# Oratorio

An **ORATORIO** is a large-scale sacred work for SATB chorus, soloists and orchestra, sung in ENGLISH. Oratorios are based on religious stories, often taken from the bible. Like an opera, an oratorio features **recitatives** and **arias** for the soloists, and **choruses** for the choir to sing. However, whereas an opera would be acted out, with costumes and scenery, an oratorio would be performed with no costumes or scenery. Therefore, while an opera would be staged in an opera house or a theatre, and oratorio would be performed in a church or a concert hall.

*Features of an Oratorio:*

- Usually sung in **English**
- Choruses
- Recitatives
- Accompanied by orchestra *(including harpsichord continuo in Baroque only)*

Religious
Arias
Duet/Trio/Quartet

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) and a Baroque orchestra consisting of 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

*e.g. Hallelujah Chorus*

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

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# 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

e.g. Unto which of the angels (Messiah)

The recitative is accompanied by simple chords played on the harpsichord.

- Name the solo voice
- What is the TONALITY?
- Name the cadence at the end.

e.g. *Behold, I tell you a mystery (Messiah*)

- Name the solo voice
- What is the TONALITY?
- What interval is heard on the word 'mystery' in the first phrase?
- With what cadence does the recitative end?

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# ARIA/DA CAPO ARIA

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

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 (Messiah)* – listen to the whole of this in order 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 the cadence at the end.
- Name three RHYTHMIC features you hear.
- What is the TONALITY of the middle section?
- Listen specifically to the two cadences at 'and we shall be changed'. What are they?

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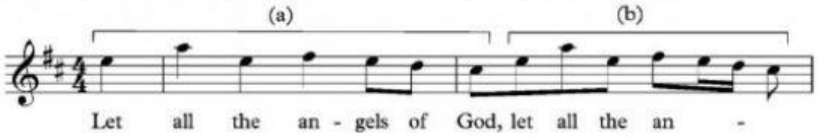
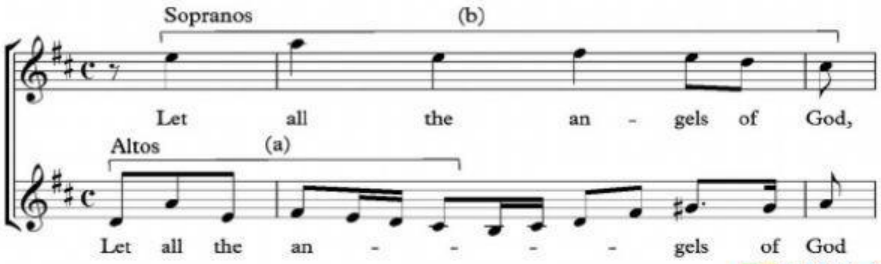
e.g. CHORUS - Let all the angels of God *(this follows on immediately from the previous recitative)*

- What is the TEXTURE in the first line?
- What is the tonality?
- Name the cadence at the end of the first phrase.
- After the first phrase the TEXTURE becomes and the voices enter in the following order:

The first seven notes in the soprano part (a) are repeated (b) but with the note lengths being half the original value. This shortening of the note values is called DIMINUTION




If you look more closely at the very opening of this section, you'll see that first seven notes of the soprano part (b) are double the value of the first seven notes in the alto part. This lengthening of the note values is called AUGMENTATION. Both augmentation and diminution occur frequently in this movement.

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Tick the concepts you hear in each excerpt (total is at bottom). Then select **6 common to both**

| CONCEPTS | EXCERPT 1 | EXCERPT 2 | COMMON TO BOTH EXCERPTS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **MELODIC**<br>Melisma | | | |
| Imitation | | | |
| Sequence | | | |
| Acciaccatura | | | |
| Trill | | | |
| **HARMONIC/ RHYTHMIC**<br>Minor | | | |
| Anacrusis | | | |
| Polyphonic | | | |
| Tierce de Picardie | | | |
| Major | | | |
| Triple changing to duple metre | | | |
| **TIMBRE**<br>Counter tenor | | | |
| A cappella | | | |
| Pizzicato | | | |
| Consort | | | |
| Tremolando | | | |
| **STRUCTURAL**<br>Ground bass | | | |
| Basso continuo | | | |
| Pedal point | | | |
| Countermelody | | | |
| **STYLES/FORMS**<br>Oratorio | | | |
| Opera | | | |
| Chorus | | | |
| Chorale | | | |
| Da capo aria | | | |
| Recitative | | | |
| | **9 concepts** | **12 concepts** | **6 common concepts** |

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# ORATORIO – CLASSICAL

Haydn's 'The Creation' was composed for SATB soloists, SATB chorus and orchestra. The oratorio is in 3 parts and depicts the creation of the world as described in the book of Genesis. The first part is about the creation of light, heaven and earth, the sun and moon, the land and water and of plants. The 2nd is about the creation of the animals and of humans. The 3rd part is about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

e.g. *The Heavens are telling* – CHORUS

Listen to the music, following the text and fill in the features in the right hand box.

| | |
|---|---|
| The heavens are telling the glory of God, *CADENCE at end?* | |
| *Instrumental* *TONALITY?* | |
| the wonder of his work displays the firmament, *SOPRANO & BASS moving in ...?* | |
| *Instrumental* | |
| the wonder of his work displays the firmament, *CADENCE at end?* | |
| *Instrumental* *Flutes & Violins playing in...?* | |
| To-day that is coming, speaks it the day, | |
| *Instrumental* *TONALITY?* | |
| the night that is gone, to following night, *TEXTURE?* | |
| the night that is gone, to following night, | |
| The heavens are telling the glory of God, | |
| the wonder of his work, | |
| the wonder of his work displays the firmament, | |
| the wonder of his work displays the firmament, | |
| *Instrumental* | |
| In all the lands resounds the word, *TEXTURE?* | |
| never unperceived, ever understood. *TEXTURE?* | |
| ever, ever, | |
| ever understood. | |
| ever, ever, | |
| ever understood, *CADENCE at end?* | |
| *Instrumental* | |

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