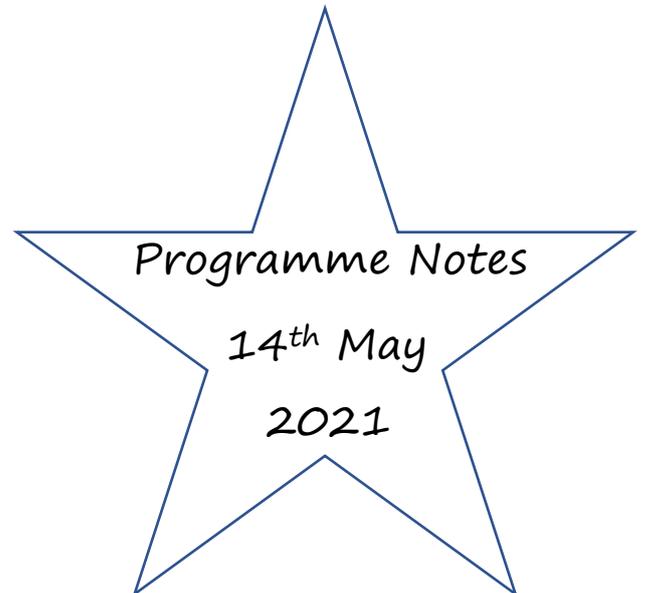
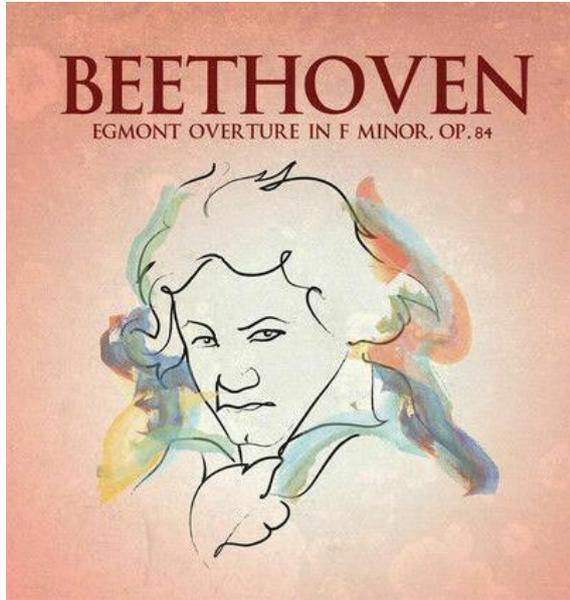




UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE
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Today's Selections and Musicians

Ludwig van Beethoven – Egmont Overture



Lamoral, Count of Egmont

Lamoral, Count of Egmont, Prince of Gavere (18 November 1522 – 5 June 1568) was a general and statesman in the Spanish Netherlands just before the start of the Eighty Years' War, whose execution helped spark the national uprising that eventually led to the independence of the Netherlands.

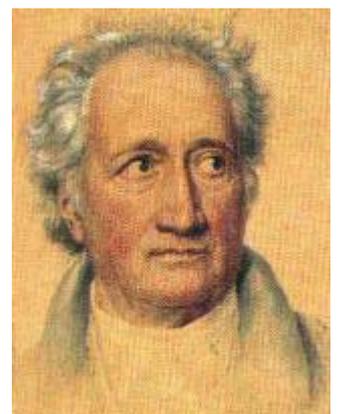
In his drama *Egmont*, Goethe (1787) relates the fight of Count Egmont against the despotic Duke of Albe (a Spanish general and statesman, known as the Iron Duke because of his ruthlessness, who almost succeeded in putting down the rising in the Low Countries against Spain).

Though under threat of arrest, Egmont refuses to run away and give up his ideal of liberty. Imprisoned and abandoned because of the cowardliness of his people, despite the desperate efforts of his mistress Klärchen, he is sentenced to death.

Thus, faced with her failure and despair, Klärchen puts an end to her life. The play ends on the hero's last call to fight for independence. His death as a martyr appears as a victory against oppression.

Egmont is both a political manifesto of Egmont's craving for justice and national as well as a drama of destiny in which the Flemish nobleman, with fatalism, accepts the dire consequences of his straightness and honesty.

