

A Mighty Fortress is Our God



"Ein' feste Burg."

arranged by
 Michael E. Ekbladh

Historical context for "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

Many events in Martin Luther's life during the years 1527-29 dramatically shaped his writing of "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." From the Diet of Worms (1521), the Peasants' War (1525), the execution of his friend Leonhard Kaiser (1527), and the Diet of Speyers (1529) we can see the turbulence in the development of this new church and of the changing culture from which it came.

Many view this hymn a "battle cry" of sorts. While this may be true in some sense, it is a "battle cry" of theological importance rather than of physical altercation. The alterations in the text apply to this theological battle raging around Martin Luther.

In the Peasants' War of 1525, one can easily see the influence of this revolt in the text of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," as Luther stated himself:

"Therefore let everyone who can, smite, slay, and stab, secretly or openly, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel ... For baptism does not make men free in body and property, but in soul; and the gospel does not make goods common, except in the case of those who, of their own free will, do what the apostles and disciples did in Acts 4 [:32-37]. They did not demand, as do our insane peasants in their raging, that the goods of others-of Pilate and Herod-should be common, but only their own goods. Our peasants, however, want to make the goods of other men common, and keep their own for themselves. Fine Christians they are! I think there is not a devil left in hell; they have all gone into the peasants. Their raving has gone beyond all measure."

(Jaroslav J. Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, Luther's Works, 55 vols. ((St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Pub. House and Fortress Press, 1955-1986)), 46: 50-51.)

Also, in his theological beliefs:

"For I do not want to deny in any way that God's power is able to make a body be simultaneously in many places, even in a corporeal and circumscribed manner. For who wants to try to prove that God is unable to do that? Who has seen the limits of his power?"

(Luther's Works, 37:223-224)

Luther composed the melody for the hymn, which is called "Ein' Feste Burg" and is in hymn meter 87.87.55.56.7, denoted rhythmic tune as distinguished from the later isometric tune setting of the hymn, 87.87.66.66.7 meter. The isometric meter that is employed is more widely known and used in Christendom. In 1906 Edouard Rœhrich wrote, "The authentic form of this melody differs very much from that which one sings in most Protestant churches and figures in Giacomo Meyerbeer's The Huguenots "...the original melody is extremely rhythmic, by the way it bends to all the nuances of the text..."

While in the 19th century musicologists disputed Luther's authorship of the music to the hymn, that opinion has been modified by more recent research; it is now the consensus view of musical scholars that Luther did indeed compose the famous tune to go with the words.

The text is a paraphrase of Psalm 46 and this translation is by Frederick H. Hedge (1853).

Any set of drums with three distinct pitches can be used.

The following are acceptable:

Djun Djuns

Djumbes

Tumbas

Tom Toms

Congas

Hand Drums

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Martin Luther, trans. Frederic Hedge
alt. Michael E. Ekbladh

music by Martin Luther
arr. Michael E. Ekbladh

Energetic ♩ = 100

The first system of the musical score is for the instrumental introduction. It consists of five staves. The top two staves are for a grand staff (treble and bass clef) in 3/4 time, both containing whole rests. The third staff is for Triangle, marked with a forte (f) dynamic, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The fourth staff is for High Drum, also marked with a forte (f) dynamic, playing a similar rhythmic pattern. The fifth staff is for Mid Drum and Low Drum, marked with a forte (f) dynamic, playing a pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The tempo is marked as 'Energetic ♩ = 100'.

Energetic ♩ = 100

The second system of the musical score includes the vocal melody and accompaniment. It consists of five staves. The top staff is the vocal melody in treble clef, with lyrics 'A might - y for - tress is our God, a'. The second staff is the vocal bass line in bass clef. The third staff is for Triangle (Tri HD), marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The fourth staff is for Mid Drum and Low Drum (MD LD), marked with a forte (f) dynamic. The fifth staff is for Organ, marked with a forte (f) dynamic, with a 'GT to Ped' instruction. The tempo is marked as 'Energetic ♩ = 100'. The system includes measure numbers 8 and 9.

