1 Handel: Water Music Suite No. 2: Alla Hornpipe

This movement is probably George Frideric Handel's most well-known piece of instrumental music. Handel (1685–1759) was a great master of the Baroque era, and this movement is a perfect example of his sprightly, dancelike music.

0:01 The piece begins with a familiar "sailor's hornpipe" melody.

0:16 Now the trumpets enter, playing the beginning of the same "sailor's hornpipe." And at **0:23**, the horns echo what the trumpets just played.

0:35 After another brief alternation of brass instruments, the strings enter here for the first time. Without glancing at the time counter on your CD player, see if you can pick out this moment by sound alone. The musical "tone color" changes drastically, and the violins, violas, cellos, and basses take center stage.

0:43 First the trumpets, then the horns, and then the full orchestra take over the theme, bringing it to a satisfying conclusion.

1:03 But what's this? The music seems to begin all over again. The musicians repeat everything they've played up to this point, note for note.

2:06 Now comes something new: a contrasting section — or, as musicians often say, a *middle section.* (As you read on, you'll see why that title is appropriate.) How is it contrasting? First, the melody is different. Second, this music is quieter than what came before — mainly because all the brass instruments have stopped playing. And third, this section is in a *minor key* — creating a very different feeling from the opening of the piece, which is in a *major key.* (For much more on major and minor keys, see Chapter 11.)

3:04 Now, once again, we hear the familiar "sailor's hornpipe" theme from the beginning of the piece. But with a twist: This time, the *strings* start things off instead of the woodwinds. It takes a very astute listener to notice this. But what *everyone* notices, at least subliminally, is that the music sounds fresh and new, even though the same old theme is being played again.

3:20 From here to the end of the movement, the sequence of events is exactly the same as before. (Read from **0:16** to **1:02** for a detailed description.)

If we back up a bit and "view" this music from a distance, we can get a good idea of the structure of this movement. Look what happens if you call the "sailor's hornpipe" theme A, and the contrasting minor-key section B. You get an overall structure of

A (repeated) – B – A

This form is *unbelievably* important to the history of music. After Handel's time, it became the basis of *sonata form,* which you can read about in Chapter 3 — and in the discussion of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (Track 4) coming up. Thousands upon thousands of composers used sonata form — all the way up to our own time.

Now you know why musicians refer to that contrasting B section as the *middle section:* because as soon as they hear it, they know that sooner or later, Theme A will be coming back again.

2 Bach: Well Tempered Clavier, Book 2: Prelude and Fugue in C Major

We mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that George Frideric Handel was a great master of the Baroque era. Well, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) was *the* greatest.

Bach and Handel lived and worked at the exact same time — in fact, they were born in the same year. But the two composers never met, and they developed sharply different personal writing styles.

The biggest difference is in their use of *counterpoint* — several melodic lines playing at the same time. Bach used it more often than Handel did. And nowhere is that more evident than in this composition.

In the early days, piano-like instruments were tuned in such a way that they sounded right only when playing in certain keys. (See Chapter 6 for more on keys.) But during Bach's lifetime, the theories of keyboard tuning underwent a big change. For the first time, people started tuning their keyboards so that the musical distance from each key to the next was the same. This development made it possible to play music in any key — starting on any note of the keyboard. To celebrate, Bach composed a book of 24 preludes and fugues — one for every major and minor key. And then, in a second book, he did the whole thing all over again. Today, "the 48," as they're often called, stand as some of the finest keyboard pieces ever composed.

We're going to listen to the first prelude and fugue from Bach's *second* book. Because it's the first one in that book, it's in the simplest of all keys — C major — which uses only the white notes on the keyboard.

0:01 In this recording, you can hear the sound of a *harpsichord,* an early keyboard instrument that existed long before anyone dreamed up the piano. Bach wrote some of his best music for this instrument.

This is the beginning of the prelude part of the composition. It has an almost monumental quality to it; it's almost as if Bach were throwing open the big doors to some enormous building.

One of the things that creates this feeling, in our opinion, is Bach's use of a *pedal note* — a low note that keeps ringing, even as everything swirls around above it. If you listen carefully, you can hear that the first note (a low C) lasts a full 13 seconds. The pedal note gives a sense of rock-solid stability to the music, and that's what you feel as momentous.

You can certainly hear the counterpoint in this piece as it progresses. The melody seems to be everywhere — sometimes in the high notes, sometimes in the low notes, sometimes in between (in the so-called *inner voices*).

If you've read Chapter 6, you may remember that the harpsichord is not *touch-sensitive*. That is, no matter how hard or softly you strike the keys, the volume comes out the same. One of the ways a harpsichord player can simulate more volume is by *rolling* chords. Rather than playing the three or four notes of a chord all at once, he separates them all by a split second (usually playing the lowest notes first). The added time it takes to play the chord gives the illusion of added volume. You can hear this at **1:03**, and again *very* prominently on the last note of the prelude, at **2:15**.

