



2 April 2020

Musical Endings

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Welcome to the third and final part of the series *Making Music*. The previous two lectures have dealt with Musical Openings and Unfinished Music. So finally, to Musical Endings. You'll have noticed that I'm not in Barnard's Inn Hall in Gresham College. Coronavirus restrictions confine me physically to Hammersmith, and electronically to a small oblong in the right-hand corner of your screen. But in my mind, I'm full-size in Holborn addressing my faithful regular audience – I do hope you're all keeping well.

Part 1

Let's begin with one of the most celebrated musical endings in classical music – that of Beethoven's 5th Symphony. As discussed in the first lecture in this series, Beethoven's 5th Symphony has an extremely famous opening [g g g eb]. But here's the powerful and insistent ending.

Audio Clip: End of Beethoven's 5th Symphony 40"

Here's another big Beethovenian ending – the close of the 8th Symphony.

Audio Clip: End of Beethoven's 8th Symphony 25"

And here's the ending of Beethoven's 9th symphony.

Audio Clip: End of Beethoven's 9th Symphony 20"

Beethoven's 9th Symphony is known as the 'Choral' Symphony, because, uniquely for an early-19th century symphony, Beethoven introduced a chorus into the final movement. But, as you've just heard, for the last few bars, Beethoven didn't actually end with the chorus. The 9th Symphony ends with just the orchestra.

Moving on over a hundred years, one of the best-loved choral works of the early-20th century is William Walton's dramatic and colourful *Belshazzar's Feast*. Although *Belshazzar's Feast* features a large choir throughout, Walton didn't use the chorus for the final bars, as you can see from the last page of the vocal score. The chorus stops with the word *Alleluia* on the top system. But that was deemed unsatisfactory by the Atlanta Symphony Chorus in 1989. Sir William Walton had been dead for 6 years by then, so the Atlanta Symphony did what they thought Walton should have done all along – they added the choir for the last chord.

Audio Clip: Belshazzar's Feast (Atlanta) 40"

The conductor Robert Shaw 'improving' on the ending of Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* by involving the otherwise redundant chorus during the final chord.

To return to Beethoven's 9th, what is noteworthy about the very end? And I mean the very end. Examples of this gesture occur at the end of over half of Beethoven's 16 string quartets (numbers 2, 3, 4, 6, and 12-thru-16, if you're counting), and the ends of the 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 8th, and 9th Symphonies, as well as at the end of the 3rd Piano Concerto. And even within Beethoven's symphonies this gesture occurs: for example at the end of the Scherzo



of the 'Eroica' Symphony, at the end of the 2nd movement of the 'Pastoral' Symphony, and at the end of both of the first two movements of the 'Choral' Symphony.

It's this. A significant amount of Beethoven's music finishes with a rest augmented by a *fermata* (a pause): an elongated rest. What's the meaning of that elongated rest? On the face of it it's rather a wilful and self-important marking: "let's hold the audience in the palm of my hand for a little longer". Or, is it more to provide symmetry? To offset the material that precedes it. To balance the material on the page rather than to stop dead. And should the conductor reflect that pause in performance? I would say yes; but if an audience chooses to applaud before I've held that rest for long enough, I'm not going to complain. Beethoven didn't invent the end-pause – there are a few examples in Haydn and Mozart – but Beethoven did make a feature of it.

The pause-infused rest at the end of Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' Symphony is definitely warranted; albeit retrospectively.

Here's how this valedictory movement starts.

Audio Clip: Opening of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.6 'Pathétique' 10"

Tchaikovsky died nine days after conducting the première, and the hush after the 6th Symphony's performance at a memorial concert three weeks after Tchaikovsky's death, made sense of that enforced silence at the end of this emotional swansong.

Here's the last page of the symphony:

Audio Clip: End of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.6 'Pathétique' 1'10"

Descending to the depths of the orchestra, and the depths of Tchaikovsky's soul.

The *fermata* end-pause was parodied on the gravestone of the Soviet composer Alfred Schnittke.

A bar's rest with a pause on it. But also marked *fortississimo* – very very loud! And in death, Schnittke's memory is indeed very loud, in my mind, at least.

