DEBORAH: THE CREATION OF A CHAMBER ORATORIO IN ONE ACT

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In comparing oratorio traits across history, three aspects of oratorio were found to be particularly applicable to the creation of *Deborah: A Chamber Oratorio in One Act*. These aspects were: the selection of topic and the creation or adaptation of text; the differences between recitative and aria, in form and function; and the level of stylistic diversity within a given work.

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ORATORIO THEN AND NOW: AN OVERVIEW AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED

ORATORIOS FROM THE EIGHTEENTH, TWENTIETH, AND EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

1.1   Introduction

In researching the oratorio for this paper, particular aspects of the creation and

characteristics of an oratorio gained particular notice. This was due both to experiences and

discoveries made throughout the composition process and to conventions observed in

historical and analytical accounts. Thus, in the chapter comparing oratorio traits across history,

three aspects of oratorios are given attention: the selection of text, considering both the

motivations behind the selection of a topic and the adaptation or creation of a libretto to suit

said purposes; the differences between aria and recitative, in form and in function; and the

level of stylistic variety within the same piece.

Since oratorios take up a larger percentage of Handel's catalogue and legacy than

perhaps those of any other composer, English oratorio – the subgenre he created – has become

the standard in the popular consciousness. For the purposes of this paper, the traits of several

of Handel's oratorios are compared with a single oratorio each from the catalogues of two

contemporary composers: *The Light in the Wilderness* by Dave Brubeck (1920-2012) and *El Niño*

by John Adams (b. 1947).

1.2   Defining Oratorio

Any definition of oratorio inevitably includes, as suggested above, a mention of its status

as something between opera and sacred music. In short, an oratorio conveys a contemplative

topic provided by a sacred text – one "made up of dramatic, narrative, and contemplative elements,"[1] as described by the New Grove Dictionary of Music – presented in a concert setting and in a theatrical way. Except for its lack of costumes and scenery, and its tendency to place greater weight on choruses, the musical characteristics of oratorio are extremely similar to contemporaneous opera in any given time period. Oratorio also tends to be freer than opera to adhere to a looser dramatic narrative or meta-commentary rather than a straightforward plot. In addition to this, oratorio composers have more liberty to select a wide variety of textual sources, with or without the help of a librettist.

The genre of oratorio gained its name from its origin in the second half of the sixteenth century: the devotional practices of the Congregazione dell'Oratorio in Rome.[2] This religious association had taken to performing sacred motets and madrigals with dramatic or narrative texts as a form of spiritually-constructive entertainment. The general public, too, developed a taste for this activity: the Congregazione's meetings eventually became so popularly attended that they were compelled to construct an additional gallery, called an oratory, above the nave of the church to accommodate the large number of attendees.[3]

The earliest oratorios were written in a monodic style that resembled madrigals and were intended for use in church liturgy, sometimes in two parts that sandwiched the sermon.[4] By the mid-17th century, however, oratorios had become popular forms of entertainment in

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[1] Howard E. Smither, "Oratorio," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrell (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001), 503.
[2] Howard E. Smither, "Oratorio," in Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online (Oxford University Press), accessed October 22, 2015, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20397, §1.
[3] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §1.
[4] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §4.

secular contexts as well – most commonly during Lent, when opera houses were closed.[5]

Oratorios most closely resembled contemporaneous operas by this point, and they were seen as an acceptable substitute. With increasing popularity came a variety of changes: the previously small instrumentation of basso continuo and a few optional violins was expanded into that of a standard contemporaneous orchestra; a similar increase in complexity and density led to polyphony being the usual harmonic texture. Recitatives and arias, once freely mingled and ambiguously defined, took on distinct roles and forms.[6]

Despite this extensive evolution in almost all areas, a few key consistencies, present from almost the beginning, must be noted – the first being the selection of topic. Since all oratorios had sacred texts, the New Testament, hagiographical texts, and moral allegories were sometimes chosen; the majority, however, drew upon Old Testament stories. Audiences favored oratorio plots filled with lofty ideals and intense emotions; the colorful and occasionally downright scandalous content of the Old Testament likely provided the most promising material for oratorios.[7] The other consistent convention is, perhaps paradoxically, the fact that oratorio libretti were very rarely made up of direct biblical quotes: they were most often biblical paraphrases with a balance of dramatic and narrative text.[8]

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[5] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §5.
[6] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §5.
[7] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §5.
[8] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §4.

1.3   The English Oratorio: Handel's Creation

When George Frideric Handel produced the first English oratorio in 1732, he introduced something entirely new – not only to himself but to British musical life as a whole, as oratorio had not yet reached England's shores.[9] English oratorio, in many regards, resembled oratorio styles from the continent, particularly its topical and structural conventions. Stylistically speaking, however, Handel's music was "more complex than that of many contemporaries,"[10] as David Ross Hurley notes. Blending early and late Baroque idioms with *galant* sensibilities, Handel's unique synthesis of international genres of musical drama produced a style admixture which, as observed by Hurley, is the foundational essence of English oratorio.[11]

The first English oratorio came about by accident. In 1732, Handel sought a public performance of his 1718 opera *Esther* for the King's Theatre in London*.* However, the Bishop of London morally objected to and forbade the staging of a sacred subject in such a socially objectionable place. In order to get his public performance, Handel was forced to compromise; he ultimately revised *Esther* for concert performance and had it premiered in this form as "The Sacred Story of Esther: An Oratorio in English."[12] This novelty proved so financially successful that Handel was prompted to write more oratorios: over the following twenty years of his career, he wrote sixteen in total (besides *Esther*). Towards the end of his life, he abandoned work on his previous forte, opera, in order to focus more on oratorios, though his work in both genres was stylistically extremely similar.[13]

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[9] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §8.

[10] David Ross Hurley, *Handel's Muse: Patterns of Creation in his Oratorios and Musical Dramas, 1743-1751* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 278-279.

[11] Hurley, *Handel's Muse,* 280.

[12] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §8.

[13] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §8.

In accordance with tradition, Handel was consciously aware of the sacred aspects that defined oratorios. The majority had texts based on either the Old Testament or the Apocrypha; *Messiah,* the only Handel oratorio that used texts from both halves of the Bible, still had more of its text drawn from the Old Testament than the new.[14] Old Testament texts were popular with Handel's British audience because they likened themselves to the ancient Israelites in their nationalistic fervor and belief in a special chosen-ness under God.[15] As was common practice, Handel most often worked with a librettist to heavily paraphrase and adapt the biblical text; *Messiah*, with its use of non-narrative texts taken from the King James Bible, was a rare exception.[16]

While not operatic in function, Handel's oratorios were definitely so in form. The placement of and relationship between overtures, instrumental interludes, recitatives, and arias was much the same as in opera, and individual movements frequently adopted popular formal structures. The difference between aria and recitative is pronounced. Recitatives almost always consist only of a through-composed, speech-like melody accompanied by simple chords. They generally serve as stage-setters for arias or choruses, often focusing on succinct narrative texts that minimize their duration. Arias, by contrast, hinge on emotional, rather than narrative, expression. Free-flowing and possessing a distinct melody, the standard aria is accompanied by a denser texture with allowances for countermelodies, imitation, and so forth; depending on the text, it may be through-composed or aligned with a number of possible formal schemes.[17]

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[14] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §8.
[15] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §8.
[16] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §8.
[17] Smither, "Oratorio" in Grove Music Online, §8.

The true lifeblood of a Handelian oratorio, however – both in terms of its prominence and its contrast with opera conventions – was the chorus. Many of Handel's oratorios, *Israel in Egypt* in particular, are dominated by single and double choruses, and it is in choruses that Handel most took advantage of the stylistic variety and expressive possibilities available to him. Hurley notes that Handel's oratorio choruses "disclose compositional concerns like those found in all his compositions: effective text-setting, tonal balance, formal proportions, and musical contrast."[18] In effect, they demonstrate in a (relatively) compact form the composer's great skill in writing lyrically and with stylistic variety. The result is that the choruses are frequently the highlight of a Handel oratorio; if the universal popularity of the "Hallelujah!" chorus (excerpt shown in

Example 1.1 – Excerpt from "Hallelujah!" mm. 75-77, from *Messiah*[19]

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[18] Hurley, *Handel's Muse,* 128-130.
[19] George Frideric Handel, *The Messiah: An Oratorio,* ed. T. Tertius Noble (New York: G. Schirmer, 1912), 201. Technical difficulties prevented the creation of a better-quality example.

Example 1.1) from *Messiah* is considered, they may be the highlight of his entire compositional career. Taken as a whole, Handel's oratorios do not only offer a microcosm of his musical style,[20] but also remain the commonly conceived standard to this day.