When the prelude ends, you may think that the piece is over. But, as musicians know, the fun is just about to begin. Here comes the *fugue.*

It's easiest to understand a fugue if you imagine it being sung by four different voices. The keyboard player has to imitate all those voices with just two hands — an astoundingly difficult task.

2:22 Voice One sings the fugue's melody, all by itself, with no accompaniment.

2:27 Now, as Voice One goes on to sing something new, Voice Two begins singing the melody, a little higher than Voice One did.

2:32 It gets even more complicated. As Voices One and Two continue on, minding their own separate businesses, Voice Three begins the melody. See if you can hear the exact moment when Voice Three comes in. Because Voice Three sings the lowest notes that you've heard so far, it should be easy to identify.

2:37 But wait — there's more! Voice Four enters the fray. You can't miss this voice, because it's (a) the highest thing going at the moment and (b) the highest thing you've heard since the beginning of the fugue.

Now all four voices continue their heated discussion. Although each voice has something extremely individual to say, all four voices somehow manage to blend with each other. That's the essence of counterpoint, Bach's specialty; and that's what makes a fugue so amazing. No matter how hard *playing* a fugue may be, *composing* one is a million times harder.

By now, you're familiar enough with the fugue's melody to be able to recognize little snippets of it whenever they pop up. What you should listen for is a group of six notes — two very short, two slightly longer, and two longer still. That's the main characteristic of the melody. You can hear it at **2:52, 2:56, 3:08, 3:18, 3:23,** and a score of other places.

At **3:28,** Bach introduces a common fugue technique. At a point near the end of the piece, the entrances of the melody come closer together, in quick succession. Here, a voice enters about once per second — adding to the buildup of excitement.

Once you figure out how this fugue is put together, you'll marvel at its complexity and enjoy it all the more. And you'll also understand why many people consider Bach's works to be among the true wonders of human achievement — like the Chartres Cathedral, the Hoover Dam, and the Great Wall of China.

3 Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-Flat, Third Movement

This piece isn't the most *famous* of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's piano concertos, but it's one of the best. We picked this movement out of all the works of Mozart (1756–91) because it expresses what was great about him in so many different ways. It's beautiful, witty, and dramatic, and it embodies the very spirit of Mozart himself: elegant, refined, warm, and playful.

This movement is the third and final one of Piano Concerto no. 22 in E-flat. It's a *rondo* (see Chapter 3), meaning that the main theme comes back again and again and again, alternating with little subsidiary themes.

0:00 The piano starts off right away with the main theme (or melody). We'll call it Theme A. Simple, isn't it? Like a little children's melody. Or like hunting horns in the distance. We think that's what Mozart meant it to sound like . . . as you'll hear in a moment.

0:09 Theme A again, loudly — except that now it's the entire orchestra.

0:18 Turns out that the melody you just heard was only the *first part* of the theme. The piano now tells you something more.

0:27 While the piano holds on a trill, the horns play a little riff: four quick notes. (This segment is *definitely* meant to sound like a hunting call.) And one second later, they're imitated by the clarinets.

0:29 Now the piano moves into a little flight of fancy to bring you back to the main theme.

0:38 The first part of Theme A again. But this time, rather than simply echoing Theme A as it did the first time, the orchestra goes off on a little flight of fancy of its own. In the music biz, we may say that the orchestra is "establishing the key of the piece" by setting up a chord progression that makes it very clear what key we're in.

0:58 A delightful little addendum: a capper to the main theme. This part starts with two clarinets, one spinning out a quick accompaniment down at the bottom of its range and the other joined by a horn in a cute little melody.

1:06 A lone bassoon adds yet another capper to the theme, echoed by a solo flute four seconds later. Finally, the entire orchestra comes in with finality, as if to say, "Enough cappers already. Let's get this rondo on the road."

1:21 After what seems to be the final chord of this orchestral outburst, the piece suddenly quiets down to nothing. *Almost* nothing, that is. If you listen carefully, you can hear a *vamp* in the string section (a repeating little *waiting* figure), as if the violins are saying to the solo piano, "Come on in anytime you're ready. The water's fine."

1:24 Just two statements of the vamp convince the piano. It enters, almost timidly at first — and then . . .

1:36 The piano begins imitating the bassoon and flute idea (that extra cap from **1:05**).

Now permit us to pause for a second (or, actually, 37 seconds) here. Why are we explaining everything in such detail? First, we want you to see how music can be taken apart. And second, all these segments get repeated later in the movement. If you ever want to learn a piece of music — to play it on the piano, say, or to conduct it — understanding these little subdivisions of the structure really helps.