Let's return to where we started, with the end of Beethoven's 5th Symphony.

Audio Clip: Beethoven's 5th Symphony ending again 30"

Beethoven's grandiose endings are the stuff of legend. Prone to fill a dozen bars where other composers might feel that a couple would do, Beethoven owned the early-Romantic orchestral ending. In particular, the final bars of Beethoven's 5th, 8th, and 9th symphonies are massive. Yet the French composer Hector Berlioz found the ending of Beethoven's 5th Symphony tiresome. And the Russian landowner and music-lover Alexander Oolee-Beesheff, described the ending as "filled up with commonplaces of military music".

Beethoven's bombastic endings led to a merciless parody at the end of *Desiccated Embryos*, a 1913 piano piece by the French avant-garde composer Erik Satie. The closing bars feature a series of end-gestures in improbably repetitive and comedic combination. Amusingly, the actual ending is impossible to divine except in retrospect – thereby adding to the uncomfortable comedy value.

Audio Clip: Satie's 'Embryons Desséchés' 30"

Erik Satie, parodying what he saw as overblown Romantic endings.

Part 2



Let's go back a long way to find out how music used to end. In the first millennium, when the musical content of plainchant was being codified, these single-line melodies were grouped according to the note on which they finished (the so-called 'Final'). And those four 'Finals' (d, e, f, and g in modern parlance) defined the mode to which each melody was assigned.

Here's the chant *Viderunt omnes*, the Gradual for Mass on Christmas Day. It starts on an F and finishes on an F. In other words, it has the same Final as its starting note.

It begins: Vi-de-runt—
F F AC

And ends: a————m
FGACCGBBAF

So, it starts and ends on the same note: [F] It starts there [F] and ends there.

But turning to the following Christmas Day chant. This chant has a **different** Final to the starting note.

It begins: Al-le-lu—ia
C D FG G

And ends: ram————m
C D E F D

The Final is a degree higher than the starting note: [C] It starts there [D] and ends there. The important point is that a piece of plainchant is classified by its ending. So, musical endings in plainchant were deemed to be the most important identifier.

Let's return to that *Viderunt Omnes* chant, the Gradual at Mass on Christmas Day. When polyphony emerged as elaboration of plainchant, pieces for two voices ended on perfectly consonant Unisons or Octaves: in the case of *Viderunt omnes* by Léonin, an Octave. The pre-existent plainchant is heard in the lower voice at a stately, slow speed and a freely composed part is added above. Léonin worked in Paris and was composing in the late-12th century. As you'll hear, the music finishes on the interval of an Octave.

Audio Clip: Léonin's 'Viderunt Omnes' 25"

A perfectly consonant Octave ending. A few years later, another Parisian composer, Pérotin, presumably a pupil of Léonin, made an elaboration of the same piece of plainchant for four voices. One voice part sang the original plainchant and three voices were added to it. Here the piece ends on an open 5th, a bare chord with a stereotypically medieval flavour.

Audio Clip: Pérotin's 'Viderunt Omnes' 25"

Pérotin's *Viderunt omnes*, ending on the chord of the open 5th. That piece was possibly composed in the year 1198.

Three centuries later, the Renaissance saw the fleshing out of final chords. But the change was a gradual one.

To demonstrate, here are three pieces from around the year 1500 showing the different ways of finishing a piece of music. Here's a bare 5th ending at the end of a *Nunc dimittis* attributed to Josquin des Prez, but more likely by Pierre de la Rue. This ending beautifully paints the words '*in pace*' – in peace.

Audio Clip: End of Josquin's 'Nunc Dimittis' 45"

An early-Renaissance piece ending in medieval manner on a bare 5th.

Here's an ending by Johannes Ockeghem, another composer whom we'd these days classify as Belgian.



It's a prayer in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and it ends on a full chord with a stately Minor 3rd.

Audio Clip: End of Ockeghem's 'Intemerata Dei Mater' 25"

Ockeghem's *Intemerata Dei Mater*, ending on a full chord including a Minor 3rd. And now, here's an ending by the Spanish composer Cristóbal de Morales. This setting of the Magnificat ends with a full chord including a Major 3rd.

