AN ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE OF JOHN WORGAN'S HANNAH

by

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AN ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE OF JOHN WORGAN'S HANNAH

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ABSTRACT

John Worgan (1724 – 1790) was a British organist and composer. His oratorio Hannah was premiered on April 3, 1764 but was not performed again until the 21^{st} century. The dominance of Handel and the obscurity of Christopher Smart, the librettist, both contributed to an unfavorable reception. A modern edition was prepared in order to present selections from the work in recital.

John Worgan (1724-1790) was an organist and composer who spent his career in London. His musical education began with his older brother, James, who also was an organist and composer. He attended Cambridge University where he studied organ with Thomas Roseingrave. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1748 and returned to complete the Doctorate of Music in 1775. Worgan was an excellent performer and held the prestigious position as the organist of Vauxhall Gardens from 1751-1761 and 1770-1773. *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* reports that Worgan had obtained permission to sit by G.F. Handel while the great master played concertos. Handel's response was "Mr. Worgan shall come... he plays my music very well at Vauxhall."

While regarded as an excellent performer, Worgan's compositional output was prolific but not always highly regarded. It "was thought by many to be old-fashioned (his sons, particularly Thomas Danvers Worgan, resented the lack of acclaim afforded to their father)."

No scholarly efforts have compiled a complete listing of his works; many of them were unpublished or are now lost. Thomas Danvers lists his output consisting of oratorios, anthems, organ concertos, voluntaries, vocal harmony, and sonatas. The Quarterly Review lists several other works which may be Worgan's, however McGairl reports that some of the pieces are now credited to his older brother, James. Both brothers frequently signed manuscripts with "J. Worgan." He may have composed symphonies or other orchestral works at Vauxhall Gardens. Programs from 1786 and 1787 "identify some.... they may, however, have been in the Vauxhall

¹ "Memoir of The Life and Works of John Worgan, MUS.D." *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (1823), 116.

² Pamela McGairl, "Worgan." Edited by Deanne Root. *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid

repertory... and cannot be accurately dated from those performances."⁵ Worgan also taught private lessons. His most notable pupil was Charles Wesley (junior), the son of the great hymn writer and co-founder of Methodism.

On April 3, 1764 at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, John Worgan's *Hannah* was premiered. The event was well advertised; "notice of the oratorio appeared in the *Public* Advertiser on February 21" for two performances, originally scheduled on March 30 and 31.6. These performances were consolidated and delayed due to a lack of singers during the season of Lent. Some tickets were sold for a second performance at the Theatre but that, too, was cancelled. The *Public Advertiser* of May 1 explains why and what the theater planned to do for the ticket holders. Many of the singers were already scheduled to sing during holy week (April 15 was Palm Sunday), so they were unavailable. After Easter, several people "who had taken their Tickets have left the Town for the Summer" and would not be able to attend a performance if it was rescheduled. In response, the Theater planned to wait until the following winter, as tradition dictated that oratorios were only performed during Lent. Opera was the more popular genre, but of course it was secular. Oratorios, while musically were almost identical to operas, were not staged and considered sacred enough to be performed during Lent. To calm the public, the notice stated that the songs in the oratorio were being printed and would be for sale in a few weeks.8

November 23, 1764 is the date printed on the bottom of the cover page of the score of *Hannah*. Unfortunately for the public, the promise of being able to purchase the score within a

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Chris Mounsey, *Christopher Smart: Clown of God.* (Cranbury, NJ: Lewisburg Bucknell University Press, 2001), 265.

⁷ Ibid., 265.

⁸ Ibid., 265.

few weeks was not upheld. The ticket holders, waiting on the second performance of *Hannah*, were also betrayed. No records list a performance of *Hannah* during the winter of 1764-1765. With such a favorable outlook in the *Public Advertiser*, it is curious that *Hannah* was never performed again.

Worgan's anonymous biographer attributes the lack of success to the popularity of Handel, "the adorers of Handel would not hear of oratorios composed by Arne, Worgan, and Arnold, and such is human nature, that in certain points those who ought to know better, are as weak and infatuated as the million." To some extent, the author was right. For example, the list of oratorios performed at The Theatre Royal in Convent Garden during Lent of 1765 consists of eleven performances, nine of which were works by Handel, one a pasticcio of a Handel work done by Toms, and one of Handel's *Israel in Egypt* "with considerable alterations and additions." Despite Worgan's biographer's claim that "*Hannah* teems with resplendent beauties," It is possible that people would not buy tickets for the oratorio for the simple reason that Handel's name is nowhere to be found on the score.

Another possible reason for *Hannah's* unfavorable reception is due to the libretto. The text was written by Christopher Smart shortly after he was released from an insane asylum in 1763. Presumably, Smart needed money and was looking for work. Smart knew Worgan from their time at Vauxhall; in 1751 "Worgan composed music for Smart's *Solemn Dirge* on the death of Frederic Prince of Wales." Smart wrote favorably about the poetic potential of oratorio,

⁹ "Memoir," 118-119.

¹⁰ Howard Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 203.

¹¹ "Memoir," 119.

¹² Marcus Walsh and Karina Williamson, *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 157.

saying "no subject more naturally affords the *true sublime*, than that of which the *oratorio* consists; and consequently, an exalted genius can nowhere find a more suitable or ample field, for the exercise and exertion of his most magnificent conception." Whether for artistic fulfillment or money, *Hannah* was nevertheless written but not received favorably. An article in *St. James Magazine* granted the libretto "some poetical merit." However, even Worgan's biographer tried to blame Smart, writing that Hannah is "enfeebled by the doggrel of poor Kit Smart." Now considered one of Britain's finest poets of the 18th century, Smart was largely misunderstood during his life.

In both *Hannah* and *Abimelech*, Smart's only other oratorio libretto, Smart takes liberty with biblical scripture for dramatic effect. ¹⁶ Smart himself was aware of this as he prefaced the libretto with an "Argument extracted from the First and Second Chapter of the First Book of Samuel" which summarizes the Hannah story from the beginning until the birth of Samuel and the Song of Hannah. Smart continues: "The only Liberty Mr. Smart has taken with the sacred Story is that he has introduced the Song of Hannah as a Thanksgiving immediate upon her Acceptance in Shiloh, whereas it was not composed till after the Birth of Samuel. This Liberty he humbly hopes is more pardonable than the total Omission of so pious and beautiful a Piece." ¹⁷ This drastic change is the largest editorial piece of work done by Smart, but to claim it as the only one is far fetched. The primary theme of the oratorio centers around Hannah and Peninnah's relationship. Both women are married to Elkanah, but Hannah is the favored wife. While

¹³ Ibid., 157.

¹⁴ Ibid., 158.

¹⁵ "Memoir," 119.

¹⁶ Moira Dearnley, *The Poetry of Christopher Smart*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1968), 218.

¹⁷ Christopher Smart, *Hannah*, (Tonson, 1764).

Peninnah has born all of Elkanah's offspring, she thinks Hannah to be lesser because of her barrenness. A secondary theme, celebration of music, has undertones throughout the work.

The first scene begins with Peninnah singing "the theme of fertility by means of references to the genealogy of Abraham." Peninnah's handmaid introduces the idea of jealousy, because Hannah receives a larger portion from Elkanah, despite her lack of progeny:

Far other is the Lot of her, that shares A nobler Portion of her Husband's Bounty, The highly-favour'd Hannah; for her Honour Is not hereafter in the sweet Idea Of Self continued in a genuine Race

As if insufficient, the following air furthers the idea:

How joyful the Triumph, how sweet the Content O'er Rivals in Love to prevail

Having pitted Peninnah and her handmaid against Hannah and Elkanah, Smart presents Hannah as grateful, but guilty for not providing Elkanah a son. Elkanah's response echoes 1 Sam 1:8, as he tells Hannah to:

cease, cease lamenting... is not thy Husband with thee, more thy Glory, and Pleasure than ten Sons – there is a Dow'ry More blessed than the Gift of num'rous Seed.

This theme of fertility vs. infertility continues throughout the work.

In the bible, Hannah's Song occurs after Hannah left Samuel at the temple in Shiloh. Smart placed the ode after Eli promised that the Lord would give Hannah a child. In the third stanza, a Virgin sings 'The Barren shall prevail/and reckon to the seventh Son.' Smart is intentionally doing two things here: allowing Hannah to be celebrated for her lack of childlessness as well as predicting that Samuel will pick David, the seventh son of Jesse

¹⁸ Dearnley, 219.

