

Classical Music Appreciation—Introductory

Session 4 notes

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Tonight's agenda

Wagner, Prelude to Act III Lohengrin

Beethoven, Symphony No. 1

Warlock, Capriol Suite

Elgar, Cello Concerto

Wagner, Prelude to the Mastersingers

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) (Germany) Lohengrin: Intro to Act III

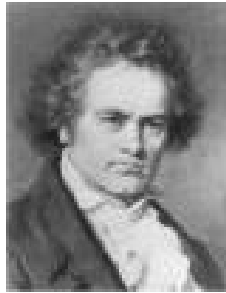


This introduction is effectively the overture to Act 3, the concluding act of Wagner's great opera. It is in this act that the well-known "Here comes the bride" wedding march appears, although we do not hear this theme in this Introduction.

This Introduction presents two major excerpts from the opera, arranged in the by-now familiar ABA form we've seen in marches and scherzo-and-trio movements.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) (Germany) Symphony No. 1

Symphony orchestra (Classical Period)



Historical context

Beethoven was born in Bonn, into a musical family, although none of his forbears was a composer. Beethoven studied piano and music theory with his father and later with Christian Neefe, to whom Beethoven was appointed deputy when Neefe was appointed court organist to the Prince-Elector in 1782. In that same year, Beethoven published his first composition, the Dressler Variations. Encouraged by Neefe's prophetic remark that Beethoven "would surely become a second Mozart were he to continue as he has begun," Beethoven produced several more works—some showing distinct originality—over the next several years.

In 1792 Beethoven had the opportunity to meet Haydn (38 years his senior), who was passing through Bonn on his way back to Vienna from London. After Beethoven had shown Haydn some of his compositions, Haydn agreed to take on Beethoven as a student, and Beethoven left soon after for Vienna, never to return to Bonn.

In Vienna, Beethoven's career blossomed, both as a concert pianist and as a composer. His compositions were much in demand, thus providing income from members of the nobility paying for commissions and dedications as well as income from publication.

The First Symphony appeared in 1800, and although Haydn's style was the principal model, Beethoven introduced several daring innovations. It was around this time that Beethoven first sought medical advice on the first manifestations of his hearing difficulties, which are thought to have been caused by an infection contracted some three years earlier.

The music

The symphony is ostensibly constructed along the standard pattern of a Haydn symphony—sonata-form first movement, slow second movement, minuet-and-trio third movement, fast finale.

Here is a map of the symphony. Timings refer to the recording by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Walter Weller, on 532409H¹.

¹ Musical Heritage Society

First movement—Adagio molto, Allegro con brio*Sonata Form*

bar	time	
1	0:00	introduction the symphony begins with a slow introduction that epitomizes Beethoven's daring innovation, beginning on a dominant seventh chord ² resolving to F major. After some progressive modulation...
13	1:12	exposition ...the exposition's first theme is introduced in C major.
53	2:00	the exposition's second theme, in G major
88	2:45	codetta, incorporating both themes
109/13	3:13	exposition repeats
110	5:13	development begins with a very abrupt arrival of the key of A major
178	6:33	recapitulation first theme (C major)
206	7:06	second theme (C major)
241	7:50	codetta
259	8:14	coda

Second movement—Andante cantabile con moto*Sonata Form (condensed)*

This is the slow movement.

1	0:00	exposition: first theme
27	0:45	second theme (dominant key)
54	1:37	third theme (dominant)
64		exposition repeats—or not, as the case may be. (Beethoven's score indicates a repeat, but this recording does not take it)
65	1:57	development —very brief, almost vestigial
101	3:01	recapitulation: first theme
127	3:47	second theme (tonic key)
154	4:37	third theme (tonic)
162	4:52	coda

² This chord alone was enough to enrage the critics of the day. Some things never change—such as critics' resistance to innovation, which must rank as one of the most powerful forces in the universe.

Third movement—Allegro molto e vivace

Minuet (?—!!) and Trio

It’s unclear why Beethoven labeled this movement “menuetto”—its furious pace is that of a scherzo, not a minuet.

After the first presentation of the scherzo we hear the trio. Unlike most trios, it provides scant contrast with the mood of the scherzo (minuet, whatever). It maintains the same frantic pace, with the woodwinds playing a slightly more relaxed melody, which almost sounds like it could be subtitled “Beethoven meets One-Note Samba,” above string runs even more frantic than the scherzo. The scherzo itself is then reprised, ending as suddenly and as energetically as it began.

Fourth movement—Adagio, Allegro molto e vivace

Sonata form

Like the first movement, the final movement begins with a slow introduction, a very short one in this movement. The symphony ends with an extended coda (something of a Beethoven trademark), which intermixes brand new material with material derived from themes already stated.

1	0:00	introduction
6	0:23	exposition: first theme
56	1:04	second theme (dominant key)
87	1:29	codetta
97/6	1:38	exposition repeats (for real this time)
98	2:52	development
163	3:48	recapitulation: first theme
192	4:12	second theme (subdominant key)
226	4:41	codetta
238	4:53	coda

Peter Warlock (1894-1930) (England) Capriol Suite



Philip Heseltine, a music critic and composer, used his real name in his role as a critic, but adopted the pseudonym “Peter Warlock” for the composing side of his life.

