Last changed: 10 December 2025. Pastoral Cantata: Jesus as Good Shepherd. Form: Chorus - Recit (T) - Aria (T) - Recit (B) - Aria (B) - Chorale.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/11; BC A65

Misericordias Domini: 2. S. after Easter (BWV 104, 85, 112)

*1 Peter 2:21–25 (Christ as example; you have returned to the shepherd of your souls)

*John. 10:11–16 (Jesus declares himself as Good Shepherd)

Librettist: Unknown; perhaps Christian Weiß the elder

FP: 23 April 1724 (Leipzig: St. Thomas). This cantata belongs to Bach's first cantata cycle in Leipzig (see note).

Alfred Dürr writes, "Whether in painting, poetry, or music, baroque art took special delight in the representation of rural life, and particularly the pastoral setting, which seemed calm and peaceful, far from the despotism and intrigues of absolutist princes, and a valuable aid to the realization of ideal feelings, such as love, faith, innocence, friendship, and so on. It therefore comes as no surprise that the Christian faith of the age was enkindled with special ardour by the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The music of the shepherds—the pastorale—could be directly understood as a symbol of the community watched over by Christ. And a phrase like 'Lead us into Your sheepfold!' (no. 4) could be taken into this world-view without reflection, nor with that touch of the comic which might be felt in it by the modern listener. See Dürr/Jones, p.. 299.

Cantata No. 104

Du Hirte Israel, höre

Instrumentation:
Ob I, II; also Ob d'am I, II
Taille
Vln I, II
Vla
SATB
Continuo

Form (often homophonic choral insertion)
Ritornello (mm. 1-25) GM
Line 1 (25-36) GM-Bm
Line 2 (37-42) E7-DM
Line 3 (43-45) Bm-DM
Rit (45-46) DM
Line 1 (47-52) DM
Line 2 (fugato: 53-71) Bm-GM
Line 1 (72-83) GM-DM
Line 2 (fugato: 84-111) GM-Em
Line 3 (112-114) Am-GM

No. 1. (Coro.)

•Shepherd of Israel sought in prayer: Psalm 80:1 (104/1).

In no. 1, triplet eights (a pastoral effect associated with the reference to God as "Shepherd of Israel" (compare Mendelssohn's "He watching over Israel") and staccato quarters (associated with the imperatives "hear" and "appear," are treated in alternating fashion among oboes, strings, and chorus (oboes apparently an afterthought, see note).

104/1. (Pastorale ♩ = 72.)

1. staccato

Vln I

Vln II

Ritornello

p 3 3 3

G major, G pedal... (Concerning the significance of G major, see note.)

4.

The tonal ascent appears related to the idea that the leading of the Good Shepherd means this life can already be a foretaste of heaven (see note for more).

Rocking in Obs, Vln II, Vla.

8.

12.

16.