(according to 1 Chronicles 2:13-15), as king of Israel. Hannah's Song becomes a prophetic statement about the future of Israel:

The Prince of Peace shall tow'r In Glory, Strength, and Pow'r, To whom all Flesh shall bend the Knee; The Fame he shall atchieve, I now, ev'n now believe, And in the Spirit now foresee.

This verse articulates Hannah's belief of a future Davidic kingdom and suggests she foresees this, with aid from the Holy Spirit. However, Eli takes undue credit at the end of the libretto, prophetically declaring to Elkanah 'Hannah to thee shall surely bear a Son,/And call him Samuel – he shall minister/as Priest in Childhood... Unto his People, shall anoint a King.' Nevertheless, an educated audience would know the end of the story: David becomes king over Israel after being anointed by Samuel. Smart's rewriting of this story empowers Hannah.

Why Hannah? One reason is practical. The actual "Song of Hannah," 1 Samuel 2:1-10 is a poem. Isolated poems exist in the Old Testament, many of which have been set to music. Giving Hannah a voice through music is logical when half of her story is poetic already. Another reason is presented by Walsh and Williamson in their commentary on Smart where they suggest that Hannah was an important figure in his imagination:

He couples her as a divine singer with David in Mary in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Hymns 1 and 9), and makes her the pattern and exemplar of Christian hope in the *Hymns for the Amusement of Children* (Hymn 2). In the oratorio her story is made the focus of ideas which preoccupied Smart at this period. The theme of late fruition, on which the plot hangs, seems to have been personally significant to Smart, but his concern with prayer, gratitude, and consecration of the poetic gift also shows clearly the common inspiration linking *Hannah* with *Jubilate Agno*, the *Song to David*, and the *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. ¹⁹

¹⁹ Walsh and Williamson, 158.

Such an assessment certainly proves that Smart was interested in Hannah. She certainly deserves the songs written for her by Smart and Worgan.

Worgan's setting of *Hannah* highlights Smart's libretto by use of key centers. Minor keys "reflect sombre thoughts: Hannah's lamentation, the Levi's comments about widespread corruption... the frightening images ("moonless night," "death," "hurricane") during the first half of Elkanah's air in act II..., and the comments in the trio on "the poor, the lowly and obscure" whom the Lord exalts." Of these, the Levite's air "Far and wide corruption reigns" is set in d minor, a key that has been considered pious and serious: Worgan's use is no exception. Smither's logical assessment is that seriousness is achieved with complex accompaniment; "the first violin, for instance, begins with an idea that is melodically and rhythmically independent of the vocal line." While the work as a whole is mainly set in flat keys, the bright keys of "A and E major are used only by or in relation to Hannah and only for optimistic and joyful expressions." By using major keys when the text is about fertility, minor keys when the text is darker, and the brighter sharp keys of A and E major in relation to Hannah's joyfulness, starting at the end of the second act, Worgan accentuates Smart's themes in a musical way.

Hannah is written for four sopranos: Hannah, Peninnah, a Handmaid to Peninnah, and A Virgin Attendant on Hannah; a tenor, Elkanah; two basses; Eli and a Levite of Elkanah's household; a "chorus of priests and damsels, and other attendants" (SATB); and an orchestra consisting of Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, Bass, pairs of flutes, oboes, bassoons, and horns, and continuo. In nature and format Hannah is Handelian; the work is divided into three acts. With regard to form of individual movements, Worgan strays from the norm. Not a single da

²⁰ Smither, 292.

²¹ Ibid., 296.

²² Ibid., 292.

capo sign exists throughout the whole work. Four airs resemble da capo form, but are through-composed. Presumably the reason for this is Worgan's desire to slightly alter the second A section. Da capo arias were the musical *lingua franca* of the time and it is unusual to not see at least one somewhere in the oratorio. One air "has a dal segno form; the sign is used to delete the opening ritornello."²³ The remaining airs are binary in nature.

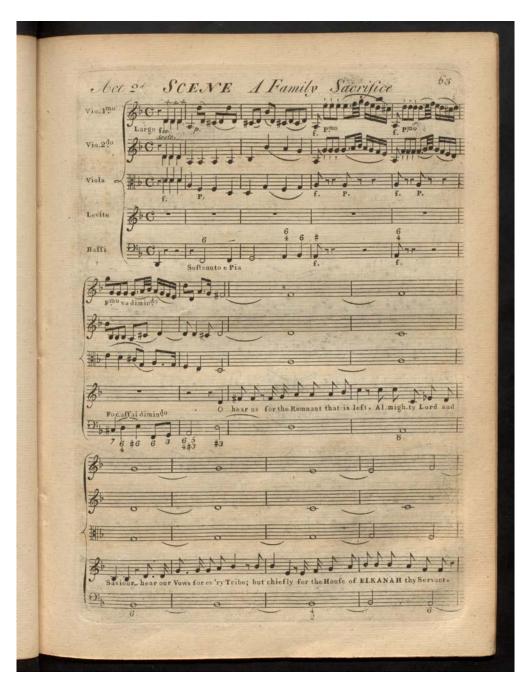
Despite the many claims that Worgan's music was old fashioned, *Hannah* is much more Classical in nature than Baroque. The main element borrowed from the Baroque era, which ended around 1750, is the use of harpsichord/organ as a continuo instrument. By the end of the 18th century, obbligato keyboard parts became the norm. Qualities considered Classical are described by Smither; "melodic lines are simple and clear, most successive phrases are of equal length, the harmonic rhythm tends to be slow and texture is homophonic and uncomplicated."²⁴ Worgan doubles the voice and orchestral parts frequently; however, the instrument doubling often will stray momentarily or accent the vocal line; the interplay between them is interesting and effective. The vocal parts themselves are virtuosic; perhaps this too is another reason why *Hannah* was never performed again.

The score published on November 23, 1764 is the only surviving musical score of Hannah. The inscription reads that *Hannah* was "Printed for the Author by Mrs. Johnson opposite Bow Church Cheapside." Mrs. Johnson survived her husband, the publisher John Johnson. Worgan used Johnson to publish some of his previous works; namely songs from the Vauxhall days. After John's death in 1762, Mrs. Johnson continued to run the business with publications listing her name dated as late as 1771. John Johnson "issued a higher class of music,

²³ Ibid., 292.

²⁴ Ibid., 292.

generally particularly well engraved, and printed on stout paper of good quality."²⁵ The level of quality did not suffer after Mrs. Johnson continued the operation. Worgan's choice to publish *Hannah* with Mrs. Johnson was a wise one: the score today is in great condition, over 250 years later.



²⁵ Frank Kidson, *British Music Publishers, Printers and Engravers.* (London: W.E. Hill & Sons, 1900), 66-67.

Unfortunately, the score is incomplete. It includes three accompanied recitatives, nineteen airs, a duet, trio, and one chorus; however, the overture, five choruses, and all simple recitatives are no longer extant. The libretto lists all of the lyrics of the recitatives and choruses, so it is known what they say and where they go. In the score at the conclusion of a solo movement reads the marking "segue l'coro" but then proceeds to the next act. The loss of the choruses is devastating and likely is the reason that *Hannah* has not been investigated further in the 20th and 21st century. Simple recitatives could be recreated without straying too far from Worgan's style, but it would be impossible to recreate the choruses in an authentic manner. This especially unfortunate because the "'choruses of this oratorio,' says Dr. [Charles] Burney, 'were masterly'."²⁶ The last chorus in the score provides a little taste, but it is a rather short chorus following a tenor solo. It is likely that the other chorus movements were more extensive. Why they were not printed is up to speculation. The cost of publishing is almost certainly a factor. If, as the *Public Advertiser* suggested, the score was published for private consumption, people would have only been interested in the songs to sing in their own homes.

In order to perform selections from *Hannah*, I knew I would need an electronic version of the score. To accomplish this, I used a program called PhotoScore Ultimate 7. I scanned each page and the program turned it into an editable electronic file. This process was extremely time consuming due to the many errors from reading the document. Two main factors causing the errors are the beaming notes both up and down and the old convention of not beaming vocal parts when syllables change. To correct the errors, I estimate that it took approximately 15-20 minutes per page. The score frequently lists sections as "unis col parte" so I had to copy in the

²⁶ "Memoir," 119.

notes to all instruments. After all 157 pages were scanned, I exported the work into Finale 2014.

Once the complete score was converted to Finale, I separated out files for each individual movement. This made it much easier to edit specific sections.

