HIGHER MUSIC Listening

Medieval & Renaissance Music

The Medieval Period (c. 500 – 1400)

Medieval music is heavily tied to the Catholic Church and is characterised by its simple MONOPHONIC texture

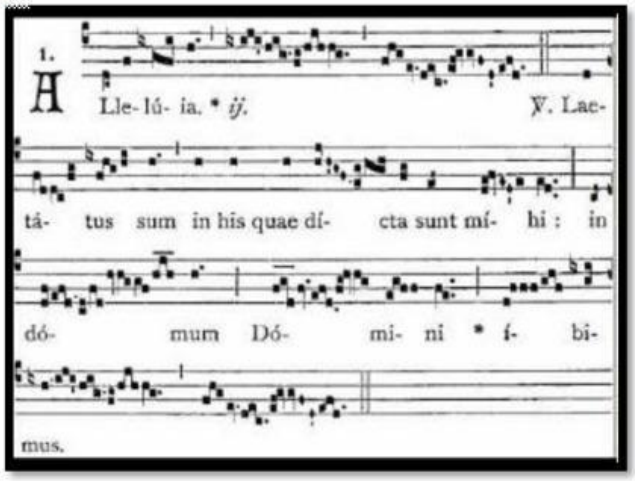
Monophonic Texture:
A single, unaccompanied melodic line. There are no harmonies or backing instruments. When performed by more than one singer, this can also be described as **UNISON**

Plainchant :

A CAPPELLA sacred vocal music sung by monks.

- MONOPHONIC / UNISON texture.
- It has no regular time signature or pulse.
- It is based on MODES.

Listen to an example of plainsong



MODES
Early scales used before modern major and minor keys were established. The easiest way to visualise the modes is by looking at a piano keyboard. If you play an octave sequence using **only the white keys**, the note you start on determines the mode They give Medieval music an "ancient" or unresolved sound.

Many traditional Scottish and Irish folk tunes use modes (particularly Dorian or Mixolydian) rather than major/minor scales, giving them a rustic flavour

Mainly Syllabic	Major	Modal	A cappella
Mainly melismatic	Polyphonic	Triplets	Unison

- Choose 4 relevant concepts from the box above and write them in the correct categories on the table below.

Melody	Harmony	Texture	Timbre

LIVEWORKSHEETS

The Renaissance Period (c. 1400 – 1600)

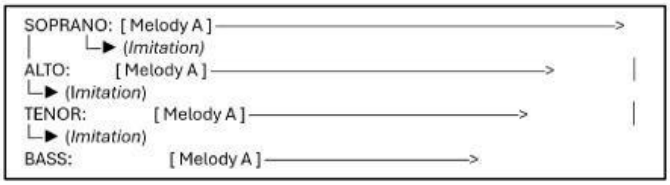
MASS

The Mass is a large-scale sacred choral work in LATIN, setting the five standard parts of the Catholic service. The Latin setting of the mass divides into five main sections.

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison	Lord have mercy, Christ Have mercy
Gloria in excelcis Deo	Glory to God in the highest
Credo in unum deum	I believe in one God
Sanctus; Osanna; Benedictus	Holy, holy, holy; Hosanna; Blessed is he….
Agnus Dei	Lamb of God

Key features of the Mass:

- **Polyphonic / Contrapuntal Texture**: The defining texture of the Renaissance Mass. Polyphonic *(or contrapuntal)* texture means multiple independent melody lines weave together at the same time, rather than moving as block chords. It relies on imitation, where different voices take turns copying the same melody line shortly after one another.



Notice how each voice starts the melody at a different time. This overlapping effect is exactly why polyphony sounds like "weaving" lines rather than block chords.

- **A Cappella**: Renaissance Masses are traditionally performed completely unaccompanied. If you hear a large choir singing sacred Latin texts with absolutely no instruments playing underneath, it is a definitive indicator of a Renaissance Mass or motet.

- **Mode / Modal**: In a Renaissance Mass, the composer would pick one mode for a movement to give the sacred Latin text a specific spiritual atmosphere. Because modes don't have the sharp, driving chord progressions of modern keys, the music sounds like it is **floating, seamless, and timeless.** As the Renaissance period progressed, music naturally began shifting toward our modern major and minor system

- **Tierce de Picardie** is when a piece of music in a minor key unexpectedly **finishes on a bright, major chord.** It is achieved simply by raising the middle note (the third) of the very final chord by one semitone. During the Renaissance, the **Tierce de Picardie** was heavily used at the ends of movements in a Mass to give a sense of finish and stability. It also symbolised the theme of hope and redemption by ending on a major chord.

- **Word Setting:** **Syllabic setting** (*one note per syllable*) is used in text-heavy sections like the *Credo* or *Gloria* to keep the religious words clear and fast-moving.

