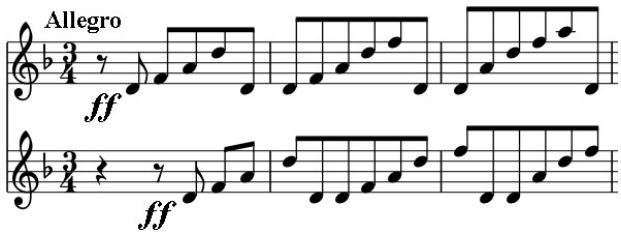
Calefax

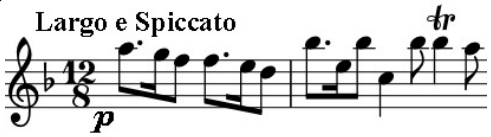
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Concerto for solo organ in D minor BWV 596 (1717) being a transcription of
Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) Concerto for Two Violins and Cello Op. 3 No. 11 (*L'Estro Armonico*, Bk 2) RV 565 (published 1711)
Allegro - Grave – Fuga
Largo e spiccato
Finale: Allegro

In 1844 an edition was published of an Organ Concerto nominally by J.S. Bach's eldest son Wilhelm Friedemann (1710-1784). The concerto became very well known in this form. But in fact the work was a transcription by his father of a Vivaldi concerto for two violins and cello, which the son had intentionally misattributed to himself, perhaps to increase his income and prestige during his unsuccessful declining years.

Vivaldi's original concerto was the eleventh of a set of twelve concertos for different string combinations published by the Amsterdam firm of Estienne Roger as *L'Estro Armonico* (Harmonic Inspiration). Roger not only had an extensive distribution network throughout northern Europe, but also used modern copperplate technology, which produced a superior print to the clumsy one-note-one-block method of contemporary Venetian printers. Vivaldi's choice of publisher was a good one: *L'Estro Armonico* transformed Vivaldi's career and set the pattern for instrumental concerto writing. J.S. Bach's organ transcription is largely faithful to the Vivaldi original; he adds just a single bar to the opening *Allegro* and necessarily makes many detailed changes to suit the organ. Bach not only transcribed today's D minor concerto, but also five others that impressed him with their ingenious counterpoint. He also modelled his own concertos on them, imitating, for example, the *cantabile* style that Vivaldi had introduced in his slow movements.



Counterpoint is evident with a canon between the two upper soloists (violins in the original) at the start of the short introductory *Allegro.* A 3-bar *Adagio* leads to a full-blown fugue introduced by the solo cello. The Sicilienne-style *Largo* gives the upper solo voice a beautiful long *cantabile* line and the work ends with a lively *Allegro*.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Orgelstück für eine Uhr (Fantasia in F) K608 (1791)
Allegro
Andante

The Austro-Turkish War of 1787 to 1791 reduced the number of concerts in Vienna and was thus generally bad news for Mozart. But there was a small plus side. Count Josef Deym owned a waxworks, in which he had recently installed an effigy of the late commander-in-chief of the Austrian army Field-Marshall Baron Ernst Gideon von Laudon. Deym's waxworks boasted a clock that housed a mechanical organ and he commissioned three pieces from Mozart for this instrument in honour of the Field-Marshall's arrival.

Mozart was glad of the money but hated the job. In 1790 he wrote to his wife from `Frankfurt (where he was looking for commissions at the coronation of Leopold II) :

> *'… it is the kind of composition which I detest, I have unfortunately not been able to finish it. I compose a bit of it every day – but I have to break off now and then, as I get bored... If it were for a large instrument and the work would sound like an organ piece, then I might get some fun out of it. But as it is the works [of the organ] consist solely of little pipes, which sound too high-pitched and childish for my taste.'*

Mozart might have been more motivated had he anticipated an arrangement of the piece by Calefax. It has also been arranged for 2- and 4-handed piano and, by Busoni, for two pianos. The piece, as befits one for lots of 'little pipes', was originally scored with three treble clef staves and one bass, which generally stays in the tenor range. The opening *Allegro* consists of a short prelude leading to a fugue. A modified *Allegro* returns after the main *Andante*. Mozart was clearly happy to get to the end, indulging in a little cod Bach for his despised miniature organ.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) 7 Variations on 'God Save the King', WoO 78 (1803)