When, in 1809, the Burgtheater of Vienna asked Beethoven, a great admirer of Goethe, to compose incidental music for a revival of the play, he accepted with enthusiasm. It recalled themes close to his own political preoccupations, already expressed in his opera *Leonore* (renamed *Fidelio*, in the definitive 1814 version) and in his overture *Coriolan* (in 1807).



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

According to BBC music presenter John Suchet (brother of David of 'Poirot' fame), Beethoven in this case felt the historical circumstances of Goethe's play personally. He was writing about the land his beloved grandfather and forebears came from. (Although Beethoven was born in Germany, his parents were Flemish – today's Netherlands – hence he is van Beethoven, not von Beethoven).

Besides the overture, Beethoven wrote nine pieces of incidental music for *Egmont*, music of great quality but a little disconnected, culminating with beautiful *Klärchen's Death*. We hear it performed by the Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by their Music Director Karina Canellakis.

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy – Symphony No.4

Felix Mendelssohn was a child prodigy. He began composing at a very young age, and although most of his early works do not reach the level of musical invention of his later compositions, they are often more refined in conception and surer in execution than the music many prominent mature composers of his time were producing.



At twenty, Mendelssohn did what most young men from wealthy families did at the time: He embarked on a “grand tour” through Europe. Whereas Scotland inspired the stormy Hebrides Overture and the Scottish Symphony, a visit to sunny Italy sparked a symphony that, according to the composer, was “the

jolliest piece I have ever done.”

He sketched part of the symphony while in Italy in 1830–31, and he completed it in 1833 for the Philharmonic Society of London, the same group that had commissioned Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony.

The Italian Symphony, completed when Mendelssohn had just turned twenty-four, was never published in his lifetime because he never was fully satisfied with it. The last movement caused him considerable anguish; he always talked about plans to revise it. His judgment about this symphony’s quality, however, has never been shared; historically, critics have often called this a “perfect” work, many noting that the last movement is a particular “gem.”

In the spring of 1829, when he turned twenty-one, Mendelssohn’s father urged him to travel so that he could “examine the various countries closely to fix on one where [he] wished to live. [He] was to make [his] name and gifts known, and was to press forward in [his] work.” He travelled first to Britain, (which inspired his Hebrides Overture and the Scottish Symphony), where his work came to be so admired that it had a very influential effect on the course of music there.

The German poet Goethe suggested that Mendelssohn go to Italy for the next part of his travels. Beginning in May 1830, he spent about a year and a half there. In Italy, he sketched his sunny Piano Concerto No. 1 and began this Italian Symphony. After he returned home, he pronounced his dissatisfaction with the score, but when the London Philharmonic Society asked him to present a new symphony, the invitation inspired him to work on it again.



The first performance, given on May 13, 1833, in London, was followed by several other performances in London, too, all of them successful with knowledgeable musicians and with audiences; nevertheless, Mendelssohn always was unhappy with this work and felt that both the first and last movements needed to be completely rewritten.



Ignaz Moscheles

Almost two years after he died, the symphony was performed in Germany for the first time, apparently lightly edited by Mendelssohn's friend Ignaz Moscheles. In the spring of 1851, this best loved of all the Mendelssohn symphonies was finally published. Joining principles of classicism and romanticism, it has a special place in the 19th century canon.

We will look at it through the eyes and energy of conductor Julian Rachlin and the Turku Philharmonic Orchestra. The Turku Philharmonic, founded in 1790, is the oldest orchestra in Finland and recently (2019) won an international award for a recording of music of Sibelius. The orchestra is also a pioneer in audience accessibility, providing access to concerts online in hospitals, residential care homes and schools.

Leonard Bernstein - Halil, a Nocturne for Solo Flute, String Orchestra, and Percussion

Leonard Bernstein came of age during a period that shaped modern Jewish identity: the Holocaust and the founding of Israel, and his artistic consciousness was shaped by the ongoing mixture of joy and struggle.



In 1981, Bernstein premiered this new mystical work for flute and orchestra with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra.

"Halil" is the Hebrew word for flute. Bernstein dedicated Halil to Yadin Tennenbaum, an Israeli flute student killed in his tank close to the Suez Canal during the 1973

Yom Kippur war:

In a note on the work Bernstein wrote "Halil is formally unlike any other work I have written, but it is like much of my music in its struggle between tonal and non-tonal forces. In this case I sense that struggle as involving wars and the threats of wars, the overwhelming desire to live and the consolations of art, love, and the hope for peace. I never knew Yadin Tennenbaum, but I know his spirit".

