

Mozart 225
Part 2: The Earlier Symphonies
by Michael Greenhalgh

The structuring and support material of Mozart 225 encourages you to take a chronological journey through all Mozart's symphonies performed on period instruments (CDs 50-60) and then consider performances including alternative movements or scorings (CD 61), some interpretations on modern instruments (CDs 88, 91-2, 99, 101), a fragment (CD 174), a symphony by Carl Abel that Mozart arranged (CD 179), Symphony 37, by Michael Haydn but with introduction and possibly rescoring by Mozart (CD 181) and 9 symphonies accredited to but probably not by Mozart (CDs 197-8). To undertake a listening schedule and present this article of not too daunting length I'm confining it to the earlier symphonies, but that's appropriate for the focus here is on getting to know what is neither familiar from the concert hall nor recordings unless you buy complete sets. Only when you discover a masterpiece, and there are a couple, does the interest in alternative interpretations become more pressing. Here I record what struck me most on my journey, restricting myself to the two most striking symphonies CD by CD, the full contents of which are listed at the end.



CD 50 begins with **Symphony 1**, written in London by the 8-year-old Mozart, stuck for something to do with father ill and he not allowed to make a noise on the keyboard. Its appeal is very much owing to being the earliest symphony yet it's also striking proof of Mozart's early technical prowess and innate feeling for contrast and drama. It opens with a bold, loud phrase, immediately followed by a soft, conciliatory response, exactly the pattern of Symphony 41, Mozart's last written 24 years later. But this first symphony's second theme (tr. 1, 0:46) also has a hint of subtlety, only gradually gaining momentum and outline. The slow movement wallows a bit indulgently in its sunny, musing chords for oboes and horns but becomes more interesting in its second half when the oboes' melody expands and the first violins comment on it. A refreshingly lively finale rounds things off nicely.

In CD 50's contents list you'll see there are no Symphonies 2 and 3. This is the first of 3 anomalies about Mozart symphonies only to be discovered in complete sets: not all Mozart's numbered symphonies are now considered authentic. The second anomaly can also be seen in the heading: there are authentic un-numbered Mozart symphonies identified by key and Kochel number. As it happens I suggest the **Symphony in G, K45a, Alte Lambacher** is the first in which there are hints of greatness. For a start there's the arresting opening with sonorous oboes and horns supporting the busy strings, a powerful motif in the cellos and basses, later returning in the first violins. The second theme (tr. 13, 0:42) is little more than a flimsy incitement to a triumphal response but in the second half of the movement that theme is re-coloured when exchanged by oboes and horns. The slow movement is a lovely melody with graceful, balletic leaps rather smoochily presented on muted first violins to a rosy horns' backcloth. The *Presto* finale is vigorous and stylish by turns though I felt Trevor Pinnock could have given more emphasis to the dynamic contrasts and whipped up the tension with more excitement. Generally, however, Pinnock maintains a fine balance between objective clarity of presentation and dynamism.

Immediately on **CD 51** you encounter the third and final anomaly regarding Mozart symphonies: there are various single movements that scholars argue may at one time have been part of a symphony. These are only to be found in complete editions like Mozart 225 or the complete Academy of Ancient Music set jointly directed by Jaap Schröder as concert master and Christopher Hogwood on continuo; Mozart 225's documentation regrettably ignores Schröder. It's a bit cruel, yet realistic, to term these single movements Mozart flotsam and jetsam because you can't see how they

might contribute to a satisfying sequence. And on this disc only *La Betulia liberata* Overture has sufficient substance to retain your attention. It begins as helter-skelter drama, fiery and frantic, stopping abruptly at a cliff edge to meet a well contrasted second theme of conciliatory feminine wiles (tr. 23, 1:26), after which this material and the fast and furious alternate in splenetic discord. The good thing is that you're tempted to enjoy the completed opera on CDs 155-6.