  Melismatic setting (*many notes spun over a single syllable*) is used on expressive, shorter words like *"Kyrie"* or *"Alleluia"* to create a flowing, decorative sound.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

- **Rhythm:** Renaissance music had no vertical bar lines, creating a continuous, flowing stream of notes. Because of this, the music feels fluid and seamless with no heavy downbeat on 1st beat.
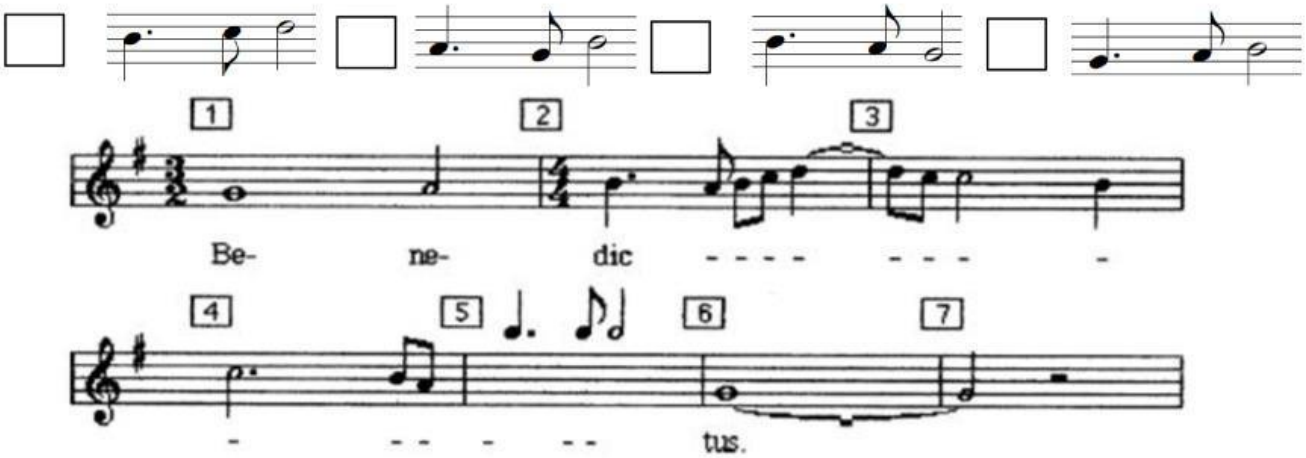
- **Suspension:** (*Adv H concept)* A suspension is a musical device that creates a brief, beautiful clash. It happens when one voice holds onto a note a little too long while the chords change underneath, creating a momentary **discord** before gently stepping down to resolve cleanly into the harmony. Renaissance Masses are packed full of these suspensions. Their constant overlapping effect gives the choir's singing its trademark bittersweet tension and a smooth, continuous sense of forward momentum

Listen to some of Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* and fill in any features that you notice.

Style	Melody/ Harmony	Rhythm/Tempo	Texture/Structure	Timbre

Listen to *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* from Byrd *Mass for 5 Voices*:

Follow the Benedictus melody and tick the correct box to fill the missing notes in bar 5



Tick FOUR boxes to identify the titles of movements you would expect to find in a mass.

- ☐ Kyrie eleison
- ☐ Exsultate Deo
- ☐ Credo in unum
- ☐ Ave Maria
- ☐ Veni sancte spiritus
- ☐ Sanctus
- ☐ Agnus Dei
- ☐ Jubilate Deo

A minor-sounding Mass movement ends unexpectedly with a bright sounding chord because its middle note was raised. **What harmonic** concept is this?

_____

A choir sings an unaccompanied Latin text. The sopranos start a melody, and the altos copy the exact same tune while the sopranos move on. **Which texture concept** is this?

_____

LIVEWORKSHEETS

The Baroque Period (c. 1600-1675)

Following the Renaissance, the Baroque Period completely transformed how music was written and performed, moving from smooth church vocal weaving to dramatic, structured instrumental music. Here are some of the features that changed:

- **Major/Minor Keys** (Tonality): Baroque music completely abandoned old Renaissance modes. Music was now written in modern **major and minor keys,** allowing for clear chord progressions and strong **CADENCE** points. Baroque music in the minor key often finished on a **TIERCE DE PICARDIE.**

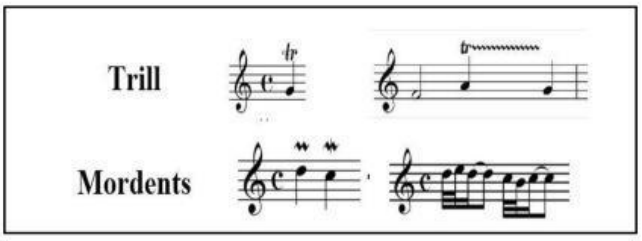
- **Basso Continuo**: Every piece of Baroque music features a mandatory driving foundation. This is always played by a chordal instrument (harpsichord or organ) and a low bass instrument (cello or bassoon).
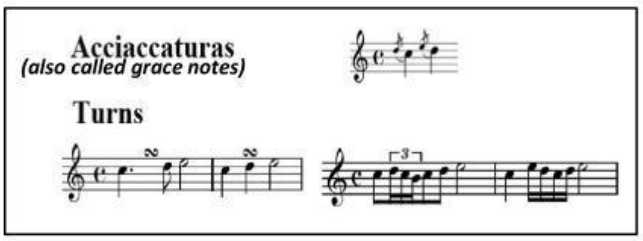
- **Terraced Dynamics**: Volume shifts suddenly between loud (forte) and soft (piano) like a light switch, avoiding gradual crescendos or decrescendos.