The Flautist in the performance we see and hear is American **Paula Robison**



Paula Robison has played a major role internationally in redefining the flute as a solo instrument. At the New England Conservatory in the USA she occupies a teaching chair endowed in 2005 by Charles "Chuck" and Donna Hieken, with matching funds from the Nicholas Family Challenge.

At age 20, Robison was invited by Leonard Bernstein to be a soloist with the New York Philharmonic. Robison joined the Young Concert Artists roster and became the first American to win First Prize at the Geneva International Competition.

Matthew Szymanski is a co-founder and the Music Director of “Phoenix”, a Boston-based orchestra chock-full of New England Conservatory alumni and current students, with a mission of revitalizing the presentation of orchestral music for modern audiences. Venues are non-traditional, performance attire is casual, and program notes share why the music is special to the orchestra members. Concert attendees are encouraged to express their excitement – and maybe even Tweet about it – at any time during a performance.



Matthew Szymanski combines with Paula Robison and the orchestra “Phoenix” as together they play Bernstein’s “Halil”.

Johannes Brahms – Variations on a Theme by Hadyn

Concert notes accompanying an online “Visit to Vienna” Concert by the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra in their current season gave the following background to these ‘Variations’:



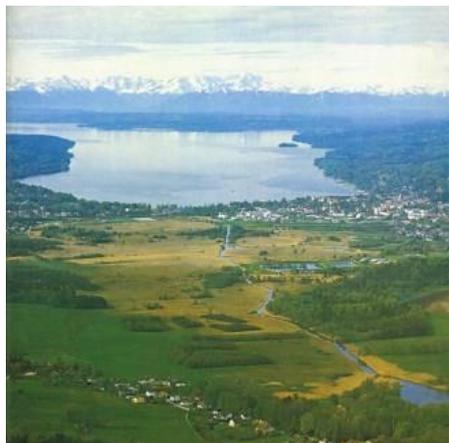
“As a child, you may have been told that (through fairy tale magic) Rumpelstiltskin spun straw into gold. A neat parlour trick, perhaps, but how does it stack up against a Red Hedgehog spinning a mystery into eight pastoral vistas? Johannes Brahms was given the moniker “Red Hedgehog” after the Vienna coffeehouse of the same name. The famed Romantic composer was so fond of the place that he stubbornly refused to eat or drink anywhere else for most of his adult life.

Brahms himself was not unlike a hedgehog anthropomorphized: whiskered and portly, described as having a “...notoriously curmudgeonly [exterior], but [one that] hid a profoundly sensitive and noble nature for which he found fullest expression in his music.” Nowhere is this nobility of musical spirit more evident than in his “Variations on a Theme by Haydn”.

Three years before he would compose the Variations, Brahms met with his friend Carl Ferdinand Pohl for coffee. At that time, Pohl was a musicologist and biographer of Haydn, serving as the librarian of the Vienna Philharmonic Society. He had called Brahms over to share with the composer what he believed to be an important discovery: a work that bore the name of the great eighteenth century composer Joseph Haydn that was utterly unknown to him.

Pohl had made a transcription of the original piece (titled Divertimento No. 1) for Brahms to examine, who was particularly drawn to the second movement. This section bore the heading “St. Anthony Chorale” and immediately caught Brahms’ eye because of its odd melody (which began with two irregular, five-bar phrases). Brahms furiously scribbled down the melody of the “St. Anthony Chorale”, thanked Pohl profusely, and hustled out into the busy Vienna streets. Unlike most people, who needed a walk to clear their heads, Brahms required long sojourns in

the countryside to access the most passionate (and personal) fragments of music that swirled within his mind.



A view of Lake Starnberg from the north. Tutzing, where Brahms composed the variations, is located on the lake's western shore.

And so it was in the summer of 1873 Brahms penned his “Variations” during his stay at the gorgeous town of Tutzing in Bavaria. Brahms originally set the piece for two pianos. Soon after, he made the decision to adapt his variations for orchestra, and it is this version which enjoys a more enduring popularity today. But how did the Red Hedgehog stumble across this theme by Haydn? And what was it about this theme that moved Brahms to compose eight unique variations?