Audio Clip: End of Morales' 'Magnificat' 20"

The ending of the 8th-tone Magnificat by Morales. A grand major-key ending. This type of early-Renaissance harmony paved the way for the impressive endings of Beethoven, admittedly with a few evolutionary steps in between.

So, moving on a couple of centuries: in the last decade of his life, JS Bach set about composing a musical manifesto, which became known as *The Art of Fugue*. A collection of fugues and canons on a single subject, *The Art of Fugue* lay unfinished at Bach's death, but it remains a pinnacle of contrapuntal achievement. From the very opening, the first fugue demonstrates clarity, balance, and control. So, it's surprising that the ending of the first fugue (*Contrapunctus I*) was revised by Bach after he'd copied it out neatly by hand – as you can see at the top of the page. Here's Bach's original ending to *Contrapunctus I*.

Audio Clip: Bach's 'Contrapunctus I' early ending 15"

Even having introduced two dramatic silences within the final cadence, Bach still thought that *Contrapunctus I* didn't propagate closure. So, he added 4½ bars. This coda also contained a further statement of the fugue subject in one of the inner parts. It is, it turns out, a stronger and more symmetrical ending than Bach's original version. And I find it reassuring to know that even Bach could change his mind. So here's the first fugue of *The Art of Fugue* with Bach's improved ending.

Audio Clip: Bach's 'Contrapunctus I' full ending 35"

That definitely brings closure to the piece.

Closure didn't seem to matter to Stravinsky in *Piano Rag Music* of 1919. Its unrewarding 'wonky jazz' peters out in the mid-bass register.

Audio Clip: Stravinsky's 'Piano Rag Music' 25"

Stravinsky himself playing his own *Piano Rag Music*. A damp squib of a musical ending if ever there was one.

A more satisfying and quiet ending is that of the 1853 B-minor Piano Sonata by the Hungarian composer Franz Liszt. A *tour de force* of Romantic piano writing, the ending is mysterious, with unstable B-major chords given finality by the shortest possible keystroke on the lowest B of the piano. As you can see at the beginning of this last line of music – some of this ending was an afterthought – observe that squeezed-in bit at the beginning of the line.

Audio Clip: Liszt's 'Piano Sonata in B Minor' 50"

The spacious ending of Liszt's Piano Sonata was dedicated to Robert Schumann.

Staying in Eastern Europe, but with the loudest and most majestic possible ending, the final chord of the 1966 *St Luke Passion* by the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki is a simultaneously terrifying and uplifting blaze of E major. The last chord of Penderecki's *St Luke Passion* brings an hour and a quarter of tense and unresolved music-making to a monumental close.



Audio Clip: Penderecki's 'St Luke Passion' 50''

Krzysztof Penderecki died recently, and his passing will leave a gaping hole in European musical culture.

Part 3

The opposite of a majestic ending is a fade-out. Gustav Holst created the first live fade-out at the end of *The Planets*, written during the first half of the First World War. Premiered a few weeks before Armistice Day in 1918, the last movement of *The Planets*, 'Neptune, the Mystic', ends with upper voices repeating the same two chords over and over. You might be able to make out at the very bottom of the score, the words: 'this bar to be repeated until the sound is lost in the distance'. This effect is best achieved by processing the chorus off the stage and away from the performance space until their singing is no longer audible. I personally had a difficult moment in the Gallery of the Royal Albert Hall some years ago, trying simultaneously to conduct and hold open a particularly well-maintained fire door. Here is Neptune's fade-out.

Audio Clip: Holst's 'Neptune' 1'15

The original live fade-out, by Gustav Holst, from over a century ago.

The effect of a recorded fade-out had been achieved over two decades earlier. *Spirit of '76* was recorded on the Berliner Gramophone label on 5 December 1895 and issued on a 7-inch shellac disc. The recording recreated a street scene in Boston, Massachusetts in 1776 when General Washington rode by to the musical accompaniment of *Yankee Doodle*. By using shouting and cheering actors and a band of fifes and drums, the recording machine itself was moved towards and away from the players in order to create the effect of the band marching towards and away from the listener – the first recorded musical fade-out.