D major

D7

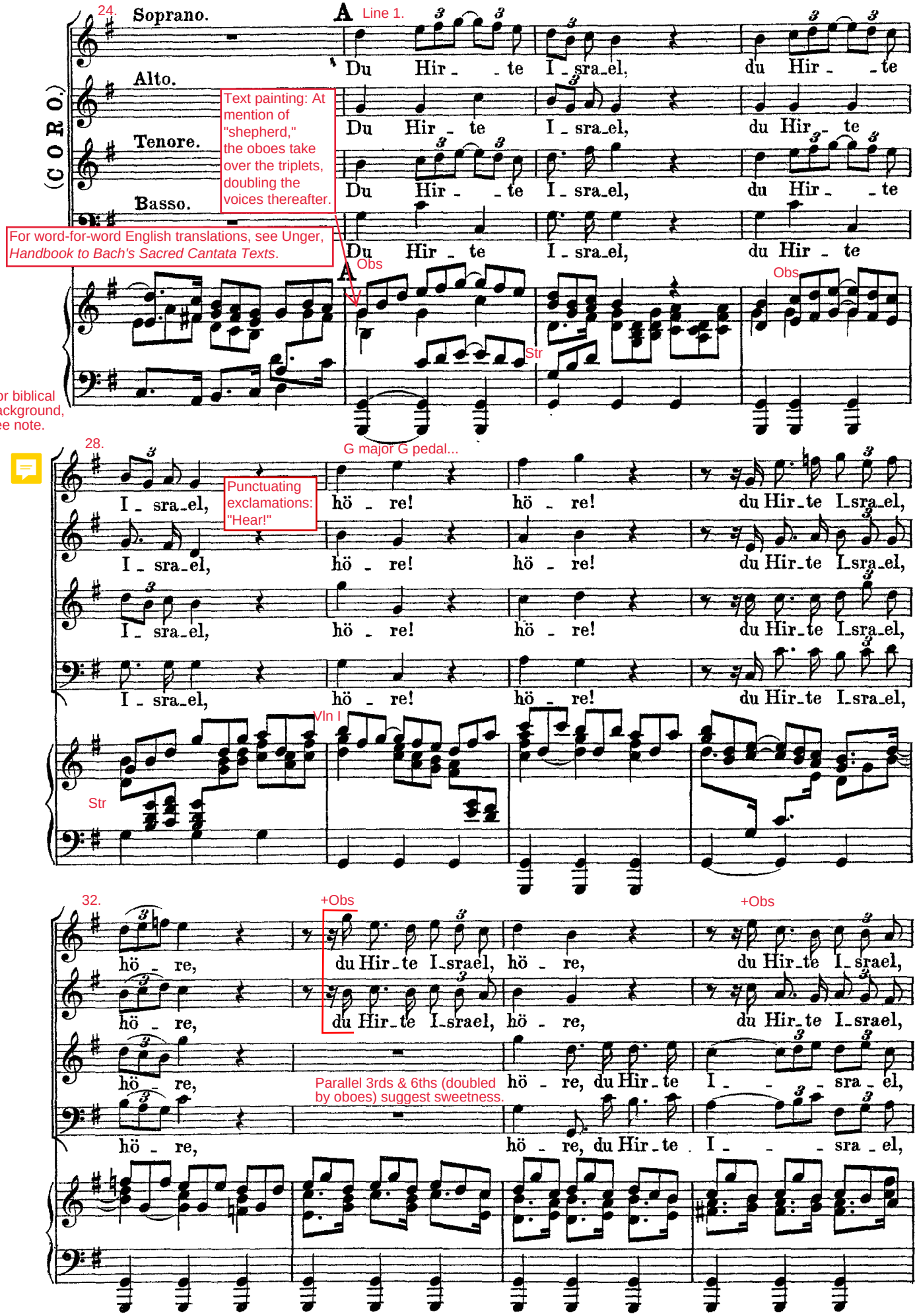
G major

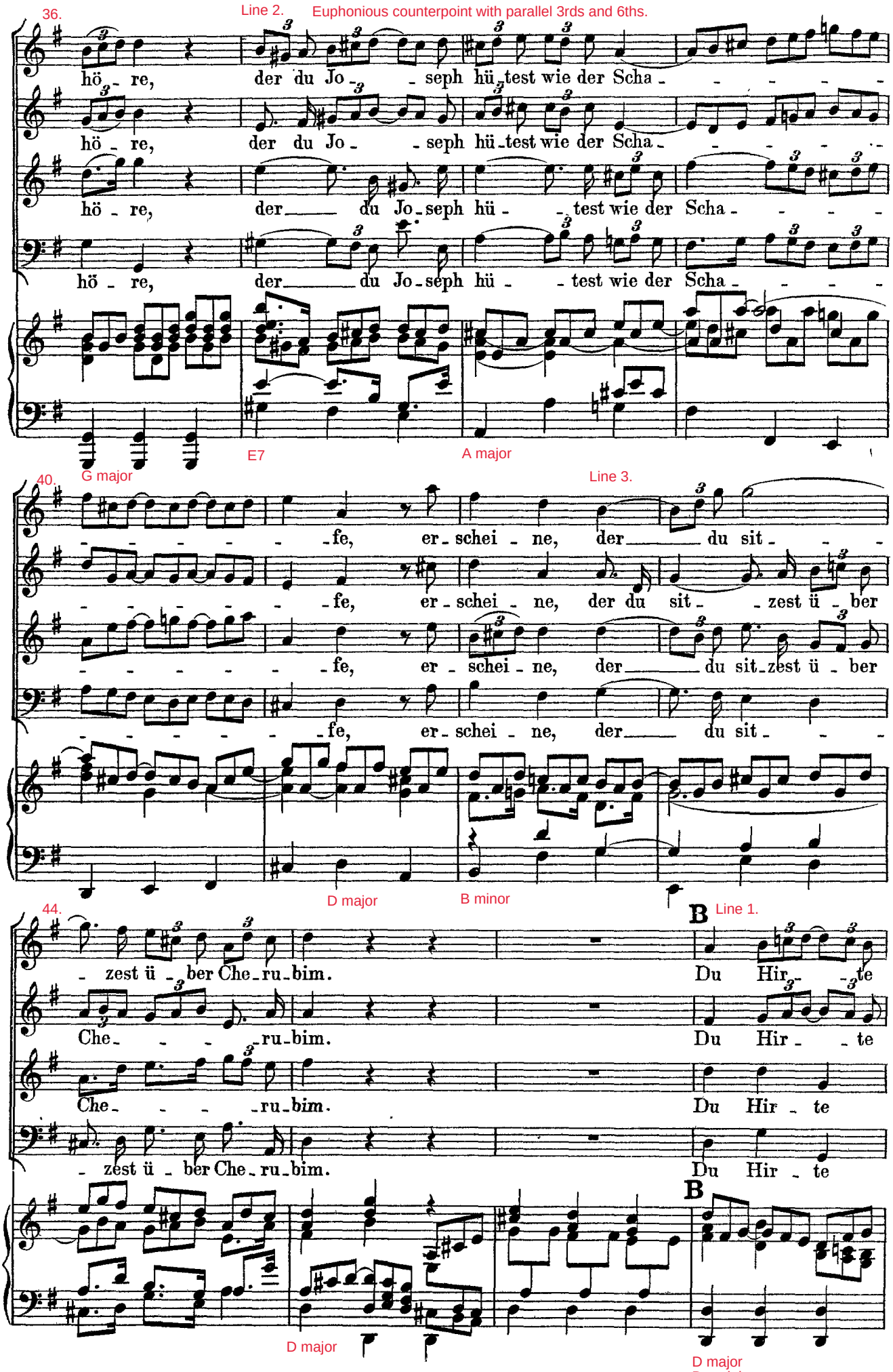
G7

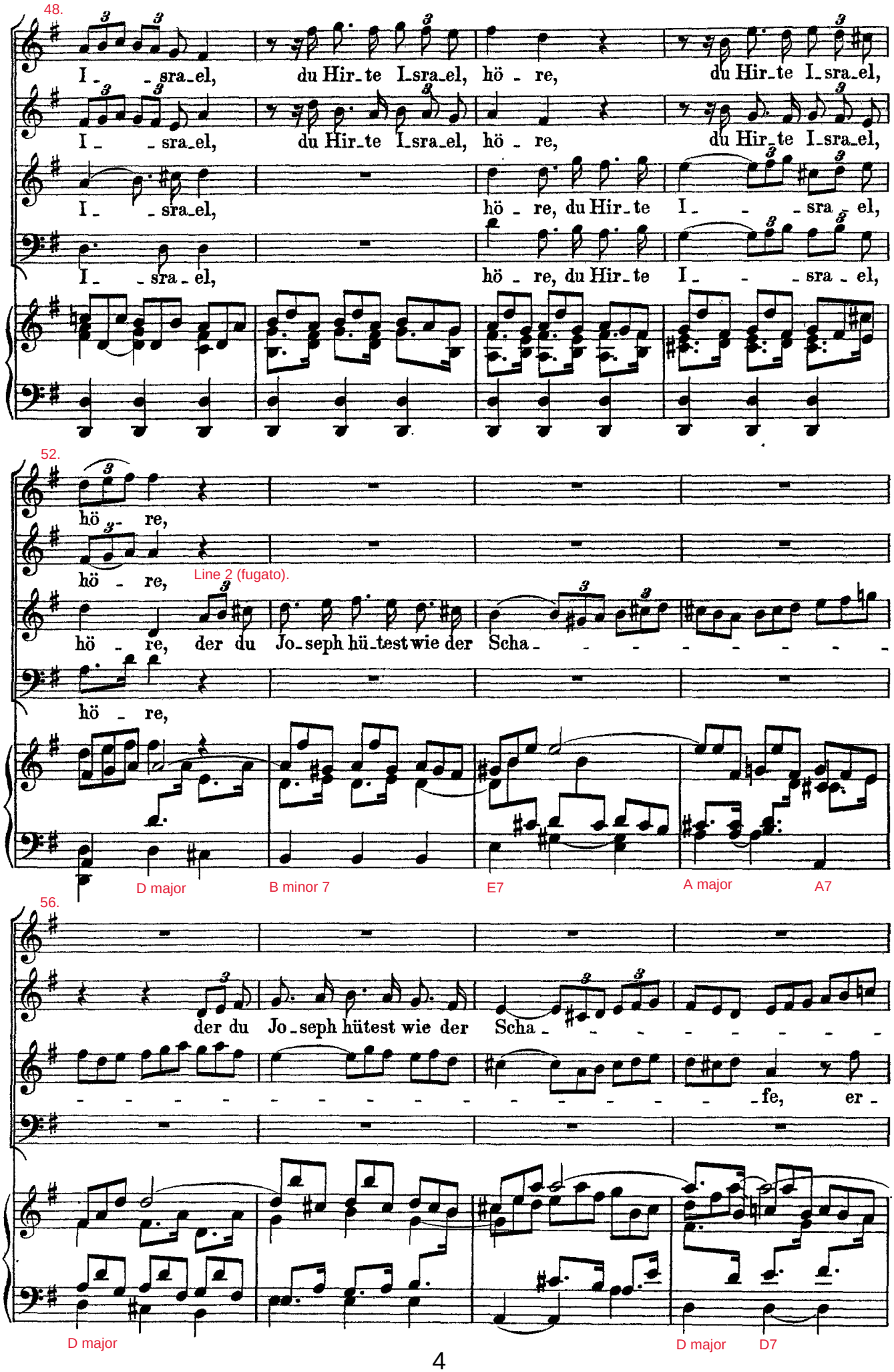
20.

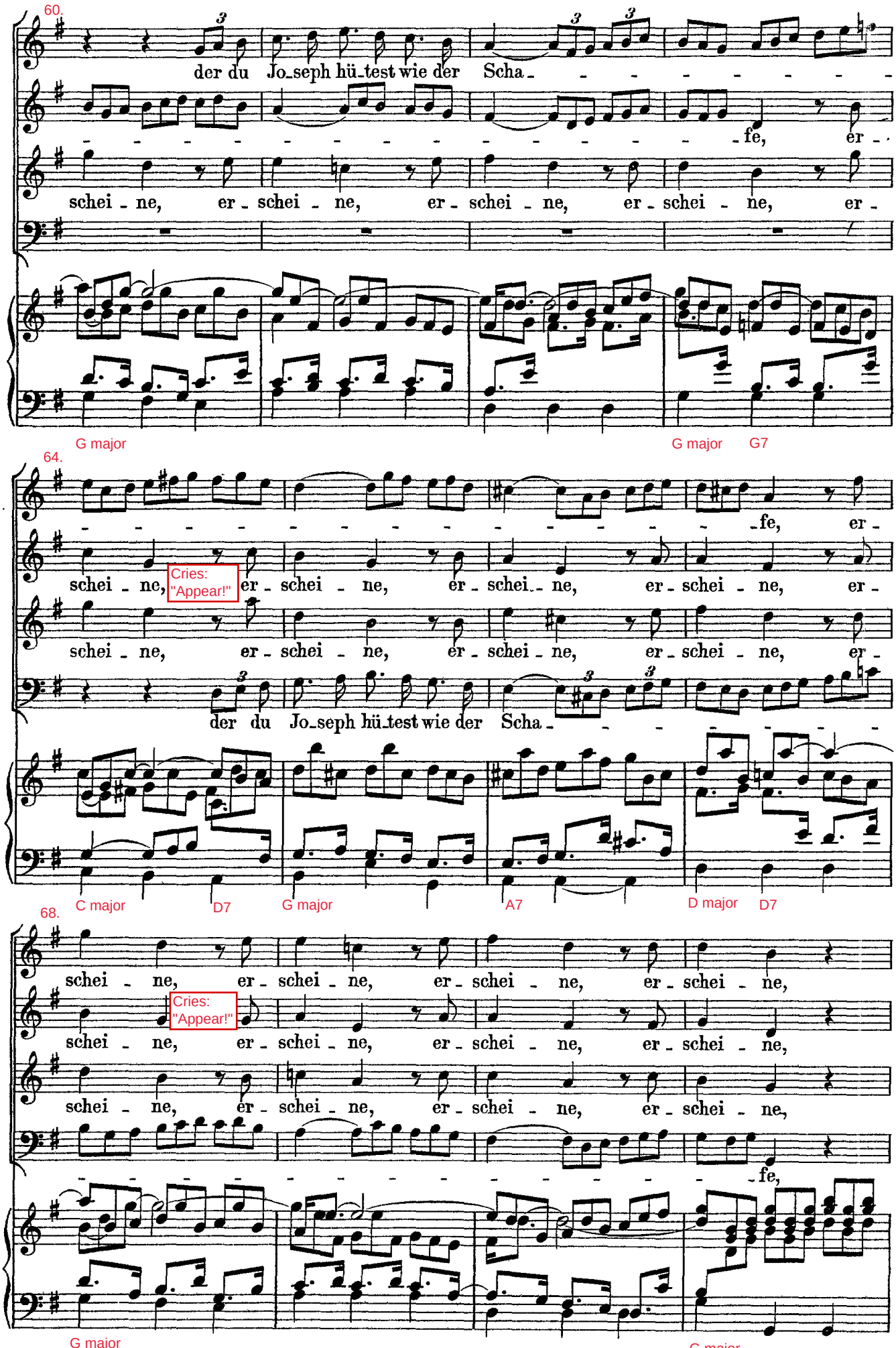
C major

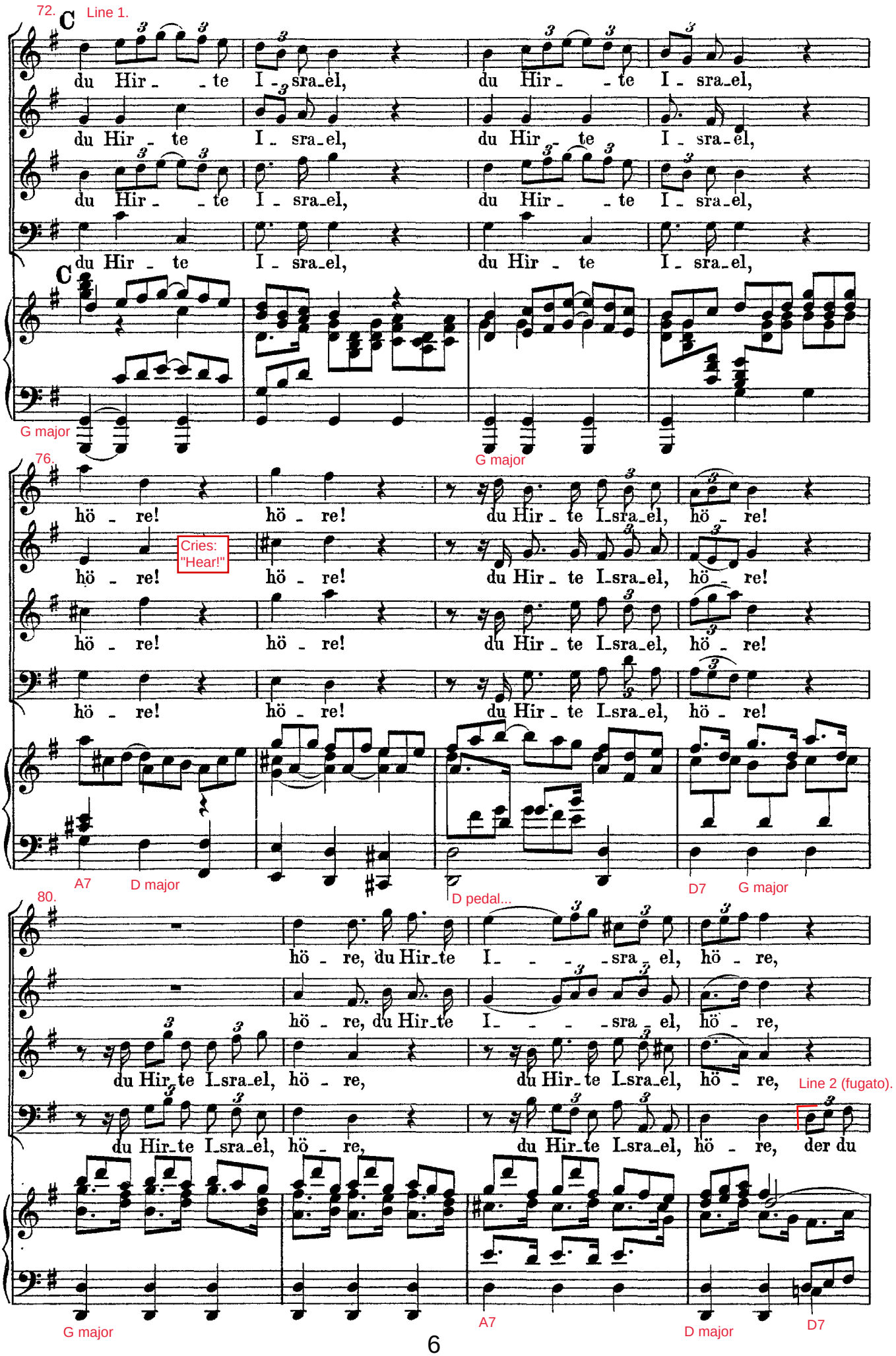
To create an Arcadian picture of heavenly pastures (but also the earthly foretaste of it), Bach employs flowing triplets, oboes, and euphonious harmonies in the key of G major (with pedal points providing rustic drones—perhaps representing constancy and certainty in the safety of the shepherd's hands).