- **Texture**: While textures remain mainly polyphonic (contrapuntal) with independent lines weaving together, the era introduced homophonic textures—such as a single solo singer backed strictly by orchestra chords.

- **Baroque Orchestra**: This era saw the birth of the orchestra. It was relatively small, dominated by a core string family (*violins, violas, cellos, double basses*), with **basso continuo** plus sometimes one or two flutes (or recorders), oboes, bassoons, natural horns, natural trumpets and timpani.

- **Ornamentation**: Melodies became highly complex, packed with small decorative notes to make the music sound fancy and busy





1. Trill - a rapid shake between an added note and the main note
2. Mordent - a single movement from the main note then down or up then back to the main note
3. Acciaccatura (grace note) - a quick movement from an unaccented added note to the main note
4. Turn - a quick movement around a note, usually up, down and up again (the note, the note above, the note, the note below, and the note)

Ornamentation quiz

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Cadences / Bass clef / Tierce de Picardie REVISION

A **cadence** is formed by two chords at the end of a passage of music.

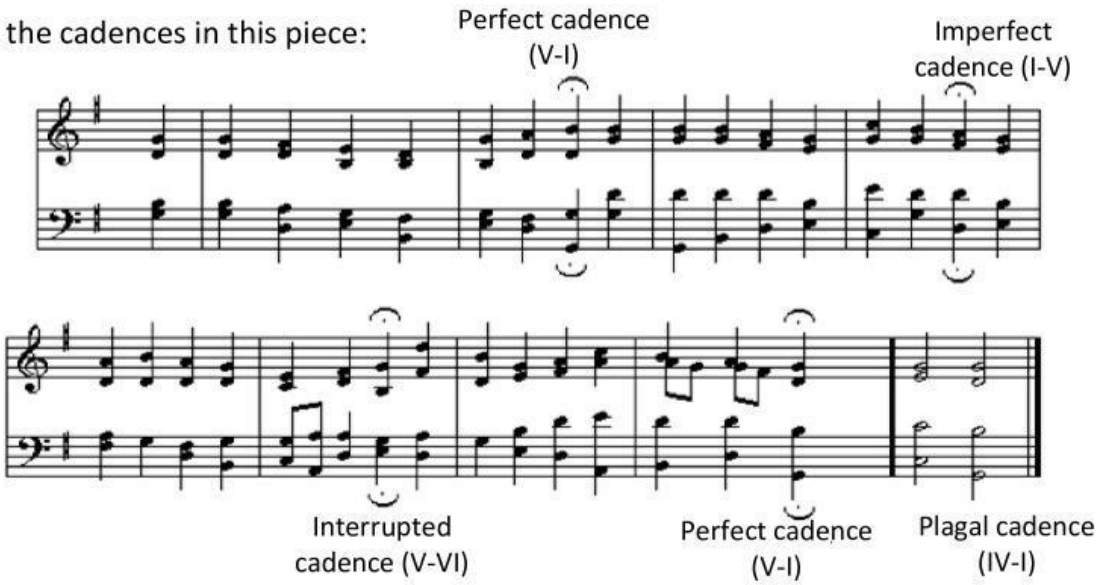
Perfect cadences sound as though the music has come to an end. A perfect cadence is formed by the chords V - I.

Imperfect cadences sound unfinished. They sound as though they want to carry on to complete the music properly. An imperfect cadence ends on chord V.

Interrupted cadences are 'surprise' cadences. You think you're going to hear a perfect cadence, but you get a minor chord instead – it is formed by chords V-VI.

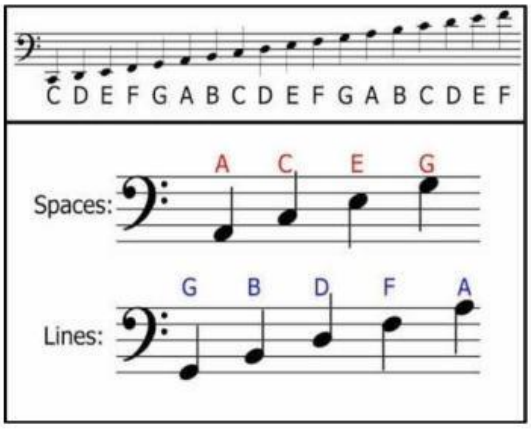
Plagal cadences sound finished. Plagal cadences are often used at the end of hymns and sung to "Amen". A plagal cadence is formed by the chords IV - I.
Sometimes the final cadence of a piece in a minor key ends with a major chord instead of the expected minor. This effect is known as a **Tierce de Picardie**.

