

The cantata Lied-movement that became **Hark! the herald Angels sing**

Composed by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in 1840 for male choir and 10 brass instruments

Edited by Klaus Smedegaard Bjerre in 2013 for 14-piece brass ensemble & timpani with optional woodwind parts

For decades I have known that Mendelssohn was the composer of the melody for 'Hark! the herald angels sing' without me going to the source looking for the context into which Mendelssohn wrote this fine tune. Then a week before the Christmas of 2013 a Facebook-friend, a well-known figure in the international tuba community, wrote about the original title line of Charles Wesley's 1739 text being 'Hark! how All the Welkin Rings'. Which made me read about Mendelssohn's 1840 cantata written to commemorate the 3rd centennial of Gutenberg's revolution of the printing industry and about William H. Cummings adapting the music for Charles Wesley's text.

Mendelssohn's cantata was performed in the town square of Leipzig by a TTBB male choir and two brass ensembles, the smaller of these placed at a distance for echo effects. Cummings used the music from the 2nd movement, Lied, of the cantata, where the echo ensemble is not employed. The choir sings in unison most of the way only splitting into thirds in four short passages. The musical form of the 3 verses could be described as //:AB://CB. The text of the C-section calls for dramatic expression. Whether Mendelssohn succeeded is up to your own opinion, but Cummings only used the music from the A and B sections.

Mendelssohn employs 10 brasses in this movement, which is not written in traditional 4-part chorale harmony. The 2 trumpets, aside of the call and responses between choir and brasses, play an octave above the male voices with the same splits into thirds. The 4 horn parts, which originally must have been played on early valve horns, mostly use notes available to the natural horn. Mendelssohn uses the horns very cleverly to fill out the harmony. The alto trombone plays the melody in the trumpet range for a long passage, and then plays an inner line. The tenor trombone plays an inner line. The bass trombone plays the bass line in unison or in octave with the ophicleide.

Giving the ophicleide part to the tuba of the 14-piece brass ensemble and the other 9 brass parts to their respective counterparts leaves 4 instruments to cover the male choir lines: 2 trumpets, a trombone, and the euphonium. The 3rd and 4th trumpet parts of this present edition play the tenor and bass vocal lines an octave up. Making their parts very similar to those of the 1st and 2nd trumpets. This octave displacement is not ideal, but it contributes to the choral effect of several unison lines. The euphonium plays the bass vocal line throughout. As it would not be ideal to let the 1st tenor trombone play the very high passages from the original alto trombone part, and as the trumpets already cover these passages, the original trombone parts and the original tenor vocal line have been reshuffled between 3 the tenor trombones of this present score. At least one of them will represent the tenor vocal line at any given point. Your ears will tell you where.

The original German text has no relevance for the carol tradition, and it is very forgettable anyway, so there will be no vocal parts for this project.

As the presentation of the history behind this carol melody however may have interest in some band contexts, woodwind parts presenting the vocal lines are provided as options. The parts for flutes and oboes move in the lower end of their ranges, but no matter how tempting it might be to play them octave up, they most definitely should be played *loco*. They already are one octave up from the original vocal lines. The Bb clarinets and Eb alto saxophones can play these lines in their original octave except for one note, D/A, which I have written in the playable octave. A few passages have been taken octave up to avoid the breaking of them. The 2 alto clarinet parts have the vocal lines in the right octave throughout. There are Bb treble clef tenor parts for bass clarinets, tenor saxophones, and baritone horns. The baritone saxophone part represents the bass vocal line. The bass clef parts for bassoons also may work for extra euphoniums. If only one extra euphonium then let it play 1st for the thirds' effect with the euphonium of the 14-piece core parts.

The call to stay in the written octave also goes for the tuba(-s). The entry in bar #26 may be high, but it should be played as-is (or be omitted) to display Mendelssohn's intended contrast effect as compared to the entry in bar #28.

The timpani part is entirely by this present editor. It was added to provide some extra punch to the lower range, especially the vocal lines in the call and response passages. If you don't like it, you may omit it.

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