Music

“When the Saints Go Marching In” is a spiritual with a recurring refrain. A refrain gives the listener a familiar passage to recognize even when another singer or instrumentalist changes the way it sounds.

Listening pair The Paramount Jubilee Singers’ 1923 version features a vocal group with organ. Louis Armstrong’s 1938 version gives the tune to a jazz ensemble with singing, brass, and drums. Supply the two excerpts below and paper for two columns.

Hear the 1923 quartet · Hear Armstrong’s 1938 recording

Try it Listen to the first statement of the refrain in each recording. Tap a steady beat. Write who carries the tune and what you hear behind it. Sing the phrase “O when the saints go marching in” twice, borrowing a different rhythmic detail from each performance. Ask a partner to identify the change.