



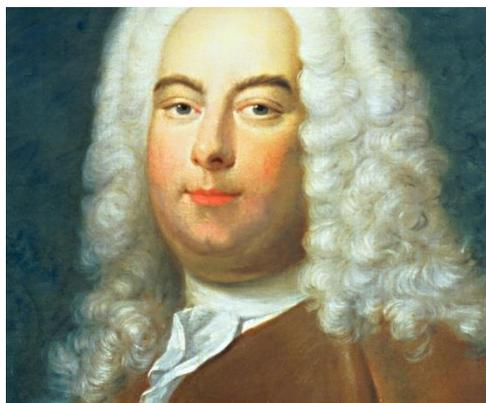
UNIVERSITY OF  
THE THIRD AGE  
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## Today's Selections and Musicians

### George Frideric Handel - Arrival of the Queen of Sheba

#### The Story behind the Music



Handel settled permanently in England in 1712. He wanted to make his reputation and fortune there as an opera composer. For many years he was successful in that endeavour, becoming the director of the Royal Academy of Music, an enterprise sponsored partially by the King for the production of Italian-style operas - Handel's specialty.

However, public taste always changes, and Handel became the victim of the fickle crowd in 1728, when London went crazy over the first English ballad opera, *The Beggar's Opera*. (A "Ballad Opera" is a play where spoken dialogue is interspersed with sung ballads or folk songs).

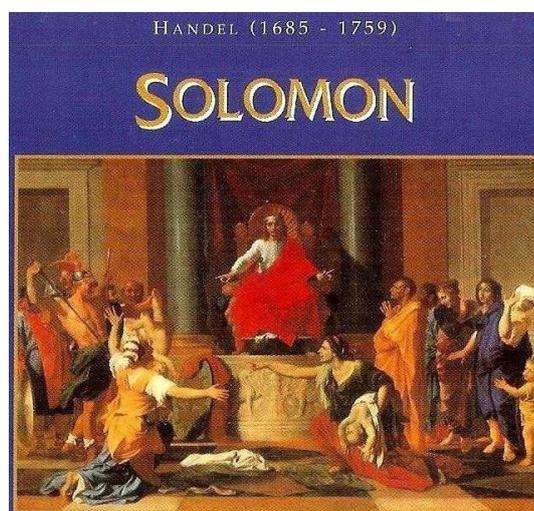
Ballad operas were the forerunners of "Comic Operas" such as the Gilbert and Sullivan 'Savoy Operas'. Little by little, the Royal Academy's loyal subscribers lost interest in stilted Italian opera, in favour of the more earthy and entertaining ballad operas, which were now capturing the city's theatres.

Handel did not quit Italian-style opera entirely, but he struck out in a new, somewhat related direction: quasi-religious oratorios, mostly on Old Testament stories. (The most famous and enduring of these, *Messiah*, was actually controversial in its time because of its close connection with Jesus). During his long years in England, Handel composed 17 oratorios. Usually, these were premiered during the weeks of Lent, when opera houses were closed.

Famous for his operas, oratorios, and concertos, his oratorios are said to be the high point of the baroque period.

The *Arrival of the Queen of Sheba* is part of the oratorio *Solomon* in which was performed during church services. This is one of three parts of the oratorio in which the other two are the building of the temple and the famous judgment. Handel was of the age 65 when he composed this piece. Though this was played for churches in the baroque period, today people use this piece for weddings, recitals, or even just dances. Handel really just wanted his music to be for any public domain.

Handel composed *Solomon* in May-June, 1748, and it was premiered at Covent Garden the following March.



The Queen of Sheba herself is the subject of much historical conjecture, having apparently arrived at the court of King Solomon from the kingdom of Saba (Sheba) bearing rich gifts. It's not totally clear whether she and Solomon actually married, but there were rumoured goings-on, and various debates about whether she had hairy legs or not.



