

## A detailed commentary of the first movement of Prague Symphony

First, a brief explanation of notations. The accompanied music notes are “cut-off” (cut and paste) from an orchestral score published by Ricordi, the famed Italian music publisher. Therefore, the instruments are named in Italian. Prague Symphony uses the following instruments: listed in the format of Italian name/English name (abbreviation).

2 Flauti/Flutes (Fl.)  
 2 Oboi/Oboes (Ob.)  
 2 Fagotti/Bassoons (Fg.)  
 2 Corni in Re/French Horn in D (Cor.)  
 2 Trombe in Re/Trumpets in D (Trb.)  
 Timpani/Kettle drums (Tp.)  
 Violini I/First Violin (Vni I)  
 Violini II/Second Violin (Vni II)  
 Viole/Viola (Vla)  
 Violoncelli/Cellos (Vc.)  
 Contrabbassi/Double Bases (Cb.)

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The first movement starts with a slow *adagio*, which gradually builds up the tension in anticipation of the faster *allegro*. The fast *allegro*, which starts in measure (bar) 37, is the beginning of the Exposition of the sonata form (3’31” = 3 min 31 sec from the beginning). The Exposition is led by a syncopated pattern of a single note D in the 1st violin section (see Fig. 1). A not-too-distinguished first theme then appears in 2nd violin, viola, cello and double bass sections (starting measure 38; Fig. 1).

[1] 

Another brief theme appears in flutes and oboes (Fig. 2), with a prominent introductory fanfare of bassoons, horns and trumpets (not shown). This short theme is subsequently fully exploited in the Development Section (measure 43 and on; see later).

[2] 

When the syncopated D note reappears, the oboes initiate a hard-to-miss tune which sounds like the inversion of the first theme (3’48”) (see Fig. 3), while the first theme is being repeated in the 2nd violin, viola, cello and double bass.

[3] 

It is this kind of additional bonus themes in late Mozart symphonies that demands “divided” attention. It is also this kind of additional bonus that Boyden referred to as Mozart’s “generosity.”

Concurrent with the above elaboration, the syncopated beating of the 1st violin soon evolved into a new rhythmic passage (measure 49 and 50; 3’56”); Fig. 4),



which is passed on to the 2nd violin and viola, while 1st violin starts yet another lively tune (measure 51-54) which sounds more distinguished than the first theme (Fig. 5).



Then the entire members of the orchestra participate in a successive presentation of harmonious chords. Characterically Mozartian in fashion, the string sections (especially 1st and 2nd violin) never forget to “spice up” the chords with some rapid 16th notes. The variability was amply displayed in, for example, the passage from measure 63-65 (4’15”).



In the above three successive repetitions (Fig. 6), Mozart generously presented three distinctly different 16th note ornamentations (seen above at the beginning of each measure; also found in the coda section of the Exposition). I mean, if the three repetitions were exactly the same, I would have found it acceptable.

Measure 66 to 68 display the harmonious blending of two distinct types of rhythms (4’20”): the wind section and the viola, cello, and bass section present a rhythm (Fig. 7),



whereas the 1st and 2nd violins present another rhythm (Fig. 8), thus demanding “dividing” attention from the listeners.



The result is absolutely phenomenal -- a dazzling kaleidoscopic agitation. It is almost like holding a full tank of water which is shaking with a considerable momentum and is almost spilling over the edge of the tank.

But not to worry, the passage soon settles down to something akin to the beginning of the Exposition (4’30”), with the leading syncopated pattern of the D note (Fig. 1), and the subsequent appearance of the first theme. But when the previously mentioned distinguished tune appears again, it become interlaced and interwoven through different instruments of the string section, giving rise to the feeling of colorful variability and diversity. For example, in the two successive measures below (Fig. 9), the 1st and the 2nd violins exchange lines to be played. I believe the effect is noticeable even to novice ears.

[9]

The image shows a musical score for two violins, labeled 'I.' and 'II.'. The music is in G major and features a complex, rhythmic passage with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, creating a busy, intertwining texture.

The busy intertwining passage gradually leads to a mood change and a key change to A major, thus ushering in the second theme which begins at measure 97 (Fig. 10), with a quiet accompaniment of the remaining string instruments (5'30").

