

C.I.'s favourite music

in one hundred very heterogeneous items,
from minutes to hours long,
ordered chronologically
(August 2012)

While 'favourite books' was a piece of cake, I struggled very long with 'favourite music'. Eventually I settled for a naïve chronological list where Mendelssohn's Venezianisches Gondellied (under 3 minutes) meets Wagner's Lohengrin (over 3 hours). Clearly, this makes no sense, and someday I'll do better. But there is so much to choose from! Masterpieces abound, and the giants have produced whole series of them in their choice genres. I had a hard time selecting symphonies by Haydn, sonatas for violin and piano by Mozart, piano concertos, piano sonatas and string quartets by Beethoven.

On my emotional scale, Richard Strauss for female voices and Schubert lieder rank highest.¹ When forced to produce a single name, it would be Beethoven.²

Fifteenth century (3 items)

- Johannes Ockeghem, rondeau *D'ung aultre amer* (15th)
- Hayne van Ghizeghem, rondeau *De tous biens plaine* (2nd half 15th)
- Antoine Brumel, rondeau after Johannes Ockeghem *Du tout plongiet – Fors seulement l'attente* (ca. 1500)

Sixteenth century (2 items)

- Benedictus Appenzeller, *Een venusdierken* (1st half 16th)
- Carolus Souliaert (Swilliaert), *Druck en verdriet – Ick treure* (1st half 16th)

Seventeenth century (1 item)

- Claudio Monteverdi, *Vespro della Beata Vergine* (1610)

Eighteenth century (18 items)

¹though I agree with Goethe and Victor Hugo that music spoils poems.

²This being the best known Flemish name on earth, we had as well understand 'van Beethoven' correctly. Around 1500, Beethoven's ancestors spelled their name 'van Bettehoven', which means 'originating from Bettenhoven'. The latter is a place near the Dutch-French linguistic border. Formerly Dutch speaking, it is now inside the French speaking province of Liège, where it is called 'Bettincourt' (Dutch 'hof' translated as French 'court'). In 1139 we find it as 'Bertincurt', i.e. 'Berhta's farm', after the owner. Summarizing: 'van Beethoven' means: 'originating from around Berhta's farm'. There is no relation with 'field of beets', as popular etymology has it.

- Johann Sebastian Bach, Violin Concerto No. 1 (1717)
- Johann Sebastian Bach, Violin Concerto No. 2 (1717)
- Johann Sebastian Bach, Concerto for two violins (1717)
- Johann Sebastian Bach, Partita for violin No. 1 (1720)
- Johann Sebastian Bach, Partita for violin No. 2 (1720)
- Johann Sebastian Bach, Harpsichord Concerto No. 1 (1738)³
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Violin concerto No. 5 (1775)
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Sonata for piano and violin KV 379 (1781)⁴
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Horn Concerto No. 1 (1782)⁵
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Piano Concerto KV 466 (1785)
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Maurerische Trauermusik* (1785)
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Symphony No. 38 *Prague* (1786)⁶
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Piano Concerto KV 488 (1786)⁷
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Piano Concerto KV 491 (1786)⁸
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni* (1787)
- Franz Joseph Hadyn, Symphony No. 88 (1787)⁹
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Clarinet Concerto (1791)
- Franz Joseph Hadyn, Symphony No. 104 *London* (1795)

Nineteenth century (41 items)

- Ludwig van Beethoven, Violin Concerto (1806)
- Ludwig van Beethoven, String Quartet op.59 No. 3 *Rasumovsky* (1806)

³version for piano

⁴Composed in one hour's time (11-12 at night), and performed the next day, Mozart playing the piano part not yet written out

⁵second movement a completion by Franz Xaver Süßmayr of an incomplete draft by Mozart.

⁶first movement a Don Giovanni prefiguration

⁷second movement Mozart's only bars in *fis* minor

⁸*Ah, Cramer, we'll never be able to do anything like that*, Beethoven commenting on the end of KV 491 to visiting pianist. Ludwig's third piano concerto was a nice try, though.

⁹selected *inter pares* because of its intriguing minuet

- Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 4 (1806)¹⁰
- Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Sonata *Appassionata* (1807)¹¹
- Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 (1808)¹²
- Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concerto No. 5 (1809)¹³
- Franz Schubert, *Gretchen am Spinnrade, Erlkönig, Heidenröslein, Die Forelle, Du bist die Ruh, Liebesbotschaft, Frühlingssehnsucht, Abschied, Die Stadt, Die Taubenpost, Ständchen* (1814-1828)
- Franz Schubert, *Unfinished Symphony* (1822)¹⁴
- Franz Schubert, *Die schöne Müllerin* (1823)¹⁵
- Franz Schubert, String Quartet No. 13 *Rosamunde* (1824)
- Ludwig van Beethoven, String Quartet op.130 (1825)¹⁶
- Franz Schubert, String Quartet No. 15 (1826)¹⁷
- Franz Schubert, *Winterreise* (1827)¹⁸
- Franz Schubert, Piano Trio D.929 (1828)
- Franz Schubert, String Quintet (1828)