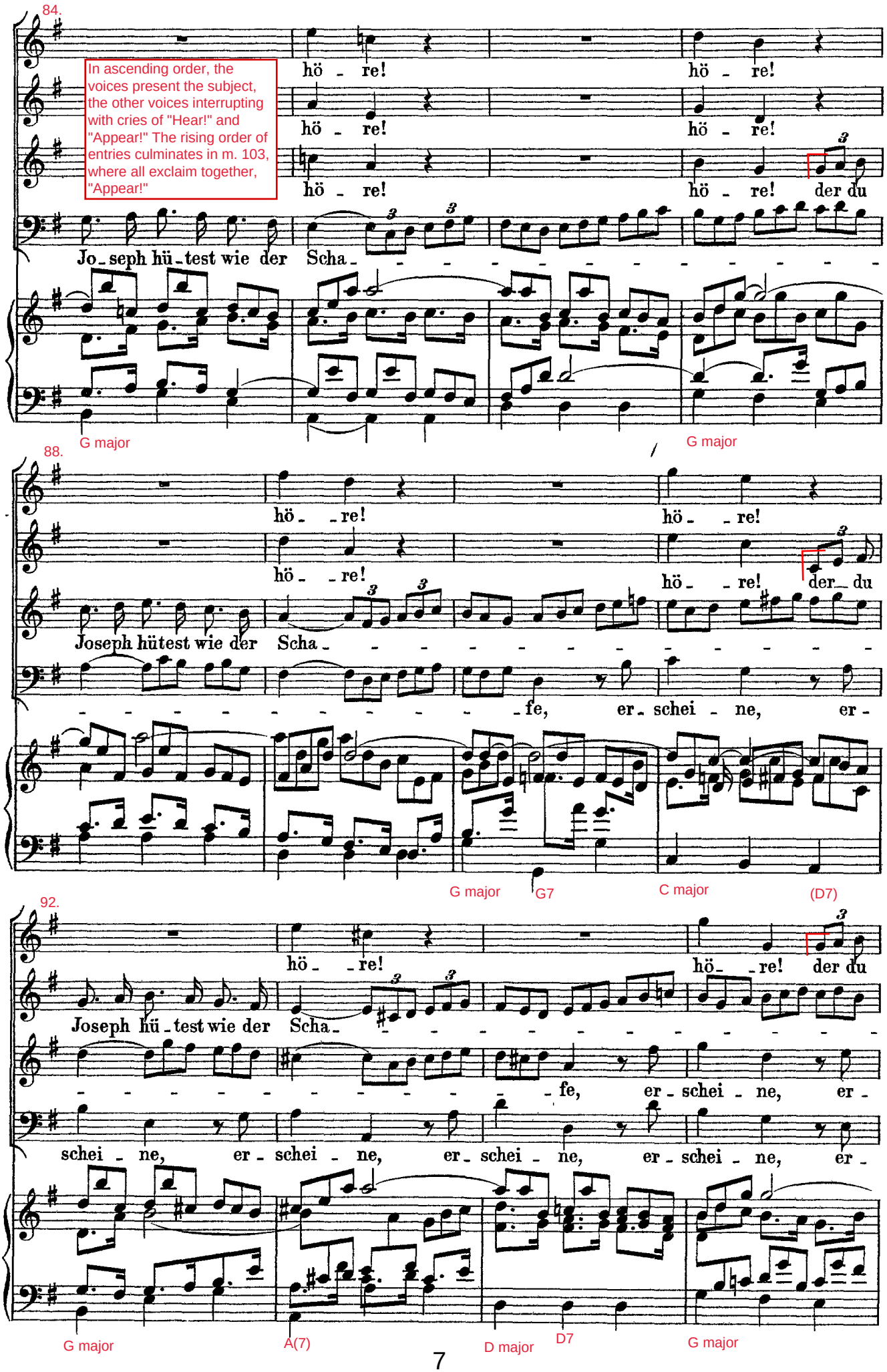



36.
Line 2.
Euphonious counterpoint with parallel 3rds and 6ths.
hö - re, der du Jo - seph hü - test wie der Scha -
hö - re, der du Jo - seph hü - test wie der Scha -
hö - re, der du Jo - seph hü - test wie der Scha -
hö - re, der du Jo - seph hü - test wie der Scha -
E7
A major
G major
40.
Line 3.
- fe, er - schei - ne, der du sit -
- fe, er - schei - ne, der du sit - zest ü - ber
- fe, er - schei - ne, der du sit - zest ü - ber
- fe, er - schei - ne, der du sit -
D major
B minor
44.
B
Line 1.
- zest ü - ber Che - ru - bim. Du Hir - te
Che - ru - bim. Du Hir - te
Che - ru - bim. Du Hir - te
- zest ü - ber Che - ru - bim. Du Hir - te
B
D major
D major
D pedal...

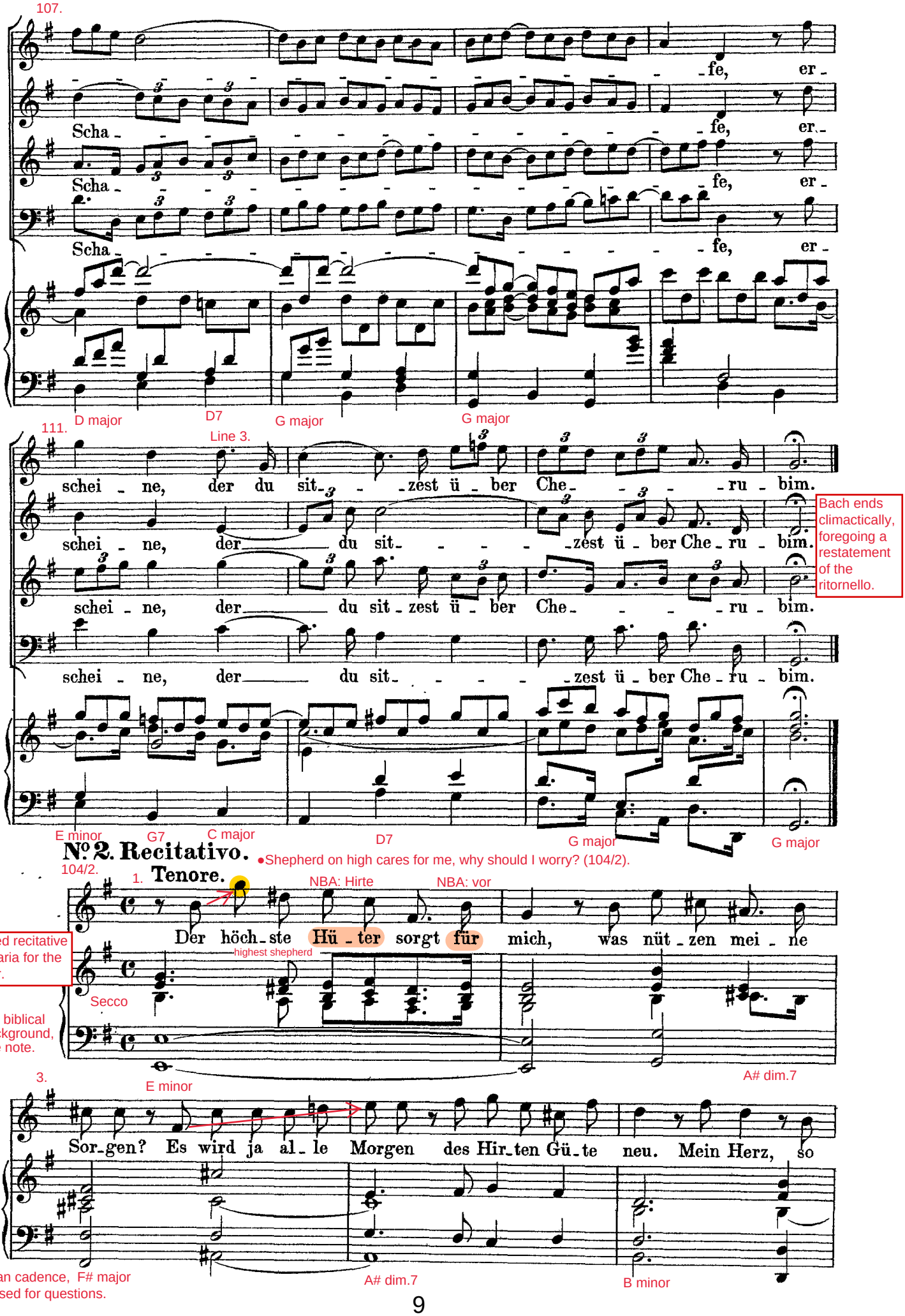

48.
I - sra-el, du Hir-te Is-ra-el, hö - re, du Hir-te Is-ra-el,
I - sra-el, du Hir-te Is-ra-el, hö - re, du Hir-te Is-ra-el,
I - sra-el, hö - re, du Hir-te I - sra - el,
I - sra - el, hö - re, du Hir-te I - sra - el,
52.
hö - re,
hö - re,
Line 2 (fugato).
hö - re, der du Jo-seph hü-test wie der Scha - - - - - - - -
hö - re,
D major
B minor 7
E7
A major
A7
56.
der du Jo-seph hütest wie der Scha - - - - - - - -
- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - fe, er -
D major
D major
D7


60.
der du Jo_seph hü_test wie der Scha_
fe, er_
schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_
G major
G major G7
64.
fe, er_
schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_
Cries: "Appear!"
schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_
der du Jo_seph hü_test wie der Scha_
C major D7 G major A7 D major D7
68.
schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne,
Cries: "Appear!"
schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne,
schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne, er_schei_ne,
fe,
G major
G major
G pedal...

