WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Symphony No. 36 in C major, K. 425 ‘Linz’ (1783)

**Instrumentation:** 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

**Duration:** about 26 minutes

Mozart wrote this symphony on a visit to the music patrons Johann and Maria Thun in Linz. Mozart also had to write it in five days for an upcoming concert on the Thun estates. This ‘breakneck pace’ renders it all the more remarkable, because though he had already composed over thirty symphonies “it is the grandest of Mozart’s symphonies thus far” (symphony scholar A. Peter Brown).

One example of its breadth: he writes a slow introduction to a symphony for the first time. Though a common feature with other composers, especially Haydn, Mozart fashions one of unusual complexity. Instead of standard introductions in a single mood, he passes through three different emotional states depicted with rich chromaticism.

The solo wind writing in the middle of that introduction likewise reflects Mozart’s advanced symphonic style. However, writing wind solos in every movement (as in the Linz symphony) ultimately proved to Mozart’s detriment. His symphonies “were long considered unplayable...primarily because of their wind parts which slowed the dissemination of his orchestral works in much of Europe” (Mozart scholar Neal Zaslaw).

After that dramatic introduction, Mozart creates a fast Sonata-form movement of distinction. His new style of expansive symphonic writing surfaces immediately in the primary theme. Notice that in its repetition, Mozart varies and expands both sections of it. He also creates an unusual...
secondary theme, a *forte* presentation of a Gavotte dance that opens in the ‘wrong key’ (E Minor).

Mozart’s heightened sense of orchestral color places trumpets and drums in the **Sonata-form** slow movement, one of the earliest symphonies anywhere to feature this. (Haydn did not use trumpets and drums in a slow movement until years later.) “This may also have influenced Beethoven [to do the same] in his First Symphony, also in C Major” (Zaslaw). Here, Mozart also uses them to dramatically highlight another secondary theme in the wrong key (C Minor) “in a slow *siciliano* movement that moves to a deeper expression” (Brown).

The otherwise conventional **Minuet and Trio** features delightful wind solos in the trio section. Mozart’s lively *Presto* conclusion finally features a traditionally soft and lyrical secondary theme in the strings—soon colored by wind additions. But in the development section of this **Sonata-form** movement, Mozart’s mature symphonic style bursts forth again. Hedevotes it entirely to the first phrase of the primary theme, an example ofremarkable motivic concentration even Beethoven never emulated. One of the last six symphonies Mozart wrote, Brown writes that all six are “18th-century masterpieces matched or exceeded only by those of Joseph Haydn.”

**JOHANNES BRAHMS**

*Variations on a Theme of Joseph Haydn*, Op. 56 (1873)

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons and contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, triangle, and strings

**Duration:** about 19 minutes

When Brahms began this piece in 1873, he had composed little for orchestra alone. However, the variation genre already held a central position in his career. While “Beethoven’s variations occupy a central role in the history of the form…the true inheritor of Beethoven’s variation mantle is Brahms, who wrote more variations than anyone else after Beethoven” (musicologist Elaine Sisman). He wrote at least four independent sets of variations for piano (Opp. 9, 21, 24, and 35), and also wrote nine variation sets as movements within a larger work (the *Andante* movement of Piano Sonata Op. 1, the finale of String Quartet Op. 67, etc). Finally he wrote variation sets *within* a section of larger movements in several works (for example, the secondary theme section in the *Sonata form* first movement of the Piano Quartet, Op. 60).
Brahms wrote this independent set of variations for two pianos in 1873, then immediately scored it for orchestra as well. The theme is probably not by Haydn, and it often goes by the name of *Chorale St. Antoni*—its name in the wind-band book (*Feldparthie*) that served as Brahms’s source. With his reverence of earlier music styles, his orchestral version initially states the theme in wind scoring close to the original. He follows this with eight strict variations (each in a different tempo and mood) and a finale. Brahms and Clara Schumann premiered the two-piano version in August 1873—and after he conducted the orchestral premier with the Vienna Philharmonic three months later, this version became Brahms’s most popular work during his lifetime.

Brahms highlights *legato* writing for strings in the first variation, and the second features a dramatic switch to the minor mode and *staccato* strings. For Variation 3, a return to major mode and a tender opening oboe solo shifts the focus to the winds, while a slower tempo and minor mode establish the weight of a symphonic slow movement in the fourth. A lighthearted, *staccato* Scherzo constitutes Variation 5 (with Brahms’s rhythmic penchant for disguising the beat) and a stately passage for the horn leads into the next variation. A lovely pastoral Variation 7, with the sweetest dissonances of the piece, yields to ominous *presto* minor mode muted strings in the eighth.

Brahms also wrote that “in a theme for variations, it is almost only the bass that actually has any meaning for me.” For the finale he derives a five-bar bass pattern from the opening phrase of the theme, reaching back beyond Haydn to passacaglia techniques of the Baroque era. Beginning with hymn-like gentleness, Brahms states his bass pattern seventeen times, alternating forceful and more tender presentations. Finally, the swirling scale runs in the strings accompany a return to the original theme, now presented “with a sense of triumph and grandeur” (Michael Beckerman).