Capriol Suite is a suite of dances for string orchestra, very much in the structural style of dance suites of the Renaissance period, its thematic material being derived from a book published in 1589. Although the work is largely recognizable as owing its origins to the 16th century, Warlock's bold—yet very sparing—sprinkling of 20th century harmonies adds a piquant modern spice.

The origin of the name “Capriol” and indeed of the name “Warlock” are not without interest, and can be pursued at <http://129.22.153.16/hco/notes/051103notes.htm>. Coincidentally, the same Web page has some revealing notes on Debussy's *Prelude a l'apres midi d'un faune*, Both notes are brief and digestible, and well worth the mouse click it takes to get there.

The movements are:

1. **Basse-Danse**, a fairly fast dance in triple time. “Basse-Danse” is nothing to do with bass instruments. It's a term that means that the feet are to glide across the floor rather than being raised. Notice how we only get 13 bars in before Warlock throws us the work's most surprising zinger: the same note of the melody that was harmonized by an [1a] F major chord the first time around now gets treated with [1b] A major with an added second (B natural). How wild is that?
2. **Pavane**, a fairly slow dance in 2/4 time (two beats to the bar).
3. **Tordion**, a moderately fast dance in triple time (actually 6/4, with 6 beats to the bar).
4. **Bransles**, a very fast dance in 2/2 time. The music can't decide what key it wants to be in. It starts ambiguously in G minor and plays with G major. The final chord is G major.
5. **Pieds-en-l'air**. Literally, “feet in the air.” The mind boggles. Apparently it doesn't mean “dead.” Rather, this name is used to describe a figure of the *Galliard*, a dance in which the feet are raised from the floor.
6. **Mattachins**, a fast sword dance, performed by men wearing armor of gilded cardboard. It was also known as “Bouffons,” which strikes me as a far more appropriate label. The coda goes through some fairly wild modulations and harmonies—three bars from the end the first violins are playing Ab against A natural³—but finally lands on a plain vanilla F major chord.

³ I see this in the score, but either my recording or my ears (probably my ears) don't allow me to claim I can actually hear it.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) (Germany) Symphony No. 4

Symphony orchestra (Romantic Period)



Historical context

Mendelssohn was born into a wealthy and privileged family. His father Abraham, a successful banker, was the son of esteemed Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. The innate talent that the very young Felix revealed was carefully nurtured through the best teachers and a rigorous discipline of dedicated hard work imposed by Abraham. Under these three driving forces, the young Mendelssohn quickly developed into an outstanding musician at a very early age.

Mendelssohn played violin well, and piano and organ brilliantly, making his first public appearance at age 9. His work was first publicly performed when he was 10, and he attained maturity as a composer at the astonishingly young age of 16 with his Octet for Strings, a accomplishment that eclipses even that of Mozart.

Mendelssohn enjoyed great fame and admiration. Acquiring a reputation as a conductor by the time he turned twenty, he had the influence to stage and conduct, on 11 March 1829, the first performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in over a hundred years. Such was the success and impact of this event that it led to a full-blown revival of Bach's music, which had languished in obscurity since the composer's death. Mendelssohn's stature as a conductor continued to grow, and he was appointed musical director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra at the age of 27. By this time he was the most famous and most admired musician of his time.

Mendelssohn's stature and comfortable financial circumstances allowed him the freedom to travel widely. He made many visits to England, where he was enormously popular. The winter of 1830-1831 he spent in Italy, and it was this period—recall that he was only 21 at the time—that saw the germination of the ideas that led to the creation of the Fourth Symphony. Mendelssohn completed the work in March 1833, and it was first performed in London on 13 May 1833. Successful as this premiere was, Mendelssohn resolved to revise the work, a task that apparently spanned several years. The first performance of the

revised version apparently took place on 18 June 1838, again in London. (Oddly, this version of the symphony was never performed in his native Germany during Mendelssohn's lifetime.) The still-unsatisfied Mendelssohn revised the symphony yet again, but he was dead by the time this new version was performed on 1 November 1849, fittingly in the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

The music

The symphony portrays Italy through the ears of a tourist responsive both to local color and to a less tangible sensation of atmosphere. It is the *atmosphere* of the south, rather than any identifiably national trait of melody or orchestration, that permeates the jubilant 6/8 opening movement, in which the momentum eases only once, shortly before the cleverly camouflaged beginning of the recapitulation. The third movement's graciously old-fashioned minuet and trio is similarly devoid of explicit local reference. There are even hints in the trio and coda of the fairy-land world of Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* music.

Local color plays a greater role in the other two movements. The second, a D minor Andante, is an impression of a religious procession that Mendelssohn saw in Naples. The fragment of liturgical chant that forms the two-bar introduction imparts an air of solemnity; "the rest," as musicologist Donald Tovey wrote, "is eminently picturesque and processional." The finale is a dance movement of great vitality, driven onwards by the relentless rhythm of the *saltarello*, an old Roman dance.