It seems that Pohl had unintentionally slipped The Red Hedgehog a red herring, as Divertimento No. 1 was not actually composed by Haydn at all. Subsequent research has concluded that Divertimento No. 1 could not have been composed by the Father of the String Quartet, because it does not utilize the most oft-encountered hallmarks of Haydn’s musical style. Some academic sources posit that the Divertimento was written by Ignaz Pleyel, a student of Haydn’s, but this has not been definitively established. In the early nineteenth century, it was quite common for music publishers to attribute certain works by lesser or flat-out unknown composers to famous ones to increase the likelihood of a sale. This might explain why the Divertimento No. 1 was labelled “Haydn” in the first place. But this musical “whodunnit” grows even more perplexing when one considers the second movement of Divertimento No. 1. The mysterious composer of this work could have created the “St. Anthony Chorale” themselves, but it is more plausible that they created the melody by embellishing a pre-existing chorale. Unfortunately, it is here that the trail grows cold...as no record of a “St. Anthony Chorale” (or its unique melody) predating Divertimento No.1 has ever been found.

In more recent years, musical scholars have attempted to rename the variations Brahms created around the theme of Divertimento No. 1’s second movement. Many musicologists now agree that “The St. Anthony Variations” is a more appropriate title for Brahms’ masterwork. After all, it is this theme which, in its entirety, forms the melodic backbone for the eight variations that follow. And, as the name implies, each of Brahms’ thematic recreations vary in small but significant ways from their prototype, most notably in their coloration, tempos, and overall character. Several of the variations recollect the technical forms of earlier musical eras, and many of these specific variations showcase Brahms as a master of counterpoint: one whose innate gifts with creating musical textures set him apart from later composers of the Romantic period”.



Brahms himself conducted the Vienna Philharmonic in the premiere of the orchestral version on November 2, 1873.

The performance we see and hear is by the WDR Symphony Orchestra of Cologne under the baton of their principal conductor Cristian Măcelaru at a concert early last year.

...and so to the Music.....

Ludwig van Beethoven – Overture to “Egmont” in F minor Opus 84

A brief recapitulation: When the Spanish occupied the Netherlands in the 16th century, a certain Count Egmont, member of one of the oldest and noblest families in Flanders, led resistance to the Inquisition and persecution of Protestants. For his troubles, he was arrested and executed.



Lamoral, Count of Egmont and Philip de Montmorency, Count of Horne are the honour of Brussels.

This bronze statue was erected in 1864 on the Grand-Place (Brussels town square), before being transferred to the Petit-Sablon – a garden square created to honour the memory of these Counts of Egmont and Horne, both decapitated in 1568 by the Duke of Alba, because of their resistance to Spanish occupation.

With this knowledge in mind, listen to the Egmont Overture. In the music you hear the arrest of the Count. You hear, in the deep strings, the Spanish judges prosecuting him. You hear, in the plaintive wind, his wife, mother of his 11 children, pleading for mercy for her husband. You hear, in the fortissimo staccato notes of the brass, the verdict of guilty being given. A final piano pleading in the first violins. The whole orchestra in unison on a single note is the sentence of death. A forte fall of a fourth in first and second violins is the executioner’s sword coming down. But Beethoven has not finished. Triple piano, slowly building to a massive fortissimo, an exhilarating passage in the major key which tells us that Count Egmont’s spirit, and all he fought for, lives on; that the people of the Netherlands ultimately threw out the rapacious invader. That – as in so much of Beethoven’s work – darkness has given way to light, freedom has triumphed over oppression.

Felix Mendelssohn – Symphony No.4 in A major Opus 90 (“Italian”)

On one level, the Italian Symphony is not particularly Italian. Not for Mendelssohn the continuous use of local folk songs or musical traditions; instead, the work is much more an expression of how Italy made him feel. Indeed, it’s not until the final movement – some twenty minutes into the

symphony – that we first hear a genuinely Italian music motif, in this case the sound of a national peasant dance.

