

JS 050
5 minutes, 10 seconds

fits & starts: after Handel

SATB, a cappella

Music by
Joshua Shank
(after Handel)

Text from
Isaiah 40: 1-3

Note from the composer

I've always had a complicated relationship with the second movement of George Frideric Handel's 1741 masterwork, *Messiah*. It is—without question—my favorite movement, but, as a baritone, there was never going to be a chance that I'd get to perform it myself. So, relegated to the bass section during the half dozen times I've participated in productions of *Messiah*, I got to sit back and listen to the fascinating way that Handel sets the scene for what's to come in the next few hours of music. He does this by sort of creating the feeling of the stoppage (or slowing) of time and this is, I think, because he was a master of the English-language oratorio (a genre which he helped invent).

The “Comfort ye” movement is technically a *recitativo accompagnato* (in that it uses orchestra), but Handel flirts with some elements of the more speech-like *recitativo secco* and lyrical arias as well. This fluidity between metered tempi, rapid-fire speech, and moments for the tenor to draw out creates that push and pull which has fascinated me over the 25 years I've known the choral warhorse that is *Messiah*. Sometimes you're moving forward; sometimes you're held hovering in the air. Hence, the title (and all the tempo changes).

B&F Music

fits & starts: after Handel was commissioned by The Singers—Minnesota Choral Artists and Artistic Director, Dr. Matthew Culloton, in great thanks for the service of the organization's Board President, Allie Tunseth Lundgren (to whom the composer is also indebted for her years of friendship and laughter). It received its premiere on December 8, 2024.

On a personal note, it's the second time The Singers have asked me to sort of “reconstruct” a movement from *Messiah* in my own fashion—the first being 2010's arrangement of the “Rejoice greatly” soprano aria which I titled *Daughter Ecstatic*—and it can be performed with that work as the first in a two-movement set titled *Two (new) Choruses from Messiah* (see performance note below).

Performance notes

- If performing alongside *Daughter Ecstatic* as the first movement of *Two (new) Choruses from Messiah*, this piece should be transposed down a half step so that it begins in E-flat.
- This probably goes without saying but, when the harmonies are closer, shore up the vibrato where possible to let stuff shimmer a bit.
- Where a 3-part divisi occurs in the SA or TB, it's preferable to have an even split between the voices if possible.
- Staggered breathing should be employed throughout with no apparent break in the musical line unless specified.

The text

Isaiah 40: 1-3

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God;
Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her,
that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.
The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness;
prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Commissioned by The Singers-Minnesota Choral Artists and Artistic Director Dr. Matthew Culloton
Dedicated with great thanks to Board President, Allie Tunseth Lindgren

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Text from
Isaiah 40: 1-3

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very slow, but with life (quarter = 37)

SA *mf* (m) (m) (m) *rit.* G.P.

TB *mf* (m) (m) (m) *rit.* G.P.

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7 quarter = 66 10 *mp* 12 quarter = 45

S1 Com - fort ye, ah *f rit.* *mp*

S2 Com - fort ye, ah *f rit.* *mp*

A1 Com - fort ye, ah *f rit.* *mp*

A2 Com - fort ye, ah *f rit.* *mp*

T1 ah com - fort ye *f rit.* *mf with spin* *f*

T2 ah com - fort ye *f rit.* *mf with spin* *f*

B1 ah com - fort ye *f rit.* *mp*

B2 ah com - fort ye *f rit.* *mp*

5...4...3...

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17 a little slower;
deliberate

19 quarter = 66

15

rit. *p* *mf a tempo* *rit.*

(n) (m)

rit. *p* *mf a tempo* *rit.*

(n) (m)

rit. *p* *mf a tempo* *rit.*

(n) com - fort ye,

rit. *p* *mf a tempo* *rit.*

(n) com - fort ye,

rit. *mf* *p* *mf a tempo* *rit.*

my peo - ple, (n) com - fort ye,

rit. *mf* *p* *mf a tempo* *rit.*

my peo - ple, (n) com - fort ye,

rit. *p* *mf a tempo* *rit.*

(n)

rit. *p* *mf a tempo* *rit.*

(n)

23 quarter = 45

26 twice as fast (quarter = 90ish)

(n) *p* *mf* sneak in , *mf*
 uhl* saith your God, _____
 (n) *p* *mf* sneak in , *mf*
 uhl* saith your God, _____
f *mf* , *mf*
 com - fort ye me peo - ple, saith your God, _____
f *mf* , *mf*
 com - fort ye my peo - ple, saith your God, _____
mf , *mf*
 oh ah _____
mf , *mf*
 oh ah _____
mf , *mf*
 oh ah _____
mf , *mf*
 oh ah _____

* The same as the second syllable of "people" (like the altos are singing).

28

S
saith your God; saith your God; *f* *ff* 8 G.P. 2/4

A
saith your God; saith your God; *f* *ff* G.P. 2/4

T
your God; *f* *ff* G.P. 2/4

B
your God; *f* *ff* G.P. 2/4

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33 noble (quarter = 45)

mp unobtrusive dm _____

mp unobtrusive dm _____

mp speak ye com - for-ta - bly to Je - ru - sa - lem, *mf* speak ye com - for-ta - bly

mp speak ye com - for-ta - bly to Je - ru - sa - lem, *mf* speak ye com - for-ta - bly

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53

54

mp that her war fare, her war - fare is ac - com - plished, that her in -

mp that her war - fare, her war - fare is ac - com - plished, that her in -

mp war - - - fare, her war - fare is ac - com - plished, that her in -

mp war - fare, her war - fare, her war - fare is ac - com - plished that her in -

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Joshua Shank

57

59

ff i - qui - ty is par - don'd, that her in - i - qui - ty is par -

ff i - qui - ty is par - don'd, *mf* in - i - qui - ty is par -

ff i - qui - ty is par - don'd *mf* in - i - qui - ty is par -

ff i - qui - ty is par - don'd, *mf* in - i - qui - ty is par -

*semi-exaggerated Baroque dance
(quarter = 60ish)

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* Sorry for the clumsy tempo marking. By this I guess I mean that it shouldn't sound lyrical nor should it be so exaggerated that it sounds out of place. You have the composer's permission to just figure out what works for you.

60

kind of like the beginning (quarter = 50ish, but with life)

sub. *mp* slam shut to 'n'

mp joining the phrase

67 forceful (quarter = 80)

f open and release quickly!

f churning

ff

*Repeat this text as fast as you can immediately after entering.

72 foreground; spin! ——— rit. a tempo **77**

pare ye the way of the Lord; _____

rit. a tempo *mf* — *fp*

***...Lord make straight in the

rit. a tempo *mf* — *fp*

***...Lord make straight in the

rit. a tempo *mf* — *fp*

***...Lord make straight in the

**A few more repetitions and then come to rest on the word "Lord."

78 **80** **82** *p* lunga *p* lunga *p* very lunga

rit. *p* a tempo // (m) (m) (m)

for our God.

rit. *mp* *p* a tempo // *p* lunga *p* lunga *p* very lunga

des - ert — a high - way for our God. (m) (m) (m)

rit. *mp* *p* a tempo // *p* lunga *p* lunga *p* very lunga

des - ert — a high - way — for our God. (m) (m) (m)

rit. *mp* *p* a tempo // *p* lunga *p* lunga *p* very lunga

des - ert — a high - way — for our God. — (m) (m) (m)