*'The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon' ~ Edward Poynter*

As mentioned above, the first two “Parts” (acts) of Solomon deal with his building the famous Temple in Jerusalem and an illustration of his abundant wisdom in the story of the two women, both claiming to be the mother of a newborn child – the so-called “Judgment”.

Act 1 of ‘Solomon’ begins with the king and his people celebrating the consecration of the Temple he has built in Jerusalem, and the king rejoicing in his wedded bliss.

Act 2 tells of the famous biblical story of the two women claiming a single baby as her own. When Solomon orders the baby split in half to settle the case, the real mother begs him not to and he hands the child to the other woman, as Solomon knew the real mother would.

Act 3 is to do with the state visit from the Queen of Sheba. Although not named, the queen is famous in history and literature. All that is known of her is that she visited Solomon, flaunting her wealth at his court. She came as his equal, a royal ruler in her own right. The kingdom of Sheba is believed to be based on the ancient civilization of Saba in South Arabia. Woman rulers at that time were not uncommon; queens from the 8th and 7th centuries BC are listed in Assyrian inscriptions.

In the Bible, it says that the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem “with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones ... Never again came such an abundance of spices” which she gave to Solomon. She came “to prove him with hard questions”, and he answered all to her satisfaction. They exchanged gifts and she returned to her land. And, frustratingly, nothing more is said of her; nothing more is known of her.

This 3rd act is introduced by a *sinfonia* (a type of overture derived from Baroque Italian opera). Musically, it consists of energetic alternations between the strings and a pair of oboes. The strings cling to recurring variations on a stimulating single idea, alternating with more melodic episodes played by the oboes. Toward the end, oboes and strings join forces to bring the *Sinfonia* to an energetic conclusion. Perhaps the music is intended to illustrate the splendour of the queen. It is also possible that the contrast between strings and oboes symbolizes this first encounter between the wise king and the beautiful queen.

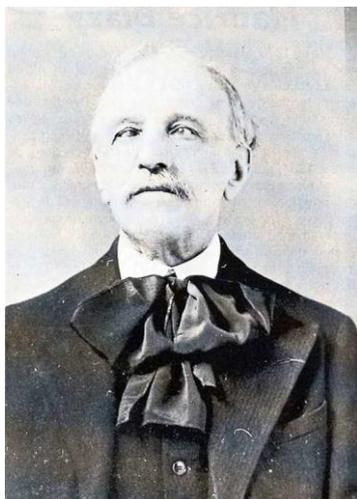
The recording we hear is by the Academy of Ancient Music led by violinist Bojan Čičić and directed by Christopher Bucknall at the harpsichord.

# Louis Verne

## Marche Triomphale pour le Centenaire de Napoléon I, op.46

### The story behind the music

One of the largest commemorative projects of the early 20th century undertaken by the French was the May 1921 celebrations to mark the centenary of Napoleon's death. This was the occasion for a plethora of government-sponsored solemnities, processions, lectures, exhibitions and public eulogies. Several composers were commissioned to write music for the events, including Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) and Louis Vierne (1870-1937).



Louis Vierne

Louis Vierne had been principal organist of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris since 1900, and held the position for 37 years until his death (at the console).

He composed the Marche Triomphale pour le Centenaire de Napoléon I (op. 46) for a commemorative service at the cathedral which took place on 5th May 1921. As well as a packed cathedral, there were around 80 distinguished guests up in the organ gallery (loft), and Vierne recalls how difficult the conditions of this first performance had been, especially as the gallery was also to hold a small brass ensemble and percussion.

The Marche Triomphale is scored for organ, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones and timpani, an unusual combination of instruments which is identical to that of Charles-Marie Widor's 1916 *Salvum Fac Populum Tuum* (op. 84), a work Widor (1844-1937) conducted for the Armistice Day service at the cathedral on 17th November 1918 with Marcel Dupré (1886-1971) at the organ. (Vierne had been most disappointed to miss this occasion, only returning to Paris in April 1920, having been away from the French capital since 1916 undergoing protracted treatment for his eyes in Switzerland).