Nevertheless, Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony*, is a work of warm harmonies and engaging melodies, and is his most classically styled piece, following in the tradition of Haydn and Mozart. Scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, kettledrums and strings, Mendelssohn remarked that all of Italy is contained in this work: its people, its landscapes and its art.



Mendelssohn's bright impressions of Italy are borne out by the bouncing themes and running triplet pulse of the *Allegro vivace* movement that opens the symphony.

A loud string *pizzicato* is followed by pulsating rhythm in the woodwinds before the violins announce the sunny and spirited first theme. The underlying rhythm suggests an Italian dance, the *tarantella*.

The second movement, *Andante con moto*, a solemn processional that may have been a pilgrims' march, was probably motivated by Mendelssohn's experience viewing a religious procession in the streets of Naples. He evokes these with a dusky melody (oboes, clarinets, and violas) that unfolds over a plodding bass-line. It is nostalgic and elegiac in character and begins with counterpoint in two voices. The strings and winds play the principal material, while underneath there is an omnipresent "walking bass" line.



The moderate pace and smooth flow of the third movement resemble the minuets native to the symphonies of Mozart and Haydn, as opposed to the more rambunctious scherzos popularized by Beethoven. An elegant, smooth, flowing *Con moto moderato*, perhaps it can be described as a musical equivalent of the symmetrical forms and restrained beauty of some of the architecture Mendelssohn saw during his Italian sojourn. The trio sounds vaguely militaristic, with its fanfare-like melodic figure for horns and bassoons.

The finale, a spirited *Presto*, could be called the most characteristically Italian of the symphony's four movements. For the symphony's whirlwind finale, Mendelssohn borrowed the lively rhythmic patterns of the *saltarello*, a folk dance from central Italy defined by its fast triplet pulse and its leaping movements.



Mendelssohn composed it in the style of a saltarello, a lively Roman or Neapolitan country folk-dance dating from the 16th century. Performed by a man with a woman partner, who holds her apron up in the air as she dances, the saltarello almost always is characterized by its fast triple metre. He never relaxes the tension during

the movement, which hurtles to a close with a minor-key reiteration of the first movement's opening theme.

Leonard Bernstein - Halil, a Nocturne for Solo Flute, String Orchestra, and Percussion

Bernstein once commented about his music that everything he composed was "of the theatre". To dramatize his tribute to an unknown soldier, he created a struggle between tonal and non-tonal forces. "It is a kind of night music which, from its opening 12-tone row . . . is an ongoing conflict of nocturnal images: wish-dreams, nightmares, repose, sleeplessness, night terrors—and sleep itself, Death's twin brother."



To add to the drama, Bernstein creates images of conflict with "shrieking" and "crude" episodes, after which the flute, representing Yadin, is silent.

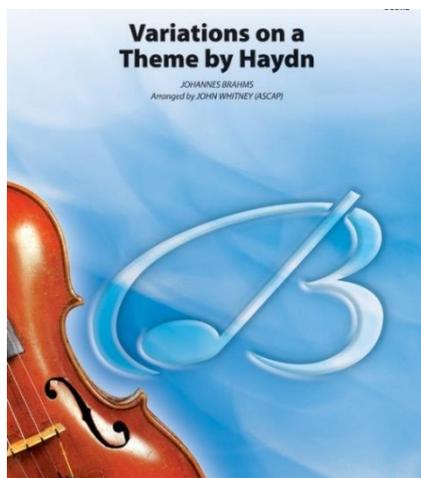
The music critic of the day for the New York Times commenting on the New York premiere of the work by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by

Bernstein said: "Understandably elegiac and mournful in overall mood, it exudes a sense of struggle, particularly in a central section where the soft-voiced flute finds itself matched against a hostile-sounding percussion section.....".

"It is a tribute to Mr. Bernstein's craft that (the) flute was almost invariably able to speak through, over or around the orchestral din, so that the solo instrument became a still point and a stabilizing influence".

Another American musicologist described 'Halil' this way: "From the start, the flute's pure voice rises from the denser textures, clearly evoking the voice of the fallen soldier. Both tonal and timbral processes emulate a continuously shifting of perspective – clearly between the 'threat of war' and the 'consolation of art', but more universally between a sense of security and one of threat, and, most poignantly, between what was lost and what might have been. "I never knew Yadin Tannenbaum, but I know his spirit," said the 62-year-old composer about the 19-year-old flautist. In the end, this nocturne restlessly inhabits the space between the twilight of one artist, and the barely-glimpsed dawn of another.