Before beginning extensive editing, I knew I needed to decide on which movements I would present at the lecture recital. I wanted to have a program which gave a sense of the overall plot of the work, a variety in character, and include selections from the Song of Hannah. I also wanted to keep the orchestration limited to strings and continuo. The program consisted of:

Act I, Scene I – Recitative and Aria, "Say, Ye Turtles, as Ye Pair" – Peninnah Act II – Recitative and Aria, "Far and Wide Corruption Reigns" – Levite Act III, Scene I – Air "My Heart with Transport Springs" from Song of Hannah, Hannah – Air "She That On Dainties Fed" – Virgin Attendant on Hannah – Trio "The Lord Exalts the Poor" – Hannah, Virgin, Levite Act III, Scene II – Air "The Cherubs of the Highest Sphere" – Virgin Attendant

The first piece did include a pair of flutes, but other than that, the instrumentation, with one on a part, could be accomplished with five players.

Editing the score was the most subjective part of the project. The first task was to ensure that all the notes and rhythms were correct. While in Photoscore I did my best to match the notes, but after the score was in Finale, it became apparent I was not always successful. The most straightforward decisions were those regarding missing accidentals. Due to the extensive amount of labor involved to engrave the metal plates to publish music in the 18th century, accidentals in a system applied to a note of any octave. Modern notation requires an accidental at every octave, which I added whenever they were missing. For the score to be the most readable for modern musicians I had to "translate" some differences in notation. It was common practice in the 18th century to only notate consonant intervals on downbeats. Dissonant notes on downbeats were composed, but written as grace notes. For notes of equal rhythm (turning an eighth into two

sixteenths), I wrote out the dissonant note as a regular sized note. Notes of unequal rhythm (an eighth and a dotted half note) were kept as a grace note/regular note pair. The modern performer needs to understand the performance practice of placing the notated grace notes on the beat as opposed to the Romantic interpretation where they are performed before the beat. However, it was easier to accomplish that during rehearsal than by notation. Ultimately a mix of the old and the new was used to create a score that is easy to read. This was the most important goal of editing the work.

The next task was to match articulations and dynamics. Again, likely due to the labor required to produce the score, articulation markings and dynamics were often only placed in one of the instrumental parts. With some freedom, I copied the dynamics between parts, most often the first violin to the second. In the published score, dynamics are restricted to *p* and *f* but are modified with *piu* - more, and *poco* – a little. Mainly the dynamics were marked to ensure the orchestra would not overpower the vocal soloist, but then play out during ritornello sections or interludes. I reinterpreted some of the markings with modern dynamics like *mp* and *mf*. Deciding which articulations to put in the new edition was done on a case-by-case basis. If parts were playing in parallel, articulations were copied. In some instances, an articulation would be marked at the beginning of a melodic idea. The phrase would continue, but the articulation would not. I interpreted this to mean the articulation should continue as long as the phrase and added several to the score.

Invariably some notes were published incorrectly due to errors in the engraving. By cross referencing the parts to the figured bass, the numbers corresponding to the intervals above the bass line, I was able to fix some discrepancies between the chord structure and the notes in the

parts. Using the Finale playback function was helpful – due to Worgan's common-practice harmonic style it was generally easy to detect wrong notes aurally.

After the editing was complete, I separated the full scores into individual parts for the strings and flutes. I didn't make a piano reduction for the singers; they read off of the full score. During rehearsal, other errors were noticed and I further edited the score.

While I wanted to present a performance of the highest quality, I also wanted to be respectful of the musicians' time. I met individually with each of the singers to coach them through their part, once with the strings alone, once with the strings, flutes, and vocalists, and our final and only rehearsal with harpsichord took place the night of the performance. Having high quality instrumentalists and vocalists made this possible. At 8:30 pm on April 18, 2016 in Ed Landreth Auditorium, selections of *Hannah* were performed again, 252 years and 15 days after the premiere.

What is next for *Hannah*? Editing the rest of the score is the first task. At that point, a complete performance of what is authentically Worgan's could take place. Then, composing recitatives in Worgan's style would complete the songs. Unless the choruses are found, those will never be heard again. Further research into the publishing of Worgan's works may turn up something interesting. It is unlikely that the actual plates still exist, but perhaps they could be tracked down. Also worth pursuing is a visit to the King's Theatre and seeing if any manuscripts could be found in their archives.

For now, *Hannah* remains incomplete. As one of the most significant women in the bible with one of the most poignant songs, Hannah is deserving of the musical setting Worgan and Smart created for her. The work has historical and artistic merit and it is unfortunate that it was

only performed once. Perhaps modern ears would appreciate the music and poetry more than the Handel-worshipping audiences of 1760s London.

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TCV The Jehool of Ellusie

Uncovering Hannah; an oratorio by John Worgan

Senior Honors Lecture Recital by Collin Boothby

April 18, 2016 8:30 pm Ed Landreth Hall

Selections for Performance

Act I, Scene I

Recitative and Air, Peninnah, "Say, Ye Turtles, as Ye Pair"

Amber Davis

Act II

Recitative and Air, Levite, "Far and Wide Corruption Reigns"

David Robinson

Act III, Scene I

Song of Hannah

Hannah, "My Heart with Transport Springs"

Virgin Attendant, "She that on Dainties Fed"

Trio (Hannah, Attendant, Levite), "The Lord Exalts the Poor"

Audrey Davis, Francesca Mehrotra, David Robinson

Act III, Scene II

Air, Virgin Attendant, "The Cherubs of the Highest Sphere"

Francesca Mehrotra

Collin Boothby, conductor
Santiago Ariza Rodriguez, Catherine Beck, violin
Emily Long, viola
Foster Baird, cello
Melissa Rowl, Natasha Costello, flute
Robert August, harpsichord

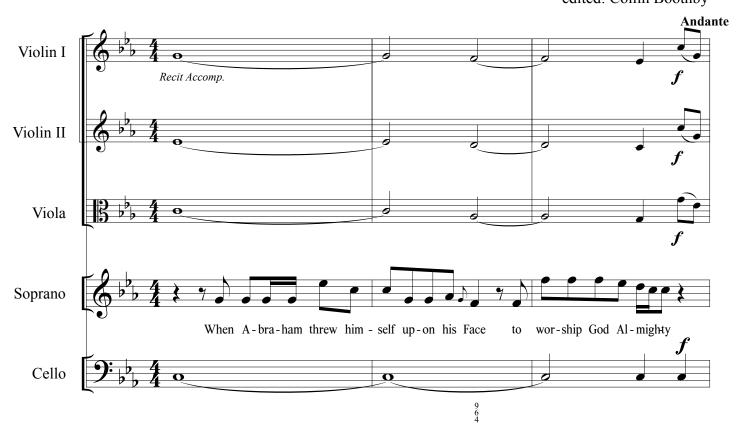
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of Departmental Honors in Music. Mr. Boothby's honors project committee is Dr. Christopher Aspaas, Dr. H.J. Butler, and Dr. Claudia Camp.