Though Vierne was born blind, he had had some sight restored to him when he was 6 years old but in 1915, glaucoma had threatened to make him lose it again. In October 1918, he had just undergone treatment for a secondary cataract of his right eye, and had then to keep to a darkened room for six months. During Vierne's absence from Notre Dame, Marcel Dupré had assumed his post as organist of the cathedral.

On his return to Paris in 1920, Vierne lamented the state of the organ, writing to a friend that it was 'filled with dust, dead bats, and swallows, and is perishing from mildew and dry rot' (quoted in Smith: 268). During the war, though the cathedral had been spared by the bombs, the stained glass windows had been removed to safety. Water had got into the mechanism and mould was eating into the structure. One of the larger pipes even broke loose and fell onto a group of worshippers. Until 1924, there was also no electric blower and Vierne was dependent for wind supply on the six men who were employed to activate the pumps.



Workmen removing the Notre Dame organ following the fire that engulfed the cathedral in 2019.



Louis Vierne at the console of the Notre Dame organ

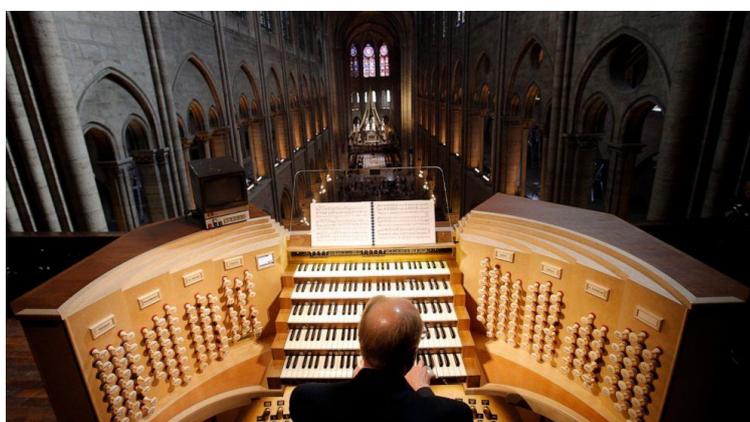
Though programmatic in nature and written for a specific occasion, the *Marche Triomphale* stands alone through its sheer drama, force and colour.

After its initial performance in May 1921 with Vierne at the organ, it was played again several times in very different contexts, including concerts given for the Feast of All Saints on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1921 in the Théâtre des Champs Elysées; on the 5<sup>th</sup>

July 1924 for a special service at Notre Dame Cathedral in honour of the opening of the Olympic Games; and on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1929 in the Palais du Trocadéro for a Gala evening. It was first published 10 years after Vierne's death in 1947.

### Music Summary

Vierne's *Marche Triomphale* starts with a brief introductory fanfare characterized by striking open fifths, in a spatial call and response pattern between organ reed stops and the brass. After a short contrapuntal chromatic transition on the organ, trombones, then trumpets, enter in dialogue, offering two contrasting themes.



The Notre Dame organ console prior to the 2019 fire

The first theme is characterized by a rising sequence in dotted rhythm, and contrasts with the second theme, which is more grand and stately. The brass is underpinned by a driving ostinato dotted martial rhythm played fortissimo on the organ. The opening fanfare briefly returns, before giving way to a long development section, with the organ swelling in dynamics and tonal build-up, successively adding the reeds as the phrases rise in consecutive waves, with the Brass now punctuating the dense organ texture with the fragmented dotted-rhythm opening thematic material.

This leads into the final section reminiscent of a funeral march, with the organ playing loud detached chords on the beat, punctuated by almost imitative playing in the brass, and leading to a climactic ending.



The recording we listen to is by the Saint Joseph Cathedral Brass Ensemble, in Columbus, Ohio, USA.

Paul Thornock II is the conductor, and Robert Wisniewski the organist.