Now to my choice of 2 symphonies on this CD. **Symphony 48**, also has an operatic link in that its opening 2 movements are also the Overture and No. 1 of *Ascanio in Alba*. Is it, with just finale added, still effective as a symphony? My answer would be an emphatic 'Yes!' The opening movement has spaciousness as well as thrilling dramatic insistency in the stoking up of its rampaging masculine theme, alongside which the feminine sallies are easily overwhelmed respites. In the slow movement the flutes add air while it has both a Handelian pastoral aura and behaves like a courtly dance. The finale is an explosive yet terse rondo with a triumphant close. This Schröder/Hogwood account also shows that, at their best, their performances have more fizz than Pinnock's, albeit most of their recordings are in brighter but thinner toned analogue sound.

Symphony 48 shows a potential dramatic path the symphony didn't develop because it was more strictly structured, as Mozart's better examples even of this time were. **Symphony 13** has clearly defined themes in its opening movement, a second theme (tr. 19, 0:30) of more substance than usual, and a development which toys with its tail. A diaphanous slow movement, for strings alone, has a sweetly flowing, ornately decorated first violin line of finely turned craftsmanship. The Minuet is sunnily assertive, the Trio calm and assured. Both are effectively brief owing to the quality of their phrasing. The finale is an effervescent rondo sporting a memorable theme with some bite and quite meaty episodes too.

CD 52 begins with a pleasant surprise. In **Symphony 14**, if an early Mozart symphony is like the contents of a suitcase, here everything is in place and you feel Mozart was clear about this from the outset. The melody is established in just first and second violins, then flutes, horns and string bass are added and soon create a more fanfare like idea, all with a descending tendency. The second theme (tr. 1, 0:58) is more delicate but has an ascending path, as does the bravura codetta which follows to complete the exposition. The development begins with a new theme but with similar characteristics to the others so there's a welcome kinship at this moment of change. In the D major slow movement Mozart plays the descents versus ascents game again. It starts with silky descending first violins. The second theme (tr. 2, 0:37) is a touch more florid and mainly rising. The second half of the movement seamlessly spins shining strands of sound. The Minuet is all confidence, with an especially bullish second strain. The key changes from A major to A minor for a Trio which has a sensitive, simple, barely moving melody from the first violins over anxiously busy seconds. The finale is all fun yet has a well worked, quieter yet still assured, second theme (tr. 4, 0:20) for contrast from the otherwise breezy progress while a similarly decorative theme begins the movement's second half. Everything from Pinnock sounds freshly minted.

For this symphony Mozart 225 allows you to indulge in some musical archaeology because Mozart wrote an original Minuet which he then crossed through. You've to do a bit of digging yourself to reach it as it's on **CD 174** and the cross references in the booklets unhelpfully aren't to specific tracks and there are 68 on CD 174. Fortunately, it's track 15 on which this original Minuet is played by The Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields/Neville Marriner recorded in 1989. And it's quite interesting, grand and open air in character with florid horn parts, whereas in the replacement Minuet it's the flutes topping the strings that are noticeable. Nevertheless the replacement is more firmly structured as a Minuet.

Symphony 18 doesn't have the immediate appeal of Symphony 14 but that of a more complex and curious work. As in Symphony 14 it starts with just first and second violins, then adds flutes, horns but here *tremolando* lower strings. It's a chirrupy first theme with a reclining second part (tr. 15, 0:16) then an upstanding third part (0:27). The second theme (0:46) is more intricate and dainty but meets a bold rejoinder (1:05), after which these two aspects alternate to close the exposition. In the

development the chirruping becomes fierce and dramatic before the recapitulation sidles in as if nothing has happened. The slow movement is soft and tender on muted strings, then opens out airily in repeat garnished with flutes and horns. Its second half has the atmosphere of gentle pastoral murmurings. In the Minuet busy second violins and violas belie the optimism of the first violins' tune. As in Symphony 14 the Trio has a barely moving melody in the first violins but this time there's a powerful rejoinder in the second strain. In its second half the robust and graceful appear in reverse order but this is splendour with a pale hue, subverted by the harmonic twists of the inner parts. The finale keeps switching steadiness and exhilaration in its 4 themes: the second (tr. 18, 0:31) has furtive quavers creeping into *tremolando* chords, the third (1:01) is stylish and reflective but with an upbeat second part, the fourth (1:46) very quiet and halting before a bold peroration. Mozart delights in laying out a profusion of themes.