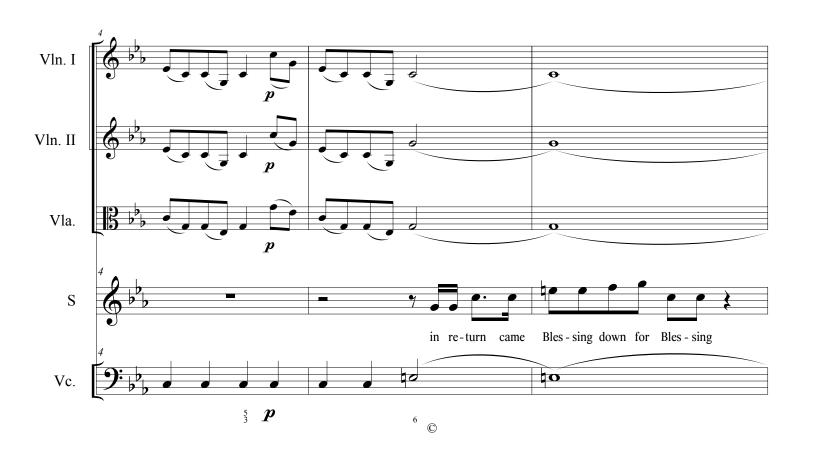


Say, ye turtles, as ye pair

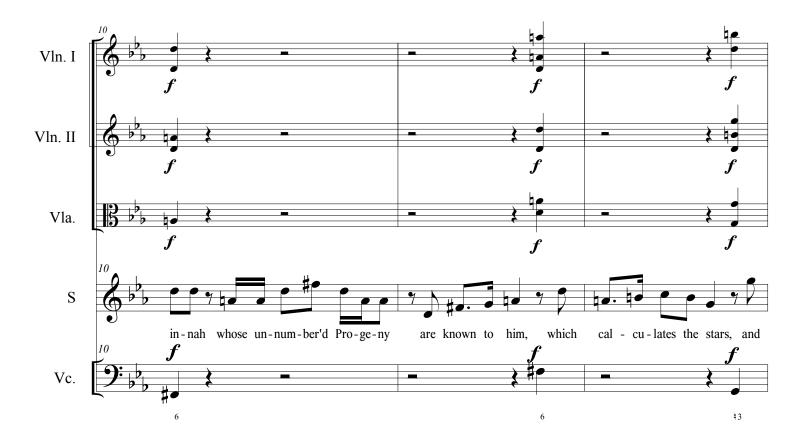
Recitative

John Worgan edited: Collin Boothby



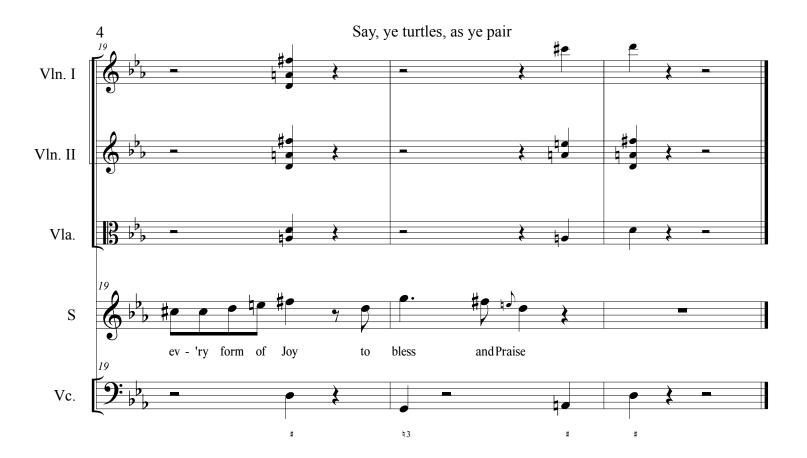












Say, ye turtles, as ye pair



















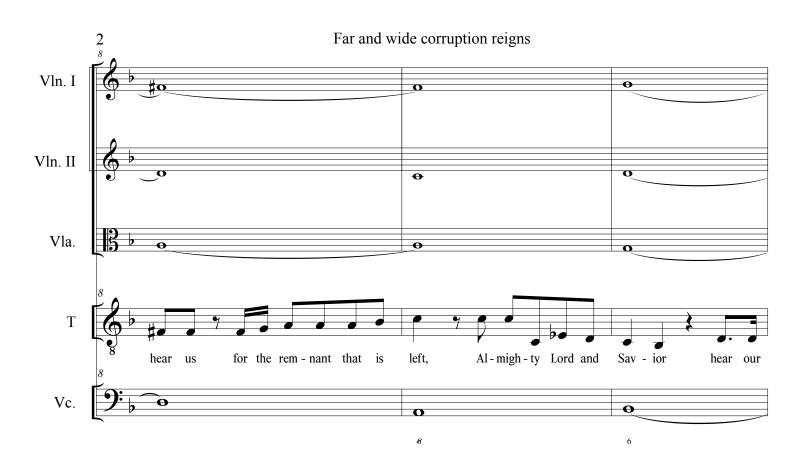


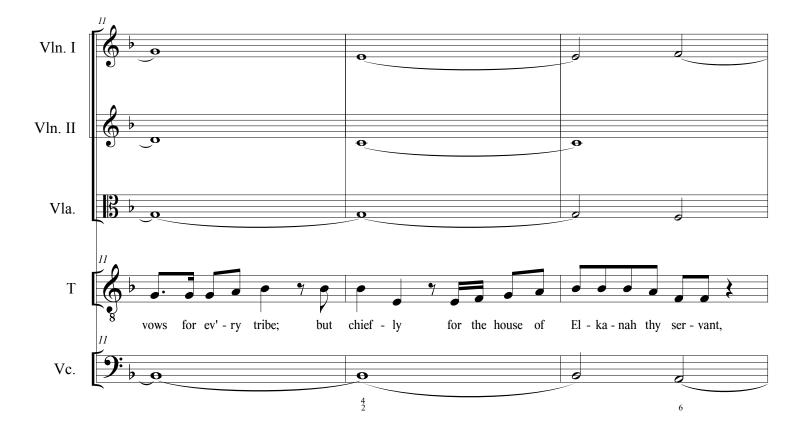
Far and wide corruption reigns

John Worgan edited: Collin Boothby





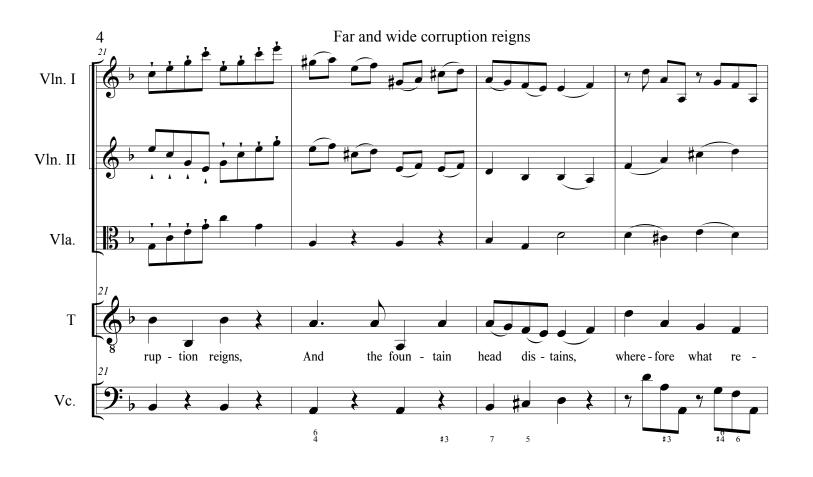








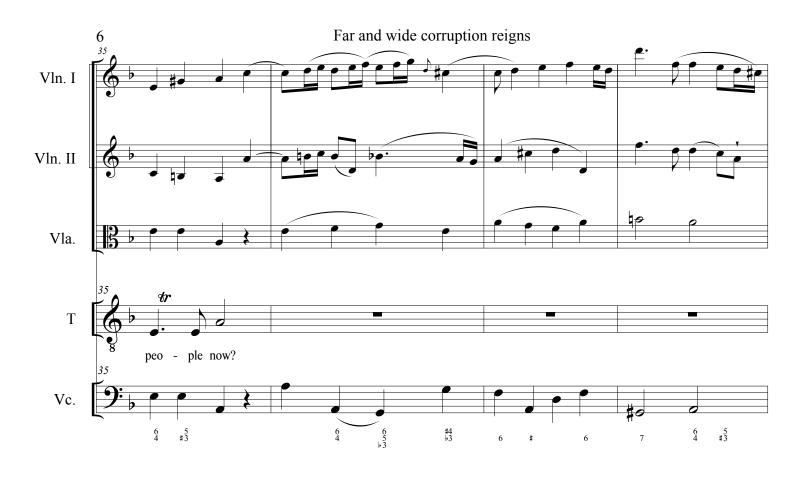
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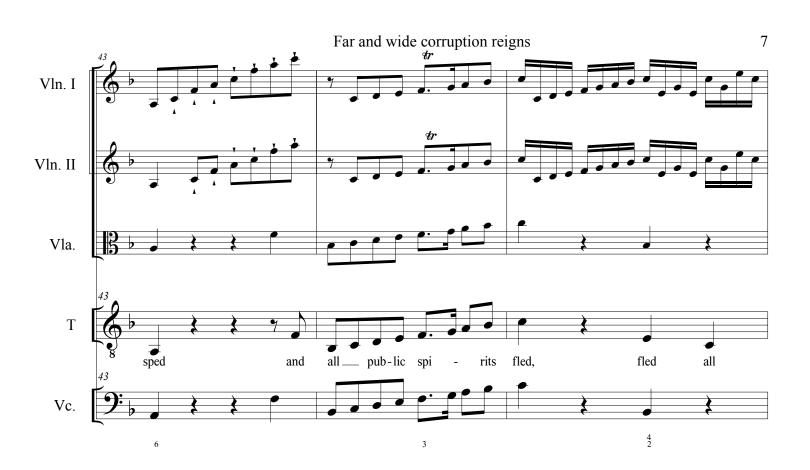