1.4   By Way of Jazz: Dave Brubeck and *The Light in the Wilderness*

An oratorio is perhaps the last thing one would expect to spring from the pen of a jazz composer. However, if anyone could make such an attempt successful, it would be Dave Brubeck. Though he firmly insisted upon his identity as a jazz composer, once stating "I have never been a classical musician,"[21] his musical style does not fit exclusively into the stereotypical confines of jazz; instead, he embraced and synthesized a broad and eclectic range of influences, culminating in a unique and celebrated musical voice.

In the centuries since oratorio's advent, Old Testament texts have given way to those from the New Testament in terms of popularity and frequency of use; the New Testament's language of peace and brotherly love seems to be more palatable to modern audiences than the formerly popular tales of battles and nationalistic glory found throughout the Old. This interest certainly applies to Dave Brubeck's work; in the liner notes to the world premiere recording of his oratorio, he described the personal appeal of this more comforting belief system: "This composition is, I suppose, simply one man's attempt to distill in his own thought and to express in his own way the essence of Jesus' teaching."[22]

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[20] Hurley, *Handel's Muse,* 3.
[21] Ilse Storb and Klaus-Gotthard Fischer, *Dave Brubeck: Improvisations and Compositions: The Idea of Cultural Exchange,* trans. Bert Thompson (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1994), 78.
[22] Dave Brubeck, *The Light in the Wilderness*, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Erich Kunzel, recorded March 19-20, 1968, Decca DXSA 7202, 1968, LP.

In contrast with Handel's liberal adaptations of biblical texts, Dave Brubeck sought to work with text far closer to the source material for *The Light in the Wilderness.* Almost everything in the libretto is a direct quotation or an extremely close paraphrase of texts from Deuteronomy, Psalms, or the New Testament gospels. In the two cases where an original text is used, it is one composed by Brubeck himself with the help of his wife Iola.

The Light in the Wilderness, composed in 1967, was a personal, non-commissioned project for Brubeck, though it was encouraged in various stages by choral conductor Lara Hoggard and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra conductor Erich Kunzel. Because Brubeck wrote several different performance versions of the oratorio in succession, the instrumentation is very flexible; the result is that the score's lengthy subtitle is "An oratorio for mixed chorus, baritone solo, and organ (supplementary spring bass and percussion, optional) or symphony orchestra with optional keyboard improvisation."[23] Opportunity for said improvisation is provided in a handful of interlude jazz choruses with key changes; however, Brubeck states that, in terms of performance pacing, he prefers the work without the improvisation sections. [24]

Still, Brubeck does not reject all semblance of stylistic variety: the mostly tonal-sounding atmosphere of the piece is jarringly, yet skillfully, interrupted by a surprising use of dodecaphonic technique in the work's centerpiece, "Love Your Enemies." Supported by a texture of "war-like"[25] improvisations in the percussion, text exhorting kindness towards violent abusers is expressed in three overlapping twelve-tone rows and a strident, speech-like vocal

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[23] Dave Brubeck, *The Light in the Wilderness* (Delaware Water Gap, Pa.: Shawnee Press, 1968), ii.
[24] Brubeck, *The Light in the Wilderness,* ii.
[25] Brubeck, *The Light in the Wilderness,* 72.

timbre, bringing a surprising degree of severity to a radical text often taken for granted as benign. An excerpt from this movement is shown in Example 1.2.

Apart from this, however, *The Light in the Wilderness* sits comfortably within a pan-diatonic, classical-friendly tonal language. It relies heavily upon the chorus and the baritone soloist; with very fluid text-setting throughout, smooth alternation between imitative counterpoint and homophony, and a through-composed progression of ideas, there is no

Example 1.2 – Excerpt from "Love Your Enemies," mm. 22-26, from *The Light in the Wilderness*[26]

[26] Brubeck, *The Light in the Wilderness,* 73. Technical difficulties prevented the creation of a better-quality example.

distinction between recitative and aria. Ultimately, contrast in this case is not necessary. This surprising hybrid of styles is enhanced by its natural growth and seamless flow from beginning to end; it suggests that revered jazz composer Dave Brubeck is severely underrated as a composer of classical-tradition concert music.

1.5   A Not-So-English Oratorio: John Adams and *El Niño*

Despite nearly two centuries between the death of one composer and the birth of the other, American composer John Adams drew a tremendous amount of inspiration from Handel, especially *Messiah,* during the conception of his 2000 oratorio *El Niño.* This massive work is based upon various apocryphal and devotional texts about the birth of Jesus Christ and requires three vocal soloists, a countertenor trio, a chorus, a children's choir, and a large orchestra; it is an imposing monument brimming with Adams's signature multi-layered textures and rich flavoring from a catalog of musical influences. His appealing blend of classical-tradition sophistication with a vivacious character have most certainly contributed to his status as the most performed living American composer.[27]

Michael Steinberg observes, "*El Niño* is deeply Handelian in two senses: in the simplicity and directness with which the words convey their message of belief, and in the joy the composer takes in setting English words to music."[28] However, this statement can be misleading as the text is not entirely in English. An apt example of the multitudinous sources

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[27] Thomas May, ed., *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer* (Pompton Plains, New Jersey: Amadeus Press, 2006), xiii.

[28] Michael Steinberg, "El Niño: A Nativity Oratorio (1999-2000)," in *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer,* ed. Thomas May (Pompton Plains, New Jersey: 2006), 175.

that Adams incorporates into his work, the libretto is composed of texts from sixteen different authors or anonymous sources, centuries of literary history, and three languages (English, Spanish, and Latin). In contrast with Handelian tradition, Adams has not written an English oratorio. The scope of *El Niño* – in terms of the viewpoints discussed, sources embraced, and styles referenced – is global.

Like the oratorio's textual landscape, the motivations behind the creation of *El Niño* are multilayered*.* Motivated in the long term by Adams's feelings about the birth of his child in 1984, this setting of the nativity story celebrates the miracle of life and the innocence and simplicity of the newborn Christ. As opposed to Handel's *Messiah,* Arnold Whittall notes, in *El Niño* "Jesus is to be loved for his innocence and purity, not worshipped in awe for his Divine power."[29] Also of necessity was recognizing the female experience of pregnancy and childbirth – "How can you tell this story in 2001 and not have a woman's voice?"[30] as Adams said – and his use of texts predominantly by female writers reflects this motivation. Feelings about social injustices also are reflected in the movement "Memorial de Tlatelolco," which compares Herod's massacre of the innocents, the slaughter of Aztecs by conquistadors in the battle of Tlatelolco in 1521, and the slaughter of rioting Mexican youth in Mexico City's Tlatelolco Square in 1968.[31] In *El Niño,* the events of the Christmas story resonate across time and space; it is the nativity viewed through a kaleidoscope.

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[29] Arnold Whittall, "Birtwhistle's Last Supper and Adams's El Niño: Echoes of Old Beliefs," *The Musical Times* 143, no. 1881 (Winter 2002): 19.
[30] Steinberg, "El Niño," 174.
[31] Steinberg, "El Niño," 180-181.

Kaleidoscopic, too, is Adams's musical aesthetic. A "representative twenty-first-century composer," as described by Thomas May, his work draw inspiration from the measured, reasoned quality of Baroque music,[32] the eclecticism of Charles Ives, and the accessible quality of vernacular music.[33] His "unique sound world . . . rebalances the opposing forces of simplicity and complexity."[34] Said balance of opposing forces might be best described as a spectrum; the changes in character in *El Niño* range in intensity from the dramatic to the subtle. For this reason, *El Niño* can be said to have made more of a distinction between recitative and aria: there is a clear contrast between the narrative-oriented, soft-spoken countertenor trios and the more explosive vocal solo movements.

However, true distinction between movement genres cannot be defined here, and that is Adams's intention. His concern is not with a linear narrative, but with a multifaceted commentary upon the narrative. In an interview with Ken Ueno, Adams noted that he chose the title *El Niño* in part because of the word's use to describe an enormous meteorological event;[35] for an event as universally significant as the nativity, one perspective is simply not enough.

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[32] Kheng Keow Koay, "Baroque Minimalism in John Adams's Violin Concerto," *Tempo* 66, no. 260 (April 2012): 25.

[33] May, *The John Adams Reader,* xv-xvi.

[34] May, *The John Adams Reader,* xvi.

[35] Ken Ueno, "John Adams on El Niño and Vernacular Elements," in *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings on an American Composer,* ed. Thomas May (Pompton Plains, New Jersey: Amadeus Press, 2001), 184.

CHAPTER 2

KNOWLEDGE OF ORATORIOS AS APPLIED TO "DEBORAH"

2.1   Introduction

This chapter will begin to address the composition process of *Deborah*, with a primary

focus on decisions made in the pre-compositional planning stages that determined the overall

structure and sound world of the entire work. Interspersed throughout at logical intervals will

be comparisons of the aforementioned oratorios and, in particular, three previously discussed

aspects of oratorio – selection of topic and text, the difference between recitative and aria, and

stylistic variety – of the sources with those of this original work.

