Mozart fell ill on November 20, 1791, only to die two weeks later of either rheumatic fever, uremia (a buildup of urea in the bloodstream), or kidney failure, depending on which source one believes. As Mozart’s life drew closer to its untimely end at just thirty-five years of age, four major projects fell into place. His magnificent opera, *La clemenza di Tito*, was premiered in Prague on September 6, 1791, by Antonio Salieri as part of the coronation festival for Emperor Leopold II. Mozart himself conducted the premiere of his popular singspiel, *The Magic Flute*, at the Theater auf der Wieden in Vienna on September 30. The Clarinet Concerto, his last solo work, received its premiere on October 16. Of course, the somber *Requiem* remained unfinished in the form of a very skeletal sketch at the composer’s death on December 5.

Each of these new works were in a different genre, almost as if Mozart were searching for a new voice (and a new audience) to ease his flagging popularity in Vienna. His desperation for lucrative income led him to vie for any job that paid even the smallest amount.

Perhaps Mozart’s best bet for income was with *The Magic Flute*, composed for the Theater auf der Wieden, which served Vienna’s lower social strata. Technically, the work is a singspiel – a specialized type of German-language opera with spoken dialogue. Mozart’s friend and fellow Freemason, Emanuel Schikaneder, provided the decidedly ridiculous libretto filled with supernatural and Masonic elements. Blended with Mozart’s timeless music, the work was received with adulation. Unfortunately, the composer died just a few months after the premiere, never knowing the impact that his life’s work would make upon future generations of composers.

Mozart’s Overture to *The Magic Flute* begins with an example of the Masonic symbolism that saturates the singspiel. Three heavy chords are heard, simultaneously expressing trepidation and reflecting a revered Masonic number. A brisk allegro follows with a masterful fugue that spans most of the overture. Mozart’s thorough development section, also beginning with the three chords, leads to a fresh reworking of the allegro material.
The cello, even though it was widely used as a solo instrument in Baroque music against a small group of instruments, had never been widely featured with the Classical orchestra. Joseph Haydn, always the innovator, composed two cello concerti, the familiar one in D major from 1783 and an early one in C major. The C major cello concerto dates from the early 1760s and was likely written for Joseph Weigl, the principal cellist in the Esterhazy orchestra. It was lost until archivist Oldřich Pulkert discovered a mysterious set of orchestra parts in the Prague National Museum in 1961.

The C major concerto is in the customary three movements, all of which exhibit elements of sonata-allegro form. The modified sonata form of the first movement states the theme, as usual, in the orchestra, followed by a straightforward exposition by the soloist. This is an early example of the monothematic sonata form used by Haydn later in his symphonies, in which short segments of the theme are developed independently, thus providing a sense of unity to the work. The character is stately, yet virtuosic, with quadruple-stops, high range, and nimble acrobatics for the soloist. An extended cadenza appears near the end of the movement.

Haydn’s adagio slow movement is scored for soloist and strings. After a fifteen-measure string introduction, the soloist enters on a sustained note and soon takes over the theme. This is a movement of surpassing beauty with wonderfully lyrical lines for the soloist. After a cadenza, the movement ends with one last orchestral statement.

The finale is another monothematic sonata form. Haydn’s humor is apparent here with rapidly changing registers in the difficult cello solo lines. The light and graceful movement displays the cello’s flashiest music, requiring nimble fingers and expert timing.

_Fidelio Overture, Op.72b and Leonore Overture No.3, Op.72_  
– Ludwig van Beethoven  
Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany  
Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

In 1805 when Ludwig van Beethoven completed the first version of his only opera, known today as _Fidelio_, it was the culmination of a lifelong desire to compose music for the stage. His choral works, especially the _Cantata on the Death of Emperor Joseph II_ and _Cantata on the Accession of Emperor Leopold II_, both from 1790 in Bonn, show an innate dramatic sense. Beethoven’s greatest aspiration, however, was to compose a bona fide opera.

Upon the composer’s arrival in Vienna in 1792, he immediately began studies with Haydn. When Haydn left for his second London visit in 1794, Beethoven began studies with noted teacher Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, whose methods were even more confining than those of Haydn. It was not until the turn of the century that Beethoven found a mentor who was not only sympathetic to his operatic aspirations, but was himself one of the greatest operatic composers of his day – Antonio Salieri.
Beethoven’s *Fidelio* has an interesting plot. Florestan, a political prisoner, sits in his cell and awaits execution. He is eventually rescued after his wife, Leonore, masquerades as a young man named Fidelio, acquiring a job in the prison in order to save him.

The opera, originally entitled *Leonore* after the protagonist of the story, exists in three versions with four overtures. The *Leonore* Overture No. 2 is actually the prelude to the original 1805 version of the opera. *Leonore* Overture No. 1 dates from a proposed 1807 production of the opera in Prague that never materialized. *Leonore* Overture No. 3, the longest and most dramatic of the four, is from the 1806 revision, making it the second in order of composition. The fourth of the preludes, simply called the *Fidelio* Overture, is a short curtain-raiser from the 1814 final version of the opera.

**Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Opus 56a**

– Johannes Brahms

Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany

Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna, Austria

After moving to Vienna in the 1860s, Johannes Brahms developed a deep friendship with Karl Ferdinand Pohl, the librarian of Vienna's Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. Pohl was writing a biography on the great Austrian composer, Franz Joseph Haydn, and had located some period manuscripts for small wind ensemble. Since Brahms was also well-known as a music historian, Pohl asked him in 1870 to view the pages and help identify them. The composer believed them to be the work of Haydn, although history has shown him to be wrong (they are thought to be by Ignaz Pleyel, but that, too, is uncertain).

One theme from the manuscripts, the St. Antoni Chorale, captivated Brahms. This two-part structure was complex enough to stand on its own, but simple enough to permit the composer to ornament it in theme-and-variations form. Finally, in 1873, during a vacation in Tutzing, Bavaria, he composed a set of eight variations and a finale based on the chorale. The original version for two pianos was simultaneously orchestrated. It was his first major work for orchestra and cemented his reputation across Europe.

*Variations on a Theme by Haydn* opens with a straightforward statement of the chorale theme by the oboes, bassoons, horns, and low stings. The first variation, *poco più animato*, follows the structure of the chorale. In fact, the harmonies are hardly changed, but the soaring violin lines against triplets in violas and cellos put the unmistakable signature of Brahms on the work. Marked *più vivace*, the second variation is stormy with dotted rhythms and strong dynamic contrasts. The placid third variation begins with the melody in the oboes, but it moves to the strings. Shifting suddenly to a minor key, the melancholy fourth variation is reminiscent of a symphonic second movement. Brahms launches into the *vivace* fifth variation with the mercurial approach of a Mendelssohn scherzo, but the chorale framework is still quite discernible. Horns begin the sixth variation with a bucolic hunting character, but the orchestra bursts forth in a brilliant blaze of tumult. The gentle and innocent seventh variation allows the melody to be
traded between the flutes and violins. Brahms provides a sense of foreboding and uncertainty in his eighth variation. Emerging from the low strings, the unsettled and dramatic movement builds to include the entire orchestra. The finale uses much the same approach, but the mood is shifted from ominous to majestic. After Brahms builds to a grand climax, the chorale theme returns in a magnificent statement that guaranteed the composer a place in the musical pantheon.

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