CD 53 starts with **Symphony 19** which opens in convivial fashion. Its second theme (tr. 1, 0:47) wears a light smile in its succession of trilling motifs on the first violins yet soon gives way to a more buoyant, even triumphant manner which glides into a recapitulation without the second theme. The *Andante* slow movement in B flat major spins a sweet melody on first violins with occasional dark plunges into their lower register. Its opening phrase is soft, followed by a loud one which is less appealing. This dynamic contrast pervades the movement and I feel Pinnock might have given it more marked emphasis. The Minuet scintillantly creates the progression of a simple motif exchanged between first and second violins. Its Trio is in C minor with a hymn like line which moves rather squarely and generally slowly. The boisterous rondo finale takes us back to the pizzazz of the opening movement. It sports a tough first episode (tr. 4, 0:33) with busy second violins while C minor returns for a more reflective second episode (1:35), but the third episode (2:40) is comfortingly warmer. While displaying Mozart's adept sleight of hand, this symphony is also of interest in this Mozart 225 edition context in being the first to be presented in two interpretations. This is because the slow movement exists in two versions, the first of which, an *Andante grazioso* was recorded in 1979 by The Academy of Ancient Music directed by Jaap Schröder and Christopher Hogwood along with the rest of the symphony and appears on CD 61. But I'll make comparison here. To take first the different slow movement, Schröder/Hogwood's is about half the length of Pinnock's and less substantial in content, being decorative pastoral, ostentatious in its trills and violins' parade of triplets in semiquavers which close both sections. The second part relies on the interplay of violins and oboes with touches of horn. With regard to the rest of the symphony, Schröder/Hogwood bring more exciting attack to the *tuttis* of the first movement, more marked and dramatic dynamic contrasts soon after the introduction of the second theme, becoming part of it, so it ushers in a new dramatic phase. Pinnock has a recording of more density but his more even-handed approach is less stimulating. However, in the Minuet Pinnock finds an ideal balance of sinew and momentum, discipline and bloom. Schröder/Hogwood, timing at 4:45 against Pinnock's 4:19, are more effortful in their scintillance though they do find more intimacy in a softer first section of the Trio. In the finale Schröder/Hogwood are also a little slower which makes the delivery of the rondo theme a touch stiffer. Where they are usually more comfortable than Pinnock is in the dynamic contrasts of the episodes: those of episode 1 more forthright, of episode 2 clarifying its wheedling articulation. But Pinnock is more successful in providing more tempered dynamic contrasts in episode 3 which suit the warmth of its swing.

Splendour, tranquillity and then resolve are the moods rapidly experienced at the start of **Symphony 21**, followed by charm and ease in its second theme (tr. 9, 0:34), bolstered and then expanded by flutes, underneath which the first theme slips in again before the exposition ends in mid-air with a question. The slow movement is *cantabile* first violins over seconds murmuring in demisemiquavers, but before long the firsts also take up in part the demisemiquaver figurations and their pulse dominates the second part. The magic lies in the placing and orchestration of the sustained and ornamental aspects. This is the first time in a Mozart symphony I found myself thinking only Mozart could have written this. The Minuet is showy and bubbling, the Trio calm yet still ornate until its second section features a horns' summons and *pizzicato* violins response before calm is restored. The

finale delights in the intricate progress of a busy theme, but its second theme (tr. 12, 0:29) gives breathing space before its second part suddenly skips and then throws away all caution.

On **CD 54 Symphony 27** is from the start assured but also has a beamingly sunny second theme (tr. 1, 0:28) with a second part of confident then quiet authority. The slow movement, with muted violins, is cosy and intimate before being opened out airily by the addition of flutes on repeat. Now Mozart introduces first violins on tiptoe with flutes in pursuit and then a frisson of a chord on flutes and horns to unsettle the idyllic ambience. With a four-note initial motif which later extends to a playful melody, the *Presto* finale is fugal in manner and brilliant in execution, as is Pinnock's performance.