# Robert Schumann

## Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 129

### The story behind the Music



As summer drew to a close in 1850, the Schumann family left Dresden for Düsseldorf where Robert Schumann had accepted an offer to serve as “municipal music director.” The new post seemed to help restore the composer’s confidence and focus (Schumann had been experiencing mental health issues), and within a short time he produced a number of fine works

including his Symphony No. 3, “Rhenish,” and his Cello Concerto in A minor, Op. 129.

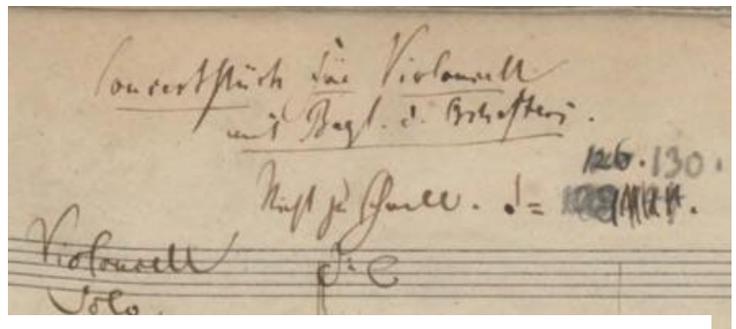
The few months of relative happiness that Schumann experienced after his arrival in Düsseldorf in 1850 allowed him to compose his Cello Concerto rapidly and without undue stress. He wrote the concerto in two weeks, finishing it in October 1850, originally not calling it a concerto but a “Concert piece with Accompaniment of the Orchestra”, suggesting that he wanted to introduce some departures from the traditional concerto structure – which he did!

(It should be noted that Schumann had ruined his right hand when a young man – and therefore his career as a concert pianist – but taught himself to play the cello, not well enough to establish a career, but certainly sufficient to gain some insight on how to write for the instrument).

Perhaps only “some” insight for, try as he may, he was unable to find a publisher who would accept it or a cellist who was willing to play it. Schumann then made an arrangement for violin and gave it to renowned violinist Joseph Joachim, who promptly filed it away without ever playing it. It only turned up in 1987 in the Joachim archive. It seems the major problem was to do with the tempo Schumann had set: the first movement being too fast, and the finale too slow.

After some amendments to the original tempo one publisher agree to buy the work but it didn’t premiere until 1860 – some four years after Schumann’s death.

Sadly all the associated drama led to further deterioration in Schumann’s mental health, a situation exacerbated by increasingly unpleasant interactions with the orchestra’s musicians. By 1853 he was distraught to the point of resigning.



The manuscript reveals several interesting details: The title Concertstück and the struggle with the metronome tempo indication. –  $\text{cresc.}$   $\text{♩} = 144 > 126 > 128 > 130$

In February of the following year, six days after he had sent the revised version to the publisher, he attempted

to drown himself in the Rhine. A week later he was committed to the asylum in Eendenich, dying there two-plus years later, a skeletal spectre of his former self.

Ironically, the concerto was finally premiered in 1860 at a concert in honour of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. It has become a standard repertoire piece since.

On the 'plus' side, with Schumann teetering on the verge of yet another breakdown, his wife Clara (a professional and gifted pianist) sincerely welcomed her husband's cello concerto. She confided in her diary, "I have played Robert's violoncello concerto through again, thus giving myself a truly musical and happy hour. The romantic quality, the vivacity, the freshness and humour, also the highly interesting interweaving of violoncello and orchestra are indeed wholly ravishing, and what euphony and deep feeling one finds in all the melodic passages!"



Robert and Clara Schumann

## Music Summary

The work opens with three woodwind chords reminiscent of those that serve as a gateway to Shakespeare's fairyland at the beginning of Mendelssohn's Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream. The soloist then introduces a long, entrancing melody:

After a vigorous orchestral transition, the soloist introduces a lighter, contrasting theme, followed by emotive passagework. These themes are then developed and (after a mysterious "false return" of the opening in the distant key of F-sharp minor) reprised. Like several other works by Schumann, this concerto's movements are linked together without pause, and the music fades seamlessly into the second movement.