2.2   Deciding to Compose an Oratorio

Oratorio was the first option that sprang to mind when considering a large-scale

master's thesis project. It was prompted, perhaps, by a lifelong fondness for and familiarity

with Handel's *Messiah,* a fixture of many Christmases and Easters. A similar, though broader,

fondness for composing vocal music, contributed; the creative appeal of a dramatic story to

portray and a multi-movement work in which to explore numerous ideas made oratorio the

natural choice.

As tempting as it would be to write an oratorio for a full chorus and orchestra, a more

practical instrumentation was a necessity. A variety of timbres and instrumental families was

desired, as well as an SATB set of vocal soloists. At first, an instrumentation of small chorus and

ten-piece orchestra (which included oboe, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, harpsichord,

percussion, and string quartet) was selected and worked with until it proved too much; the

final, trimmed-down ensemble consisted of the vocal soloists and a *L'Histoire du Soldat*[36]

ensemble. This instrumentation still presented the timbres sought, along with the balance and

variety desired regarding the representation of instrument families. In addition to this, the size

of the new ensemble was more practical in terms of recruiting performers for a recital.

2.3   Choosing the Topic: Motivation

The story of Deborah, a brief but colorful episode in the fourth and fifth chapters of the

biblical book of Judges, as the topic was selected due to both practical and thematic

motivations. In terms of performance logistics, the roles of the four principal characters in the

story (Barak, Deborah, Sisera, and Jael) align well with a performance personnel of soprano,

alto, tenor, and bass soloists. Furthermore, as a less well-known biblical passage, it carries

fewer preconceived dramatic and musical expectations. In other words, while there are varied

existing musical settings of *Deborah* (including one by Handel), none of them have permeated

the standard repertoire to the same extent as other biblical narratives; there is much more that

can be expressed about it.

For those unfamiliar with the story of Deborah, it is an account that takes place in the

early days of Israel before there was a king. Instead, in periodic times of conflict, Israel was

guided by judges. Deborah was the only female judge and the only judge who was also a

prophet. With Israel facing oppression from the neighboring Canaanites, Deborah appointed an

Israelite countryman named Barak to lead the Israelites into battle against them. Barak,

doubting the promise of divine aid, would not go into battle unless Deborah would go with him.

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[36] Igor Stravinsky, *Histoire du Soldat,* ed. John Carewe (London: Chester Music, 1987).

In response, Deborah prophesied that, while Israel would still win, the greatest honor in battle (that of capturing or killing the enemy general) would go to a woman. True to her word, the Israelites soundly defeated the Canaanite oppressors, but the Canaanite commander Sisera escaped. He fled to the tent of Jael, a woman he assumed was on his side, and asked for shelter and water. While Jael's motivations are unclear, her allegiance clearly stood with Israel; once Sisera had fallen asleep in her tent, she killed him by driving a tent peg through his head.

Over the past few years the story of Deborah has held an appeal due to its bold and macabre nature and somewhat proto-feminist theme. In the end, the motivations for its selection align with those of all the historical sources in some way: after beginning with a Handelian assumption that most oratorios address a sacred topic, I gravitated towards an Adams- and Brubeck-style approach of addressing an old and familiar story from a fresh perspective. The desire was to explore and express what I believe to be the theme of the story: that gender is insignificant compared to ability, initiative, and commitment to God.

2.4   Creating the Libretto: Choosing Source Texts

In terms both of the resources generally available and the precedents set by the sources, there were several options available in the creation of the libretto. As opposed to Handel, who worked with a librettist for his oratorios, and Adams, who selected texts from a variety of contrasting sources in several different languages, the approach for *Deborah* ultimately resembled Brubeck's the most: I used the original biblical text, though in an older translation and with fewer paraphrases than Brubeck put to use. The use of the Old King James version of the Bible was practical in that it is public domain in the United States, which nullified

concerns about copyright permissions. Additionally, its selection pays homage to the King James text in Handel's *Messiah* and captures a flavor of the Baroque edge I wanted to explore in the music.

Going further in the vein of *Messiah*-inspired text selection practices was the decision to incorporate into the libretto passages from other portions of the Old Testament besides Judges 4-5. The motivation behind this was to explore additional layers of the theme and of the characters' opinions and motivations. Using two online resources – a character development guide[37] (ordinarily used for writing fiction) and a concordance[38] – a supplementary collection of texts from the Old Testament (to which the search was limited for the sake of thematic cohesion) was compiled for use in the arias. Perhaps this process is a touch unorthodox, but the aim here is commentary rather than 100% accuracy.

2.5   Creating the Overall Structure: First Steps

Distributing the text in appropriate places and quantities throughout the oratorio required consideration for the placement of the types of movements (recitatives, arias, and choruses). A study of Handel's *Messiah* showed that, in general, recitative texts consist of three Bible verses each; in arias and choruses, one or at the most two verses are exposed. Simplification meant trimming down the text by removing superfluous (for the sake of this project) details and repetitions in order to give more space to the essentials.

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[37] The Lazy Scholar, "How to Create a Character Profile," *The Internet Writing Journal* 2, no. 6 (June 1998): accessed June 30, 2015. http://www.writerswrite.com/journal/jun98/how-to-create-a-character-profile-6986.
[38] Blue Letter Bible, accessed August 21, 2014, https://www.blueletterbible.org/.

Following the pattern laid out in more standard Handel oratorios such as *Jephthah,* recitatives were given narrative texts, while the aforementioned commentary texts were assigned to the arias. The text genres of the two choruses are divided; Movement 9 received a narrative text, Movement 15 a commentary. (The final chorus, upon the Judges 5 text "Hear, O Ye Kings. . ." is here considered to be more of a commentary; despite being adjacent to the original narrative text, it does not serve a narrative purpose in the context of this oratorio.)

2.6   Number and Ordering of Movements

When deciding upon the number, ordering, and duration of the movements in *Deborah*, a major guiding factor was an observation of Handel's general practices. His oratorios feature a series of recitative-aria pairs interspersed with frequent choruses and occasional interludes. As the intent was to divide the load for each soloist more or less evenly, each was given one aria (air) and at least one recitative (more recitatives than airs were required in order to progress the plot and display some of the character interactions). Also, two choruses were distributed where they seemed to fit the best: one as part of a "battle symphony" to describe the climactic and chaotic battle, and one as a finale for the entire work.

The ordering and flow of movements in *Deborah* are as follows:

1. Overture

2. Recitative for Tenor: "The Children of Israel"

3. Air for Tenor: "Hear My Prayer"

4. Recitative for Alto and Tenor: "Deborah, a Prophetess"

5. Air for Alto: "Commit Thy Way"

6. Recitative for Bass: "Barak Called Zebulun and Naphtali"

7. Air for Bass: "By the Multitude of My Chariots"

8. Recitative for Alto and Tenor: "Deborah Said Unto Barak"

9. Battle Symphony and Chorus: "The LORD Discomfited Sisera"

10. Recitative for Soprano and Bass: "Sisera Fled Away"

11. Recitative for Soprano: "Blessed Be the Most High God"

12. Air for Soprano: "Thus Saith the LORD"

13. Quasi-Recitative for Soprano: "Jael Took a Nail"

14. Recitative for Alto: "God Subdued on That Day Sisera"

15. Chorus: "Hear, O Ye Kings"

The first question I generally address during the composition process, once I have decided upon the type and number of movements if applicable, is defining the durations of the movements and/or of the entire work. Preference is frequently given to the rule of thirds, which places the climax of the entire piece two-thirds of the way through the overall duration. In terms of the oratorio's plot, however, one could say there are two climaxes: the first being the battle and the second the killing of Sisera. This circumstance prompted the decision to sandwich the two-thirds mark in between the two climaxes. The original timings of individual movements were approximated according to the anticipated degree of musical complexity for each type: recitatives on average would be one to two minutes long; airs, three to four; and choruses, five to six.