Much later, George Olsen's 1930 version of the Whiting & Harling song 'Beyond the Blue Horizon' rose to number five in the US charts and featured an electronic fade-out at the end of the track (to replicate the sound of a steam train heading off into the distance).

The genre of the electronic fade-out achieved musical sophistication in the 1960s with The Beatles. 'A Hard Day's Night' of 1964 is known for its unique first chord, as I mentioned in Musical Openings, two lectures back. But the song's 10-second fade-out ending is also important, not least because George Harrison riffs an arpeggiated subsection of the song's opening chord on his newly acquired Rickenbacker 12-string.

Audio Clip: The Beatles' End of 'A Hard Day's Night' 40''

George Harrison's Rickenbacker guitar had first been offered to John Lennon, but Lennon passed it up because he thought – quite rightly – that Harrison would appreciate the instrument more.

When The Beatles stopped touring in 1966 (after their appearance at San Francisco's Candlestick Park), they took the opportunity to manufacture some interesting musical endings that would be difficult, nay impossible, to recreate in live performance. One such is 'Helter Skelter' from the so-called 'White Album' of 1968. 'Helter Skelter' fades out and creates a false ending (followed by three seconds of silence; a long time in context) before the music returns for a further three-quarters of a minute. The gesture was a cover-up for a glitch, but the producer, George Martin, wanted to save the material right at the end of the take, not least Ringo Starr manically shouting, 'I've got blisters on my fingers!'. So, the track faded out to hide the glitch and faded back up again, eventually fading out quickly for a second time after Ringo's blistering outburst.

Audio Clip: The Beatles' 'Helter Skelter' end 1'20

Necessity is the mother of invention. An internal fade-out to cover an error.



The first Beatles recording on the Apple label was Paul McCartney's single 'Hey Jude' in 1968. A month before 'Helter Skelter' was recorded, 'Hey Jude' had been released. The coda of 'Hey Jude' is a massive four minutes long – longer than the main body of the song itself, which is just over three minutes. The ending is regarded as iconic or irritating, depending on your view of The Beatles (although with 8 million copies sold, it's difficult not to classify 'Hey Jude' – and particularly its insistently repetitive coda – as historically important). The long fade-out reduces to nothing after beginning the 19th repetition of its refrain: [F major] 'Na na na'

In 1995, the three living members of The Beatles re-composed, re-mixed, and re-mastered a demo tape that Lennon had made in 1977. The song had been planned as part of a piece of musical theatre called *The Ballad of John and Yoko*. John Lennon had been murdered on the Upper West Side of New York City in 1980, so 15 years after Lennon's death, George, Paul, and Ringo brushed the song up as a tribute. After four minutes in the re-composed version, 'Free as a bird' reaches a natural ending, yet after a couple of seconds of silence a whimsical coda is bolted on, which features George Harrison strumming the ukulele and the voice of John Lennon played backwards. Heard forwards, Lennon can be heard saying 'turned out nice again', the catchphrase of the comedian and ukulele player George Formby.

Audio Clip: Lennon's 'Free as a Bird' ending 35"

John Lennon's song 'Free as a bird' reconstructed by the other three of the Fab Four.

Part 4

Franz Joseph Haydn is known, along with Mozart, as one of the pillars of the Classical style in music. 'Papa' Haydn was known in his day as a musical prankster. The last movement of his String Quartet, opus 33 no. 2, is a fast and quirky Rondo. Towards the end, a slow section infiltrates the final bars, only for the main motif to begin again. But then the theme of the movement is fragmented, phrase by phrase, and with long pauses between phrases. After an even longer pause, the rondo starts up yet again but stops after its opening phrase. It stops dead and incomplete: The End. Disturbingly funny it is too, so much so that this string quartet has become known as 'The Joke'.

Audio Clip: Haydn's 'The Joke' ending 45"

Haydn's string quartet 'The Joke'. And it's still funny, particularly in live performance.

