The first voice part continues with a **countersubject** (bars 12–18) that goes together with the repeated statement of the subject. This countersubject distinguishes itself from the subject by its faster note values (continuous semiquaver runs) and a different register. The interweaving of individual voices gives rise to a **polyphonic** texture.

- Part 1 can also be regarded as a **ritornello** (a recurring passage in Baroque music for orchestra or chorus), which begins with a joyful, simultaneous entry of all instruments, integrating its motifs throughout the piece. This unifying use of materials reinforces the celebratory nature of the piece, enhancing the message of welcoming a newborn.

(Instrumental Introduction)

Part 1

Subject (ascending sequence)

p tutti For un-to us a Child is born, un-to us a Son is
Denn es ist uns ein Kind ge - born, es ist uns ein Sohn ge -

G major

Imitation

Close Imitation

Countersubject

for un-to us a Child is born
denn es ist uns ein Kind ge-born

p tutti Subject For un-to us a Child is born, un-to
Denn es ist uns ein Kind ge-born, es ist

(ascending sequence)

p tutti For un-to
Denn es ist

us a Son is giv-en, un-to us a Son is giv-en:
uns ein Sohn ge - ge-ben, es ist uns ein Sohn ge - ge-ben,

C A D B E C IV V Imperfect cadence D major

The image shows a musical score for Part 1, which is identified as a ritornello. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system includes an instrumental introduction and a vocal entry marked 'p tutti'. The vocal line has two parts: a top part with lyrics in English and German, and a bottom part with German lyrics. The instrumental part is in G major. The second system shows imitations and a close imitation between the vocal and instrumental parts. The third system continues the vocal and instrumental lines, ending with an imperfect cadence. Various musical notations like 'p' (piano) and 'tutti' are used. Chord symbols (C, A, D, B, E, C, IV, V, D major) are written below the bottom staff. Annotations include 'Subject', 'Countersubject', 'Imitation', 'Close Imitation', and '(ascending sequence)'.

Part 2

- **Part 2** (“and the Government shall be upon his Shoulder”) features an ascending melody with **dotted rhythm**. The texture is initially **homophonic**, with a single voice performed over harmonies in the basso continuo. Subsequently other voices join in and build up into a thicker texture (bars 31–32). The harmony revolves around the dominant (V), anticipating the arrival of the final part of the chorus.
- The use of dotted rhythms in the phrases “and the government shall be upon his shoulder” and “Wonderful, Counselor” gives the music **fanfare-like** and **triumphant** characters.

Part 2

The musical score for Part 2 is presented in two systems. The first system includes a bridge section marked 'bridge' above the staff. The lyrics are in both English and German. The second system continues the melody with more lyrics. The score features dotted rhythms and homophonic textures, with some passages highlighted in green boxes. The basso continuo part is shown at the bottom of each system.

Bridge:

us a Son is giv-en, Echo un-to us Echo a Son is giv-en.
 uns ein Sohn ge-geben, es ist uns ein Sohn ge-geben,
 , un-to us a Son is giv-en:
 es ist uns ein Sohn ge-geben,

Second System:

and the gov-ern-ment shall be up-on His shoul-
 und die Herrschaft ist ge-legt auf sei-ne Schul-
 be up-on His shoul- der,
 legt auf sei-ne Schul- ter,
 and the gov-ern-ment shall
 und die Herrschaft ist ge-
 con rip.

Part 3

- **Part 3** (“Wonderful, Counsellor”) is the **climax** of the entire section.
- The phrase “Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” is delivered with striking clarity through its powerful homophonic texture, ensuring

its impact each time it is heard. This also effectively conveys the character, attributes, and future reign of the coming Messiah.

- The two violin parts perform a scintillating melody of continuous semiquaver notes a third apart, hovering above the voices. An emphatic **perfect cadence** happens in bar 37, bringing both Part 3 and the entire section to a triumphant end.
- This homophonic climax contrast sharply with the prevailing polyphonic texture of this movement, thereby further emphasizing the significance of the words: “Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