¹⁰The short Andante –under four minutes– is a masterpiece of its own, and a perfect illustration of ‘profound’ music as opposed to ‘nice’ music. Recently, I heard Michael Barenboim, commenting on the first movement of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, say *When you play Beethoven, there is the discipline that is required, which is also required in others, but here you can’t ever afford to lose one percent of it because once you lose it, the whole rigour of the piece is gone and it just sounds like nice music, which it shouldn’t. There should always be a rationality behind it in Beethoven.* Yes, Beethoven is so much more than ‘nice music’!

¹¹Also Beethoven’s own favourite, first movement introducing the theme later to open the fifth symphony

¹²first movement strangely related to the fourth movement of Symphony No. 1, premiered 1808, by Etienne Nicolas Méhul, who did not know Beethoven’s 5th.

¹³Beethoven admirers should be grateful to Ferdinand Ries, who wrote eight more Beethoven symphonies and eight piano concertos. According to Schuppanzigh, *everyone steals little bits from Beethoven, but Ries does so by handfuls.* Beethoven withdrew the dedication of his op.110 piano sonata to Ries on hearing the latter’s piano concerto op.132 which he considered to be plagiarism. Even so, Ries is excellent. His symphonies sound more like reshuffled Beethoven than his piano concertos.

¹⁴first movement recalling Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 and ‘se vuoi morir’ from Mozart’s Don Giovanni.

¹⁵choosing, *inter pares*, X.*Tränenregen* and XVI.*Die liebe Farbe.*

¹⁶with 1826 finale, Beethoven’s last composition. For Beethoven, the *Cavatina* was, of all his compositions, what moved him most.

¹⁷composed in a few days’ time

¹⁸choosing, *inter pares*, XV.*Die Krähe* and XX.*Der Wegweiser.*

- Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Lieder ohne Worte*, I No. 6, *Venezianisches Gondellied* (1829)
- Richard Wagner, *Der fliegende Holländer* (1841)
- Richard Wagner, *Tannhäuser* (1842-1845)
- Richard Wagner, *Wesendonck Lieder* (1857-1858)¹⁹
- Peter Tchaikovsky, String Quartet No. 1 (1871)
- Peter Tchaikovsky, *Francesca da Rimini* (1876)
- Peter Tchaikovsky, Violin Concerto (1878)
- César Franck, Piano Quintet (1879)
- Peter Tchaikovsky, 'Romeo and Juliet' (1880)
- Peter Tchaikovsky, *Capriccio Italien* (1880)
- Johannes Brahms, Piano Concerto No. 2 (1881)
- Gustav Mahler, *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (1883)²⁰
- Johannes Brahms, Symphony No. 3 (1884)
- César Franck, *Prélude, choral et fugue* (1884)
- César Franck, *Prélude, aria et final* (1886)
- César Franck, Sonata for violin and piano (1886)
- Camille Saint-Saëns, Symphony No. 3 (1886)
- César Franck, Symphony (1888)
- Erik Satie, *Trois gymnopédies* (1888)
- Richard Strauss, *Don Juan* (1888)
- Hugo Wolf, *So lasst mich scheinen* (Goethe-Lieder, Mignon III) (1889)
- Erik Satie, *Gnossiennes I-II-III-IV* (1890-1891)
- Johannes Brahms, Clarinet Quintet op.115 (c.1891 p.1892)
- Peter Tchaikovsky, String Sextet *Souvenir de Florence* (1892)

¹⁹orchestration by Felix Mottl

²⁰choosing, *inter pares*, III.*Ich hab' ein glühend Messer*

- Claude Debussy, String Quartet (1893)
- Ernest Chausson, *Poème pour violon et orchestre* (1896)²¹

Twentieth century (35 items)

- Gustav Mahler, *Kindertotenlieder* (1902)
- Maurice Ravel, *Introduction et allego* for harp, flute, clarinet and string quartet (1905)
- Lodewijk Mortelmans, *Kennst du das Land* (1906)
- Sergei Rachmaninov, Piano Concerto No. 3 (1909)
- Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910)
- Claude Debussy, Sonata for violin and piano (1917)
- Richard Strauss, *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1917)²²
- Sergei Prokofiev, Piano Concerto No. 3 (1921)
- Maurice Ravel, Sonata for violin and cello (1922)
- Béla Bartók, Dance Suite (1923)
- Darius Milhaud, *La création du monde* (1923)
- George Gershwin, *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924)
- George Gershwin, Piano Concerto (1925)
- Heitor Villa-Lobos, Chôros No. 10 *Rasga a coração* (1926)
- Kurt Weill, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (1928)²³
- Maurice Ravel, Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (1930)
- Igor Stravinsky, Violin concerto (1931)
- Paul Hindemith, Symphony *Mathis der Maler* (1934)
- Benjamin Britten, *Simple Symphony* (1934)
- George Gershwin, *Porgy and Bess* (1935)

²¹inspired by *The Song of Triumphant Love*, by his friend Turgenev

²²with Edita Gruberova as a divine *Zerbinetta*

²³with Lotte Lenya most irresistibly slightly out of tune. To see her facing 007, watch *From Russia with love*.