Johannes Brahms – The "Hadyn" Variations



The theme on which the Variations are based was first labelled a chorale (a Lutheran hymn tune). It has a pastoral character thanks to its woodwind scoring; indeed, the original woodwind octet Brahms borrowed it from was likely intended to be performed outdoors. This bucolic atmosphere pervades the entire piece. Brahms was fond of taking extended walking tours through the countryside, and he undoubtedly indulged this pastime during his summer in Tutzling. Though the variations have no extra-musical programme, it is easy to imagine each one as evoking a different scene along such a journey.

Structurally, it is divided into two parts: the first half introduces the main idea and is then repeated; the second half begins with a contrasting phrase before returning to the main idea and ending with a coda. The second half of the theme is then also repeated.

Variation I features one of Brahms' favourite textures: triplets against duplets (3 against 2). In the first phrase, the triplets appear in the cellos while the duplets are in the violins. In the next phrase, they switch.



Variation II is in the parallel minor and has something of the character of Romani (gypsy) music with its explosive contrasts of soft and loud. Brahms loved Romani music and often included this style of music in his compositions (most famously the finale of his G minor Piano Quartet and his "Hungarian" Dances).

Variation III features oboes and bassoons in a slightly embellished version of the original melody. For this variation, Brahms writes out and re-orchestrates the repeats of each half of the melody.

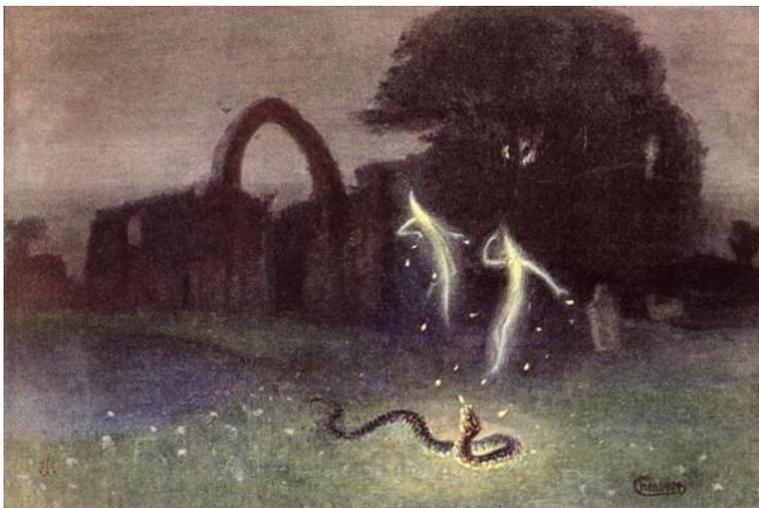
Variation IV returns to the parallel minor for a plaintive oboe solo in a slower triple meter. Like the preceding variation, it also has written out and re-orchestrated repeats.

Variation V is a fast, scherzando variation filled with bright woodwinds and unexpected accents.

Variation VI is the most dramatic. The first half begins softly with horns, perhaps evoking the instrument's age-old associations with hunting. The second half features daring harmonies and a full orchestra fortissimo; perhaps the quarry has been spotted?

Variation VII, marked *grazioso* (graceful), is one of the most beautiful and gentle. It features a tender duet between the high and low instruments.

Variation VIII is another *scherzando* variation, but this time in minor. It evokes will-o'-the-wisps and other mischievous inhabitants of dark forests, echoing the style of music developed by composers like Berlioz and Mendelssohn to depict the supernatural.



The finale is based on a different, older form of variation: the *chaconne*. In a *chaconne*, a (usually fairly short) bass line is repeated over and over while the upper parts are freely varied (Pachelbel's Canon in D major would be one example).

Brahms creates a bass line based on a simplified version of the beginning of the opening melody. Above it, choral, hymn-like textures thicken and grow increasingly expressive. The music takes off, quickly passing through an ever-shifting array of moods, colours and textures. After an episode in the parallel minor, the original theme makes a grand return in the full orchestra. The music then fades away, leading to the powerful final chords.

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YouTube Links to Recordings

Beethoven: Egmont Overture

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