A demonstration of the earliest thought processes regarding *Deborah* is shown in Figure 2.1 on the following page. This graphite- and colored-pencil sketch is a typical, though slightly

more elaborate, example of an early stage in my composition process during which I articulate

the intended character of the music before defining the specifics; i.e. the colors and shapes

Figure 2.1 – Color Sketch Created in the Early Planning Stages of *Deborah,* with Movements

Labeled (January 25, 2015)[39]

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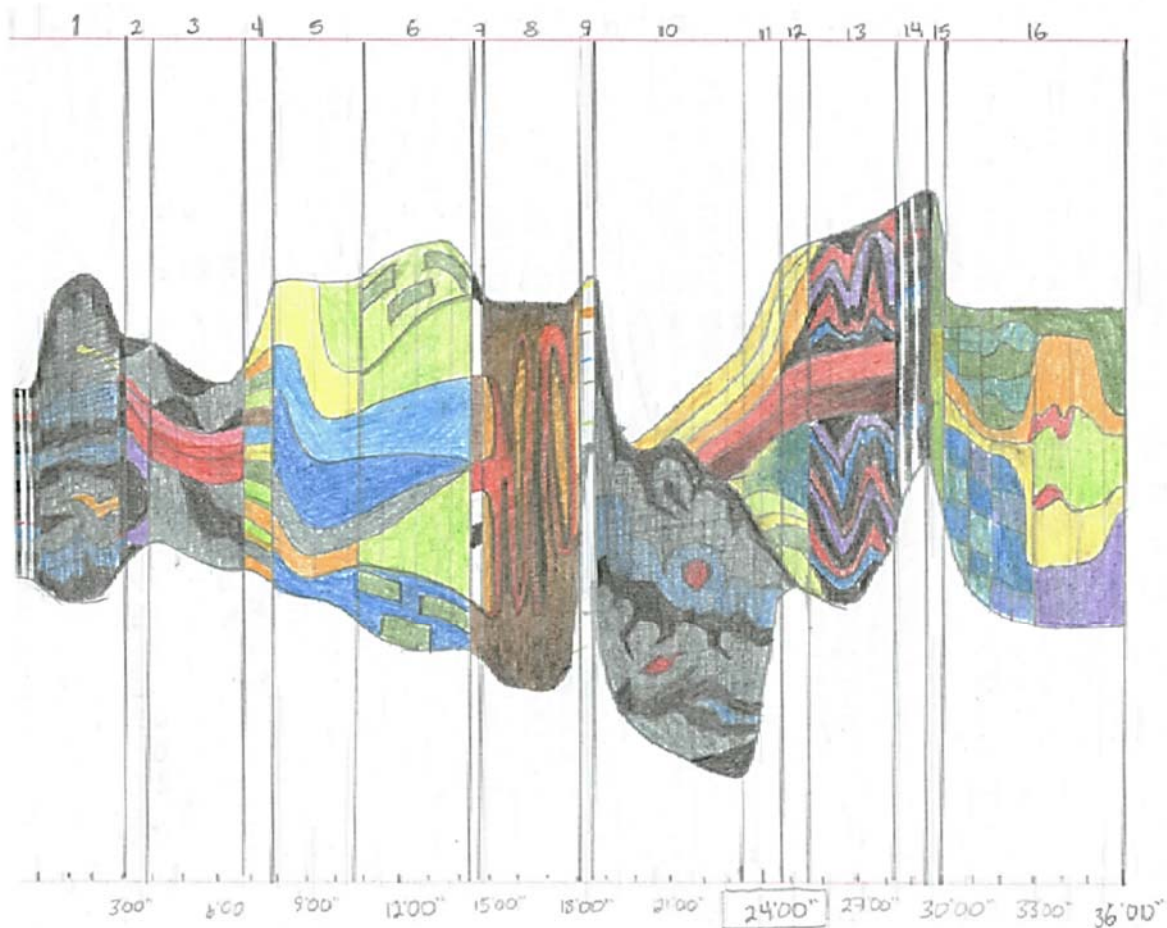
[39] The original sketches for *Deborah* allowed for a longer overture, a longer "battle symphony," and a chorus following the alto aria (labeled as movement 6 in this illustration, resulting in the movement numbering being offset from those of the final result). In order to meet thesis deadlines, and in order to adjust pacing to accommodate movements that had expanded past their anticipated duration, I trimmed down the duration and materials of the overture and battle symphony and completely removed the first chorus.

match up with general character traits rather than specific musical elements. For

example, rather than representing specific pitch collections or tonal areas, bright colors signify

a generically brighter, more spacious, and more tonally-motivated language in comparison to

sections with darker colors; these mark passages that will be far denser and more dissonant,

chaotic, and non-pitch-oriented in the finished product. The up-and-down contour of the line

has a more concrete and observable parallel in the score, as it represents the pitch range and

its development.

2.7   Determination of Musical Parameters

My definition of a musical parameter, put simply, is that it is a measurable and

controllable aspect of a musical work. This definition encompasses pitch content, rhythmic

content, durations, tempi, dynamics, and so forth. The following discussion of parameters

describes the concrete musical building blocks that were compiled to define the general idea of

each movement and to establish a balance of variety and cohesion throughout the work in its

entirety.

2.7.1   XY Graphs

Despite the lack of exceptionally non-traditional visual components in my scores,

organizing concepts visually during early stages of composition is helpful in determining and

summarizing the specifics of the parameters. Specifically for work on *Deborah,* the following XY

graphs were developed as a planning tool for defining the parameters of each movement in

relation to one another (i.e. a circle placed on a particular spot on the graph doesn't mean that

it must be assigned exactly to whichever points on the graph it intersects, but rather that it is

intended to share the same relation to the other movements as it does to the other circles). To

my knowledge, no one else has used this pre-compositional process before. The set of XY

Figure 2.2 – XY Graphs for All Movements of *Deborah* (September-October 2014)
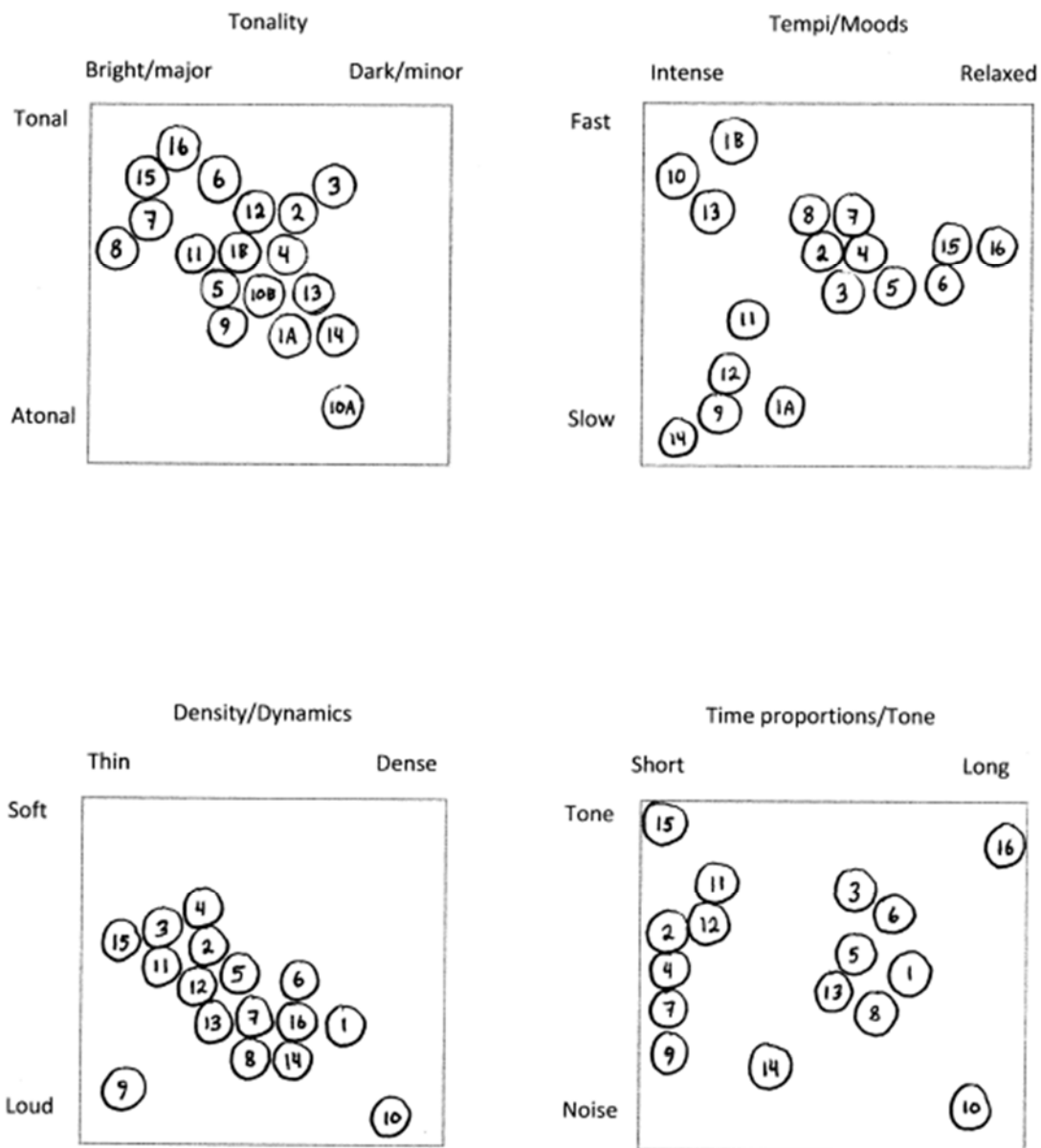
graphs for the entire piece is shown in Figure 2.2 on the preceding page; once the parameters

for the piece as a whole were more clearly defined, similar sets of XY graphs were applied to

each movement individually, with contrasting sections divided according to the structures

implied by their texts.