The symphony conforms but loosely to classical designs, a distinguishing trait of the Romantic period. Although the first movement is firmly anchored in sonata form and the third a rather straightforward minuet and trio, the second and fourth movements are rather free in form. Mendelssohn tends to construct his major sections (notably the first movement's recapitulation, and the fourth movement's first section) from a thorough integration of his principal themes. This technique stands in sharp contrast to the classical-era style, which normally presents clearly delineated themes often connected by bridge passages.

Here is a map of the symphony. Timings refer to the recording by the Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli, on Deutsche Grammophon 445 514-2.

First movement—Allegro Vivace*Sonata Form*

bar	time	
1	0:00	exposition first subject
110	1:28	second subject
159	2:08	codetta, incorporating both themes
209/4	2:49	exposition repeats
187 (sic)	5:16	development
310	6:53	here's the easing of momentum I talked about in the overview
346	7:22	recapitulation tries to slide in under the radar—but we're onto it, aren't we? The recapitulation is much more free-form than the exposition. Here, themes are extended with elements of variation, and integrated together in a much more intimate way.
475	9:07	coda

Second movement—Andante moto

This is the slow movement.

1	0:00	liturgical chant fragment
4	0:13	A (oboe, bassoons, violas)
12	0:49	listen to the delicate flute-duet counter melody
35	2:30	B
45	3:13	C
57	4:05	A (again preceded by liturgical chant fragment)
75	5:23	C
86	6:14	B
94	6:47	coda

Third movement—Con moto moderato*Minuet and Trio*

1	0:00	minuet
77	3:10	trio
125	5:03	minuet reprised
203	7:33	coda

Fourth movement—Saltarello, Presto

The final movement falls into two major sections rounded off by a coda. Although the score carries the 4/4 time signature, both major themes are in the 6/8 triple rhythm.

After introducing its principal theme, the first section spices things up with two 4/4 theme fragments, followed by a sustained and legato counter melody. Mendelssohn weaves all of this material together in a very satisfying and attention-holding way. The first section is rounded off with a bridge section that could be regarded as codetta, but also reveals some traits of a sonata-form development section. But instead of leading to a recapitulation, the music takes us into the second section.

Interestingly and unusually, the second section introduces two themes simultaneously. The first is a fast-flowing legato 6/8 figure, which dominates the underlying staccato and spacious 4/4 viola counter-theme. Indeed, the viola figure is so stealthy that it's easy to overlook as mere accompaniment.

1	0:00	First Section a brief introduction establishes 6/8 rhythm
6	0:08	A the first principal theme, in staccato 6/8 rhythm
34	0:44	A₂ here's a theme fragment in 4/4 rhythm
61	1:22	A₃ a new theme fragment in 4/4 rhythm
64	1:27	A₄ a new counter melody, sustained and legato, in 4/4 rhythm except for the quirky initial triplet
122	2:45	Second Section B₁ violins introduce the second principal 6/8 theme, flowing and legato, while violas underscore with B₂ , the spacious and detached melodic accompaniment.
133	3:00	violins and violas exchange themes
156	3:32	A Here's the first theme making a guest reappearance. Sparring between A and B will take us the rest of the way to the coda.
196	4:27	coda

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) (Germany) Overture to the Mastersingers

Wagner is remembered for his operas. The overture to an opera (and in contemporary times, a Broadway musical) traditionally presents previews of the main tunes of the opera, arranged in a free-form kind of way (dare I say "capriccio"?). The composer usually writes the overture after building the body of the work. In this case, Wagner wrote the overture first, providing himself with the raw thematic material from which to construct the opera itself.

The Mastersingers were German artisan poets and musicians, similar in some ways to the troubadours of France, but with their own unique culture. They organized themselves in guilds, and at the height of their popularity every town in Germany boasted a mastersinger guild. The movement is believed to have emerged as early as the fourteenth

century, and the last remaining guild finally called it quits in 1839, their membership having dwindled to four.

The mastersingers held meetings at which they critiqued one another's work, and also held competitions. By tradition, the composition of their poems and verses was governed by a set of pedantic rules.

The love interest of the opera involves the apprentice mastersinger Walther, who is determined to enter a mastersinger competition to win the hand of Eva, daughter of one of the mastersingers. However, being an apprentice, Walther breaks many of the rigid rules, and very nearly fails to gain entry to the competition. However, with the collusion of the respected mastersinger Hans Sachs (who was an actual historical figure, not merely a Wagner invention) he not only enters the competition but wins it, in spite of breaking more rules than ever. Because Walther's melody is so beautiful, the mastersingers invite to him to join their guild, implicitly accepting (it appears) the enrichment of their rules.

Wagner saw himself in the Walther role, which mirrored his own disdain for rigidity and tradition. He even creates a character in the opera through which to lampoon his harshest critic of the time, a straitlaced nit-picking traditionalist.

Of the music of the overture itself, there is little more to add. We hear serious-sounding themes, representing the established mastersingers, and a lighter, quicker theme that portrays the dance of the eager young apprentices. Oh, and you'll hear snippets of the love theme in there too.

You can find a very detailed account of the story of the Mastersingers in Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Die_Meistersinger_von_N%C3%BCrnberg