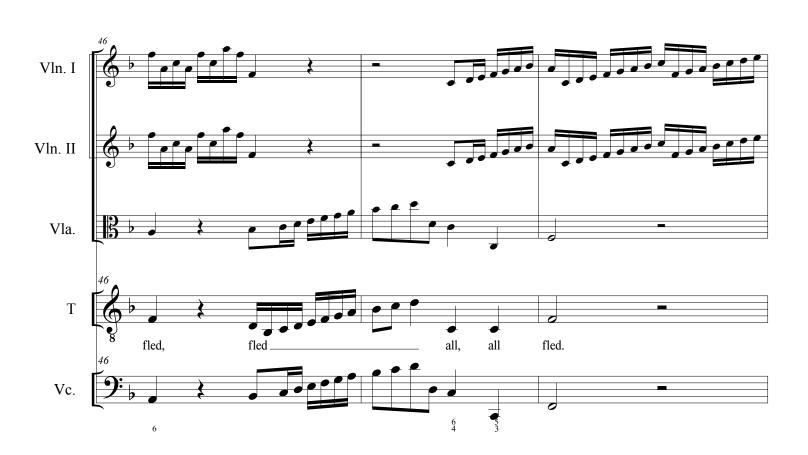




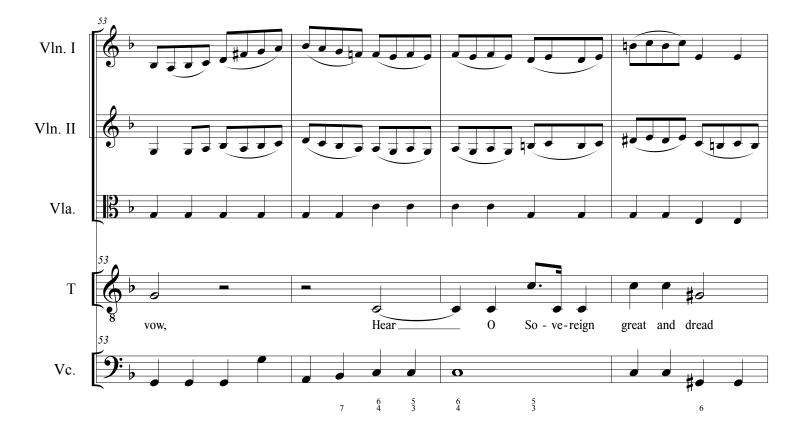
















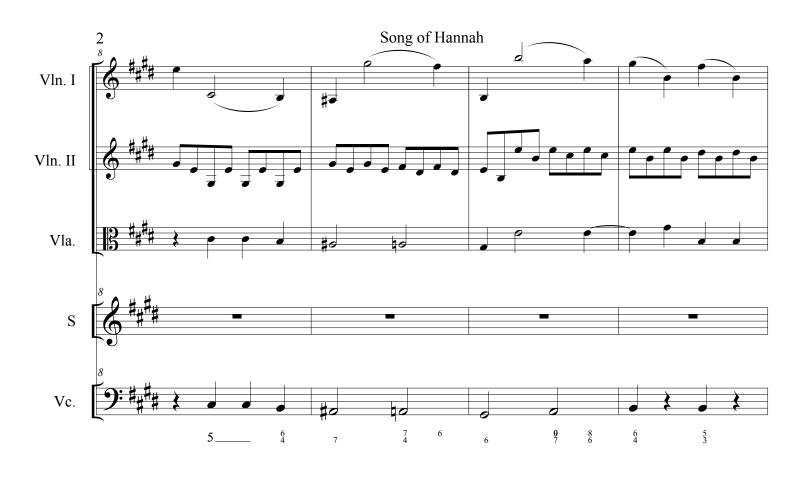
Song of Hannah

My Heart with Transport Springs

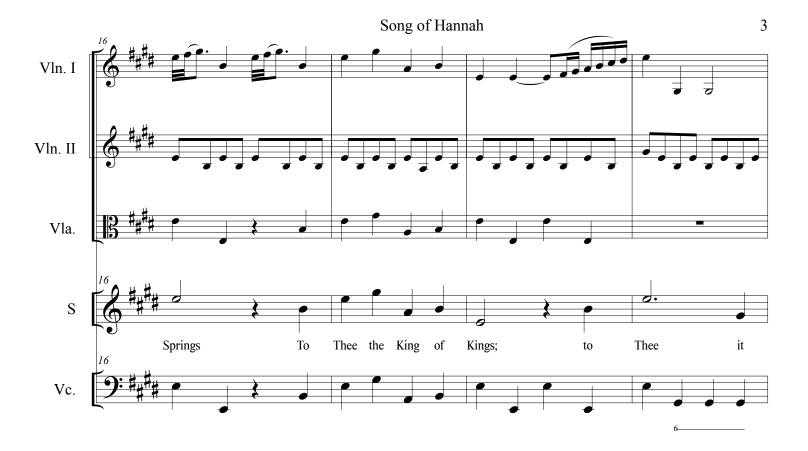
John Worgan edited: Collin Boothby

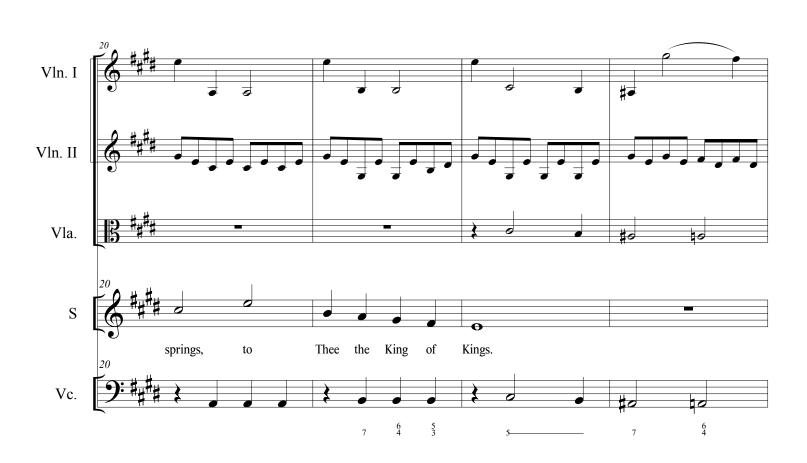


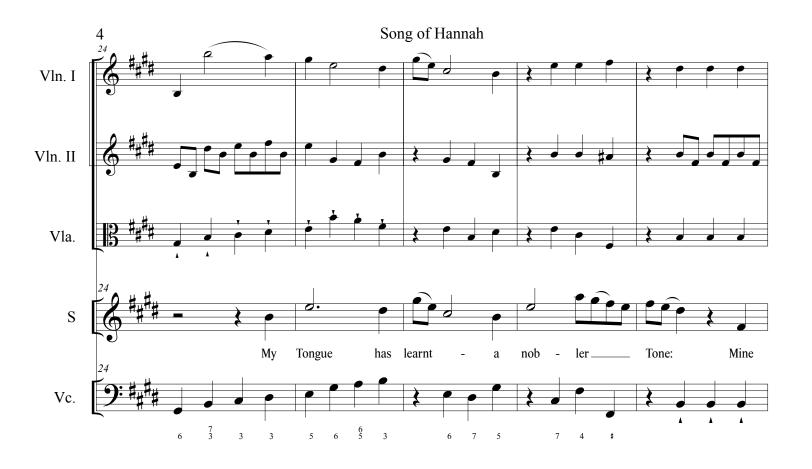


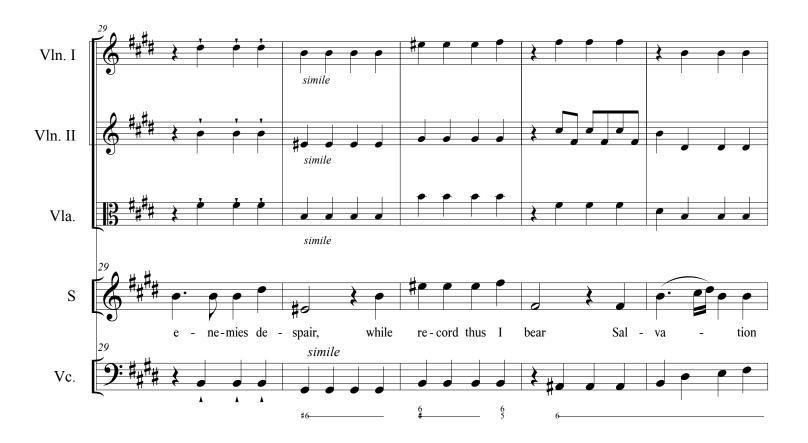


