

Classical Music Appreciation—Introductory

Session 2 notes

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Tonight's agenda

Basic elements of classical music structure

Mozart, Eine Kleine Nachtmusik

Holst, The Planets

Holst, A Moorside Suite

Elgar, Pomp and Circumstance No. 1

Basic elements of classical music structure

A (very) brief and simplified guide

ABA

A theme, a contrasting theme, and a repeat of the first theme. Very often employed for one or more of the inner movements of a symphony, and in many other types of work. A basic building block.

ABAC(AD...)A

The *rondo* form. The first theme (A) keeps coming back like a chorus after each successive “episode.”

Arch form

ABCBA

Sonata form

AB dev AB

—where “dev” is *development*, a free fantasia of variations on themes A and B.

Sonata-rondo form

Just like it sounds—a rondo with some elements of development thrown in.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) (Austria) *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*



Eine Kleine Nachtmusik translates literally to “A little night music.” Mozart composed it in 1787 while he was working on his opera *Don Giovanni*, although history has not managed to record the motivation behind it. *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* is perhaps Mozart’s most popular piece. Snatches of it will be familiar to most of us, because it turns up frequently in movies and advertisements.

Mozart scored the piece for string quartet: two violins, viola, and cello optionally doubled by bass. However, modern practice is to play the piece with a chamber-sized string orchestra, which is the version we will hear.

Curiously, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* is regarded as a “serenade”—whatever that’s supposed to mean¹. In fact, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* fits exactly with the design of a classical symphony, and with a duration of 18 minutes it can hardly be disqualified from symphony status on grounds of brevity. Indeed, Mozart’s own *Symphony No. 32*, composed eight years earlier, runs for less than 10 minutes.

Key factors in *Nachtmusik*’s popularity are its readily hummable tunes and its uncomplicated structure and transparent scoring—there are only four parts throughout.

¹ Wikipedia provides an informative discussion on the concept of a serenade at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenade>, but none of that material makes any sense to me in relation to *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.

Here is a map of the piece.

<i>ref</i>		<i>time</i>	<i>remarks</i>
	First Movement—Allegro		sonata form
	Exposition		the movement's melodic elements are stated
1	First Theme	0:00	
2	(bridge passage)	0:36	
3	Second Theme	0:55	
4	Exposition repeats	1:50	
5	Development	3:41	the themes are "developed," somewhat like variations
	Recapitulation		the themes are restated
6	First Theme	4:23	
7	Second Theme	5:11	
8	Coda	6:13	a short reworking of themes already stated to provide a tidy end to the movement

<i>ref</i>		<i>time</i>	<i>remarks</i>
	Second Movement— Romanze; Andante		rondo form
9	First theme (A)	0:00	
10	B	2:14	
11	A	3:23	
12	C	3:57	
13	A	4:59	
14	Coda	6:06	

<i>ref</i>		<i>time</i>	<i>remarks</i>
	Third Movement—Minuet and Trio		
15	Minuet	0:00	
16	Trio	0:50	
17	Minuet repeats	1:50	
	Coda		notable by its absence

<i>ref</i>		<i>time</i>	<i>remarks</i>
	Fourth Movement— Rondo: Allegro		sonata rondo form
18	First Theme (A)	0:00	
19	Second Theme (B)	0:26	
20	A	0:45	
21	Development	1:12	notice the abrupt key change into Eb major
22	B	1:44	
23	A	2:03	
24	Coda	2:39	

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) (England) The Planets



Holst's Planets suite was inspired by his interest in astrology. The music thus reflects the astrological character of the planets rather than their physical or astronomical characteristics or situation. The movements are:

1. Mars, the Bringer of War
 2. Venus, the Bringer of Peace
 3. Mercury, the Winged Messenger
 4. Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity
 5. Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age
 6. Uranus, the Magician
 7. Neptune, the Mystic
- (Pluto had not been discovered when Holst wrote this piece).

The Planets is scored for large orchestra, including organ and (wordless) women's choir. It is a substantial work, taking almost an hour to perform.

Mars has often been used in film and television music. It was written a few months before the outbreak of World War I, and paints a vivid picture of war. Note its unusual time signature (5 beats to a bar).

Venus indeed brings a welcome peace after the tumultuous opening movement.

Mercury has the pace and purpose you'd expect from a messenger, especially one with wings.