There's a feel of experiment through all the symphonies on CD 54, but unquestionably the most successful is Mozart's first symphonic masterpiece, **Symphony 25**. This is partly because for the first time he writes a tragic symphony and so must use a minor key, G minor, and he only does this once more, with Symphony 40, also in G minor. This latter is sometimes called *the Great G minor* and Symphony 25 *the little G minor*. This is a pity because in terms of its dramatic impact, coherence and sustained concentration of focus, Symphony 25 stands out among all its contemporaries. Mozart begins the opening movement with a nervous pulse, a repeated but varied, syncopated rhythm which ensures the tension before the more conventional opening figure of a rising *arpeggio* followed by a falling cascade of notes. Above that nervous pulse is the beginning of the opening theme in loud sustained notes on the oboes, but the striking innovation is after its second appearance one oboe softly repeats and extends the theme, so suddenly in this overall tragic atmosphere comes an individual lament. The second theme (tr. 13, 0:44) begins with an octave leap on the first violins immediately echoed by the horns, but it isn't an exact echo as they only leap a seventh, a skewing which adds to the sense of anguish. At the end of this theme there are sequences of violins' cascades now *tremolando*. Now there's a quiet third theme (1:27) of the wittering filler type Mozart often has as a second theme, but even this is quickly repeated loud and fierily. In the development the oboe's further entreating solo receives sympathy from the first violins' sighs, echoed by second violins and violas. Pinnock gauges all these effects piquantly and graphically. Indeed you could argue that, with their more penetrating tone, this symphony is best suited to period instruments. But, as it is a masterpiece, an alternative, modern instrument interpretation should have been offered. I shall introduce that by the Danish National Chamber Orchestra/Adam Fischer, part of his Mozart set of *45 symphonies* he recorded 2006-13 (Dacapo 8.201201). Fischer appears to have a smaller orchestra which creates a more distinctive clarity of texture. His opening is spikier, the oboe solo more alluringly melting, you could say more romantic. There's more perceptible attack from the horns in the second theme and a more shivering quality to the violins' *tremolando*. Fischer's third theme begins more daintily. In the development, although this isn't explicitly marked, Fischer applies an effective *diminuendo* to the strings' echoing sighs.

In the slow movement there are sighs in all the strings but the muted violins give them a dreamy quality and the change from G minor to E flat major suggests a craving for happier times, confirmed by the only melody in the movement: a delicate, brief dance from the first violins first appearing at the end of its opening section. Timing the movement at 6:50, Pinnock is a deal slower than Fischer at 5:35 which makes the sighs very present and more indulgent. Fischer, at arguably a truer *Andante*, makes the melody more gossamer, barely present, very much in a dream state. Back in G minor, Pinnock gives us a rather stiff and stern Minuet whose feminine pleading second phrase is immediately rebuffed by the masculine third one. But the lady's *appoggiatura* on the penultimate note of the second phrase of the second section mocks the man. Fischer is again faster for this movement, 3:02 against Pinnock's 4:08, and emphasises the dynamic contrast more, which makes the masculine phrases more waspish and feminine ones more cavalier. He is more spacious in the idyllic G major Trio for wind instruments only. The finale is at first furtive, then frenzied. Its suave rejoinder of a second theme (tr. 16, 0:16) is soon furiously rocked off course while a third theme (0:40) escapes into a delightful tripping. When second and third theme return in the recapitulation they have both been transformed into minor key versions. Pinnock, marginally faster in this

movement, at 6:25 to Fischer's 6:36, is thereby a touch more intense in conveying its precipitation of fury, though Fischer's more marked dynamic contrasts, more starkly juxtapose its charm and spleen.

On **CD 55, Symphony 28** isn't a masterpiece but is intriguing in being less predictable than many. It begins presenting in turn a solid and filigree manner, but its second theme (tr. 9, 0:42) is more elegant, shared between strings and oboes, with a more aspiring second part. The movement proceeds with considerable bravura. And next another slow movement which could only have been composed by Mozart. Its comely melody on muted first violins closes with rather frivolous demisemiquaver flourishes as if to cast off the emotion already exhibited, yet in its second section showcases delicate demisemiquaver plus dotted semiquaver figures. There's a lovely glint to Pinnock's period violins here. For me Pinnock takes the *Allegretto* Minuet, with its innovation of horns' echoing 4 notes, too steadily while the Trio, for strings alone, deserves stronger dynamic contrast. The *moto perpetuo* finale is headed by figurations in the first violins which are dotted quaver plus two demisemiquavers and come in clusters of six. At *Presto* the effect is something between exhilaration and waspishness. The second theme, however (tr. 12, 0:29), is optimistic and resolute.