In creating the graphs, complementary parameters were paired upon the XY axes. For

example, the "Tempi/Moods" graph pairs an Intense-Relaxed scale on the X axis and a Fast-

Slow scale on the Y axis. This was useful in clarifying the nuances of parameters that are too

frequently conflated; that is, tempo and mood do correlate somewhat but they are not

equivalent. The other graph pairings are tonality and modal color; dynamics and orchestrational

density; and tone/noise ratio and duration (something of a catch-all graph for the remaining

two parameters rather than an implied correlation). The parameters described in the above XY

graphs, especially those regarding tonality, will be discussed in detail below.

2.7.2   Modes and Tonality

During the process of composing a piece written a few years ago, *The Road and the End*,

I catalogued an extensive collection of seven-pitch equal-temperament modes encompassing a

variety of interval patterns; they have been a fixture in my work ever since. Having established

that the range of modes to be selected for *Deborah* would cover a spectrum of tonality versus

atonality and major versus minor (also labeled "brightness" and "darkness" in the XY graphs), it

was necessary to narrow down what specifically was meant by those terms.

A rather subjective analysis of the Greek modes (Ionian, Dorian, etc.) ranking which was

"darkest," "brightest," and so forth, revealed measurable traits for each category. "Bright"

modes have larger intervals distributed towards the beginning of the scale, providing a more

open and "major" sound, while "dark" modes have clusters of large intervals in the middle and

end. For example, the Lydian scale (beginning with three whole notes) is the "brightest" of the

Greek modes; Locrian (with half steps in the beginning and in the middle) is the "darkest."

Speaking in terms of "tonal" and "atonal" modes also has to do with the distribution of

intervals, though in a different manner. "Tonal" modes have an even distribution of intervals

across the octave, in regular or semi-regular alternations between half-steps and whole-steps

that resemble that of the Greek modes. "Atonal" modes contain half-steps, whole-steps, and

occasionally minor thirds clustered together. Once these definitions were solidified, the list was

used to select modes that encompassed an appealing range of brightness/darkness and

tonality/atonality and assign them in rows and columns for application to the movements.

2.7.3   Tone/Noise Ratio

The use of the term "noise" in this case is perhaps a bit unfortunate, as it is not meant in

the usual sense of white noise or electronic noise. Rather, its definition here concerns sonic

events that are either non-pitched (such as percussion, air sounds, and so on) or sonorities in

which the pitches present cannot be distinguished clearly (such as in an especially crunchy

dissonance). Tone, in contrast, is rather self-explanatory as a sound event with distinguishable

pitches. The simplest way to calculate and apply a variety of pitch/noise ratios was in

percentages, with the higher percentages of noise going to movements with greater levels of

thematic chaos and intensity. For instance, Movement 8 is 25% tone and 75% noise (meaning

that, of the total number of attacks across the ensemble, 25% were pitched and 75% were non-

pitched) because it is the buildup to the 100%-noise battle scene; the calmest movement, post-conflict Movement 14, is 100% tone.

2.7.4   Instrumentation

The instrumentation of *Deborah* having already been chosen, the textural density and orchestration of each movement was next to be determined. The X axis on the XY graph labeled "Density/Dynamics" graphs the instrumentation of each movement according to how many instruments perform on said movement. Fuller instrumentations were generally assigned according to dramatic need (for example, in the battle scene) or according to convention (e.g. a full ensemble for the closing chorus).

The specifics of smaller instrumentations depended on a few factors. The first was that of matching timbres to the moments in which they best seemed to fit. The first few movements were assigned to have softer, warmer timbres, resulting in a reliance on woodwinds and strings. Gradually adding brass and percussion when the atmosphere demanded something more brassy and martial, the orchestration moves to a grittier and harsher texture after Movement 9, focusing on the bassoon, strings, brass, and percussion. Movement 14 is balanced in its inclusion of one member of each family (bassoon, trombone, and violin) before the entire ensemble returns for the finale. This somewhat odd instrumentation in Movement 14 also has to do with the other focus of this stage: ensuring that the instruments were evenly distributed among the movements, as it was important that there would not be an imbalance in the prominence of each instrument. A visual representation of the part distribution is shown in Figure 2.3 on the following page.

Figure 2.3 – Instrumentation Distribution Chart for *Deborah* (September-October 2015)[40]

New Orchestration

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Clarinet															
Bassoon															
Trumpet															
Trombone															
Percussion															
Violin															
Bass															

Following the assignment of all the parameters for each movement, I created a chart (Figure 2.4 on the following page) to summarize and keep track of the selections that had been made, both for the sake of showing the work in progress to advisors and for personal reference.

2.8   Recitative and Aria

As many of the structural cues have been taken from Handel, the recitatives and arias in *Deborah* resemble those of his works more than any similar moments in Brubeck's or Adams's oratorios; however, some of those similarities are expressed in slightly different ways. Like Handel's, the recitatives in *Deborah* are through-composed and depend on the text's implied vocal inflections for their rhythms and pitch contours; but a further step is taken past dependence on vocal inflection into dictation by it. Neither the rhythms nor pitches are adjusted to fit a particular meter or melodic concept; the meters are irregular and the pitch contours are informed by an analysis of recorded spoken word. The arias in *Deborah*, by contrast, emphasize musicality of phrases more than verbal inflection and tend to have more

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[40] "New Orchestration" refers to the changes in instrumentation I made at the beginning of the Fall 2015 semester.

regular meters. They have a lot of freedom in regards to functional (within the modal context)

Figure 2.4 – Chart Detailing Concrete Parameters for Each Movement of *Deborah*[41]

Movement	Mode	Intensity (1-10)	Instrumentation	Dynamic (average)	Tone/Noise Percentage	Duration
1.Overture	A: C# D E F# G A# B B: C# E F F# G# A# B: E G G# A B C# D A: E F G A A# C# D	8	Full orchestra	f mf-f, p	50/50	3'00"
2.Recitative	E F G A Bb C Eb	4	Tenor, Woodwinds, Brass, Strings	mp-mf	65/35	0'45"
3.Air	A B C D E F# G#	5	Tenor, Harpsichord, Strings	mp	85/15	3'00"
4.Recitative	F G Ab Bb Db D Eb A B C D F F# G	6	Alto, Tenor, Woodwinds, Brass, Violin	mp mf p mf mf+	55/45	1'00"
5.Air	D E F G# A B C D E F# G A B C	4	Alto, Woodwinds, Trombone, Strings	mf	60/40	3'00"
6.Recitative	B C# D# F G G# A#	5	Bass, Woodwinds, Trumpet, Percussion	f	35/65	0'30"
7.Air	E F# G# A B D D#	6	Bass, Woodwinds, Trombone, Percussion, Bass	f	30/70	3'15"
8.Recitative	B C# D F G G# A	9	Alto, Tenor, Brass, Percussion	ff-mp	25/75	0'30"
9.Battle Symphony and Chorus	A: C# D E F G A C B: E G G# A# B C# D#	10	Chorus, Full Orchestra	fff	15/85	3'30"
10.Recitative	G A C C# D E F#	3	Soprano, Bass, Strings	f mf mp	45/55	1'30"
11.Recitative	G A Bb C D E F#	6	Soprano, Trumpet, Percussion, Strings	mf	75/25	0'30"
12.Air	A# B D D# E# F# G#	8	Soprano, Bassoon, Trumpet, Percussion, Strings	f	45/55	3'00"
13.Quasi-Recitative	F# G A# B C# D E	10	Soprano, Full Orchestra	f-ff	20/80	1'15"
14.Recitative	D E F# G# A B C#	0	Alto, Bassoon, Trombone, Violin	mp	100/0	0'30"
15.Chorus	D E F# G A B C#	1	Chorus, Full Orchestra	f mf f	95/5	6'00"

harmonies. Recitatives have more strictly prescribed chord progressions, but for the most part simple block chords are avoided: there are numerous allowances for incorporating brief motives, imitating the voice line, or otherwise filling out a dense and active texture. Ironically, contrary to the usual practice, the recitatives in *Deborah* generally require careful adherence to the tempo due to their metric complexity.

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[41] Technical difficulties prevented the creation of a better-quality example.