Jupiter is perhaps the best known of all the Planets' movements. Like Mars, it gets a lot of exposure in film and TV music. After an energetic and "jolly" opening, an expansive and optimistic-sounding theme begins in the lower orchestra, and proceeds to climb inexorably upward. The "jolly" mood returns as the opening section is reprised, and we hear the brass briefly restate fragments of the expansive theme from the middle section as the movement comes to an emphatic conclusion.

Saturn depicts the coming of old age as a relentless procession of time.

Uranus in its opening suggests magic through the twists and turns of its rhythms and the displaced accents of syncopation. Thereafter the music becomes more straightforward, consisting of hummable tunes in march tempo. The movement ends in an enigmatic climax that contrasts starkly to the rest of the movement, leaving us wondering what kind of bizarre event Uranus the magician has conjured. According to one commentator, this bizarre event is in fact the bumbling and accident-prone Uranus finally achieving his goal of opening the doorway to eternity. You can take that explanation or leave it, as you wish—I can't find any convincing support for that interpretation, though you must admit it's an appealing one.

Neptune the mystic is mystic indeed. There are no hummable tunes here—it's all mood and atmosphere. When the women's chorus joins after 4 minutes, the voices dramatically enhance the mysterious atmosphere. Chorus and orchestra conclude the work by fading very gradually to nothing. Perhaps this was the prototypical "fade out" that the popular music world was later to adopt so eagerly.

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) (England) A Moorside Suite

A Moorside Suite was commissioned in 1928 as the test piece for a national competition. We know little about Holst's inspiration for the music, except that Holst was a keen walker who much admired the North Yorkshire moors, where he often took long walks.

The piece is in three movements: Scherzo, Nocturne, and March.

Scherzo

The form of this movement will by now be familiar, mirroring as it does that of the Scherzo in Wren's *Serenade*. The opening theme, in triple time, has purpose and energy, yet the energy is subdued amid thin and transparent scoring, as perhaps befits a walk in the hills. Notice that, again like Wren in his *Serenade*, Holst employs a [1] brief canon effect on his opening theme.

[2]The trio-like section (the more lyrical theme), first played by the treble instruments, is accompanied by a rising triplet figure drawn from the opening theme. [3]The bass instruments then take over the theme as the treble instruments pick up the

accompaniment. The theme is passed back and forth before the opening theme reappears to reprise the scherzo section.

Nocturne

A *nocturne* is a piece inspired by, or descriptive of, nighttime.

[4]The opening section of Moorside Suite's Nocturne is very thinly scored and meditative. Notice the plaintive melody played by solo cornet, with a thin treble-and-alto accompaniment eventually joined by a solo bass.

Eventually the full ensemble joins in, and what a fine passage this is. [5]Pay particular attention to the bass line, which moves in a continuous stepwise progression, soaring upwards with such majesty that it seems to overtake even the treble instruments. (It doesn't of course, but it surely sounds that way.)

After another thinly scored and delicate interlude, the stepwise bass figure returns, again under the chords of the higher instruments' sustained and tranquil melody. A final thinly scored section, this time dominated by the lower instruments, brings the movement to a peaceful close.

March

The march section follows the usual march format, with an energetic opening giving way to a more lyrical trio-like middle section. The trio concludes with a fascinating development as Holst teases us with fragments of his opening theme, eventually leading to a [6]spine-tingling (it tingles mine, anyway) scale figure that starts in the lowest basses and rises and rises and keeps on rising until it climactically lands on the first note of the restated opening theme.

And we're still not done with dramatically rising bass lines, because Holst introduces [7] his coda with yet another one. The coda itself is a triumphant reprise of the trio theme, three bars of which are underpinned by (you guessed it) [8] still another majestic rising bass line borrowed straight out of the Nocturne.

Edward Elgar (1857-1934) (England) Pomp and Circumstance No. 1



The curious-sounding title of this march is drawn from a line from Shakespeare's *Othello*: "Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump, The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife, The royal banner, and all quality, Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!" The march was written in 1901. Its structure is the usual march structure we've encountered already, with an energetic opening section, a contrasting lyrical "trio" section and a reprise of the opening. Most of us will immediately recognize the trio section as the "Land of Hope and Glory" anthem featured in so many graduation ceremonies. In common with many other composers, Elgar sometimes recycled his music, in this case for his 1902 Coronation Ode for King Edward VII, and of course it was this ceremonial application that led to the popularity of the piece at events like graduations.