The slow second movement opens with a lyrical duet for the soloist and a single orchestral cello marked "mit Ausdruck" ("with expression"). In a contrasting central section, the soloist plays a warm melody in double stops (playing notes on two strings at once), occasionally enriched by the orchestral cello. After a reprise of the opening duet, the woodwinds play a reminiscence of the haunting theme that began the concerto. This ends the reverie, and the soloist responds with a dramatic recitative (a style of operatic sing-speaking) above tremolo strings.

The orchestra begins the finale with the forceful chords of the main theme, answered by virtuoso figuration from the soloist. A transitional passage leads to a second theme, in which the woodwinds echo the cello's sighing figure. After an intense, virtuoso development, the orchestra begins the reprise of the main themes.

After a final return of the main theme in the orchestra, the cello begins a spontaneous passage in the style of an improvisation (a cadenza with some accompaniment from the orchestra—a very unconventional choice on Schumann's part, since cadenzas are usually unaccompanied). Little by little, the orchestra re-enters, leading to a thrilling conclusion.

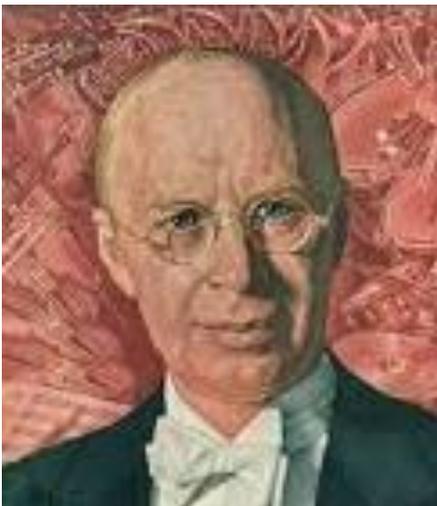


Our recording comes from The Southwest Radio Symphony Orchestra (from Stuttgart, Germany). The conductor is Christoph Eschenbach and the soloist is Kian Soltani – an Austrian-Iranian cellist, born in Bregenz to a family of Iranian musicians. He has held the post of principal cellist in Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra.

# Peter & the Wolf



## The story behind the Music



Sergei Prokofiev

*Peter and the Wolf* is a "symphonic fairy tale for children", is a musical composition written by Sergei Prokofiev in 1936. The narrator tells a children's story, while the orchestra illustrates it. It is Prokofiev's most frequently performed work and one of the most frequently performed works in the entire classical repertoire.

Prokofiev wrote the story and composed the music for *Peter and the Wolf* in two weeks for a children's theatre in Moscow. The intent was to introduce children to the individual instruments of the orchestra with each character being represented by an instrument or group of instruments:

The first draft of the libretto was about a Young Pioneer (the Soviet version of a Boy Scout) called Peter who rights a wrong by challenging an adult. (This was a common theme in propaganda aimed at children in the Soviet Union at the time.) However, Prokofiev was dissatisfied with the rhyming text produced by Nina Pavlovna Sakonskaya (real name Antonia Pavlovna Sokolovskaya, 1896–1951), a then popular children's author.

Prokofiev wrote a new version where Peter captures a wolf. As well as promoting desired Pioneer virtues such as vigilance, bravery and resourcefulness, the plot illustrates Soviet themes such as the stubbornness of the un-Bolshevik older generation (the grandfather) and the triumph of Man (Peter) taming Nature (the wolf).

*Peter and the Wolf* was an immediate success and continues to be enjoyed today by children all over the world.

The characters and their respective instruments are:

Peter: string quartet  
The wolf: 3 French horns.  
The grandfather: bassoon.  
The duck: oboe.

The bird: flute.  
The cat: clarinet.  
The hunters: timpani or kettle drum

## Story Summary

### **Beginning**

The story is about a boy named Peter who lives with his grandfather. Grandfather does not want Peter going out of their garden because there are wolves around. One day Peter goes out the garden gate and sees a duck swimming in a nearby pond. The duck is arguing with a little bird. Peter sees a cat approaching and warns the little bird who flies up into a tree.