[10]

The image shows a musical score for a violin, labeled 'Vni'. The music is in A major and features a melodic line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. A measure number '100' is indicated above the staff.

The repetition of the second theme for the second time is now keyed into A-minor and is accompanied by four measures played by the two bassoons, which echo and imitate the string rendition of the second theme, also in A-minor (Fig. 11).

[11]

The image shows a musical score for a figure, labeled 'Fig.', and violin I, labeled 'Vni I.'. The music is in A minor. The figure part consists of a distorted, echo-like version of the second theme, while the violin I part plays the original second theme.

The third appearance of the second theme is marked by *pizzicato* string plucking in the cello and bass section. While the two bassoons are repeating the distorted echo of the 2nd theme, the 1st and 2nd violins leave the second theme behind and start a new tune (measure 112; Fig. 12), (thus demanding divided attention or parallel processing of the listeners),

[12]

The image shows a musical score for a figure, labeled 'Fig.', and violin I, labeled 'Vni I.'. The music is in A minor. The figure part features a distorted, echo-like version of the second theme, while the violin I part plays a new tune. The figure part is marked with a *pizzicato* instruction.

which is then followed by the reappearance of the aforementioned three measures of mixed rhythms (Figs. 7 and 8).

The reappearance of the 1st theme in both the wood wind and the string section is the beginning of the coda section of the Exposition (measure 130; 6'09"). In the coda section, some of melodies, which are quite familiar by this time, come back in succession to bring the Exposition to a conclusion (6'32").

In Hogwood's recording of Prague Symphony, the entire *allegro* part of the Exposition (measure 37 - 142) is repeated exactly once, before the advent of the Development Section. So did Sir Neville Marriner's recording (the timing was according to Marriner's recording). Some other conductors might choose to omit the customary repetition.

The short theme which appears briefly in measure 43 (see Fig. 2 above) plays a key role in the Development section (starting at measure 143; Fig. 13) (9'35").

[13]

The image shows a musical score for two violins, labeled 'I.' and 'II.'. The music is in A major and features a short, melodic theme. The first violin part is marked with a *p* (piano) instruction.

Seen above is the brief theme taking turn to appear in the 1st and the 2nd violin sections. Essentially, the tune is repeated, modified, and played, in turn, by different instrument parts, much like the *fugue*. Undoubtedly, it catches the divided attention of a listener.

Also, the passage that first appears in measure 42 (Fig. 14) joins the *fugue*, thus presenting two racing and interlacing tunes concurrently.



It is then followed by the now familiar transitional passages of the Exposition, only to be followed by the appearance of the syncopated D note, in measure 189 (10'50"; Fig. 1). These passage suggests the beginning of the Recapitulation because it sounds so much like the beginning of *allegro* (measure 37). But wait a minute. It is only a false start, because the short melody that appears at the beginning of the Exposition becomes interwoven into various instruments; the Development section is not finished yet (see comment above). It was my observation that Mozart often preceded the Recapitulation with two parallel melodies, separated by a third interval and played by the woodwind section (Fig. 15).



The true beginning of the Recapitulation actually starts at measure 208, again with the leading syncopated D note (11'25"; Fig. 1). The rest sounds like the Exposition but Mozart did make varied presentations here and there, just to add more flavors. Notably, the mood change preceding the second theme does not lead to a key change for the second theme, which begins at measure 243-244 (12'25") as expected by the sonata form -- no key change of the second theme in Recap) (Fig. 16).



The second appearance of the second theme is presented in D-minor instead of D-major (12'39"). Please note that the second theme appears in the Exposition in A-major and then A-minor. The contrast is interesting.

Interested listeners are invited to examine the detailed differences in the transitional passages that prevent the second theme from winding down the previous path of key changes. Paying attention to these subtle differences adds to additional enjoyment and a deeper appreciation of Mozart's technical agility and inspirational resourcefulness.

Finally, another coda presents earlier melodies in a dazzling combination and recombination, leading to a climactical ending of the Recapitulation (ends 14'08"). Mozart seemed to able to please the listeners with such a natural ending that the symphony does neither sound too short nor too long but just right, giving the listeners the most enriched and generous treatment.