Symphony 29 is Mozart's second symphonic masterpiece. As with Symphony 25 it's a matter of intensity, yet not here of tragedy but a sense of purpose and direction. The music has conviction because techniques already used are here harnessed to more coherent melodic material. The beginning from Pinnock is soft and unassuming, but when repeated loud it's suddenly triumphant. The second theme (tr. 1, 0:49) is soft, demure and charming, but again there's a loudly assertive close to its first part. Its second part (1:20) has a quiet smiling ease which in turn is followed by noisy elation. This is bold writing for a small orchestra, just strings, 2 oboes and 2 horns, yet the *tuttis* have great resilience. The slow movement, by contrast, with muted violins, is a gauzy dream with the finesse of the first violins' pirouettes. Its second theme (tr. 2, 0:43) is firmer in character yet still elegantly ornamented, its second part (1:28), softer still and tender as well as ornate in its demisemiquaver patterns, in delivering which Pinnock makes time seem to stand still.

In the Minuet Pinnock brings an engagingly chatty quality to the constant impetus of its dotted rhythm, contrast of soft and loud phrases and finally the wind presenting the bare rhythm as a closing volley, an echo of the whole. The Trio lays on the charm but retains the soft-loud contrasts, judiciously tempered by Pinnock here. The finale is animated from the start yet its second theme (tr. 4, 0:37) is of a much lighter, chuckling quality before the mood suddenly changes again for it to terminate in forceful chords. The flowering of the horns in the coda is like glittering icing on the cake.

This is the first symphony for which Mozart 225 supplies a second interpretation on modern orchestra, on **CD 88**, in this case Orchestra Mozart/Claudio Abbado recorded in 2006. Sunniness is the dominant impression of Abbado's first movement. Timing at 10:30 to Pinnock's 9:59 it's a little more laid back in manner and physically too, the recording being more perspectived than the closer Pinnock. This, combined with Abbado's lighter touch and greater transparency of texture, gives the more intimate impression of a smaller orchestra. Throughout there's more sheen and smiling quality, elegance in the softer passages, crispness of rhythm in the louder, yet brio rather than weight to the *tuttis*. If you know this symphony well you'll likely be momentarily taken aback by Abbado's initiative of suddenly playing even softer, in the manner of an echo, a phrase repeated in the opening theme (tr. 4, 0:15). This effect isn't marked in the score but is a convention sometimes employed in the performance of baroque music. It works well enough here as Abbado doesn't use it for all repeated phrases to make it a mannerism. Abbado's view of the *Andante* slow movement is quicker than Pinnock's, timing at 10:15 rather than 11:22 and this makes for a less analytical, more impressionistic treatment. Abbado is soft and silky at the start. His second theme (tr. 5, 0:41) is warmer, the louder passages just a little firmer in outline. The second part of the second theme, marked *pianissimo* (1:20), is barely audible, as if it wants to go back into its own shell but the *piano* repeat with the first flute doubling the first violins lets in the daylight. Abbado finds more humour than Pinnock in the

ubiquitous dotted rhythm in the Minuet while his soft phrases are more dainty and loud ones more gruff. Abbado's Trio is more languid and the soft-loud contrasts, just as sensitively tempered as Pinnock's, are very much part of the torpor. Abbado's finale carries forward from the Minuet the contrast of the daintily soft and gruffly loud, his thicker bass particularly marked in a nevertheless disciplined development. As well as highlighting Mozart's dynamic contrasts, Abbado adds more, such as the *crescendo* stylishly applied to those forceful chords which end the second theme presentation. In sum, while Pinnock plays the work absolutely straight and with palpable drama, Abbado is always looking for light and shade to convey it with more colour. And my appreciation of the density of the work was enhanced by the differences in interpretation. There will be more such to be observed when I turn to the later symphonies in Part 3 next month.

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