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CHAPTER 1

Water Music, Suite in D Major (HWV 349): 2. Alla Hornpipe

George Frideric Handel, 1685-1759

I. LISTEN

II. A LITTLE HISTORY

Queen Anne of England reigned from 1702 until 1714. After her death, the complicated rules of succession to the throne of England meant that her heir was George, a German prince whose grandmother was an English princess. George's title at the time was Elector of Hanover, in the north of Germany.

So, at the age of fifty-four, George I moved to England to be King, even though he did not even speak English!

His favorite musician was Handel, a German-born composer who also became English and spent the rest of his life in England. Some people view Handel as a German composer, but others think of him as English.

As a young man, George Frideric Handel traveled through Italy meeting famous Italian composers and learning many styles of music that would influence him and make him a better composer. He became internationally known during these years, and upon his return to Germany, he was appointed as *Kapellmeister* to the Elector of Hanover, George. "Kapellmeister" literally means "chapel master." Handel's job was to be the official court musician, in charge of all musical happenings for the prince.

He soon began to travel to England to have his music performed there. He found great success, as the English were very fond of Handel's musical specialty, Italian opera. He returned several times, wishing he could remain permanently. On one of these trips, he decided not to return to Germany, and stayed in England.

Handel could have been in great trouble for not coming back to his job, but it worked out for him in the end. Queen Anne died that same year, and his German employer became King and also moved to England.

A few years later, in 1717, the King decided that he was going to have a great party, during which the court would ride on a barge up the River Thames. He asked Handel to write music for the occasion that would be played by musicians riding on a second barge. Since the second barge could fit as many as fifty people with their instruments, Handel planned to write the piece for that many musicians, making sure there would be a lot of horns because their sound carries well outdoors.



The Thames and the City by Canaletto

The party happened on July 17, 1717. At that time, the most popular music in England was Italian opera. Ballet had also just arrived in England for the first time a few months earlier. But, while very popular, these kinds of performances were reserved for the aristocracy, and most commoners could go their entire lives without ever hearing a great musician. So the opportunity to hear music by England's most famous composer in an outdoor concert was seized by many. The written reports from the party night

say that, beside the two barges carrying the King and his entourage and the musicians, there were hundreds of boats literally covering the river with people wanting to listen to the music!

The King loved the pieces that Handel composed for the occasion so much that he had the musicians repeat them three times! Except for the short time when Handel got off the boat for a little while to eat, the orchestra played without stopping from eight in the evening to well after midnight.

III. MUSICAL CONCEPT

A book is often made up of different chapters, which are themselves made up of paragraphs, which in turn can contain several sentences. A poem can also be clearly organized in lines and stanzas.

Likewise, a piece of music has a clear structure that is called its **form**, which is the way its different sections follow each other or are repeated. To make this structure easier to understand, musicians label the different sections of a piece with capital letters. So, the first section of a piece would be called A, the second one B, and so on.

** Musical form is the way different sections of music are put together to create the whole piece.*

Studying a specific example will make this easier to understand. Listen to this melody:

Track 1.1

A



Twin - kle, twin - kle, lit - tle star, How I won - der what you are!

This is the first part of the song "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." Let's label this section with the letter A. The second section of the song is this:

Track 1.2

B



Up a - bove the world so high, Like a dia - mond in the sky.

Because it is so different from the first, we will label it B.

The third and final section of the song is the same as the first one, so we will give it the same label A. If we put the whole song together, we can describe its form as ABA.

Track 1.3

A



Twin - kle, twin - kle, lit - tle star, How I won - der what you are!

B



Up a - bove the world so high, Like a dia - mond in the sky.

A



Twin - kle, twin - kle, lit - tle star, How I won - der what you are!

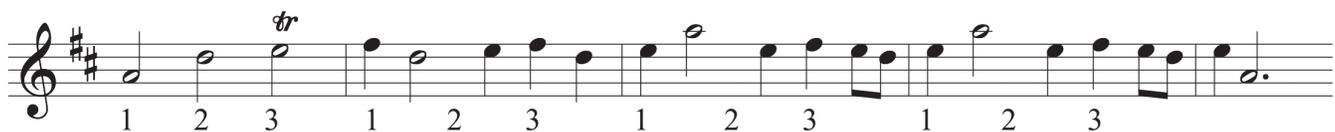
We just analyzed the form of this song, and we can now say that the form is ABA. There can be many other options; for example, we could have pieces that are AA, AB, AABA, ABC, etc. Many of these forms have real names, which we will study later.

IV. ABOUT THE PIECE

The piece we are studying is part of a large set of entertaining and varied pieces known as *Water Music*. Handel included several styles of dances that were popular with the royalty. But these were not just pieces of music that people could use to dance freely; they were highly organized dances with series of steps that had to be learned and rehearsed during dance lessons, which was a common aristocratic activity.

Handel named this particular piece “*alla hornpipe*” – “in the style of the hornpipe.” The hornpipe was a dance that began on British sailing ships in the 1600s. By the time Handel included it in his composition, there were several kinds of hornpipe dances, but the one that was the most popular at the time was in a fast triple time. We will study what this means in a later lesson; for now, listen to the example to hear how a triple time sounds.

Track 1.4



Let’s apply what we learned earlier about form to *alla hornpipe*. It happens to be in the same form as “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”!

The piece starts with a bouncy, happy, dance-like character with the full orchestra playing the first section, which we will label section A.

Track 1.5

A



Listen to how the music that the horns play seems to be always rising joyfully. This must have been a fun dance, full of leaps!

When the second section starts, the brass instruments stop playing, and only the strings and woodwinds play this fast-moving music. Listen for the change in mood—the music seems to come down, with fewer leaps.

Track 1.6

B



Then, at the end of this second section, the first section is repeated in its entirety, completing the ABA form.

V. MUSIC HISTORY

Baroque is the term that is used to describe music that was composed between 1600 and 1750. This style can be recognized just by listening to a few characteristics that we will study little by little. This will then enable you to accurately guess when a piece of music was composed, even if you have never heard it.

For now, the first characteristic of baroque music we want to remember is **contrast**. Contrast describes the difference between two items. The more differences there are between them, the greater their contrast is. In music, contrast has to do with the way several sections of the same piece can sound different from each other. In Baroque music, composers tried to have great contrast between the different sections of a piece, and also great contrast between different instruments that played together.

We heard this contrast in this piece between the two main sections, A and B. A is played by brass instruments and seems to rise and bounce happily. B is played by string instruments and woodwinds, and seems to come down and avoid jumping too much.

VI. FACTS TO REMEMBER

1. The composer of *Water Music* is Handel.
2. *Water Music* was composed for a party the Kind of England wanted to throw on the River Thames.
3. Musical **form** is the way different sections of music are put together to create the whole piece.
4. When studying the form of a piece of music, its different sections are labeled with letters.
5. **Baroque** music is the term used to describe music composed between 1600 and 1750.
6. One characteristic of Baroque music is the contrast between sections of the same piece of music.

VII. LISTEN AGAIN

- Try to count “1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3 ...” as you listen to the piece to feel the triple time. It may be awkward at first, but it will become easier as we study more pieces in the future.
- Find the beginning of the B section. To recognize it, listen for its contrasting sound and character.
- Listen for when the A section repeats.