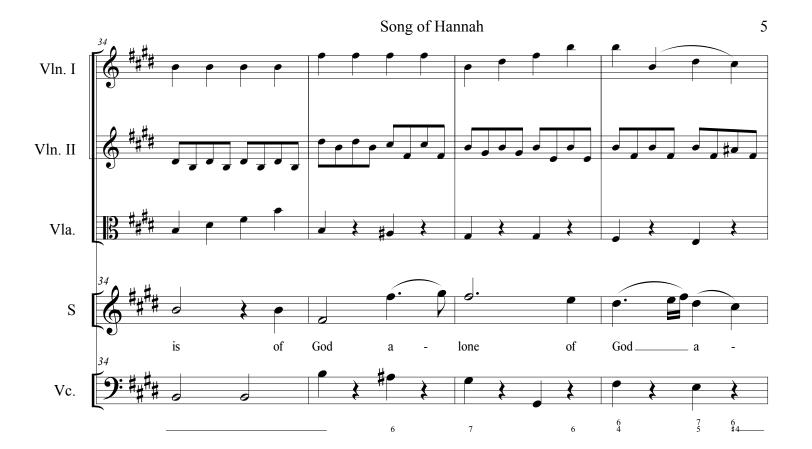


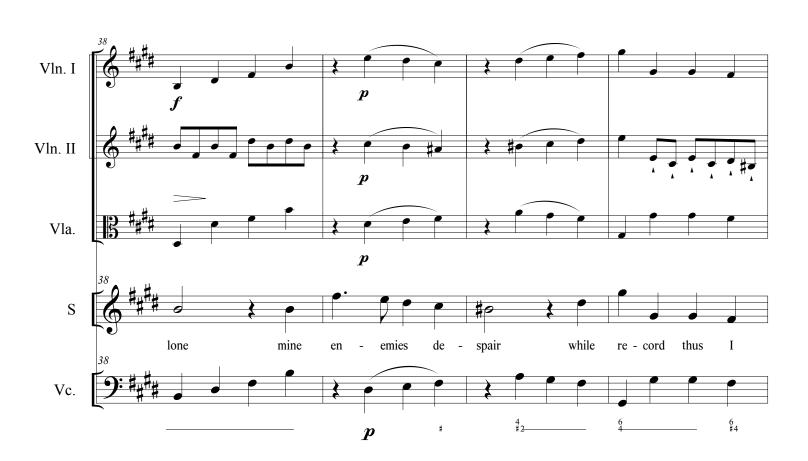


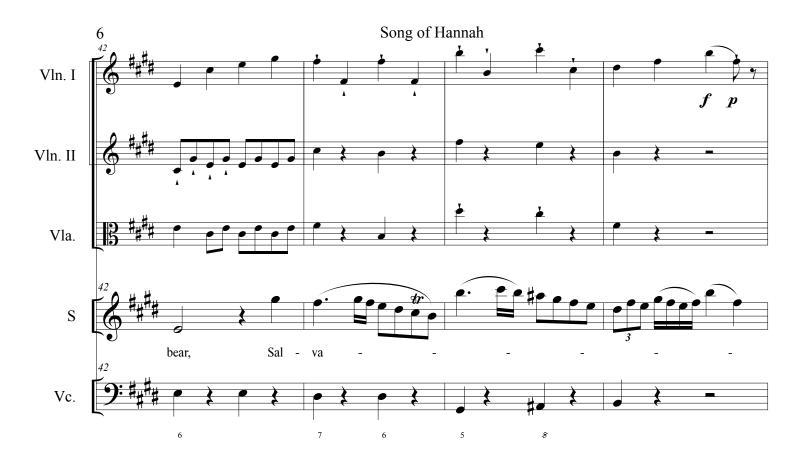




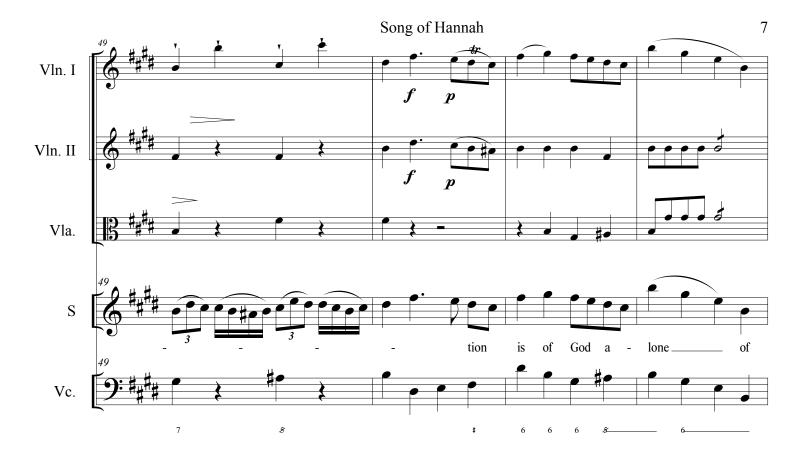


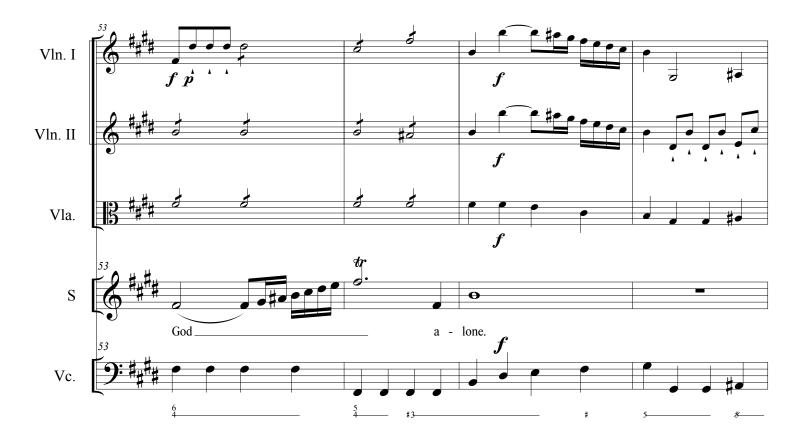


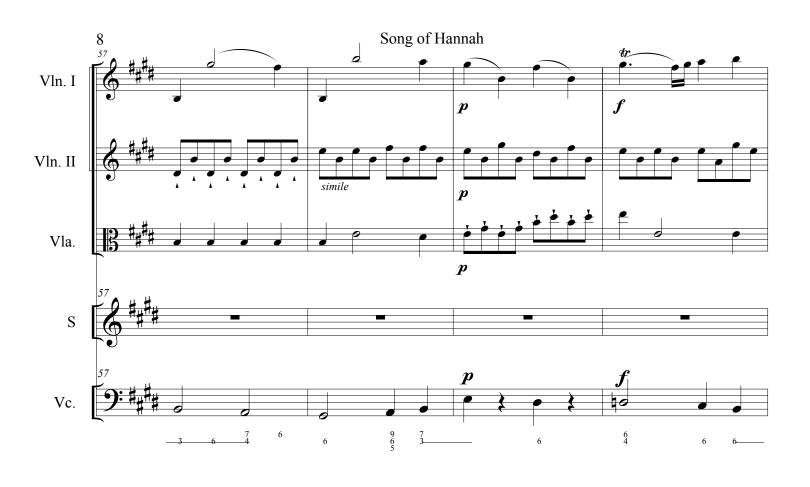




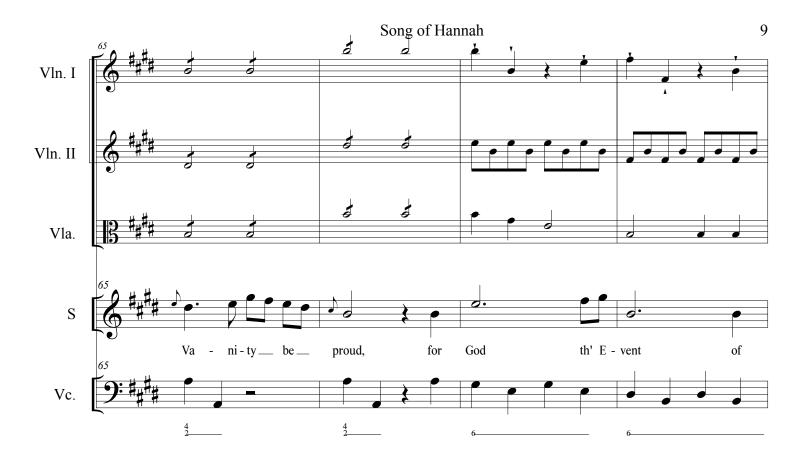


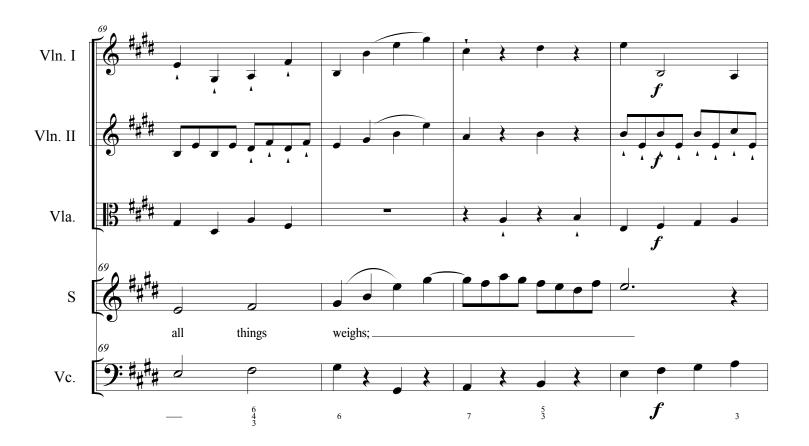


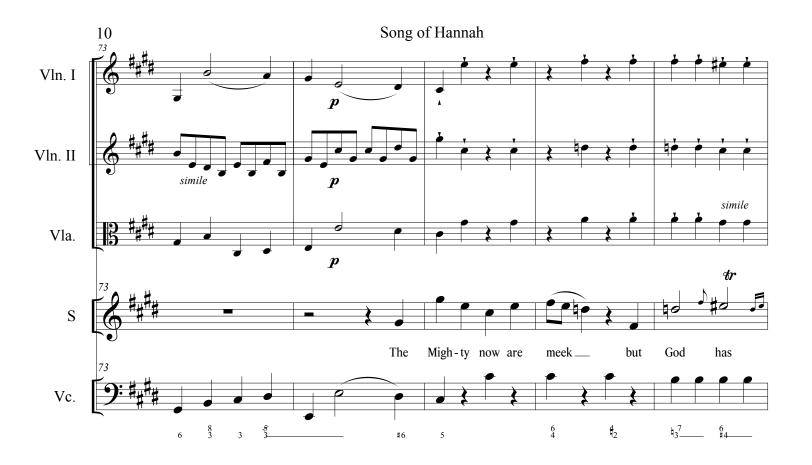