Haydn's most famous musical ending, however, is the close of his Symphony no. 45, the so-called 'Farewell', which predates 'The Joke' Quartet by nine years. In the autumn of 1772, Haydn's musicians at the summer palace of Eszterháza had been working without a break for longer than expected, and many of them were missing their families, who were back in Eisenstadt (in the late-18th century the journey from Eszterháza to Eisenstadt took a whole day). Prince Esterházy was a relatively good employer, and he and Haydn had a close and productive working relationship. But the musicians were restless, so Haydn wrote a symphony whose ending stated the contractual grievance of his orchestra. In the last movement of the symphony, one by one the players stopped playing, snuffed out their candles, and left the stage: 1st oboe, then 2nd horn, followed by bassoon. Then, as you can see on the score, the remaining players were gradually instructed to leave: '*parte*', the score says each time. 2nd oboe and 1st horn; then double bass; then cellos; then 3rd and 4th violins; and lastly violas.

That left only Haydn and one other violinist to complete the symphony – *pianissimo* and muted at that. Prince Nikolaus apparently understood the gesture and the members of the orchestra were allowed to return to their pining wives and children. It's clever that an employment grievance became a musical gesture of artistic validity, and one that's still being talked about 2½ centuries later.

Fade-out endings are one thing, but unexpected and perplexing endings are another. Mozart's 'Musical Joke' would have shocked and amused in equal measure. A Divertimento for two horns and strings of 1787 parodies the work of incompetent composers, and right at the end – if the point hadn't already been made – the last three chords are a harmonic farce. The horns alone complete the final movement sensibly, in F major. The cellos and double



basses play the final three chords in B-flat major, the violas in E-flat major, the 2nd violins in A major, and the 1st violins in G major. The effect is harmonic carnage at the end of what the more mature of you may think of as the signature tune to BBC1's 'Horse of the Year Show'.

Audio Clip: Mozart's 'A Musical Joke' 15"

The end of Mozart's 'A Musical Joke' – funny, though not subtle.

The American iconoclast Charles Ives created a similar polytonal effect at the close of his 2nd Symphony. Right at the end, a martial ending gives way to a very short and utterly cacophonous final chord, which comes out of nowhere. This is a musical raspberry.

Audio Clip: Ives' 'Symphony No.2' 40"

Symphony No. 2 by Charles Ives. In American parlance: a musical 'Bronx cheer'.

In a less cavalier and more traditional 20th-century context is the 5th Symphony by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. Sibelius's 5th Symphony ends with six *fortississimo forzando* chords (in other words as loud and heavily accented as possible). This is one of the most tense and dramatic endings in all of classical music. What contributes to the drama of the ending is that these six chords are spread over nine bars, so this page of music comprises mostly musical rests. Just one-ninth of the score is orchestral sound. But, as the French composer Claude Debussy so creatively observed: 'music is the space between the notes'.

Audio Clip: Sibelius' 5th Symphony 30"

The protracted ending of Sibelius's 5th Symphony.

I'd like to finish with an anecdote of my own. When I was a teenager, I studied the score of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* in advance of a performance in Hanley Town Hall conducted by a very young Simon Rattle. Two things impressed me: first of all, Simon Rattle, not least because he conducted the piece from memory (and I knew just how complicated and detailed the score was). Secondly, I was impressed by the ending of the whole piece. In studying the score, I'd perceived the very last chord as a loud chord played by the full orchestra. What blew my ears away in performance was Berlioz's expert orchestration. The chord begins as a full sound from all of the instruments, but as the chord is held, so the sustained nature of the brass dominates the sound and the piece ends in a blaze of brass-dominated glory. That carefully calculated orchestral effect had eluded my teenage inner ear when looking at the score. The last chord looked like one thing – a loud chord for full orchestra. But it sounded like another – a chord that became scintillatingly brassy. And over 40 years after first hearing it, this remains my favourite musical ending. Finish it, Sir Simon.

Audio Clip: Berlioz's 'Symphonie Fantastique' 15"

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