1:44 Now something very subtle happens. From the very beginning of the movement, this music has been in the key of E-flat major. Every chord progression, every instrumental entrance, every phrase has confirmed and reconfirmed that key. But now, for the first time, we get a hint that the piece is about to leave the safety and comfort of its home key.

In the old days, if you, the composer, wanted to change keys, you didn't just do it abruptly; you had to go through a series of harmonies that *gradually* took you there — so as not to upset the sensitive ears of the listener.

Right between **1:44** and **1:45** on the recording comes a strange chord that signals the beginning of the key shift. This *modulation* continues for quite a while. To the average person, the piano is just noodling around (the scholarly term for it) for 45 seconds. But the music becomes more interesting when you understand that, underneath this noodling, the chord progression necessary for the desired modulation is taking place. And when do you reach the new key?

2:23 Now. With the new key comes a new theme — Theme B. Music theorists say that this theme is in the *dominant* key, bearing a special relationship to the key of Theme A. If you want to know more about these relationships, consult Chapter 11.

2:32 After the piano states Theme B, a beautiful clarinet solo comes in, imitating and even extending Theme B. More piano noodling for almost a minute — and then . . .

3:19 The music is going somewhere else again. For the past minute, all that noodling confirmed the key of Theme B. But now we're about to leave that key again, and with a descending scale in the horns . . .

3:24 You arrive back at Theme A! And in the original key, to boot! Now, if you're a rondo buff, you *knew* that would eventually happen. (Everyone in Mozart's time knew it, even if they didn't think about it much.) At **3:33**, once again, the orchestra comes barreling in (as it did at **0:11** on this track).

3:40 What's up here? Instead of just imitating what the piano did, the orchestra does something weird: It goes to yet a different key. Then it becomes quiet, and the piano comes in on a trill as the chords underneath continue to change.

4:05 The piano abruptly lands on a strong chord as the winds come in on a held note. Then the piano noodles around on that chord — and fades out to nothing. Everything stops! What's happening?

4:16 The piece has reached a new theme: We'll call it Theme C. This theme is *much slower* than the rest of the movement. It's like an oasis of tranquillity in the midst of a busy movement, the musical equivalent of Central Park.

Mozart has made his Theme C sound like a wind serenade, a piece that would've been played outdoors in the park on a warm evening as the king sipped on daiquiris. Only wind instruments are playing: no violins, violas, cellos, or double basses — for the first time in this movement.

4:45 But now the piano enters, imitating this theme, and so do the strings. Can you hear that this segment is an *exact* repetition of the melody you just heard?

5:13 The winds have more to say. Theme C turns out to be a two-parter, and the wind serenade consort is back now, singing the second part of the theme. At **5:40**, the piano, accompanied by the strings again, imitates this part as well.

6:16 Here the strings play *pizzicato,* or plucked by the fingers, as the winds play long chords that almost seem to suspend us in the air. But then a *crescendo* (a growing sound) leads to . . .

6:49 An honest-to-goodness cadenza! A *cadenza,* as you can discover in Chapter 3, is a chance for the soloist to strut her stuff. This particular cadenza is not extremely flashy; it's quite a short cadenza, in fact.

7:00 Theme A, in all its quiet glory, is followed shortly thereafter by the orchestra barreling in again, as before.

7:17 Here's the bassoon capper, followed by the flute version. But this time, the flute takes us into a different key again. Can you hear that we're going somewhere else? As the piano enters, it, too, takes us somewhere else. For several seconds, we don't know where we're going to end up, key-wise.

8:02 False alarm. After all that modulation, we end up back in the original key. But it's not Theme A; it's Theme B, which we haven't heard for a good six minutes!

8:44 A sudden, loud entrance of the orchestra. It leads us to, at **8:49**, a particular chord that traditionally signals the beginning of another piano cadenza.

This segment is the main cadenza of the movement. In Mozart's day, the soloist improvised it on the spot — a lost art nowadays, practiced by only a few brilliant soloists. These days, most people memorize a precomposed cadenza instead.

9:48 Theme A's final appearance. By now, you probably know it so well that Mozart didn't feel compelled to repeat the first phrase, as he did at **0:09**.

10:33 And here come those cappers: first the little clarinet one (first heard at **0:58**) and then the bassoon and flute one (first heard at **1:06**). But this time, the piano adds its own little embellishments while the cappers are going on.

10:50 The entire orchestra, as before, says, "Enough cappers already." And it feels as if the piece is finished.

10:55 But one more thing. Remember that vamp from **1:21**? Here it is again, as the piano makes a final quiet statement.

11:04 "And now we *really* mean it!" says the orchestra. The movement is over.

So now you have an idea of the structure of this beautiful music. The themes boil down as follows: A – B – A – C – A – B – A. In other words, a perfect example of a *rondo.*