Brahms was not the first: Antonio Salieri wrote 26 Variations on ‘Les Folies d’Espagne’ for orchestra in 1815. However, his ‘Haydn Varia-
tions’ of 1873 “launched the independent orchestral set as a genre” (Sisman). She notes that Tchaikovsky’s Variations on a Rococo Theme (1876), Dvořák’s Symphonic Variations (1877), Franck’s Variations symphoniques (1885), Delius’s Appalachia (1896), Parry’s Symphonic Variations (1897), and Elgar’s Enigma Variations (1899), among others, soon followed.

The popularity of the ‘Haydn Variations’ in 1873 also proved no fluke for Brahms himself. It ignited his orchestral career, with all his symphonies, overtures, and later concertos bunched into the next fifteen years. Musicologist Leon Botstein writes that “By 1950, Brahms’s orchestral works had achieved second place in popularity [after only Beethoven] on the concert programs of American symphonies.”

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

**Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73 ‘Emperor’ (1809)**

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

**Duration:** about 38 minutes

After a fierce battle in 1809, Napoleon conquered Vienna. “Nothing but drums, cannons, human misery of every sort” Beethoven wrote, as he sought shelter in his brother’s cellar. It remains a magnificent achievement that under such circumstances that year, he created such enduring masterpieces as the String Quartet Op. 74 ‘Harp,’ the Les Adieux Piano Sonata Op. 81a, and today’s Piano Concerto Op. 73 (coincidentally, all in E-flat major).

Not surprisingly, the orchestral breadth of the ‘Emperor’ concerto reflects certain martial aspects lacking in his earlier concertos. The military instruments of trumpets and drums feature prominently throughout the massive first and final movements. The phrasing is short and muscular; Beethoven avoids the soft, lyrical 8-bar themes and their repetitions so often found in his concertos. Speaking of drums, note the 17-bar timpani and piano duet, the timpani constantly beating a military march rhythm (dotted 8th and 16th-note pattern) at the very end of the finale. One also finds these “warlike rhythms, victory motifs, thrusting melodies, and affirmative character…the apotheosis of military concept in Beethoven’s music” (musicologist Alfred Einstein).

Yet one finds so much more in this “best known and most frequently performed of Beethoven’s five piano concerti” (Encyclopedia Britannia-

One such ‘problem’ concerns piano technique. Beethoven already excluded most possible amateur performance in his ‘Waldstein’ and ‘Appassionata’ sonatas of 1804-05 “creating sonorities and textures never previously achieved.” The ‘Emperor’ extends this new style, with “piano writing more brilliant than in any earlier concerto” (critic Peter Laki). “Beethoven pioneers strategies later exploited by Liszt and Chopin...The double-octave display, of long and relentlessly fortissimo passages of unison octaves in both hands is truly invented in the Emperor concerto...a revolution in keyboard sonority” (historian & virtuoso pianist Charles Rosen).

19th-century audiences would also have been surprised by another ‘problem’ - the extensive piano entrance so early, starting in the second bar of the concerto. The major concerto precedents for such an early appearance (Mozart K. 271 and Beethoven Op. 58) involved the primary theme. Is that the case here? Though written out, it sounds like a cadenza. Then Beethoven further muddies the structural waters by beginning the recapitulation 350 bars later with a variant of this passage as well—making it seem like the primary theme.

But the real primary theme starts in bar 11, a powerful orchestral melody based on short motives that saturate the opening movement. It begins a traditional orchestral exposition of great breadth, lasting 100 bars. Don’t blink, or you’ll miss the pianissimo secondary theme in E-flat minor, for staccato violins.

Beethoven writes a stunning Adagio un poco mosso slow movement, with one of his great, soft, hymn-like primary themes. Also stunning is the fact that most modern editions contain the wrong (common-time) meter. Beethoven’s autograph score as well as the first printed edition (1811) mark it alla breve - a slow, duple meter.

Set in A B A form, this Adagio includes a remarkable articulation preparing for the return of the “A” section. Beethoven writes six consecutive bars of trills to close the “B” section. Composers traditionally used trills as brief cadence ornaments, but Beethoven is perhaps the first to use it motivically, as “an essential element of large-scale structure” (Rosen). Similarly motivic and extensive 10-bar trills occur in the other movements as well. Beethoven links this slow movement to the lively Sonata-Rondo finale via the sudden change of key and first appearance
(in *Adagio* tempo) of the challenging *hemiola* motive of the Rondo refrain theme. Listen again for that atmospheric timpani and piano duet at the end, with its military overtones.

Beethoven wrote out every cadenza in this concerto because he knew this would be the first one he could not perform, due to increasing deafness. This resulted in a far more meticulous manuscript than ever before. As with Mozart, his earlier concerto autographs for his own performance often left the piano part mostly blank, or with just a few cursive notes for brief reminders. Like all concerto soloists, they knew what they were going to play.

But this particular manuscript started yet another new trend, as “its immediate destination was not performance (by Beethoven) but publication” (musicologist Leon Plantinga). The keyboard and organ virtuoso Friedrich Schneider performed the premier in November 1811 with the celebrated *Gewandhaus* Orchestra in Leipzig, also the city where *Breitkopf und Härtel* published the first edition. The unusual care Beethoven took in notating the piano part even extended to alternate (*ossia*) passages for any piano that did not have the six-octave range of Beethoven’s Johann and Nanette Striecher keyboard of that era. And while passages may imply the military grandeur of an ‘Emperor,’ the origins of the nickname remain unknown, having nothing to do with Beethoven.