- Sergei Prokofiev, Violin Concerto No. 2 (1935)
- Paul Hindemith, *Symphonische Tänze* (1937)
- Béla Bartók, Divertimento (1939)
- Aram Khachaturian, Violin Concerto (1940)
- Dmitri Shostakovich, Piano Quintet (1940)
- Heitor Villa-Lobos, Bachianas Brasileiras No. 7 (1942)²⁴
- Heitor Villa-Lobos, Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5 (1938-1945)
- Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Violin Concerto (1945)²⁵
- Richard Strauss, Oboe Concerto (1945)
- Richard Strauss, *Vier letzte Lieder* (1948)²⁶
- Ralph Vaughan Williams, *Concerto Grosso* (1950)²⁷
- Paul Hindemith, Symphony for Concert Band (1951)
- Ralph Vaughan Williams, Tuba Concerto (1954)²⁸
- Francis Poulenc, Flute Sonata (1957)
- Philip Glass, Violin Concerto (1987)

P.S.1. Favourite dances.

- Anonymous / arr. Tielman Susato, *Den IIII Ronde — Ronde Pour quoy — Den VI Ronde* (1st half 16th)
- Anonymous (in Susato's *Musyck Boexkens*), *Wy comen hier ghelopen* (1st half 16th)
- Johann Strauss jr., *An der schönen blauen Donau* (1867)
- Dmitri Shostakovich, *Walz 2* (Suite for Variety Orchestra No. 1, VII) (post-1956)²⁹

²⁴though I'm not fond of the sounds in the 3rd movement which remind one of the car horns in Gershwin's *An American in Paris*.

²⁵'virtuoso kitsch' based upon themes from Hollywood movies scored by Korngold. The compelling opening theme is from 'Another Dawn' (1937), starring Erroll Flynn. The first movement of Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 2, composed 1937-1938, premiered 1939, seems strangely related.

²⁶The composer aged 84.

²⁷for 400 string players divided into four groups of varying abilities

²⁸The composer aged 82.

²⁹not, as is often claimed, the Jazz Suite No. 2 (1938).

- Igor Stravinsky, *Tango* (1953)³⁰

P.S.2. Favourite parts from unfavoured works.

- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart / Franz Xaver Süßmayr, *Requiem* (1791): *Lacrimosa*.
- Beethoven, Piano Sonata op.106 *Hammerklavier* (c.1818, p.1819). Of the four movements, the *adagio* is the only one I like. More, it contains my favourite Beethoven bars. The theme that breaks a few times into the desolation reminds me of Wolff's later *Lasst mich scheinen* Mignon Lied. The *espressivo* part eventually comes to a complete halt, abandoning the concluding note which one expects. Its continuation, with the exceptional indication *con grand' espressione*, is chillingly moving.³¹
- Richard Strauss, *Der Rosenkavalier* (1910). I'm not fond of the last act. But *Mir ist die Ehre widerfahren* (Act II) and *Ist ein Traum, kann nicht wirklich sein* (Act III) are chilling.

P.S.3. My favourite jazz music is by Harry James (*Flash*), Louis Armstrong (*St. Louis Blues*, *West End Blues*), Benny Goodman (*Stompin at the Savoy*, *Clarinet à la King*), Glenn Miller (*In the Mood*) and Dave Brubeck (*Take Five*, *Unsquare Dance*).

P.S.4. My favourite light music is by Edith Piaf (*Non, je ne regrette rien*), Yves Montand (*Les feuilles mortes*, lyrics by Jacques Prévert, music by Joseph Kosma), Elvis Presley (*That's all right, mama*), Ray Charles (*Unchain my heart*), The Beatles (*Yesterday*) and by traditional yodellers (*Erzherzog-Johan-Jodler*).³²

³⁰orchestral version after the 1940 piano composition

³¹The first two notes of this movement, last minute additions by Beethoven, are an echo of the preceding scherzo. For those who recognize them (I never do), they make the transition from *scherzo* to *adagio* mood all the more impressive.

³²I am deeply moved by yodelling, both Tyrolean and pygmy. I never understood why people need to hear of the latter before believing the former.