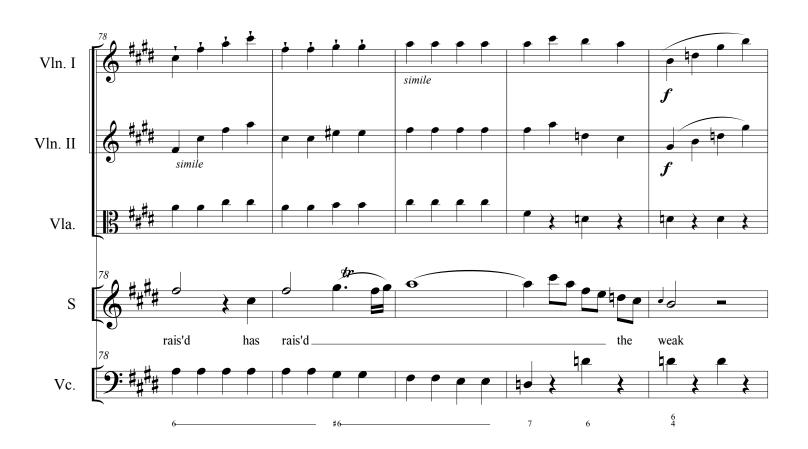


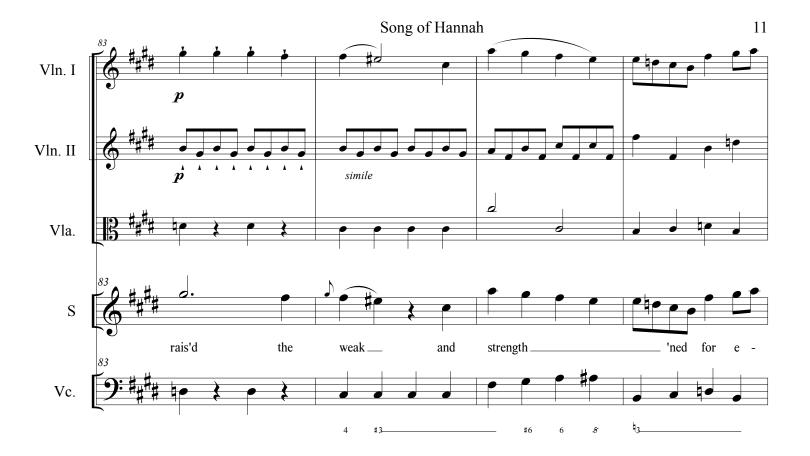




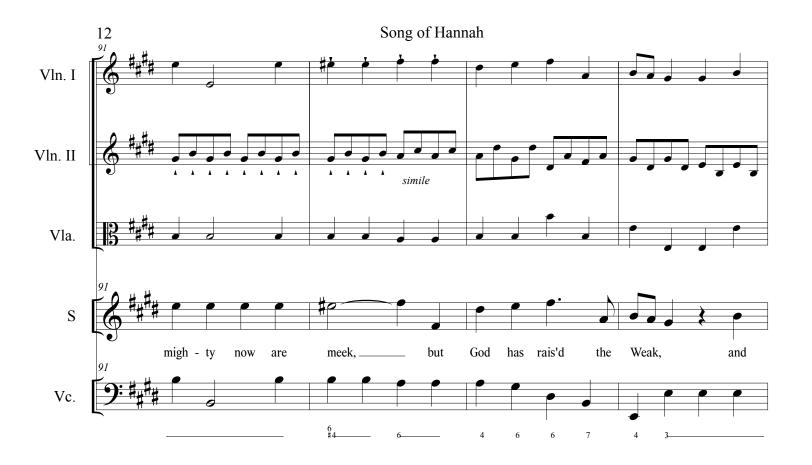


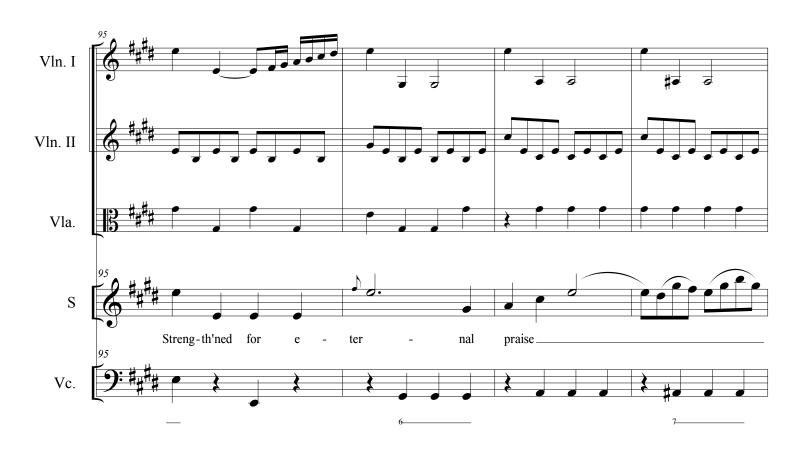


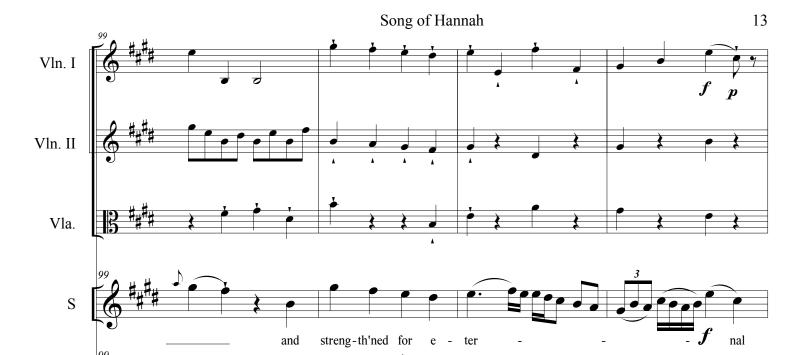








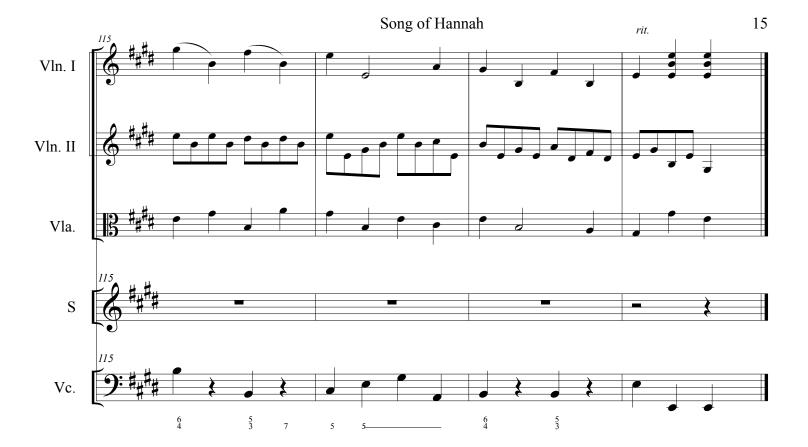




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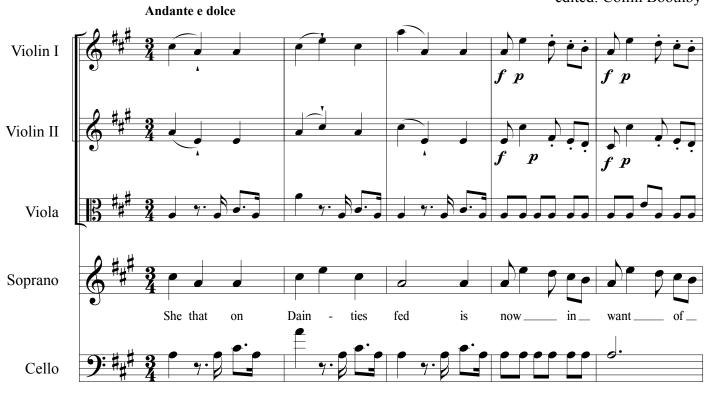




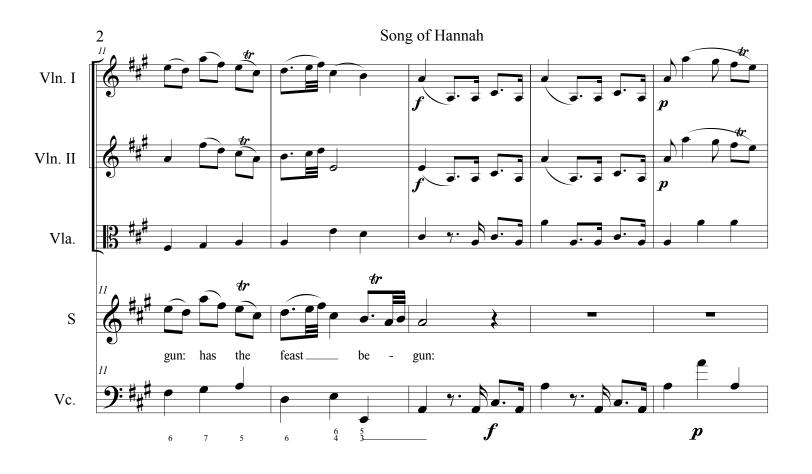