2.9   Stylistic Diversity

The three composers discussed in the previous chapter – Handel, Brubeck, and Adams –

all exhibit synthesis of multiple musical genres in some way. So, too, does *Deborah;* over the

last few years I have developed something of a polystylistic bent, and a multi-movement work

was an ideal place to express contrasting stylistic influences in varying strengths. In much the

same way as the varied spectra of musical parameters that have been discussed, elements from

music that inspires me – the modes and colorful sonorities of Olivier Messiaen (favorites

include *Cinq rechants,*[42] *Des canyons aux étoiles,*[43] and *Et exspecto resurrectionem*

mortuorum[44]*)*, the virtuosity and timbral adventurousness of George Crumb (*Black Angels,*[45]

American Songbooks V[46] *and VI*[47]*)*, and the vocal lyricism of George Frideric Handel – have

contributed to a rich palette of sonic resources.

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[42] Olivier Messiaen, *Cinq rechants, pour 12 voix mixtes* (Paris: Salabert, 1949).
[43] Olivier Messiaen, *Des canyons aux étoiles* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1978).
[44] Olivier Messiaen, *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum, pour orchestre de bois, cuivres, et percussion métalliques* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 1966).
[45] George Crumb, *Black Angels (Images 1) for electric string quartet* (New York: C. F. Peters, 1971).
[46] George Crumb, *Voices from a forgotten world: a cycle of American songs from North and South, East and West* (New York: C. F. Peters, 2007).
[47] George Crumb, *Voices from the morning of the earth: a cycle of American songs from North and South, East and West: for two solo voices (male & female), amplified piano, and percussion quartet: American songbook VI* (New York: C. F. Peters, 2008).

CHAPTER 3

COMPOSING SPECIFIC MOVEMENTS

3.1   Introduction

This chapter will discuss details about the composition process of *Deborah* as it concerns

individual movements, organized according to the type of movement. Each section will begin

with a general summary of the approach to each type, followed by brief explanations of each

movement in that category.

3.2   Recitatives

As the most important role of recitative is the exposition of the text, the aim was for the

text-setting to be dictated by natural vocal inflections, perhaps to an extreme degree. As an aid

to assigning pitches to the recitative texts, I recorded four other people (Andrew Campbell,

Michelle Flowers, Julie Mixter, and Chaz Underriner) reading selections from the libretto; these

audio files were then applied to Melodyne software (screenshot shown in Example 3.1 on the

next page), which revealed the pitches of the vocal inflections. From there it was possible to

adjust the pitches for consistency with the respective modes of each recitative while

maintaining the contour.

Before beginning to apply harmonies, I studied each of the recitatives in Handel's

Messiah and *Jephthah* to see which chord progressions were the most common. The basic

principles gleaned from this study was applied to the recitatives' harmonic structures, following

common patterns of triads built on scale degrees (I, IV, V, etc.) – this despite the fact that most

of the modes are non-tonal. In these cases, false "triads" based on the mode's scale degrees

Example 3.1 – Screenshot of Melodyne[48] File for Movement 2 Sketching
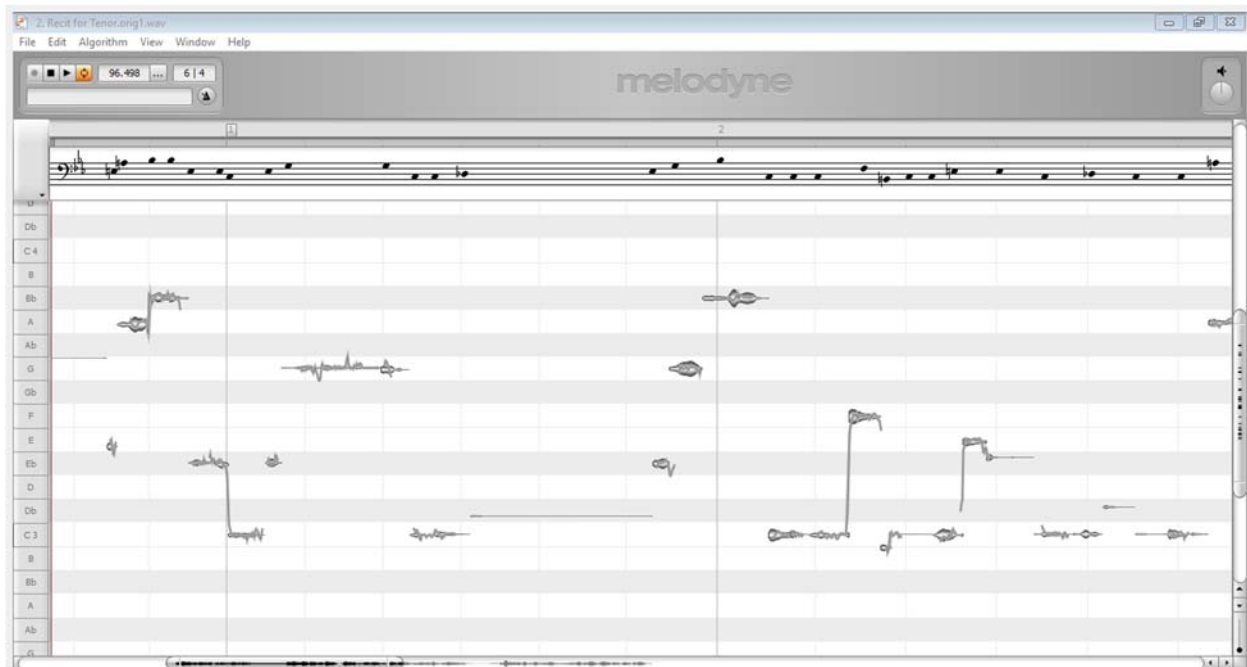
were used as a way to exploit the modes' natural properties. For example, in the mode used in

movement 11 (the bass and soprano recitative), G A C C# D E F#, the "IV" chord is C# E G.

However, the triads were a guideline rather than a strict rule. Non-chord tones were allowed

and relatively frequent; sometimes they were necessary in order for cadences to feel more

complete, such as in Movement 2 where the "tonic" triad is diminished.

3.2.1   Recitative for Tenor (Movement 2)

The goal of this movement was an antiquated, "rusty" Baroque sound with a traditional

structure. As the first movement involving a vocal part, it was also an appropriate place to

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[48] "What is Melodyne?" Celemony Software GmbH, accessed February 3, 2015,
http://www.celemony.com/en/melodyne/what-is-melodyne/.

exposit more of the details of the sound world, with tonal-esque adherence to a non-tonal mode and rattling non-pitched sounds in particular.

3.2.2   Recitative for Alto and Tenor (Movement 4)

As the first approach to Deborah's character, the initial mood of this recitative is intended to convey a somewhat intimidating and otherworldly atmosphere; a rhythmically active instrumental duet against static chords indicates crackling spiritual intensity. When the prophetess speaks for God, the accompaniment bursts with a stronger level of confidence and authority. Barak's response is more subdued, reflecting back on his previous aria both in accompanimental character and in a brief return to the mode of Movement 2.

3.2.3   Recitative for Bass (Movement 6) and Recitative for Alto and Tenor (Movement 8)

These recitatives presented a special challenge because of what was desired for the principal voice in the accompaniment. They describe the same action and event –assembling the troops for the battle – told from opposite sides. To contribute orchestrational text-painting, an attempt was made to write a war-call-like trumpet solo, superimposed over a chaotic background meant to emulate battle preparations; it would then be applied to both movements, in prime form in one and retrograde in the other.

After several attempts to work out a rhythm that would work as intended, the prime/retrograde durations still did not match. An important, perhaps very obvious realization struck: rhythmic placement in time is not the same as duration; the attacks of the notes worked in retrograde, but the note lengths were different. (An example of this result is shown in

Examples 3.2 and 3.3 on the following page, showing the beginning of Movement 6 and the end

of Movement 8).

Still, the results of this method were satisfactory, and pitch-assignment plans were

altered from the previously-planned left-to-right/right-to-left pitch ordering. As the recitatives

have the same chord progressions (albeit one is backward), I selected the two or three longest-

duration pitches in each harmony and assigned pitches to them in a complementary pattern.

For example, the pattern G-C#-G in the first recitative becomes C#-G-C# in the other. After this,

the rest of the pitches were filled in separately, according to a favorable contour and voice-

leading.

Example 3.2 – Movement 6, mm. 1-2 from *Deborah*

Example 3.3 –Movement 8, mm. 12-14 from *Deborah*

3.2.4 Recitative for Soprano and Bass (Movement 10)

With the longest text of any of the other movements, this recitative proved to be a challenge in a compounded sense. To contrast to the extremely loud and chaotic previous movement, Movement 10 was given a minimal accompaniment of violin and double bass and a deliberate, measured pace. It was organized structurally as something that might be described as an additive passacaglia; each iteration of the basic chord progression adds one or two new sonorities before cycling back.