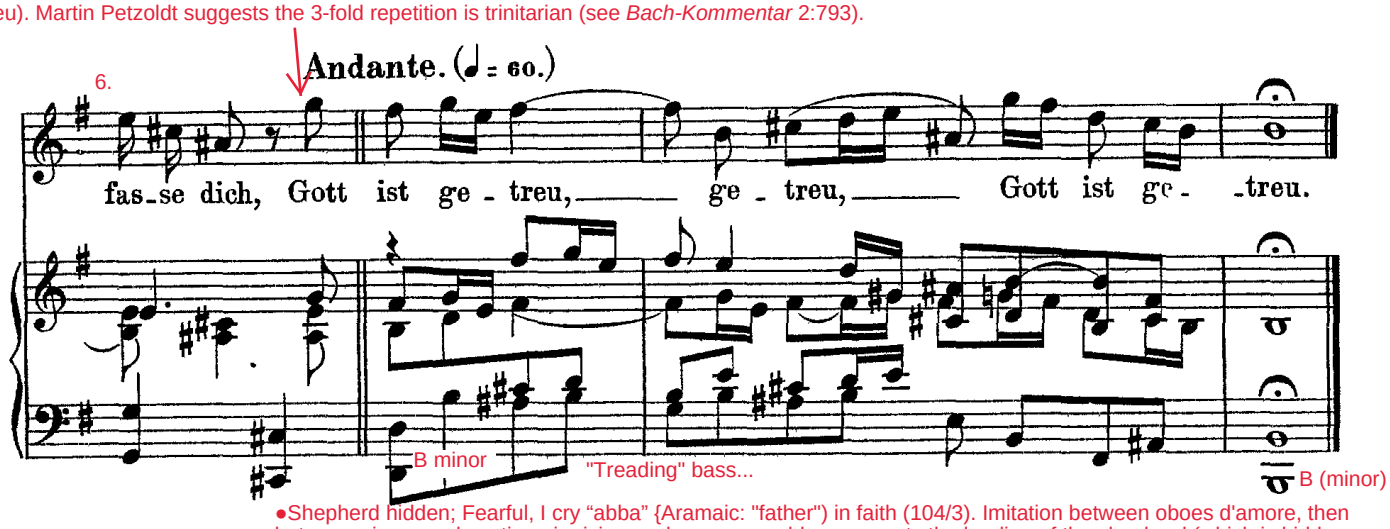

72.
C
Line 1.
du Hir - te I - sra - el, du Hir - te I - sra - el,
du Hir - te I - sra - el, du Hir - te I - sra - el,
du Hir - te I - sra - el, du Hir - te I - sra - el,
du Hir - te I - sra - el, du Hir - te I - sra - el,
C
G major
G major
76.
hö - re! hö - re! du Hir - te I - sra - el, hö - re!
Cries: "Hear!"
hö - re! hö - re! du Hir - te I - sra - el, hö - re!
hö - re! hö - re! du Hir - te I - sra - el, hö - re!
hö - re! hö - re! du Hir - te I - sra - el, hö - re!
A7
D major
D pedal...
D7
G major
80.
hö - re, du Hir - te I - - - - sra - el, hö - re,
hö - re, du Hir - te I - - - - sra - el, hö - re,
du Hir - te I - sra - el, hö - re, du Hir - te I - sra - el, hö - re,
Line 2 (fugato).
du Hir - te I - sra - el, hö - re, du Hir - te I - sra - el, hö - re, der du
G major
A7
D major
D7


84.
In ascending order, the voices present the subject, the other voices interrupting with cries of "Hear!" and "Appear!" The rising order of entries culminates in m. 103, where all exclaim together, "Appear!"
hö - re!
hö - re!
hö - re!
hö - re!
hö - re!
hö - re!
der du
Jo - seph hü - test wie der Scha -
G major
G major
88.
hö - - re!
hö - - re!
hö - - re!
hö - - re!
der du
Joseph hütest wie der Scha -
- fe, er - schei - ne, er -
G major
G7
C major
(D7)
92.
hö - - re!
hö - - re!
der du
Joseph hü - test wie der Scha -
- fe, er - schei - ne, er -
schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er -
G major
A(7)
D major
D7
G major

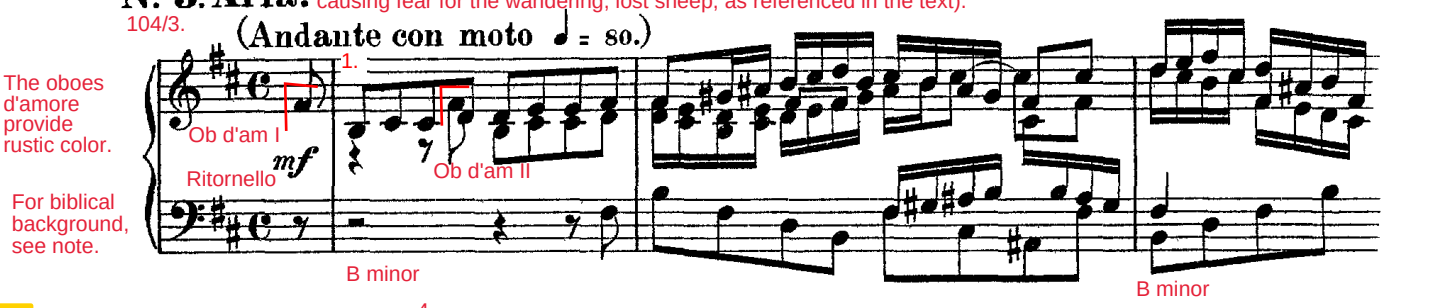
96.
Joseph hü - test wie der Scha -
- fe, er - schei - ne, er -
schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er -
schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er -
G major
G7
C major
100.
All voices declaim together...
- fe, er - schei - ne, er -
schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er -
schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er -
schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er - schei - ne, er -
C major
D7
B minor
104.
schei - ne, er - schei - ne, der du Jo - seph hü - test wie der Scha -
schei - ne, er - schei - - ne, der du Jo - seph hü - test wie der
schei - ne, er - schei - - ne, der du Jo - seph hü - test wie der
schei - ne, er - schei - ne, der du Jo - seph hü - test wie der
D7
G major
G7
C major
A7


107.
fe, er -
Scha - fe, er -
Scha - fe, er -
Scha - fe, er -
D major
D7
G major
G major
111.
Line 3.
schei - ne, der du sit - zest ü - ber Che - ru - bim.
schei - ne, der du sit - zest ü - ber Che - ru - bim.
schei - ne, der du sit - zest ü - ber Che - ru - bim.
Bach ends climactically, foregoing a restatement of the ritornello.
E minor
G7
C major
D7
G major
G major
No. 2. Recitativo.
•Shepherd on high cares for me, why should I worry? (104/2).
104/2.
1. Tenore.
NBA: Hirte
NBA: vor
Der höch - ste Hü - ter sorgt für mich, was nüt - zen mei - ne
highest shepherd
Paired recitative and aria for the tenor.
Secco
For biblical background, see note.
E minor
3.
A# dim.7
Sor - gen? Es wird ja al - le Morgen des Hir - ten Gü - te neu. Mein Herz, so
Phrygian cadence, F# major often used for questions.
A# dim.7
B minor

The arioso conclusion over treading bass alludes to Corinthains 10:13: …God is faithful (Luther 1545: Gott ist getreu). Martin Petzoldt suggests the 3-fold repetition is trinitarian (see *Bach-Kommentar* 2:793).