Along with about 140 other classical composers, Jimi Hendrix (spontaneously), the Sex Pistols (controversially) and Queen (aptly), Beethoven produced a version of our anonymous anthem 'God Save the King'. In 1803, he offered his publisher Breitkopf these 7 variations for piano along with 5 jaunty variations on 'Rule Britannia'. It is not clear why he chose to write them. Perhaps they reflected his admiration for an admiring Britain and also provided him with some light relief from writing the 'Eroica' Symphony. Incidentally, WoO 78 refers to a 1955 catalogue of those of Beethoven's works that had been published without opus numbers (Werke ohne Opuszahl).

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) 'Le tombeau de Couperin' for piano (1918)
Prélude. Vif
Fugue. Allegro moderato
Forlane. Allegretto
Rigaudon. Assez vif
Menuet. Allegro moderato
Toccata. Vif

Musically, 'un Tombeau' is a piece written in memory of someone. Ravel's original six movement piece for piano is patriotically titled as being in memory of François Couperin (1668-1733), who established a distinctively French keyboard style of composition; but each of the movements is also dedicated to the memory of a different close friend killed in the first world war. When war broke out Ravel was working on his piano trio, the symphonic poem *La Valse* and a few other projects including *LeTombeau.* He completed the piano trio in five weeks and then volunteered for service. His several attempts to enlist as an aircraft pilot were turned down on health grounds, but he finally became a driver in the motor transport corps. Despite the death in January 1917 of his mother, who was perhaps the only person to whom he was ever closely emotionally attached, Ravel finished the six pieces of *Le Tombeau* and planned to perform them. When bombing postponed the initial performance, Ravel used the time to create an orchestral version of four of the original six movements.

George Gershwin (1898-1937 An American in Paris (1928)

Music only started to impact on George Gershwin's life when he was 12 and the family bought a piano for his elder brother Ira. Ira (the future lyricist) wasn't interested, but George was. His piano teacher took him to concerts and at 15 he dropped out of school and worked as a song plugger for a firm on Tin Pan Alley, playing and singing their songs to prospective clients. He composed in his spare time. He moved to being a Broadway rehearsal pianist, was retained as a composer by Harms publishers and in 1918 composed his first musical *La La Lucille*. Two years later Al Jolson recorded *Swanee*, bringing Gershwin $10,000 in royalties in the first year.

On the classical side, he studied harmony, counterpoint and orchestration with a number of teachers including the avant garde Henry Cowell, wrote a string quartet as an exercise, and in 1924, commissioned by band leader Paul Whiteman and inspired by riding the train from New York to Boston, he wrote *Rhapsody in Blue* for two pianos. It was orchestrated by Ferde Grofé, but its famous glissando was a whim of the clarinettist at the first rehearsal.

In early 1928 Gershwin met Ravel in New York, taking him to hear Duke Ellington, and asked Ravel to teach him. Ravel declined, allegedly saying 'Why become a second-rate Ravel when you're already a first-rate Gershwin?'. On hearing how much money Gershwin earned Ravel produced a counter-proposal: that he study with Gershwin. Ravel suggested that Gershwin try Nadia Boulanger in Paris. So, with lessons from Boulanger as an incentive and also with a new symphonic tone poem already sketched out in his mind Gershwin went to Paris. Although Nadia Boulanger also declined to teach Gershwin, his composing prospered. 'An American in Paris' was premiered by Walter Damrosch soon after Gershwin's return to New York. Included in the performance were four Parisian taxi horns that Gershwin had brought with him.

Here is Gershwin's description of the piece:

> *'The opening gay section is followed by a rich 'blues' with a strong rhythmic undercurrent. Our American friend, perhaps after strolling into a café and having a few drinks, has suddenly succumbed to a spasm of homesickness. The harmony here is both more intense and simpler than in the preceding pages. This 'blues' rises to a climax followed by a coda in which the spirit of the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impressions of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has drowned his spell of blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life. At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant.'*

Programme notes by Chris Darwin