Listen to the cadences in this piece:
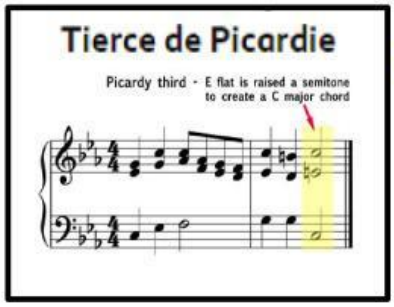


Cadence quiz 1 Cadence quiz 2 Cadence quiz 3 Cadence quiz 4

For additional practice on **bass clef notes**:



Bass clef 1 Bass clef 2 Bass clef 3 Bass clef 4



Tierce de picardie quiz

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Baroque Vocal Forms

Mass: A large-scale sacred work setting Latin texts. Unlike the Renaissance version, it features a full orchestra, a driving bassline and often distinct solo & choral movements.

Oratorio: A large-scale dramatic work for orchestra, choir, and soloists with a religious story. It is exactly like an opera, but performed **without** acting, costumes, or stage design.

Chorus: A chorus is also the name given to a specific movement or section of music within an Oratorio or Mass that is performed by this large choir, rather than by a soloist.

Recitative: A speech-like vocal style used to move the plot forward quickly. It features minimal, sparse chord backing from the basso continuo.

Aria: A formal, melodic solo song backed by the full orchestra, allowing a character to reflect on their emotions. A specific type of aria written in **Ternary form (ABA)** is called the **DA CAPO ARIA.** The singer performs the 'A' section, a contrasting 'B' section, and then returns to the beginning (*Da Capo*).

Obbligato: An obbligato is a prominent, essential instrumental solo line that accompanies a vocal singer. It weaves in and out of the vocal melody, creating an intricate duet between the singer and a solo instrument *(like a flute, violin, or oboe*)

Coloratura: High, acrobatic vocal singing featuring incredibly fast scales and trills. It is heavily used when the singer improvises decorations during the repeat section of a **Da Capo Aria**.

Mass:

The Mass started in the Renaissance period, usually a cappella, but has continued throughout the musical periods from Baroque through to Twentieth Century, usually with orchestral accompaniment. Not all masses have been composed for church services-some were composed as concert pieces.

If you hear an unaccompanied choir singing a Mass that has that floating, ancient, non-major/minor sound, it is Renaissance (Modal). If you hear a mass backed by an orchestra and a harpsichord with clear, punchy major or minor chords, it has shifted to Baroque period or later.



Listen to Kyrie – Mass in B minor (Bach) & fill in the box below:
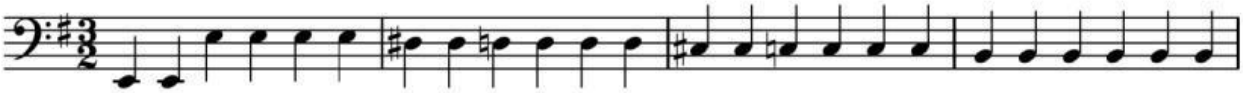
Points to think about:
- *Overall texture*
- *Tonality – Name the cadence at the end of bar 4?*
- *What instruments are in the orchestra?*



Style	Melody/ Harmony	Rhythm/Tempo	Texture/Structure/ Form	Timbre

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Listen to Credo– *Mass in B minor (Bach)* which is based on a ground bass.
A ground bass is a structural device where a theme or melody in the bass line is repeated over and over throughout a piece, while the upper parts continuously change above it.



Points to think about:

- *Introduction – what instruments play? What are they playing? Instrument(s)playing ground bass?*
- *Describe the ground bass*
- *Four voices enter – what order? What texture?*
- *Tonality of music and how does it end?*

Style	Melody/ Harmony	Rhythm/Tempo	Texture/Structure/ Form	Timbre

Now listen to 2 Glorias (Bach Mass in Bm and Vivaldi Gloria) & jot down concepts for each.
In the final box, note down concepts that show they are both from the Baroque period.

	Excerpt 1	Excerpt 2
Melody / harmony		
Rhythm/ tempo		
Texture/ Structure/ Form		
Timbre		
Baroque features		

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Oratorio

An oratorio is a large-scale sacred work for choir, soloists, and orchestra, usually based on biblical stories and sung in English. While it features the same musical styles as opera, like recitatives, arias, and choruses, it is performed without acting, costumes, or scenery in a church or concert hall. Features of an Oratorio:

- Usually sung in **English**
- Religious
- Choruses
- Arias
- Recitatives
- Duet/Trio/Quartet
- Accompanied by orchestra

(including harpsichord continuo in Baroque only)