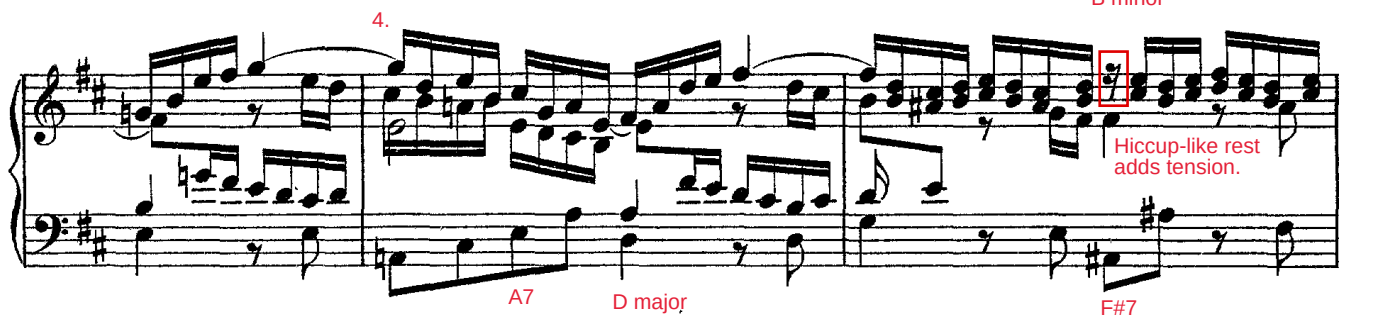


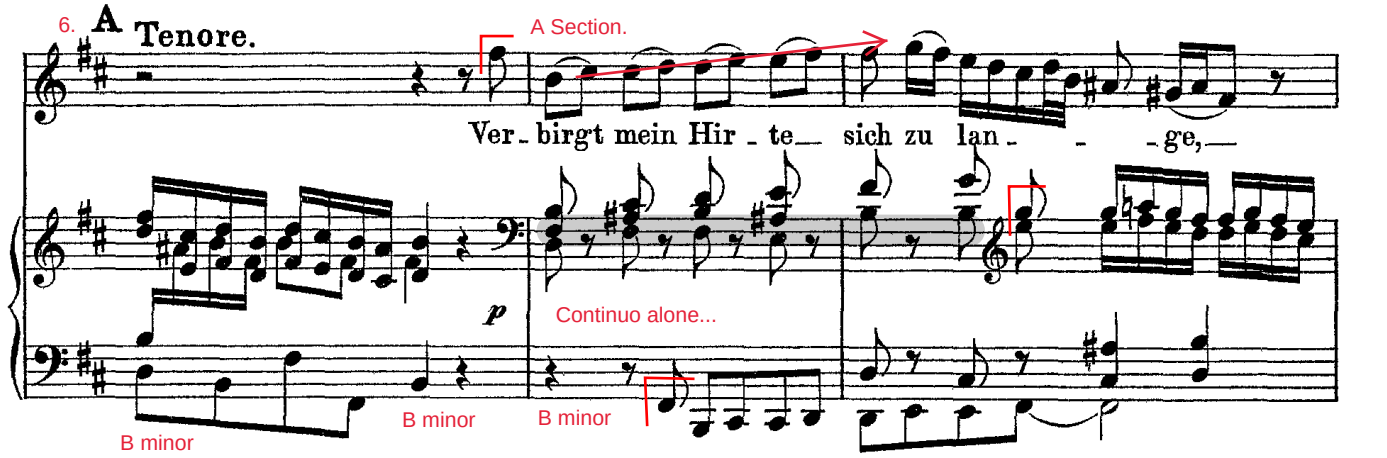
●Shepherd hidden; Fearful, I cry “abba” {Aramaic: "father") in faith (104/3). Imitation between oboes d'amore, then between singer and continuo in rising scales, presumably represents the leading of the shepherd (which is hidden, causing fear for the wandering, lost sheep, as referenced in the text).

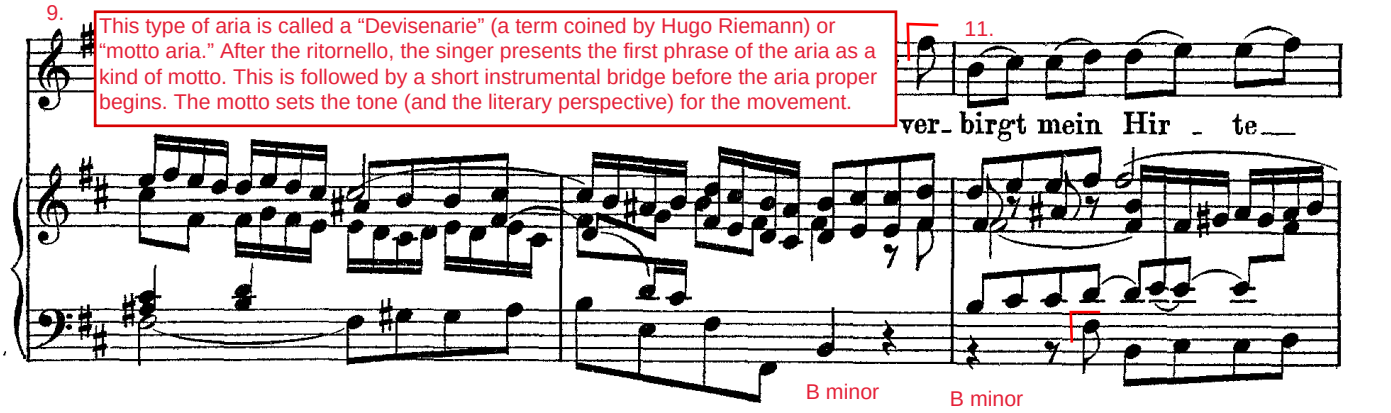


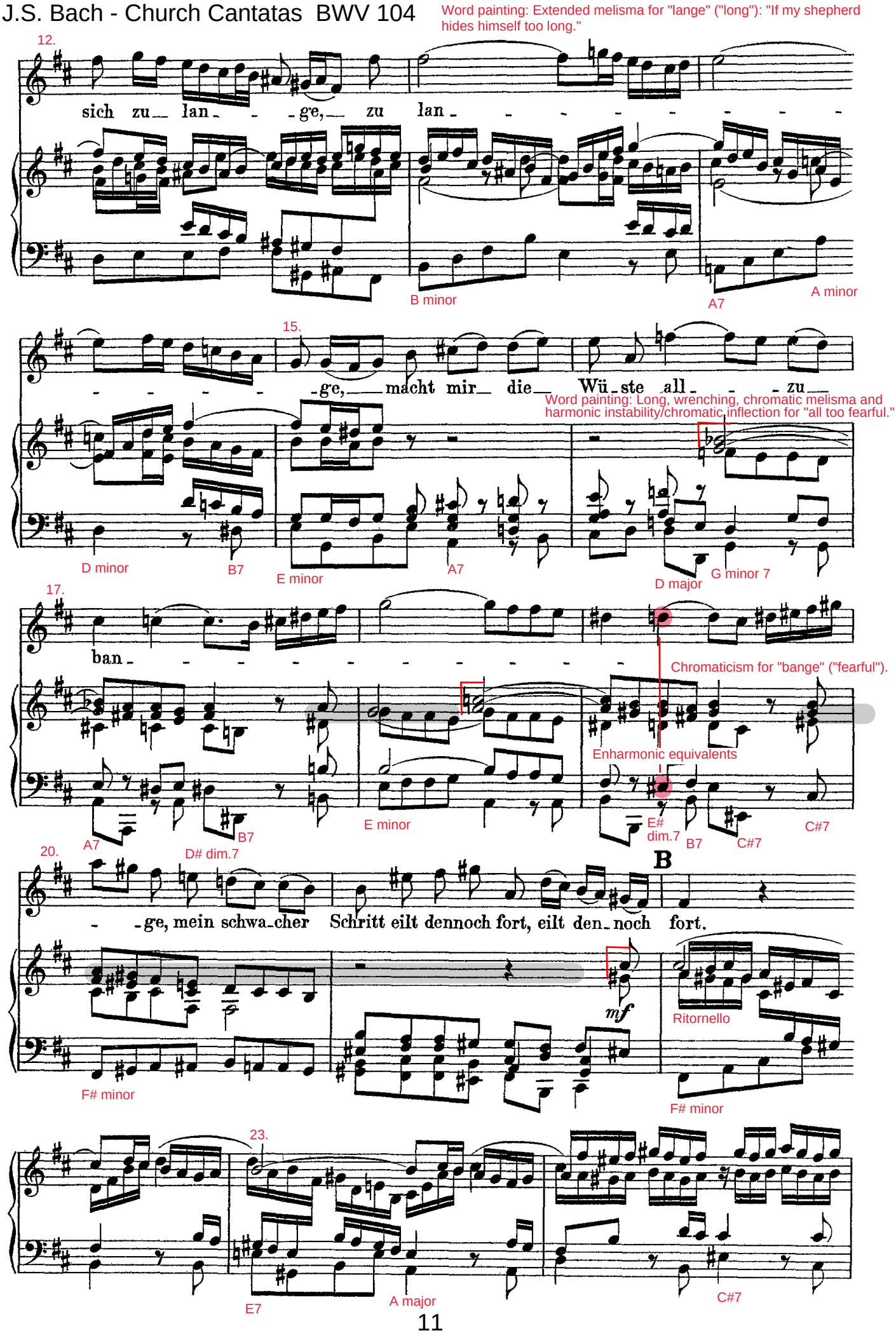
The oboes d'amore provide rustic color.

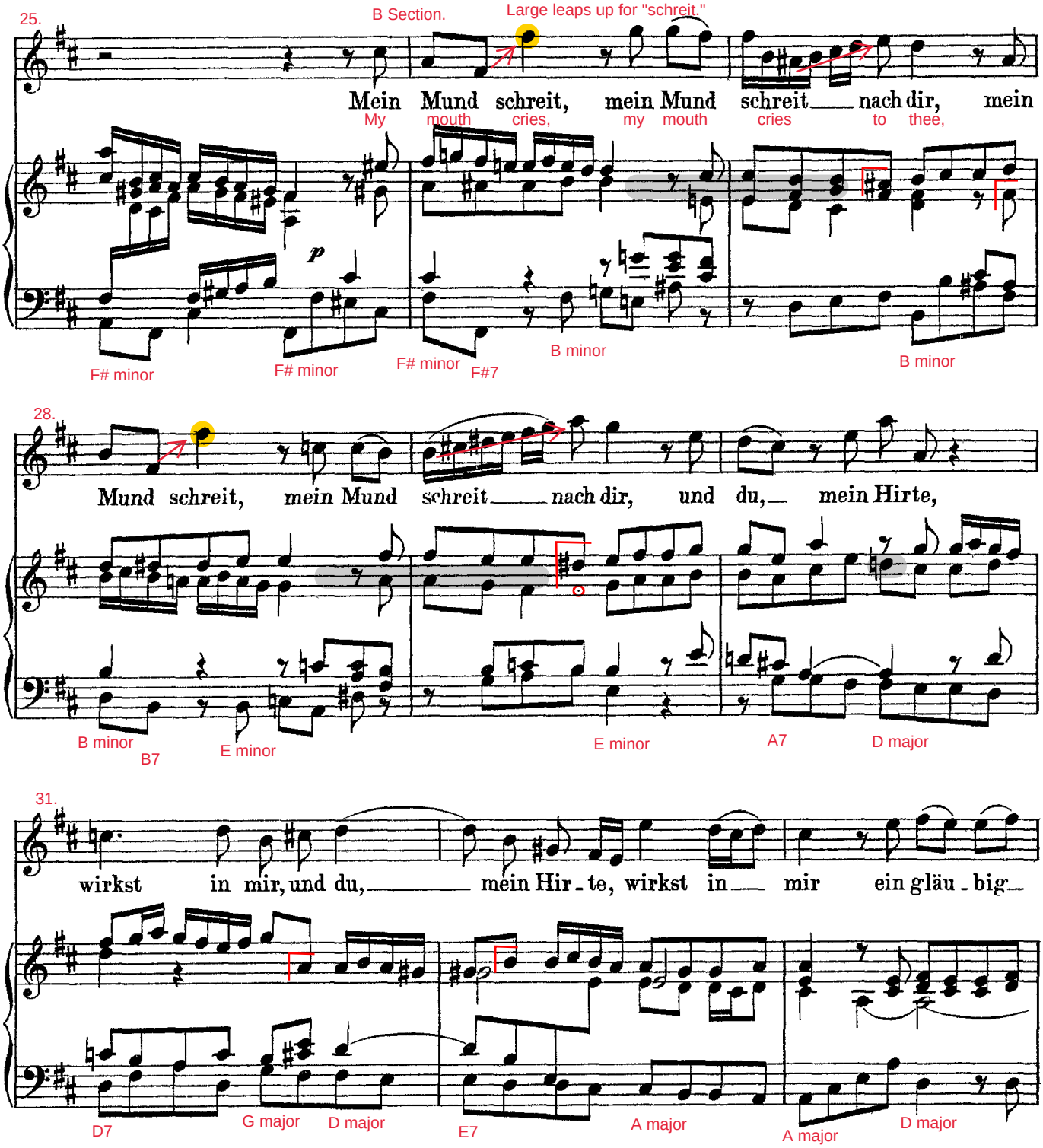
For biblical background, see note.



