

Overture to "The Abduction from the Seraglio" K384
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Written: 1781

Movements: One

Style: Classical

Duration: Six minutes

"My dear Mozart . . . there are too many notes." Those are supposedly the words of Emperor Joseph II after he heard a rehearsal of Mozart's new opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Mozart had recently arrived in Vienna and faced the problem all twenty-somethings eventually face: the need to make a living. He introduced himself to the administrator of a local opera company. The administrator was impressed with Mozart's earlier operas, so he supplied him with what was essentially a plagiarized copy of a libretto to *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Mozart was pinning his hopes for name recognition on the success of his this new opera.

Because of the location of the plot (Turkey), Mozart was able to incorporate a clever musical device into the opera. Ever since the Turkish army invaded Vienna in the seventeenth century, Turkish military music held a certain fascination for the public. The key characteristic of that music were the "Janissary" instruments: piccolo, drums, cymbals, triangles and jingling bells. A classical era composer including Janissary music in a piece would be like a modern composer throwing some Bluegrass music into a piece for fun. Mozart did it with his *Abduction from the Seraglio*.

Mozart wrote a lengthy letter to his father in September of 1781 detailing the whole opera. Of his overture, he wrote:

I have sent you only fourteen bars of the overture, which is very short with alternate fortes and pianos, the Turkish music always coming at the *fortes* [louds]. The overture modulates through different keys; and I doubt whether anyone, even if his previous night has been a sleepless one, could go to sleep over it.

In spite of the complaints of the Emperor, *The Abduction from the Seraglio* was a huge success and made the presenters a lot of money. (Mozart wasn't paid that much, and he didn't get any royalties

from subsequent performances at that theater.) Of all the operas that Mozart wrote—and he wrote a lot—this one, the first one he wrote in Vienna, was the most popular during his lifetime.

Mozart was known for his sharp and oftentimes inappropriate wit. What was Mozart's reply to the Emperor's criticism? "I ask your Majesty's pardon, there are just as many notes as there should be."

©2018 John P. Varineau

Largo Cantabile: Hymn from "A Set of Three Short Pieces"

Country Band March

Charles Ives (1874–1954)

Written: 1903, 1904–1914

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: Four minutes each

Today, we see Charles Ives as a brilliant, eccentric, and little understood anomaly of American music. "I'm the only one, with the exception of Mrs. Ives and one or two others perhaps . . . who likes any of my music," he said. "Why do I like these things? Are my ears on wrong?" Supplying some program notes for one of his more challenging pieces he wrote, "These prefatory essays were written by the composer for those who can't stand his music – and the music for those who can't stand his essays; to those who can't stand either, the whole is respectfully dedicated."

Ives wrote both his *Country Band March* while still in his twenties. It uses Ives's "collage" technique where unrelated bits of music are layered over one another. He sketched out the *Country Band March* for a small theater orchestra. Here the music represents the amateur bands of Ives's younger years in Danbury, Connecticut. "[They] didn't always play right and together," he wrote. "It was as good either way." The form of the piece is a standard march form with trio – just like a Sousa march. But there the resemblance ends. Amidst the cacophony of sounds you'll hear snippets from *Arkansas Traveler*, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, *British Grenadiers*, *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, *London Bridge*, *Marching Through Georgia*, *Massa's in de Cold*, *Cold Ground*, *My Old Kentucky Home*, *Violets*, *Yankee Doodle*, *May Day Waltz*, and *Semper Fidelis*. Ives may never have heard the *Country Band March* as he originally

wrote it, but he considered the piece to be important enough to include it in his *Concord Sonata*, the *Fourth Symphony*, and the “Putnam’s Camp” movement in *Three Places in New England*.

In contrast to the pandemonium of the *Country Band March*, Ives’ *Largo Cantabile: Hymn* is a serious and serene piece, perhaps originally written for string quartet with bass and piano. Here the tune quotations—all of them hymns—are so fleeting, it is really hard to catch them. It begins with a repeated snippet from William Doane’s *More Love to Thee*, moves on to possibly quote *David or Hexham* and then ends with a simple statement of the first phrase of *Oxford: My Faith Looks Up to Thee*.