The Oratorio started in the Baroque period but has continued throughout the musical periods from Baroque through to Twentieth Century, usually with orchestral accompaniment.
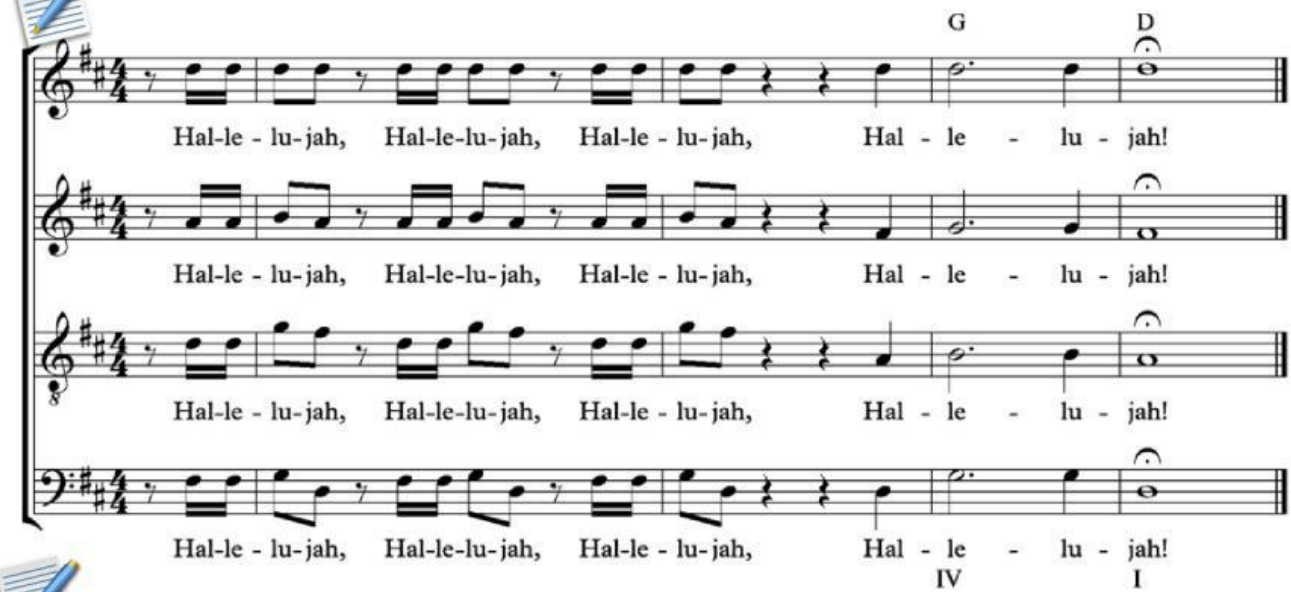
The most famous oratorio is Handel's Messiah, which is composed for SATB chorus, 4 soloists (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) & a Baroque orchestra - strings, woodwind and trumpets.

CHORUS

The term CHORUS can be used to describe a group of singers (e.g. choir) or the music performed by a group of singers. SATB is used to describe a chorus of mixed voices – Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

The Hallelujah Chorus features a particular CADENCE very prominently. Listen to the last bars and identify the cadence that you hear.

☐ Perfect ☐ Imperfect ☐ Plagal ☐ Interrupted



What is the TEXTURE of this ending? _____

Now watch this video here which identifies the different textures in the Hallelujah chorus.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

You have already watched a video which went through the textures in the Hallelujah Chorus. Listen to the music again and name the following textures where they appear in the text Write in the space provided:

U (UNISON) **H (HOMOPHONIC)** **P (POLYPHONIC)**

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah,
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, ☐

For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, ☐

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, ☐

For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth, ☐

Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, ☐

For the Lord God/ Hallelujah … ☐

The kingdom of this world is become ☐

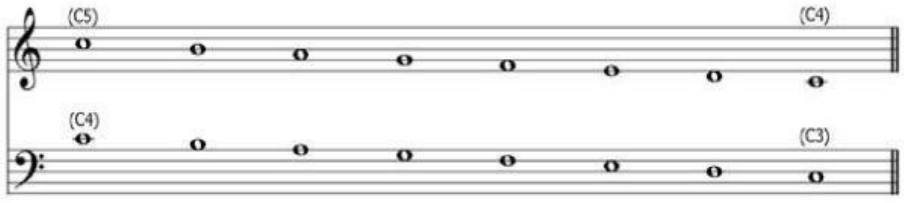
The kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and of his Christ; ☐

And he shall reign forever and ever … ☐

In the last line, name the Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass voices in the order in which they enter: _____

Transposition Examples
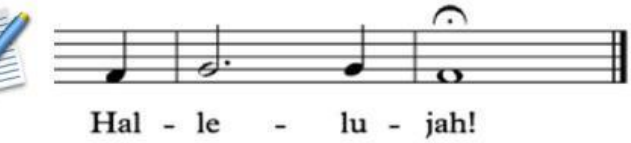
Here is the scale of C major in the treble clef, transposed **at the octave and to the bass clef**:



Transposition quiz 1

Transposition quiz 2

Transpose the final bars of the alto line down an octave in the bass clef:
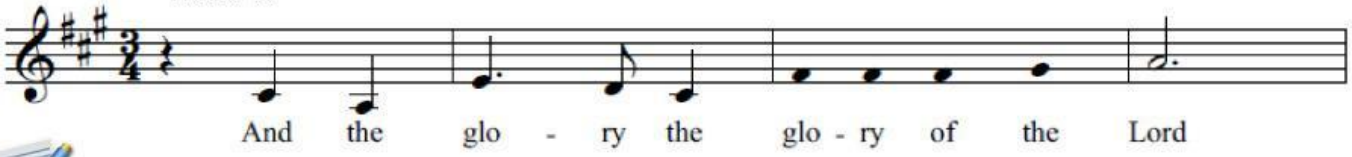


LIVEWORKSHEETS

Listen to the chorus – And the Glory of the Lord

Listen to the opening of the movement. The orchestral introduction is followed by motif 1 and then is joined by motif 2. Follow these and complete the listening tasks below.