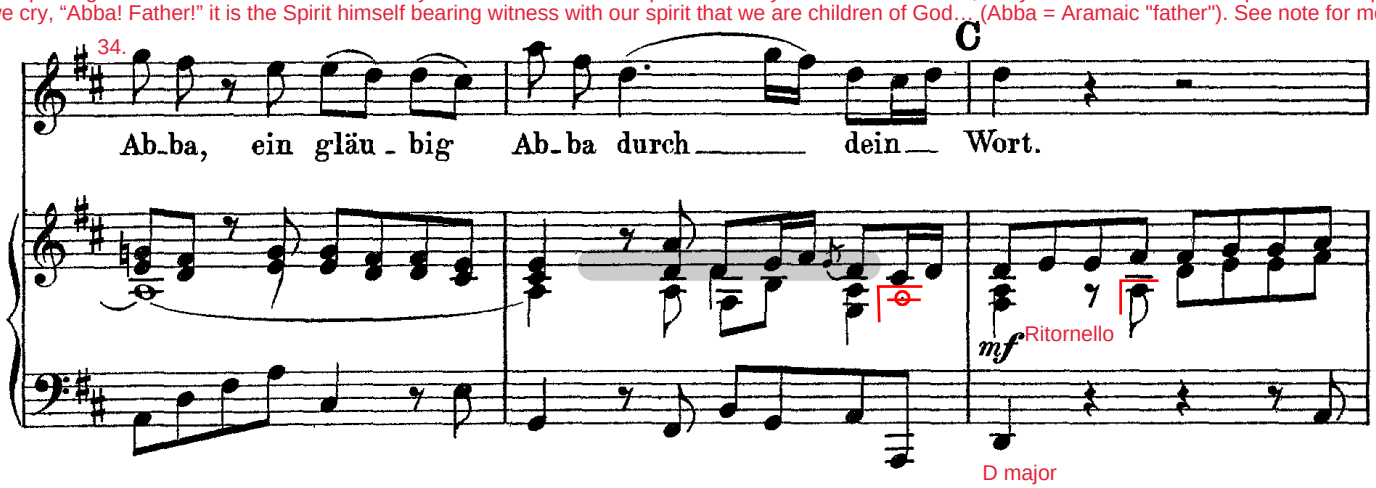




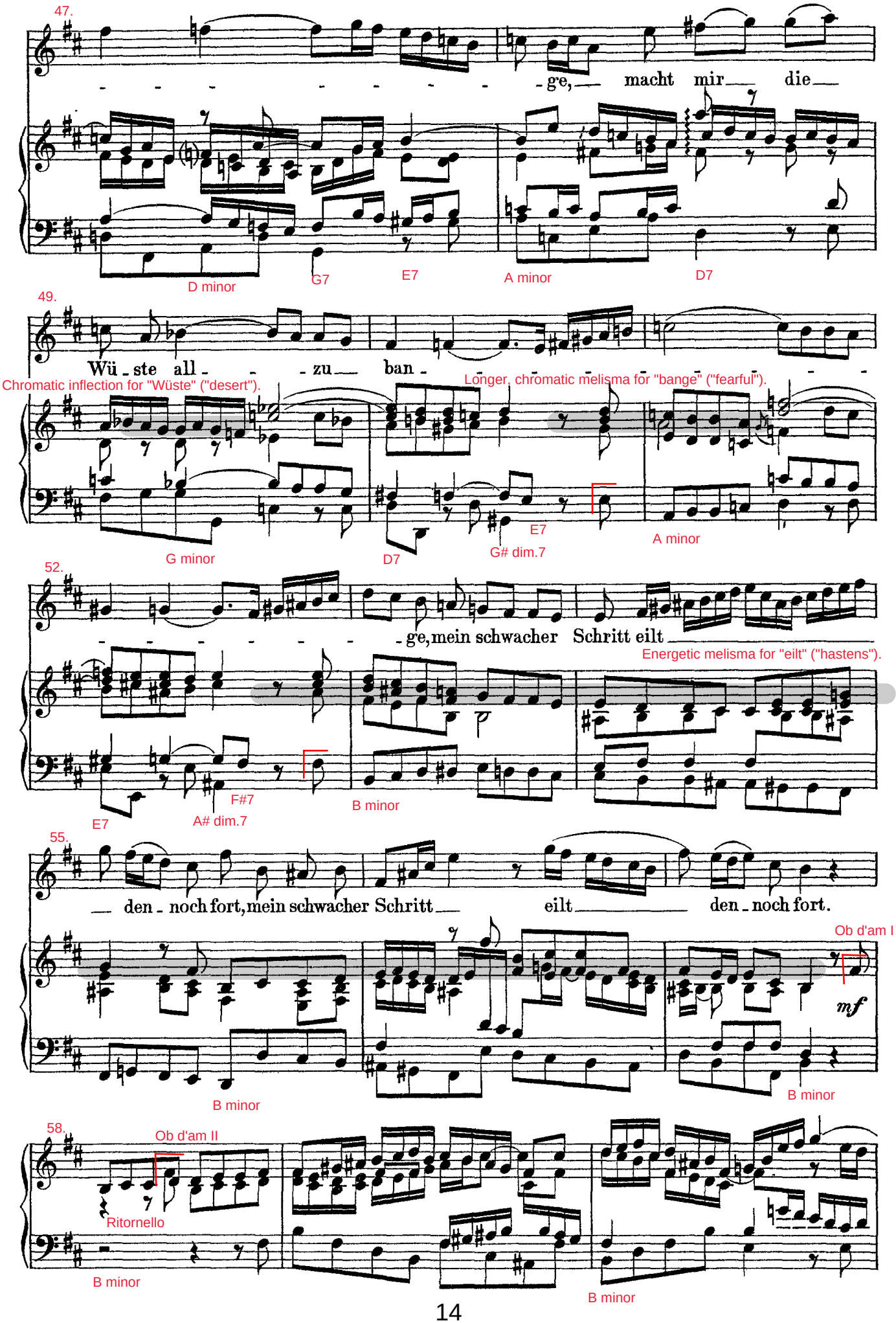

Word painting: Extended melisma for "lange" ("long"): "If my shepherd hides himself too long."
12.
sich zu lan - ge, zu lan
B minor
A7
A minor
15.
ge, macht mir die Wü - ste all - zu
Word painting: Long, wrenching, chromatic melisma and harmonic instability/chromatic inflection for "all too fearful."
D minor
B7
E minor
A7
D major
G minor 7
17.
ban
Chromaticism for "bange" ("fearful").
Enharmonic equivalents
A7
B7
E minor
E#
dim.7
B7
C#7
C#7
20.
B
ge, mein schwa-cher Schritt eilt dennoch fort, eilt den-noch fort.
mf
Ritornello
F# minor
F# minor
23.
E7
A major
C#7