Song of Hannah

She that on dainties fed

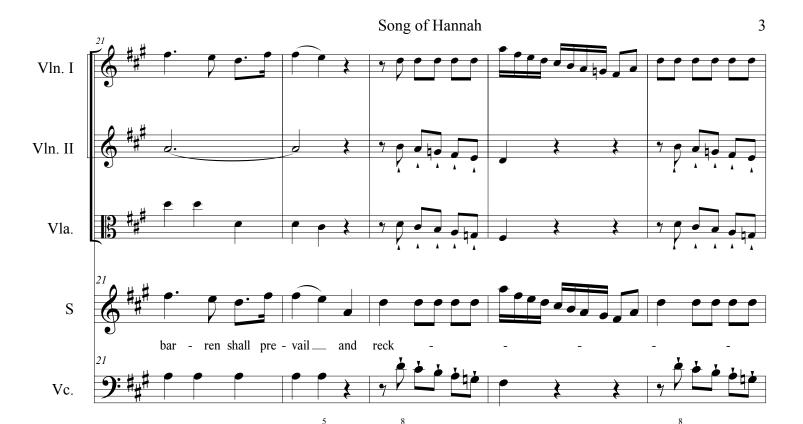
John Worgan edited: Collin Boothby



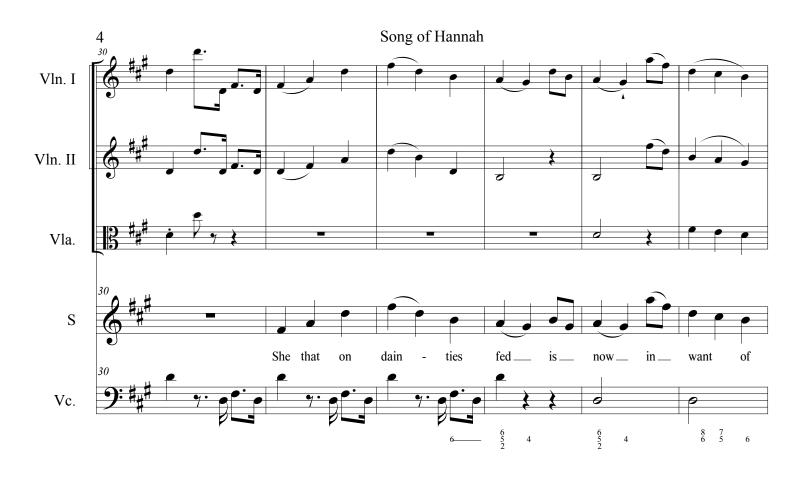




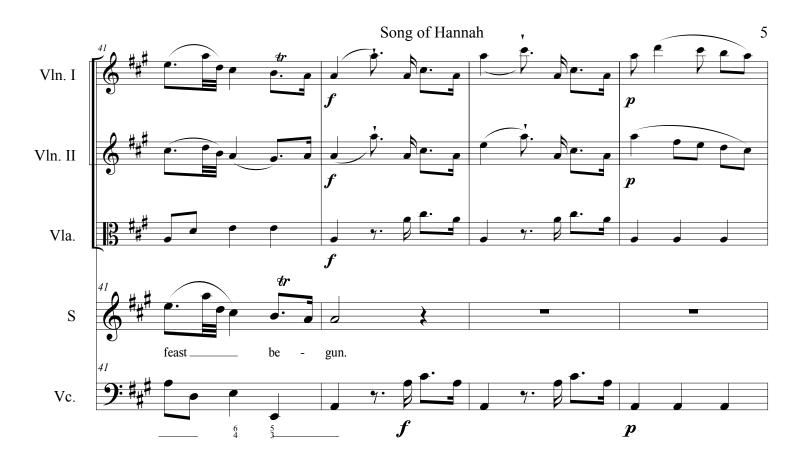


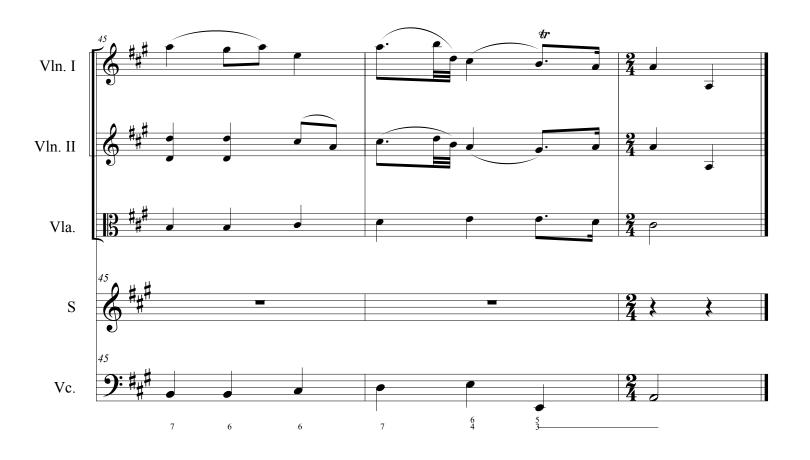












Song of Hannah

The Lord Exalts the Poor

John Worgan edited: Collin Boothby









The cherubs of the highest sphere

John Worgan