14

bul - wark nev - er fail - ing; our help - er he a - mid the

Tri HD

MD LD

20

flood of mor - tal ills pre-vail - ing. For still our an -

Tri HD

MD LD

20

20

24

- cient foe does seek to work us woe; it's craft and pow'r are great, and

Tri HD

MD LD

24

24

28

armed with cru - el hate, on earth is not his e - qual.

Tri HD

MD LD

28

28

Tri HD

MD LD

mf

Did we in our

mf

solo

mf

35

This system contains the first five measures of the piece. The vocal line (top) begins with a rest for four measures, then enters in measure 5 with a half note G4, marked *mf*. The lyrics "Did we in our" are under the first four notes. The Tri HD line plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The MD LD line plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The piano accompaniment (bottom) features chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand, marked *mf*. A box with the number 35 is placed above the vocal line in measure 5.

own strength — con - fide, our striv - ing would be los - ing,

mf

were

Tri HD

MD LD

2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4

This system contains measures 6 through 10. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "own strength — con - fide, our striv - ing would be los - ing," marked *mf*. The Tri HD line continues with eighth notes. The MD LD line continues with eighth notes. The piano accompaniment continues with chords in the right hand and rests in the left hand. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 2/4 in measure 6 and remains 2/4 for the rest of the system. A box with the number 35 is placed above the vocal line in measure 6.

41

not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choos

47

Does ask who that may be? Lord

ing. Christ Je - sus, it is he;

51 55

Sa - ba - oth, his name, from age to age — the same, and he must win

Tri HD

MD LD

51 55

51 55

the bat - tle.

mp

Tri HD

MD LD

mp

SW *mp*

SW to Ped

legato 62

mp And though this world, with ev - il filled, should threat - en to un - do us, we

mp

Tri HD 62

MD LD 62

62

Harm. from *The New Hymnal for American Youth*, 1930

66 will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to tri - umph through us. The sin of war - ing 70

66 70

Tri HD 66 70

MD LD 66 70

66 70

grim, we trem - ble not for them; that rage we can en - dure, for,

Tri HD

MD LD

This system contains the first vocal and piano staves. The vocal staff (treble clef) has lyrics underneath. The piano accompaniment consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate bass line. The vocal staff includes a 'Tri HD' line and a 'MD LD' line, both of which are empty in this system.

low, God's_ grace is sure; one lit - tle word shall free them.

76 80

Tri HD

MD LD

76 80

slow cresc.

This system contains the second vocal and piano staves. The vocal staff (treble clef) has lyrics underneath. The piano accompaniment consists of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate bass line. The vocal staff includes a 'Tri HD' line and a 'MD LD' line, both of which are empty in this system. The piano accompaniment includes a 'slow cresc.' marking.

Tri HD

MD LD

GT

GT to Ped +16'

slow cresc.

This system contains five staves. The top two staves are for Tri HD and MD LD, both showing rests. The third staff is for GT, showing a melodic line with a 'slow cresc.' marking. The fourth and fifth staves are for GT and GT to Ped +16', showing a sustained harmonic accompaniment.

87

f

That word a - bove all eath - ly pow'rs, no thanks to them,

Tri HD

MD LD

87

87

This system contains five staves. The first two staves are vocal parts (Soprano and Alto) with lyrics: "That word a - bove all eath - ly pow'rs, no thanks to them,". The third staff is for Tri HD, the fourth for MD LD, and the fifth for GT. All three piano parts start at measure 87. The GT part includes a 'GT to Ped +16'' marking. The MD LD part includes a 'slow cresc.' marking.

93

a - bid - eth; the Spir - it and the gifts are ours, thru

Tri HD

MD LD

99

him who with us sid - eth. Let goods and kin -

Tri HD

MD LD

99

99

103

- dred go, this mor - tal life al - so; the bod - y they may

Tri HD

MD LD

103

103

107

kill; God's truth a - bid - eth still; his king - dom is for - ev

Tri HD

MD LD

107

107

er.

Tri
HD

MD
LD

The musical score is arranged for a vocal ensemble and keyboard. The vocal parts include a Soprano line (labeled 'er.') and a Bass line. The keyboard accompaniment is divided into three staves: Tri HD (Triangle and Handbell), MD LD (Maracas and Low Drum), and a standard piano accompaniment. The piano part features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

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