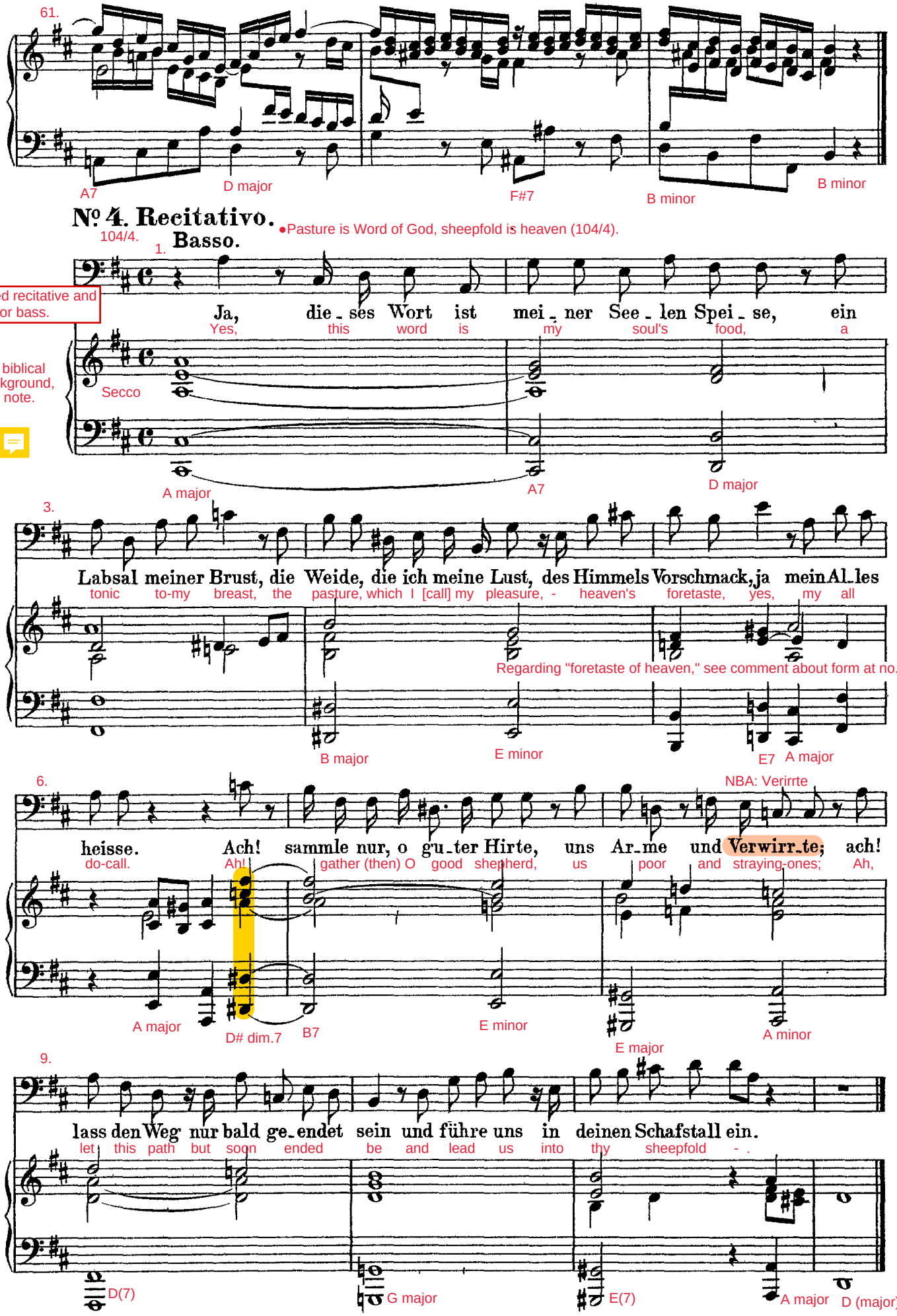
Allusion to passages such as Romans 8:15–17. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God… (Abba = Aramaic "father"). See note for more.



A' Section. The melismas for "lange" ("long") and "bange" ("fearful") are now even longer.
37.
Ver - birgt mein Hir - te sich zu lan -
Ascending duples suggests rising anxiety...
p
E7
A major
B7
A major
E minor
A# dim.7
B minor
A major
40.
Word painting: Even longer melisma for "lange" ("long"): "If my shepherd hides himself too long."
-ge,
B minor
F#7
B minor
B minor
43.
ver - birgt mein Hir - te
B minor
B minor
B minor
45.
sich zu lan -
Word painting: Another long melisma for "lange" ("long"): "If my shepherd hides himself too long."
D7
D# dim.7
E minor
A minor
D7


47.
ge, macht mir die
D minor
G7
E7
A minor
D7
49.
Wü ste all zu ban
Chromatic inflection for "Wüste" ("desert").
Longer, chromatic melisma for "bange" ("fearful").
G minor
D7
E7
G# dim.7
A minor
52.
ge, mein schwacher Schritt eilt
Energetic melisma for "eilt" ("hastens").
E7
F#7
A# dim.7
B minor
55.
den noch fort, mein schwacher Schritt eilt den noch fort.
Ob d'am I
mf
B minor
B minor
58.
Ob d'am II
Ritornello
B minor
B minor

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 104



The text alludes to Jesus' words: "He who does not enter the sheepfold (Luther 1545: Schafstall) by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep…My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:1–3, 27–28).

In contrast to the Old Testament invocation of no. 1, the libretto now presents a New Testament perspective as reflected in Jesus' words in the day's Gospel: "I am the good shepherd..." (John 10:14) as well as in the day's Epistle: "You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd...of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25). The aria's text reflects the Christian doctrines of "Already - Not Yet" and "Foretaste of Heaven": Christ's kingdom and the believer's blessings are already here but not yet consummated. Bach expresses these ideas with contrasting textures and dynamics and with melodic anticipations.

Da capo **No. 5. Aria.** •Flock of Jesus receive kindness now & reward later (104/5).

104/5.

(Pastorale ♩. = 66.)

Ob d'am I/Vln I
Vln II
Vla

Ritornello

mf

The siciliano-like triplet motion, pedal points, and oboe d'amore underscore the pastoral theme (as in movement no. 1).

D major
D pedal...

3.

D major

D major

E7

6. **A Basso.**

Variant of ritornello melody...

For biblical background, see note.

Be - glück - te Her - de, Je - su Schafe, be - glückte Her - de,

The dynamic markings are original...

p

A major

A major

D major
D pedal...

"Foretaste of heaven" expressed with contrasting texture.

9.

Je - su Schafe, die Welt ist euch ein Himmelreich, ein Him - - mel - reich, die Welt ist

Continuo alone...

D major

E7

11.

Anticipations suggest "foretaste of heaven" as referenced in the text.

euch ein Him - mel - reich, die Welt ist euch ein Him - mel - reich, be - glück -