- Motif 1

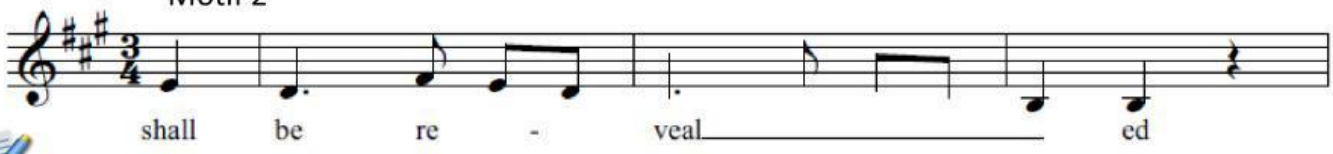


Name the voices singing this _____

Describe the word setting ☐ Syllabic ☐ Melismatic

Add stems to the notes above 'glory of the Lord' to make the correct rhythm.

- Motif 2



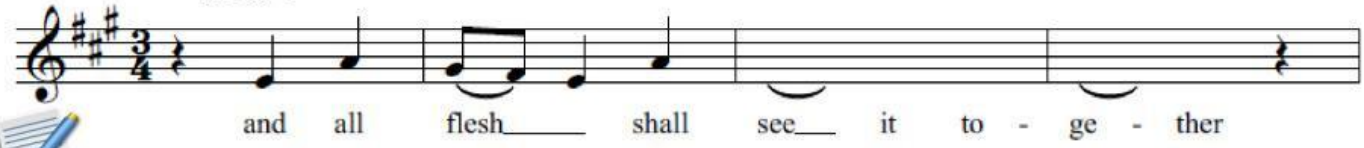
Name the RHYTHMIC feature on 'shall' _____

Describe the word setting on 'revealed' ☐ Syllabic ☐ Melismatic

Add the missing notes to the stems above 'vealed'.

What MELODIC feature is heard at 'be revealed'?

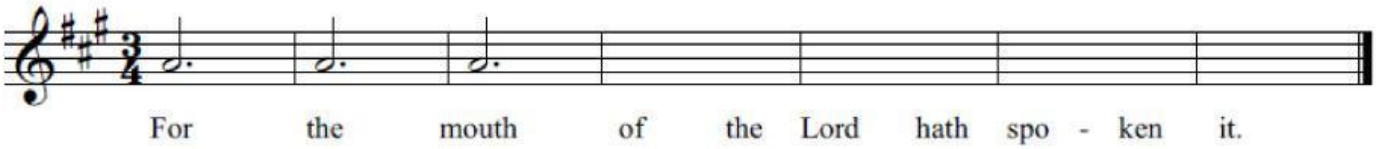
- Motif 3



What voices first sing this motif? _____

Add notes and rhythms above the words 'see it together'. _____

- Motif 4





Add notes and rhythms above the words 'of the Lord hath spoken it'.

Transpose the first 3 notes DOWN an OCTAVE into the bass clef and write in the manuscript above. *Have a look at the information below for transposition*

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Listen to the chorus – Let all the angels of God

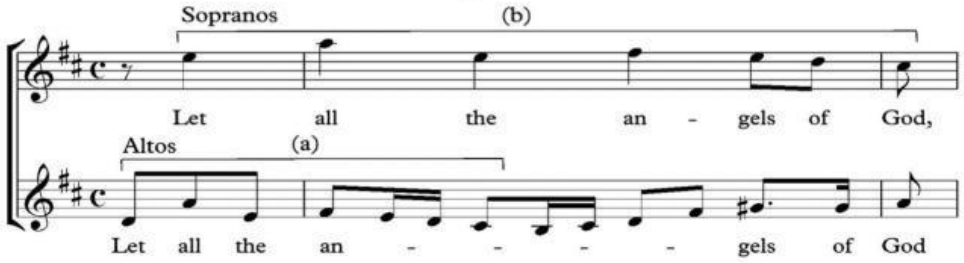
Describe the TEXTURE of line 1	
What is the TONALITY?	
Name the cadence at the end of the 1st phrase	
Describe the TEXTURE after line 1 and name the order in which the voices enter (e.g. SATB)	

- RHYHMIC concept: **Augmentation/ Diminution**

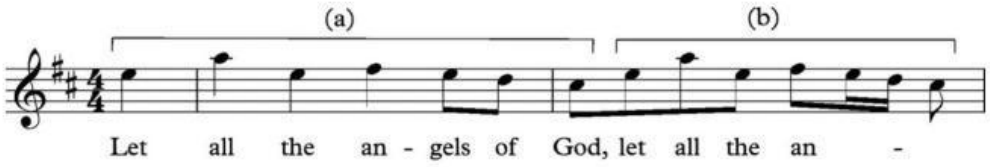
In this specific chorus movement, Handel writes a highly complex polyphonic fugue. To build an intricate, weaving texture of "angelic worship," he forces different voice parts to sing the exact same theme at three completely different speeds simultaneously.