Texture thickening →

Part 3 Block chords (chordal texture)

der, up - on His shoul-der: and His Name shall be call - ed Won - der-ful,
 ter; auf sei-ne Schul-ter, und sein Na - me wird hei - Ben: Wun - der-bar,
 be up - on His shoul-der: and His Name shall be call - ed Won - der-ful,
 legt auf sei-ne Schul-ter, und sein Na - me wird hei - Ben: Wun - der-bar,
 and His Name shall be call - ed Won - der-ful,
 und sein Na - me wird hei - Ben: Wun - der-bar,
 be up - on His shoul-der, and His Name shall be call - ed Won - der-ful,
 legt auf sei-ne Schul-ter, und sein Na - me wird hei - Ben: Wun - der-bar,

D major: V I

Transposition (up a 4th)

Cadence

Coun - sel-lor, The Might-y God, The Ev - er - last - ing Fa - ther, The Prince of Peace!
 Herr - li-cher, der star-ke Gott, der e - wig, e - wig Va - ter und Frie - de-fürst!
 Coun - sel-lor, The Might-y God, The Ev - er - last - ing Fa - ther, The Prince of Peace! Un-to
 Herr - li-cher, der star-ke Gott, der e - wig, e - wig Va - ter und Frie - de-fürst! Es ist
 Coun - sel-lor, The Might-y God, The Ev - er - last - ing Fa - ther, The Prince of Peace!
 Herr - li-cher, der star-ke Gott, der e - wig, e - wig Va - ter und Frie - de-fürst!
 Coun - sel-lor, The Might-y God, The Ev - er - last - ing Fa - ther, The Prince of Peace!
 Herr - li-cher, der star-ke Gott, der e - wig, e - wig Va - ter und Frie - de-fürst!

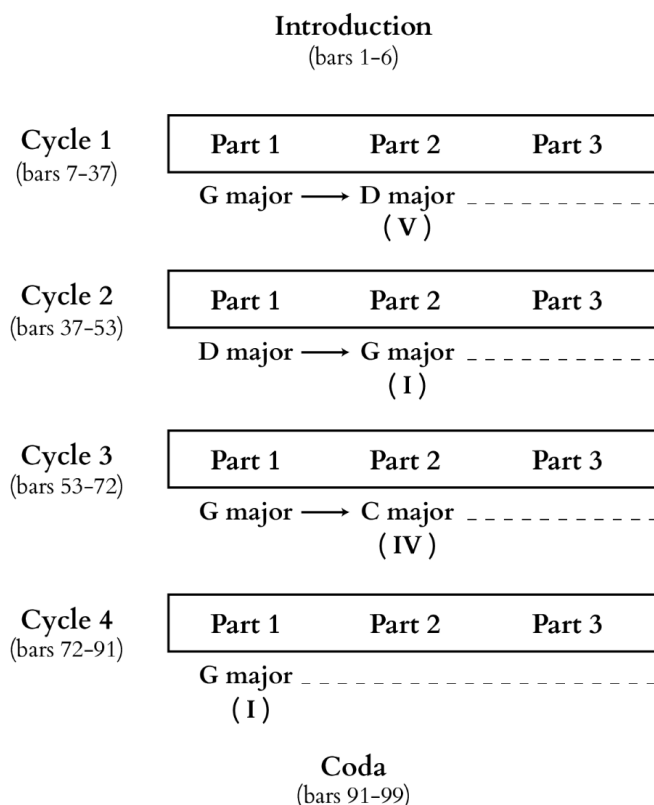
senza rip. p

I⁶ II⁶ V I
 Perfect cadence

Form

The entire chorus consists of four cycles, each of which presents the text in three parts as discussed above, with the same music set to the same text.

Yet the cycles differ in the way they **modulate**. In the first and third cycle, the music modulates to the dominant (D major) and the subdominant (C major) key respectively; the last cycle stays in the tonic key (G major) throughout. The entire form of the chorus is shown in the diagram.



Text setting

Handel is highly attentive to the rhythm of the English text. For example, the words “Wonderful” and “Counsellor” are beginning-accented, and as such they are set to music where the first syllable of each word falls on the downbeat and is sung with a higher pitch. In the next phrase (“The Mighty God”), the composer emphasizes the last word “God” by an upward leap and placing the last note on a strong beat.

Long melisma as emphasis: the extensive use of melisma on the word “born” emphasizes its significance, drawing attention to the moment of the child’s birth and enhancing the emotional weight of the text.

Ascending sequence: the use of sequences in the phrase “unto us, the Son is given” adds a sense of forward motion and urgency, underscoring the importance of the gift being offered and reinforcing the celebratory nature of the text.

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