

What features of Handel's *The King Shall Rejoice* have made the anthem so memorable to the present day?

'I beg Your Imperial Highness not to forget Handel's works, since these will certainly always afford the most excellent food for your highly developed musical soul which, moreover, is bound ever to overflow with admiration for that great man.'

Beethoven, 1819

Handel's music has endured centuries, and the fact that *The King Shall Rejoice* (TKSR) is studied as a set piece at A level shows it still has many relevant, interesting and unique styles and qualities to examine.

Handel composed during the Baroque period. Baroque has many identifiable signatures. For example, much of the music is religious and is characterised by majestic dotted rhythms and fugal textures, e.g. in the French Overture.

TKSR follows many of the traditional styles of the Baroque period, and also Handel's style. The text for *The King Shall Rejoice* is taken from the Book of Common Prayer and the Bible. It worships both the King and God and the whole tone of the piece is of splendour and glory.

It is against the rigid backdrop of English church music that one should view the style and form of all the Coronation Anthems, which are constructed from sections of differing key, metre and character. The relatively frequently changing key (mainly to the dominant and relative minor) keeps the listener interested and also adds variation to the music.

The orchestration is typical of the period, with the strings and continuo providing the core of the accompaniment, the brass being introduced for bold effects as required and again, this occasional adding of brass gives the anthem the texture to stop it being repetitive.

The choral writing displays Handel's intuition for setting words, something that had made him such a successful composer of opera; his intuition for when to use a declamatory, homophonic style for impact or a polyphonic style to generate tension and excitement over a wider span shows regular strokes of genius. This can be seen throughout the work, from the opening choral block chords of 'The King shall rejoice, the King shall rejoice in thy strength, O Lord' (bar 29) to the contrapuntal ecstasy of the drawn-out closing 'Alleluia'. (Bar 359).

From the outset the piece shows its tone, with a rapidly moving continuo in quavers with frequent triads moving up the octave. This gives a good sense of forward momentum. The 7/6 suspension at bar 5 is just one example of this signature of Handel's. The composer can also be identified by his regular use of perfect cadences and also the less common Phrygian cadence (4b -5).

The main motifs of the piece tend to come around the trills in the first movement and indeed trills are present throughout the four movements. One analysis of the anthem gives three major ideas, X, Y and Z. These are repeated throughout the piece, giving it balance and something for the listener's ear to identify with and ground them within the piece.

One of the major selling points of Handel's music is his excellent use of textural contrast. For example, at bar 13 the continuo drops out letting the oboes and violins crescendo (using motif Z) to the first entry of the trumpets and the re-entry of the continuo at 15. Here imitation is present, with the Oboes and violin 1 playing a motif first heard in bars 2 and 3. Repetition is present on a larger scale at bars 23-28; this passage is basically the same as bars 17-23. Once again, this grounds the listener and makes the music more memorable.

Possibly the most memorable part of TKSR is when the choir enters. They come in together at bar 30 and the declamatory style along with the trumpets and timpani create a massive opening statement, reflecting the ceremony and pomp of the occasion. The choir has several tools to make the music more interesting. The long melisma at bar 36 contrasting with the series of 7/6 suspensions in the continuo and 1st alto is almost an ecstasy of joy that must be recognised in the listener's ear.

In the second movement the music is less forceful and this contrast between movements lets the forceful parts be more effective. The second movement also introduces Hemiolas, another characteristic of Handel.

The last movement starts with only the voices and continuo until bar 299 where another large-scale entry is heard, setting the listener up for the dramatic finale. Here Handel splits up the alto and bass to give extra tonal harmony and this is all in anticipation of the finale. Handel has played many of his textural cards by the last movement and now must find other ways to hold the listener's attention. He achieves this by bring back some ideas from previous movements. A slow and steady crescendo leads to a dramatic pause at bar 358 before the final, massive, Alleluia leaves the listener satisfied.

Handel's intention was to impress and stun the many important people at the coronation. If the performance had been decent (unfortunately it wasn't) then the effect would have been massive. Handel set out to create a memorable piece and he achieved it.

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