©2018 John P. Varineau

Symphony No. 88 in G Major
Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Written: 1787

Movements: Four

Style: Classical

Duration: 21 minutes

Although Haydn’s contract with his employer Prince Nicolaus Esterházy obliged him to “compose music as required by the Prince” and forbade him to compose for anyone else, occasionally his prince would allow him to write for other people. So, in 1785, Haydn received a sumptuous commission from Count d’Ogny in Paris for six symphonies. Then, a couple years later, Johann Tost (the principal second violin player in Esterházy’s orchestra) went to Paris with the intent to sell two more of Haydn’s symphonies along with some new string quartets.

Johann Tost was something of a sketchy character. He obviously tried to augment his meager musician’s income. In 1787, before the invention of copy machines, Tost proposed setting up an illicit music copying enterprise at Esterháza, reproducing the many works flowing into the palace and then selling them at a reduced price. While in Paris with Haydn’s two symphonies (Nos. 88 and 89), Tost apparently sold them to at least two publishing companies. Without the protection of international copyright laws, Haydn had to do his own sleuthing, contacting the various companies and trying to make

right. (Tost also foisted off to the publishers a symphony supposedly written by Haydn but really by Adalbert Gyrowetz. They fell for it.)

In spite of shady business dealings, Haydn's *Symphony No. 88 in G Major* is a marvel of wit, seriousness, simplicity, and complexity woven into a single work. The first movement begins with a serious and stately introduction that ushers in a quiet statement of the principal fast theme. Just keeping track of that little tune throughout the first movement is a delightful listening exercise. The second movement is a theme with variations based on a hymn-like melody. Haydn's explosive use of trumpets in such a solemn movement must have taken audiences by surprise. The minuet is a robust country-like dance with a "kick" on the third beat of the measure. Its trio section, played over a gentle drone, also has some "kicks" in unusual places.

The great Haydn scholar H. C. Robbins Landon calls the last movement "one of the most intricately composed, yet brilliant sounding, movements in the [works] of Haydn." All of this is built on a recurring melody that simply has to be called "cute."

©2018 John P. Varineau

Symphonic Dances

Fazil Say (1970–)

Written: 2015

Movements: Four

Style: Contemporary

Duration: 24 minutes

Fazil Say's musical career is characterized by his double role as composer and internationally renowned pianist. His musical concepts are influenced by his great interest in jazz and improvisation, and he frequently incorporates these elements into his compositions.

He was born in Ankara, Turkey, in 1970. He began playing the piano at the age of four and commenced piano studies when he was eleven. He studied first at the State Conservatory at the University of Ankara, then at the Robert-Schumann-Hochschule in Düsseldorf, and then at the Berlin

Conservatory of Music. He won first prize at the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York when he was twenty-one. Since then, Fazil Say has given over 100 concerts each year.

He has been artist in residence at the Dortmund Konzerthaus, the Berlin Konzerthaus, Hessischer Rundfunk in Frankfurt am Main, the Rheingau Musik Festival, the Bodenseefestival and at the Alte Oper in Frankfurt. Say was also a focal point of the program of the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival and there have been further residencies in Paris, Tokyo, Meran, Hamburg, and Istanbul. Describing his approach to music, Fazil Say has written:

It's my nature and desire to unite people through music without any borders, not even in the mind. Music is very powerful. Music needs no translation. Everyone understands it, whether Chinese, Turkish or German. A great musician is someone who is able to reach people in a positive or dramatic way. When talking about human nature, music plays an important role.

Say stands out amongst contemporary composers for his fusion of the Western European and Turkish musical traditions. His *Symphonic Dances* are strongly influenced by Turkish music, with Say using a typical alternating 8/8–7/8 meter in the first dance. The second movement features Say's characteristic string glissandi, before a slow third movement and a wild and ecstatic finale. In the spirit of Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Bartók, Say has often incorporated the dance music of his homeland into his chamber music; *Symphonic Dances* is his first orchestral work to use traditional dance elements so explicitly.

©2018 Fazil Say and John P. Varineau