To convey the emotions in the bass part of Movement 10, the placement of the beat in the vocal part was adjusted in relation to the accompaniment. He fluctuates between being slightly ahead and slightly behind the accompaniment, according to the mood – in this

movement, the character Sisera has gone from fleeing a spectacular defeat in battle to finding

refuge in what he assumes (falsely) is a safe hiding place. The soprano Jael maintains an in-

tempo, composed demeanor to reassure him before the final attack.

3.2.5   Recitative for Soprano (Movement 11)

The text of this recitative is a touch peculiar, especially in the "B" section. "He asked

water, and she gave him milk. . ." is odd in the context of more general statements of victory,

but in the end it was kept because it remarks sarcastically upon the events in the previous

movement and effectively foreshadows the central pronouncement ("Drink ye, and be drunken,

and spue, and fall, and rise no more. . .") of the aria that follows.

3.2.6   Recitative for Alto (Movement 14)

This is one of the first recitatives that was completed, as well as one of the simplest. The

three instruments warmly declaim the base chords under the vocal summary of the story we

have just witnessed. When re-orchestrated and adjusted to precede the revised final chorus,

the key was changed to D-Lydian; the more obvious option of A-Lydian (to serve as the

dominant to Movement 15's tonic) resulted in a vocal range that was either too high or too low

for the alto voice.

3.3   Airs

As described previously, the arias in *Deborah* (called airs in the score as a nod to Baroque tradition) are conceived in strong distinction from the recitatives. The focus here is motivic development rather than text exposition; these moments serve the dual purpose of demonstrating the characters' thoughts and motivations as well as exploring the possibilities of the selected parameters and styles for each aria. Therefore, the compositional process for each, though still informed by the pre-determined modes and other parameters, relied more heavily on intuition rather than on externally-suggested melodic contours and chord progressions.

One particular gestural style, something I refer to as "range spread," deserves a brief explanation as it appears in both Movement 5 and Movement 15. First suggested by Professor Panayiotis Kokoras during work on my trombone choir piece *Apogee*, it consists of selecting a very compact sonority for the beginning of a section of music; creating an expanded sonority for those voices to move to by the end; connecting them with straight lines on graphing paper and evaluating where the line intersects with pitches in the selected mode; and finally, assigning those pitches according to the timings implied by the way those points are staggered. While complicated to explain, it is a simple process and produces highly satisfactory results. Once of thesis range spread graphs is shown in Figure 3.1 on the following page.

3.3.1   Air for Tenor (Movement 3)

The intention for this aria was to hearken back to the Baroque inspirations of *Deborah*. The result was a tonal-sounding melody; the opening gesture of a minor sixth followed by

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Figure 3.1 – Example of Range Spread (Sketches for Movement 5, "Commit Thy Way," mm. 122-135)
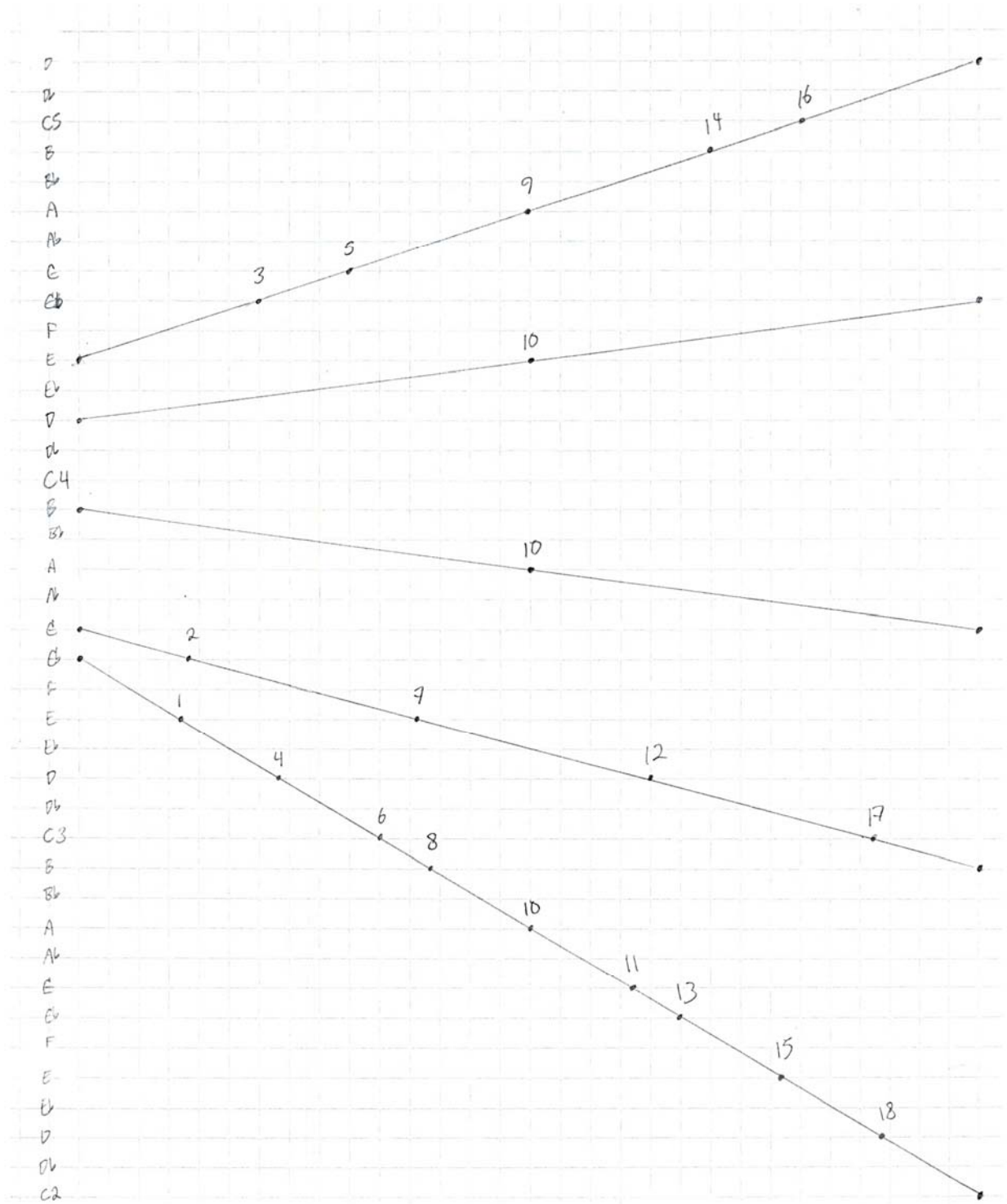
stepwise motion is inspired by observations of the same in a cursory study of Handel arias (especially "Lascia ch'io pianga" from *Rinaldo*) (compared in Example 3.4). In the supporting harmonies of triads and seventh chords, an effort was made to follow common practice voice leadings and standard chord progression conventions – for example, a handful of cadences consisting of a tonic triad in second inversion, a dominant triad, and a final tonic triad (i6/4 to V to i) were utilized. In the section with the text "for strangers are risen up against me," I elected to contribute a subtle commentary upon the word "strangers" by disrupting the established expectations, moving between chords with the most possible common tones. For example, a frequent sequence of harmonies consists of tonic, augmented mediant, and dominant triads (i to III+ to V); observe that there is only one difference between adjacent harmonies (e.g. A in i changes to G# in III+).

Example 3.4 – Minor Sixths in Arias

"Lascia ch'io pianga," mm. 18-20[49]

"Hear My Prayer," mm. 11-13

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[49] George Frideric Handel, "Lascia ch'io pianga: 'Ah, let me weep, Lord!': Recitative and Aria," in *Operatic Anthology: Arias and Duets* Series 3, trans. Henry G. Chapman (New York: G. Schirmer, 1911).

3.3.2   Air for Alto (Movement 5)

The first material created for this aria was the first iteration of "Commit thy way, commit thy way unto the LORD" (mm. 8-12); this informed an "A" section dominated by leaps of fourths and fifths, and a contrasting "B" section involving mostly stepwise motion and a slightly different mode. The sonorities within the rhythmically-active, harmonically-static accompaniment were selected by compiling a list of possibilities based on the modes and the appropriate instrumental ranges (one system of which is shown in Example 3.3), then organized to expand upwards in range over the course of the piece.