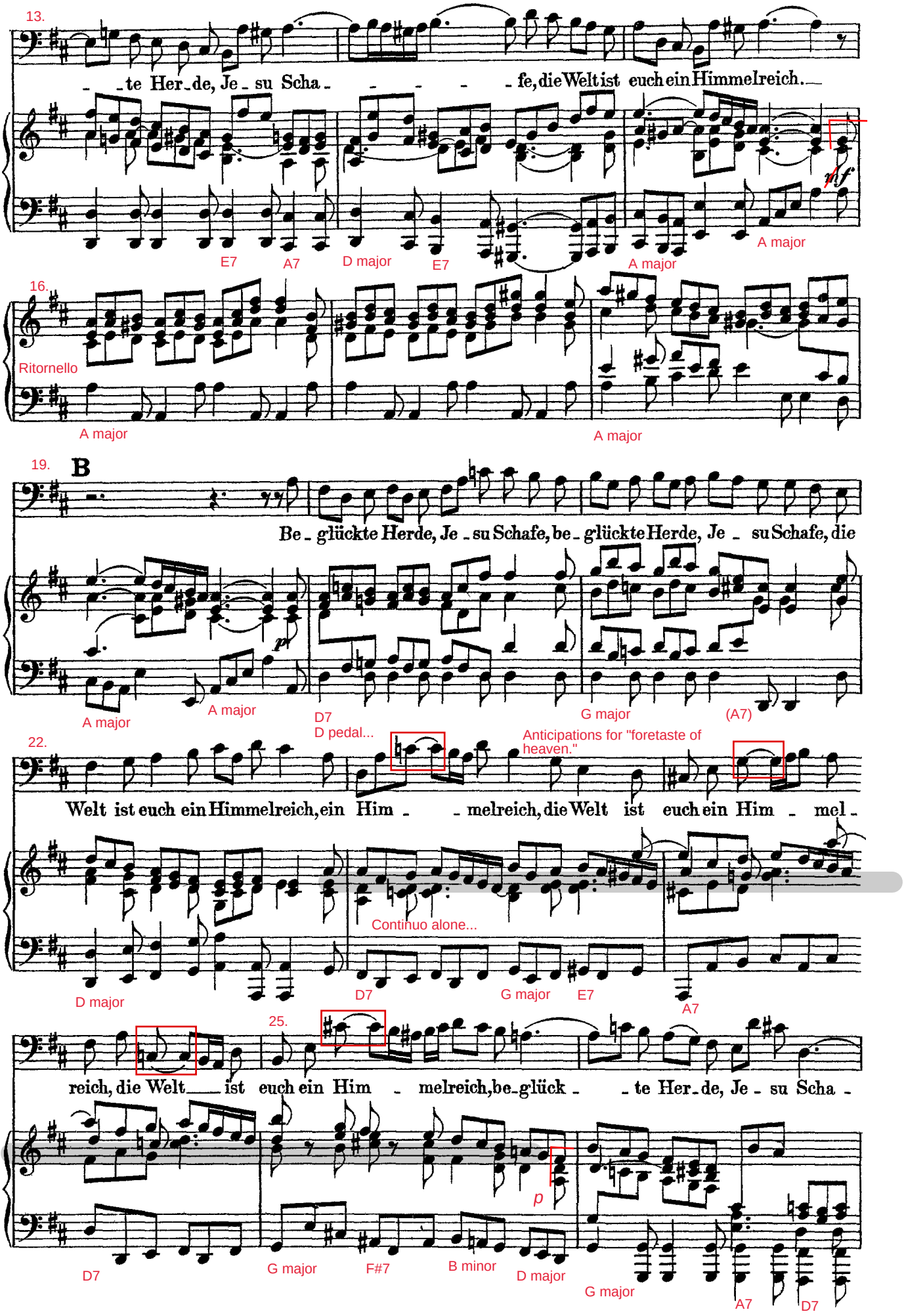
p

A major

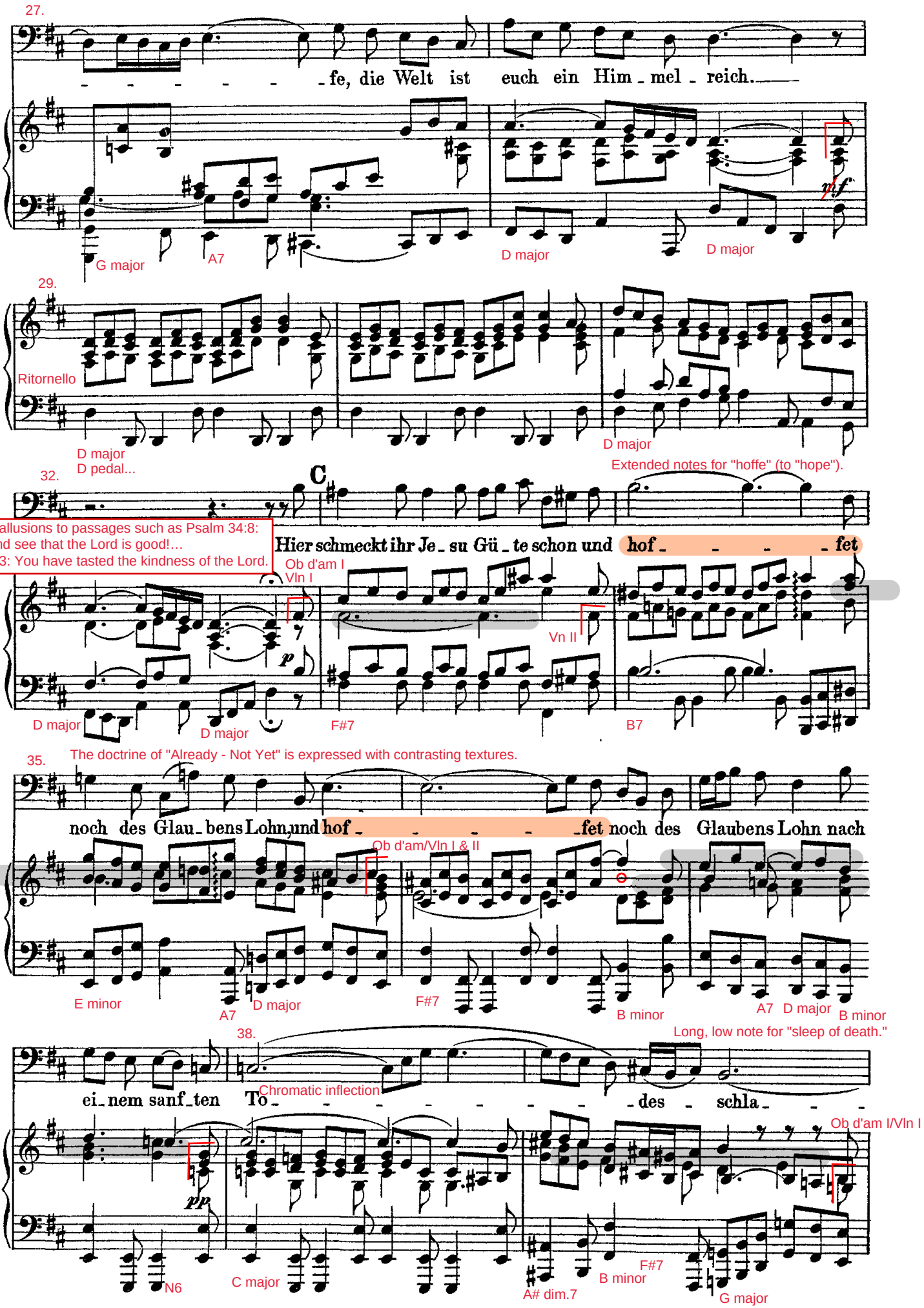
C#7

F# minor

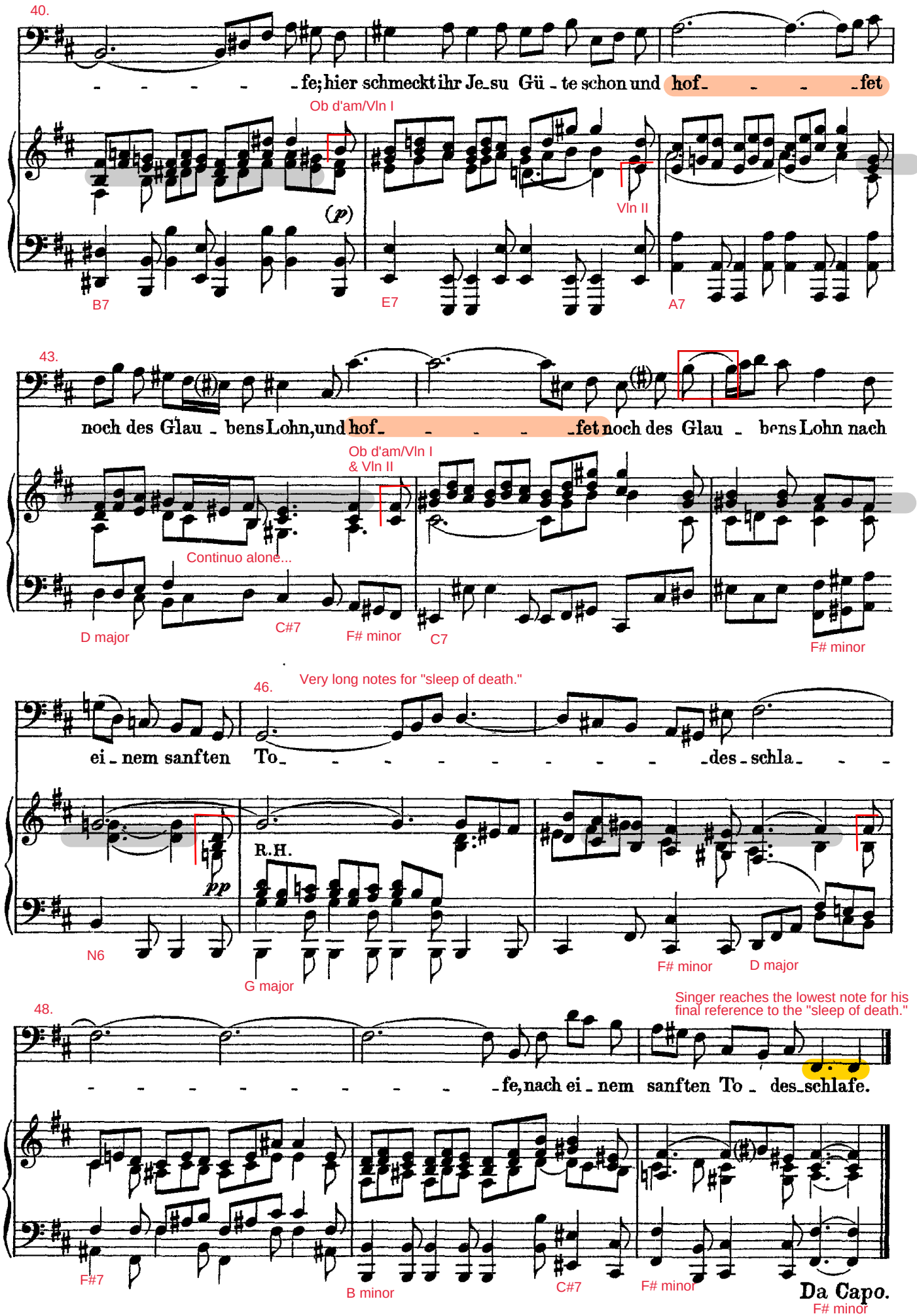
A major


13.
te Her de, Je su Scha fe, die Welt ist euch ein Himmelreich.
mf
E7
A7
D major
E7
A major
A major
16.
Ritornello
A major
A major
19.
B
Be glückte Herde, Je su Schafe, be glückte Herde, Je su Schafe, die
p
A major
A major
D7
D pedal...
G major
(A7)
22.
Anticipations for "foretaste of heaven."
Welt ist euch ein Himmelreich, ein Him melreich, die Welt ist euch ein Him mel
Continuo alone...
D major
D7
G major
E7
A7
25.
reich, die Welt ist euch ein Him melreich, be glück te Her de, Je su Scha
p
D7
G major
F#7
B minor
D major
G major
A7
D7

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 104



The reference to "sanften Todesschlafe" ("gentle sleep of death") is prepared with a N6 chord, then the oboes reenter pianissimo with the pastoral triplets (2x).


40.
-fe; hier schmeckt ihr Je-su Gü-te schon und hof- - - -fet
Ob d'am/Vln I
(p)
Vln II
B7
E7
A7
43.
noch des Glau-bens Lohn, und hof- - - - -fet noch des Glau-bens Lohn nach
Ob d'am/Vln I & Vln II
Continuo alone...
D major
C#7
F# minor
C7
F# minor
46.
Very long notes for "sleep of death."
ei-nem sanften To- - - - - - - - -des-schla- - -
R.H.
pp
N6
G major
F# minor
D major
48.
Singer reaches the lowest note for his final reference to the "sleep of death."
- - - - - - - - -fe, nach ei-nem sanften To-des-schlafe.
F#7
B minor
C#7
F# minor
Da Capo.
F# minor

This is the opening stanza of the 1598 chorale (a metrical paraphrase of Psalm 23) by Cornelius Becker (1561–1604).

104/6. **No. 6. Choral.** (Mel: „Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr'.“)

(See also 85/3.) ●Shepherd's Psalm: Psalm 23:1–2 (104/6).

Soprano. 1/5.

+Ob I Vln I

Der Herr ist mein ge - treu - er Hirt, dem ich mich ganz ver - trau - e!
zur Weid' er mich, sein Schäflein, führt, auf schö - ner, grü - ner Au - e!

Alto.

+Ob II Vln II

Der Herr ist mein ge - treu - er Hirt, dem ich mich ganz ver - trau - e!
zur Weid' er mich, sein Schäflein, führt, auf schö - ner, grü - ner Au - e!

Tenore.

+Taille Vla

Der Herr ist mein ge - treu - er Hirt, dem ich mich ganz vertraue!
zur Weid' er mich, sein Schäflein, führt, auf schöner, grüner Au - e!

Basso.

Der Herr ist mein ge - treu - er Hirt, dem ich mich ganz ver - trau - e!
zur Weid' er mich, sein Schäflein, führt, auf schö - ner, grü - ner Au - e!

NBA: grünen

Martin Petzoldt suggests the tenor's voice leading suggests a wayward sheep hurrying to catch up and that this detail underscores the catechismal function of the chorale (encouraging believers to trust the Good Shepherd). See *Bach-Kommentar* 2:796.

For biblical background, see note.

A major A major A major

9.

zum fri - schen Was - ser leit't er mich, mein' Seel' zu la - ben
zum fri - schen Was - ser leit't er mich, mein' Seel' zu la - ben
zum fri - schen Was - ser leit't er mich, mein' Seel' zu la - ben
zum fri - schen Was - ser leit't er mich, mein' Seel' zu la - ben

B minor B minor E major A major

12.

NBA: selig

kräf - tig - lich durch's sel' - ge Wort der Gna - den.
kräf - tig - lich durch's sel' - ge Wort der Gna - den.
kräf - tig - lich durch's sel' - ge Wort der Gna - den.

F# minor F# minor A major A major A major