One voice section introduces the main melody at its standard, normal speed.

Another voice section enters singing the exact same melody, but using longer notes AUGMENTATION. . This layer acts like a slow, grand anchor underneath the texture.



A third voice section sings the exact same melody using fast, clipped notes. DIMINUTION. This layer flies above the others, injecting rapid, energetic motion to evoke the fluttering of angels



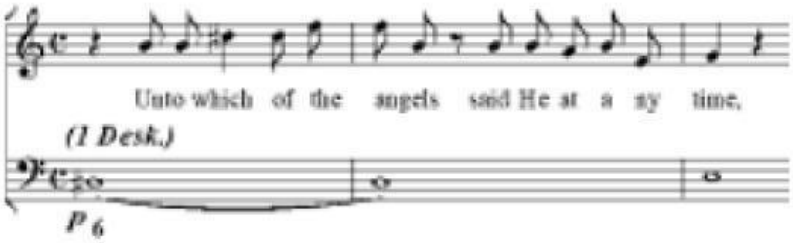
Augmentation: The note values of a melody are stretched out / doubled. The tune stays the same, but it plays twice as slowly.

Diminution: The note values of a melody are shortened / halved. The tune stays the same, but it plays twice as fast

LIVEWORKSHEETS

RECITATIVE

This is a SOLO VOCAL piece where the music follows the natural rhythm of speech. It is therefore **SYLLABIC.** It is used in OPERAS and ORATORIOS to move the story or plot on and usually leads into an ARIA or CHORUS



Key Features of Recitative
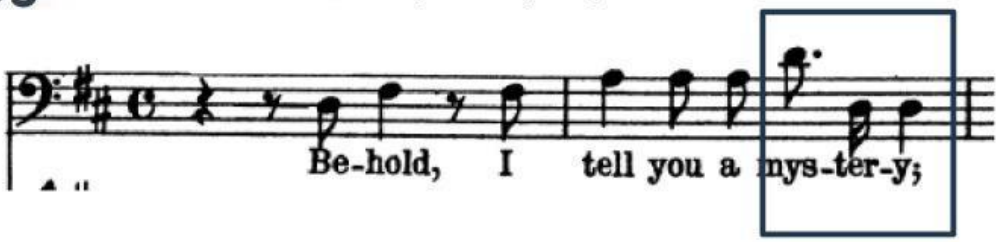
- **Speeds up the story**: Characters use it to talk, argue, or explain plot points before a big song.
- **Follows natural speech**: The rhythm matches the natural rhythm of spoken words rather than a strict musical beat.
- **Minimal backing**: The orchestra usually stops playing, and the singer is backed only by simple chords (often played by a harpsichord or cello).

Listen to the *Unto which of the angels?*

Name the solo voice	
Name the cadence at the end	
What is the TONALITY?	
Describe the accompaniment	

)

Listen to the *Behold, I tell you a mystery.*



Name the solo voice	
What is the TONALITY?	
What interval is heard on the word 'mystery' in the first phrase?	
Name the cadence at the end	

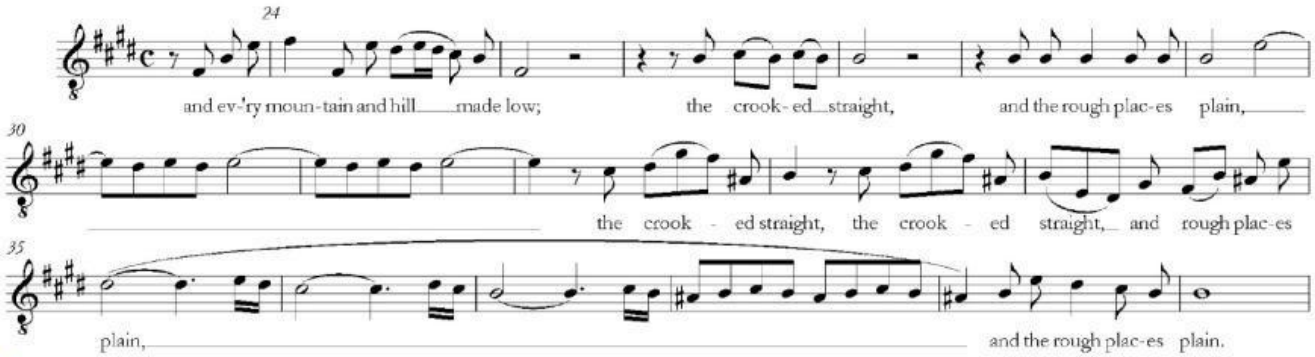
LIVEWORKSHEETS

ARIA/DA CAPO ARIA

An ARIA is a solo song with frequent use of MELISMAS, REPETITION, SEQUENCES and any other musical devices appropriate to the text setting.