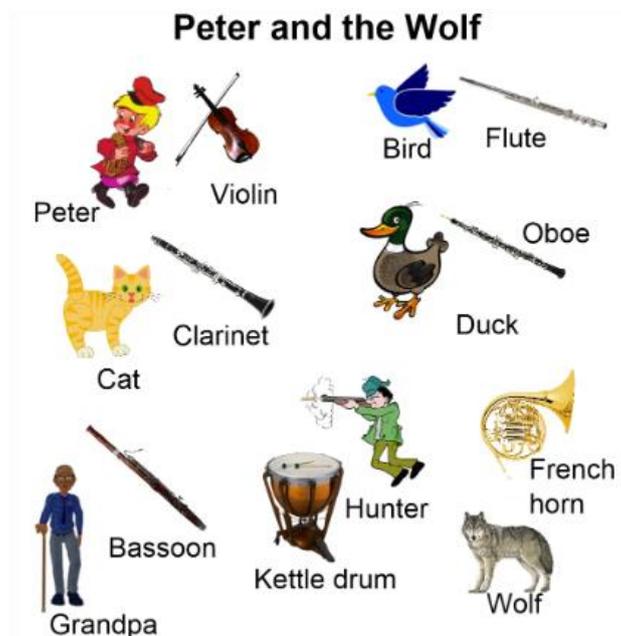
### **Middle**

Just then, Peter's grandfather comes outside and scolds Peter for going out of the garden. They go back into the garden and Grandfather locks the gate. Soon a wolf does appear from the woods. The cat climbs a tree to escape the wolf, but the duck is swallowed by the hungry wolf.

Peter gets a rope and climbs over the garden wall into a tree. The bird distracts the wolf by flying over his head while Peter lowers a noose and catches the wolf by his tail.

### **End**

Hunters then come out of the woods and fire at the wolf but Peter stops them. They all bring the wolf to the zoo and at the end, the duck can be heard quacking in the wolf's stomach.



Naturally there are many recordings from which to choose. The recording we listen to is by the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. Wielding the baton and the microphone is Bramwell Tovey, 'Conductor Emeritus' of the Vancouver Symphony.

# Marc-Antoine Charpentier – Te Deum H 146

## The story behind the Music



Marc-Antoine Charpentier was, next to Lully, the most remarkable figure in late seventeenth-century French musical life, with a prolific output of sacred and secular music.

As a young man, he studied in Rome acquiring valuable first-hand experience of opera and oratorio – both relatively new forms at that time. On returning to his native Paris, he put these skills to effective use, composing seventeen operas and a large quantity of

church music, and bringing the dramatic oratorio to France for the first time, giving it a special French character.

Charpentier's *Te Deum*, which dates from about 1692, was probably written for the great Jesuit church of St. Paul in Rue St. Antoine, when he was *Maitre de Musique* there. Since the opening section has a distinctly martial tone, he probably wrote it to commemorate a military victory, possibly the recent French victory at Steinkerque on August 3<sup>rd</sup>; something folks today might consider a bit odd in what is primarily a sacred piece of music. Yet when you consider the relationship between religion and war over the years (especially as recounted in the Old Testament), maybe it isn't so unusual.

Charpentier authored six *Te Deum* settings, although only four of them have survived (These are catalogued as H 145, 146, 147 & 148). The one we hear today is from the H 146 setting and is the only setting employing a “military band”, i.e. trumpets and kettledrums.