Figure 3.2 – Accompaniment Sonority Options for Movement 5, "Commit Thy Way," of *Deborah* (Fall 2015)
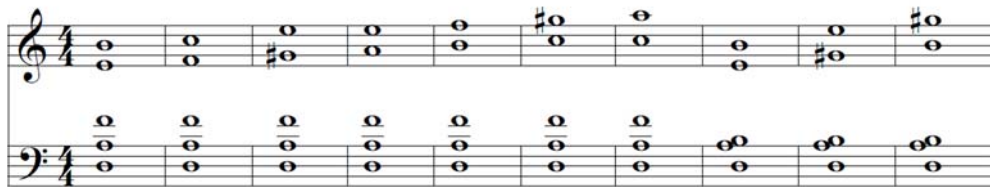
Beginning at measure 122, the "C" section of Movement 5 contains a range expansion using combined pitches from both of the movement's modes. Measures 135-141, foreshadowing the final chorus, quotes measures 155-158 of Movement 15, with an extra pitch added to each sonority to accommodate the five-part instrumentation.

3.3.3   Air for Bass (Movement 7)

For an inexplicable reason, this aria proved to be one of the most difficult movements for which to produce material. In order to encourage the development of ideas, I first determined the rhythms and timings of the vocal part; following this, general contours were assigned to each phrase and, using the contours as a guideline, I generated a list of possible pitches for each phrase and then selected the favorites from those possibilities.

3.3.4   Air for Soprano (Movement 12)

In my estimation of the characters in *Deborah,* Jael is the most straightforward and down-to-earth character of the four, making use of simple materials in order to achieve one of the more colorful incidents recorded in the Bible. Thinking somewhat parallel to this trait, I elected to write her part (the soprano) in a speech-like manner; the text-setting is entirely syllabic, and less-refined-sounding techniques (i.e. *portamenti* and so forth) are explored. These traits are especially present in the aria.

The first few phrases of Movement 12 (mm. 2-20), a single statement of the complete text, was at first intended to be an outline of the following motivic development of the fragmented text. It ultimately came across strongly enough to be used as is, once at the beginning and again in the middle, sandwiching the first development section. The second development ends without such a conclusion, leaving the aria open-ended for an *attacca* transition into the quasi-recitative.

3.4   Chorus, Orchestra, and Other Large Movements

Discussion of the larger (in terms of orchestration) movements of *Deborah* is complicated due to the extensive sharing of material between Movement 1, the instrumental overture, and Movement 13, an arioso ("quasi-recitative") for soprano. One cannot be discussed without the other, and in order to avoid repetition, it is practical to discuss both simultaneously. The remaining movements in this category, Movements 9 and 15, involve the full ensemble and fit more comfortably under the designation of a major movement without any additional explanation.

3.4.1   Overture (Movement 1) and Quasi-Recitative for Soprano (Movement 13)

The extensive commingling of Movements 1 and 13 has two causes. The first is a practical one; with the thesis deadline approaching, it was necessary to make cuts to the workload. However, the merging of these two movements in particular had to do with thematic foreshadowing: Jael's killing of Sisera in Movement 13 is the dramatic high point of the plot – the most memorable plot point, at the very least – and the return of the overture material highlights its significance; or, if one wanted to look at it another way, the overture foreshadows the oratorio's highlight.

The jarring, unison-rhythm, dissonant sonorities that dominate the accompaniment came about at first due to a failed attempt at a new style of range stretch. The results of an attempt to criss-cross lines over one another produced too many doubled pitches, and a new approach was necessary. Taking the opening and closing sonorities produced for the range stretch, plus a non-pitch-doubled sonority from the middle of the attempt, they were

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Figure 3.3 – Harmony Transpositions for Use in Movements 1 and 13

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
G4	G4	G4	A#4	A#4	A#4	B4	B4	B4
F#4	E4	C#4	G4	F#4	D4	A#4	G4	E4
B3	B3	B3	C#4	C#4	C#4	D4	D4	D4
A#3	A#3	F#3	B3	B3	G3	C#4	C#4	A#3
C#3	D3	E3	D3	E3	F#3	E3	F#3	G3
E2	F#2	A#2	F#2	G2	B2	G2	A#2	C#3

10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
C#5	C#5	C#5	D5	D5	D5	E5	E5	E5
B4	A#4	F#4	C#5	B4	G4	D5	C#5	A#4
E4	E4	E4	F#4	F#4	F#4	G4	G4	G4
D4	D4	B3	E4	E4	C#4	F#4	F#4	D4
F#3	G3	A#3	G3	A#3	B3	A#3	B3	C#4
A#2	B2	D3	B2	C#3	E3	C#3	D3	F#3

19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
F#5	F#5	F#5	G5	G5	G5	A#5	A#5	A#5
E5	D5	B4	F#5	E5	C#5	G5	F#5	D5
A#4	A#4	A#4	B4	B4	B4	C#5	C#5	C#5
G4	G4	E4	A#4	A#4	F#4	B4	C#5	G4
B3	C#4	D4	C#4	D4	E4	D4	E4	F#4
D3	G3	G3	E3	F#3	A#3	F#3	G3	B3

transposed "diatonically" (within the mode) into a selection of twenty-eight chords (shown in Example 3.4 on the previous page). Having determined the rhythmic attacks already, I was able to finish the texture by applying sonorities to the rhythms according to an appealing contour that gradually rose in pitch.

3.4.2   Battle Symphony and Chorus (Movement 9)

The moniker "symphony" is tongue-in-cheek, a reference to the Pastoral Symphony in Part One of Handel's *Messiah.* This movement is decidedly and intentionally non-symphonic; as the "battle scene," it is intended to be the loudest, noisiest, and most chaotic of all the movements in *Deborah.* The instrumental ensemble part, apart from chords that give the chorus their pitches, consists of free improvisation over motives either derived from previous movements or created to contribute to a complex timbre (flutter-tongues on any pitch, for

instance). Since the texture is very dense and unpredictable, the chorus part is relatively simple,

filled with repeated pitches and stepwise motion.

3.4.3 Chorus (Movement 15)

Apart from the recitatives, Movement 15 ("Hear, O Ye Kings") was the first movement

composed, albeit in a different form. I was commissioned by the New Music on the Point

Summer Festival 2015[50] to write a piece for four sopranos and one piano. With the final chorus

of *Deborah* already in mind, I opted to write "Hear, O Ye Kings" for this ensemble and adapt it

for the oratorio at a later date.

The primary inspiration for this movement was the finale of Handel's *Messiah*, "Worthy

is the Lamb." This extensive chorus has an ABABCD structure, with a prolonged fugue on

"Amen" at the end, both characteristics of which "Hear, O Ye Kings" adopted on a smaller scale.

The pre-selected mode for this movement was F major but was later changed to D major to

accommodate the different voice types than those in the soprano version. Some tonal variety

was warranted, beginning with an abrupt key change to E major at the beginning of the second

"B" section (mm. 60-124). The gradual addition of pitches from C# and D major[51] by measure

125 produces an almost completely chromatic texture that persists until the return to D major

in the final fugal "Amen" (mm. 159-185). A range spread on the text "as the sun goeth forth in

his might" (mm. 140-155), followed by a transcendent four-measure orchestral interjection,

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[50] http://newmusiconthepoint.com/
[51] This transition into polytonality was far clearer in the original version for sopranos, as each part was restricted to a single key. The vocal reconfiguration of "Hear, O Ye Kings" for SATB voices required the transposition of the original soprano parts phrase-by-phrase instead of in whole parts; therefore, in the present version the key areas are not as clearly stratified.

hearkens back to the transposed version at the end of Movement 5, illustrating the now-fulfilled prophecy of victory.

3.5   Conclusion

The composition of an oratorio presents many challenges, not the least of which are its duration, scope, and dramatic requirements. Nearing the end of the composition process, I find that the latter challenge was a key motivating factor. Most of the early decisions regarding instrumentation, intensity, mode, and other parameters revolved around the thematic portrayal of the four characters in the story. Throughout, care was taken to ensure that the music for nervous Barak, confident Deborah, boastful Sisera and cunning Jael retained a consistent character and smooth development. The pervasiveness of this concern for the subject matter's dramatic implications reveals to me that theatricality is a more important aspect of oratorio than I once thought.

Oratorio, though possibly underexploited as a genre today, has a promising future. Though religious topics may not be as prominent or straightforward, it will not die out completely; I anticipate that, following in the wake of opera as it always has, it will become more frequently synthesized with other performing arts. In a sense, it may have more staying power than opera because of its simpler performance requirements (i.e. sets, costumes and staging are not a concern). As a large-scale work with numerous creative opportunities, an oratorio is a worthy aim for a graduate composition student.

The end of such an ambitious, long-term project provides fodder for a good deal of reflection. Throughout this process, I have gained a far clearer understanding of the creative

thoughts and tools at my disposal and have refined them into specific understandings and

purposes. I have expanded and specified my thoughts on musical parameters and embraced an

aesthetic blended from choice sounds and influences. This research upon the genre of oratorio,

comparing large-scale works from a diverse collection of composers, demonstrated their ability

to create a cohesive voice within a broad spectrum of stylistic influences; an ambitious, multi-

movement work such as this proved an ideal opportunity to explore a stylistic spectrum of my

own.

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