Listen to the aria *'Every Valley'*, which uses a musical technique called *Word Painting*, where music reflects the literal meaning of the words. The words are:

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low; the crooked straight, and the rough places plain (Isaiah 40:4)



How does the music reflect the word 'mountain'?	
How does the music reflect the words 'made low'?	
How does the music reflect the words ' the crooked'	
What TWO melodic techniques are used on the word 'plain' in the 3rd line	Technique 1 Technique 2

Now listen again to *'Every Valley'* and comment on musical features below.

Melody/ Harmony	Rhythm/ Tempo	Texture/ Structure	Timbre

LIVEWORKSHEETS

ARIA/DA CAPO ARIA

An aria in TERNARY FORM used in opera and oratorio is called a **DA CAPO ARIA**. The 3rd section was not written out and was often ornamented.

e.g. *The Trumpet shall sound* – **listen to the whole of this to hear the DA CAPO.**

This aria features a trumpet **OBBLIGATO** – a solo instrumental part that provides a prominent and important countermelody to the main vocal line.

Name the solo voice	
What is the TONALITY of the A section?	
Name three RHYTHMIC features you hear.	
Name the cadence at the end of the A section.	
What is the TONALITY of the middle section?	
Listen to the two cadences at 'and we shall be changed'. Name both.	Cadence 1 Cadence 2

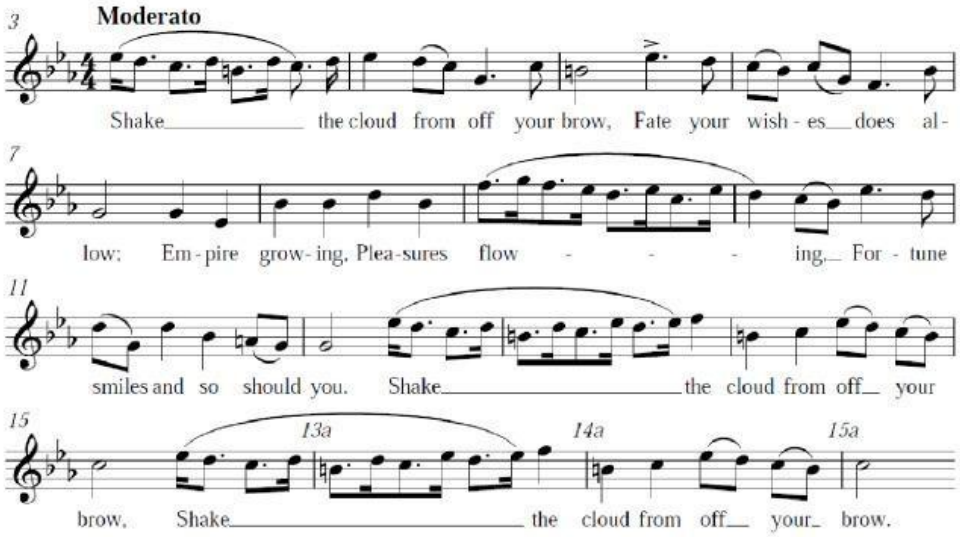
Opera

During the Baroque period, opera was invented and became the ultimate form of musical entertainment. It was dramatic, grand, and highly structured, focusing on stories from Greek mythology and ancient history. Unlike oratorio, it is NOT religious and is performed in a theatre with costumes and acting.

- **Recitative**: Speech-like dialogue with minimal backing that drives the plot forward.
- **Aria**: Expressive, full-orchestra solo songs that capture deep, personal emotions.
- **Coloratura**: Flashy "vocal gymnastics" inside an aria that showcase technical agility.
- **Duet**: Musical conversations and emotional duos shared between two solo characters.
- **Chorus**: Large group numbers where a full choir represents crowds or comments on the action.
- **Orchestra**: The musical backbone. It is small compared to modern orchestras, dominated by strings and a harpsichord (the basso continuo). It provides the Overture at the start, sets the mood for the scenes, and accompanies the singers.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Listen to an aria from Purcell's opera 'Dido and Aeneas' and fill in the grid below.



Name the solo voice	
Describe the word setting	
Name two RHYTHMIC features	
Describe the TONALITY of the opening and the end	
Describe the TEXTURE of the chorus that follows this aria	

COLORATURA: Baroque opera features a lot of coloratura singing. In fact, it was the primary tool composers used to show off a singer's technical agility and express extreme emotions like blind fury, immense joy, or madness

Listen to *"Da tempeste il legno infranto"* from Handel's Handel's opera 'Julius Ceasar.

- Sung by Cleopatra, this aria uses coloratura to express overwhelming happiness and triumph. The singer performs highly decorated, "sparkling" patterns of notes that twist and turn upward to mimic a ship safely making it through a storm into a harbour.
- It features extensive melismatic singing, which means holding out a single syllable of text while singing dozens of fast notes.
- Its is a DA CAPO ARIA.
- How does the B section contrast with the A section?

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