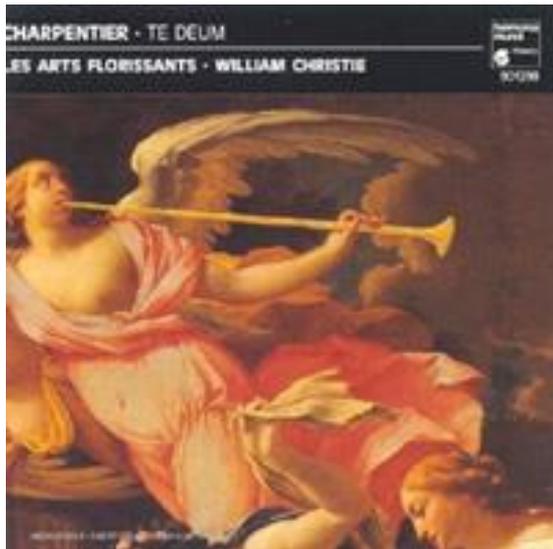
The “*Te Deum*” is unquestionably the best known composition of Marc-Antoine Charpentier. Those who watch the Eurovision Song Contest will recognise the theme from the opening prelude“ (*Prélude en rondeau*”), which for many years has been the signature tune for that competition.

“*Te Deum*” is the abbreviated name for the Ambrosian Hymn, *Te Deum laudamus* (“God we praise you”), one of the oldest and most well-known Christian hymns.



Addressed to God the Father and Christ the Son, it is traditionally sung on Christian festivals and on occasions of public rejoicing. In the Church of England's 'Book of Common Prayer' it forms part of the service of Morning Prayer. Many great composers have used the *Te Deum* text for their own music, among them Handel, Bruckner as well as Charpentier. The hymn has been played in different contexts including as a thanksgiving to God for example, for the coronation of kings and emperors, since in earlier times they often ruled by divine right.

## Music Summary



Primarily though, the “Te deum laudamus” is a good celebration of and praise to God, and that's what this music is all about. But since most of us can't understand Latin, anyhow, it probably doesn't matter what they're singing. Just enjoy the voices and the instruments, which blend together in an almost extraordinary fashion.

The work is written for group of soloists, choir, and instrumental accompaniment and it is arguably, nowhere better performed than by the ensemble “Les Arts Florissants” under the direction of William Christie.

The complete text of the Te Deum (as set to music) has some 29 sections.. The recording we hear (by “Les Arts Florissants”) contains Charpentier's Prelude and 3 sections of some 8 or 9 minutes duration recorded in the Royal Chapel of the Castle of Versailles in 2015.

The sections are:

Prelude

Te Deum laudamus:	We praise thee, O God (we acknowledge thee to be the Lord)
Te ætérnum Patrem	All the earth doth worship thee (the Father everlasting)
Pleni sunt cæli et terra	Heaven and earth are full (of the majesty of thy glory)



## Acknowledgment of Sources

**Handel - Arrival of the Queen of Sheba**

University of Wisconsin ([sites.google.com/a/gapps.uwc.edu/mus-174-rck-sp11](https://sites.google.com/a/gapps.uwc.edu/mus-174-rck-sp11))

Blog - Joy V Spicer ([joyvspicer.com](http://joyvspicer.com))

Michael Fink - for the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra ([riphil.wordpress.com](http://riphil.wordpress.com))

**Vierne - Marche Triomphale pour le Centenaire de Napoléon I**

Emilie Capulet-Musikproduktion Höflich ([repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de](http://repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de))

**Schumann - Concerto for Cello and Orchestra**

Stephen Lowe - Programme notes for the Seattle Symphony orchestra  
Interlude.hk

Calvin Dotsey - Programme Notes for the Houston Symphony Orchestra

Anssi Karttunen ([karttunen.org](http://karttunen.org))

**Prokofiev - Peter and the Wolf**

[wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

**Charpentier - Te Deum**

[wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

John Bawden ([choirs.uk.org](http://choirs.uk.org))

[classicalcandor.blogspot.com](http://classicalcandor.blogspot.com)

## YouTube/Vimeo Links to Recordings

**Handel - Arrival of the Queen of Sheba**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9FaoRJAgI>

**Vierne - Marche Triomphale pour le Centenaire de Napoléon I**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUWDuDjIRJE>

**Schumann - Concerto for Cello and Orchestra**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NayPFVXYo9o&t=1109s>

**Prokofiev - Peter and the Wolf**

<https://vimeo.com/398579758>

**Charpentier - Te Deum**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I3LlIzPtsmw>