

Pifa from “The Messiah”

Composed by Georg Friedrich

Arranged for Clarinet Choir

by Klaus Bjerre 2001

The Pifa is a well-known and beloved instrumental pastoral number from the oratorio non-plus ultra. Händel set it for 3 part violins, viola, celli, bassi, and bassoons.

This arrangement was planned to come in two versions:

The Verbatim notation would have written out all the ornaments and trills in exact notation. However faults were found in the version previously uploaded, and a correction has not been made yet.

The Simple version just has the ornaments written by means of grace notes and *tr* signs.

Händel has the 1st and 2nd violins playing the two-part melody line in the upper octave, whereas the 3rd violins and the violas play these two lines an octave below. The celli, bassi, and bassoons play a very static bass line in the bass and contra-bass range respectively. The effect intended could be considered a bagpipe imitation, even if the harmonic progression is more refined. The baroque period had a chord accompaniment implied, the so-called continuo, which added the chords on organ, harpsichord, and/or lute according to conventions based on a sparingly or even absent notation.

All of this has been translated into these options for clarinet choir:

the upper melody line 1st part can be played by the Eb clarinet and the 1st Bb soprano clarinets

the upper melody line 2nd part can be played by the 2nd Bb soprano clarinets

the lower melody line 1st part can be played by the 3rd Bb soprano clarinets and the 2nd Eb alto clarinet and

the lower melody line 2nd part can be played by the 4th Bb soprano clarinets, the 1st Eb alto clarinet, and the 2nd Bb bass clarinet

the bass line can be played by the Bb bass and contra bass clarinets plus the Eb contralto clarinet

the chord functions can be played by the less experienced choir members on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd harmony clarinet parts (either all of these parts should be played in a part distribution securing good balance, or none of these parts should be played)

An inventive director of a brass ensemble accustomed to British brass band style notation also will be able to distribute parts on the right instruments. Trombones 1 and 2 could play from the 1st and 3rd harmony parts, whereas the 3rd cornet can play the 2nd harmony part.