

## Symphonies and Sitcoms: Rethinking Genre History with Mozart in Mind

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During the spring quarter of the past year, I taught a graduate-level course on Joseph Haydn's symphonies. As one of the class activities, I asked each student to listen to a small group of the symphonies and report their impressions to the rest of the class. On more than one occasion a student would confess apologetically that, although there was nothing unusual about any of the symphony's forms, she really liked it; or someone would comment sheepishly that one of his assigned works was rather conventional and predictable, but nonetheless *so* beautiful. I also related my own experience with Haydn's many variation slow movements. As part of my preparation for the class, I had listened to all the symphonies with score (one of my most enjoyable summer projects), and if I ever found my attention wandering, it was in those slow movements: After the first variation or so (especially if the conductor took all the repeats), I would start fidgeting mentally, ever so slightly bored with the continual cadences and predictable harmonic patterns. But when I listened to those same symphonies in the same performances *without* the score, I found myself drawn in by the sheer sensual joy of hearing them unfold, continually seduced both by their subtly varying coloration *and* their predictability. These reactions provided fodder for stimulating class discussions, and caused us to ponder not only the way we listen to music but also what we expect intellectually, aesthetically, and emotionally from a symphony. All of us seemed to be programmed to value the unusual and the exceptional, making our obvious enjoyment of the "ordinary" and "conventional" an almost guilty pleasure. But why guilty? We had been discussing the symphonies from an analytical perspective—talking about forms and harmonic procedures, etc.—and thus it was probably inevitable that we would find Haydn's many deviations from expected procedure to be the most interesting. Our collective unease with the ordinary, however, seemed to have deeper roots, which stemmed from unspoken and often unacknowledged assumptions about the essence of art and about the aesthetic requirements of a symphony.

These thoughts have been much in my mind as I have begun work on a volume about the symphonic repertoire in the eighteenth century,<sup>1</sup> because it has become clear how such assumptions have shaped the standard narrative of the history of the eighteenth-century symphony. In a nutshell, our definition of the symphony—which has determined what works we deem worthy of including in the narrative—has been written to describe the works of Beethoven. Thus the fifth edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* defined the symphony as a "large-scale orchestral work of serious aim, normally in four . . . movements, at least one [of which is] in what is called "sonata" form. . . . Its action is dramatic, and the effect of the whole on the observer should be to make him forget his own petty concerns and live for the time being

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Sue Morrow and Bathia Churgin, eds., *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*, Vol. 1 of *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

on a plane of universal experience.<sup>2</sup>” Though more recent scholarship has muted the Beethoven-centric orientation of the discussion, the preference for the serious, dramatic, and metaphysical still permeates writing on the symphony. Perhaps even more insidiously pervasive is our assumption—derived from early nineteenth-century ideals and concepts of art—that good music must be both original and innovative: we seem to have a collective disdain for music that “follows a pattern.” Consider, for example, the common dismissal of Vivaldi as having written one concerto 500 times,<sup>3</sup> or the frequency with which Beethoven is admiringly described as “bursting the bounds” or “breaking the mold.” When you add to the mix our analytical fascination with the unusual, you have a densely-woven fabric of concepts that can prevent—and has prevented—us from clearly seeing and appreciating the eighteenth-century symphony.<sup>4</sup>

Our preoccupation with originality and innovation is most clearly revealed in the boiled-down narrative we typically use when we teach the history of the symphony to undergraduate students. We begin with Sammartini, the first important composer, proceed to Johann Stamitz, who added the minuet (making the “real” four-movement symphony), move to Haydn with his slow introductions, and Beethoven, who changed the staid minuet to a scherzo, etc. Though cognoscenti may point out that Antonio Brioschi was as significant as Sammartini, that the Viennese also added minuets, or that a number of composers used slow introductions as early as the 1760s, etc., such comments are mostly intended to claim the innovations, not to question their significance. And though we acknowledge the differences in purposes and roles between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century symphonies, we tend to deprecate the functionality of eighteenth-century works. As C. Hubert H. Parry observed about early Mozart symphonies:

With regard to the character of these [first four symphonies] and all but a few of the rest it is necessary to keep in mind that a symphony at that time was a very much less important matter than it became fifty years later. The manner in which symphonies were poured out, in sets of six and otherwise, by numerous composers during the latter half of the 18th century, puts utterly out of the question the loftiness of aim and purpose which has become a necessity since the early years of the 19th century. They were all rather slight works on familiar lines, with which for the time being composers and public were alike quite content; and neither Haydn nor Mozart in their early specimens seem to have specially exerted themselves.<sup>5</sup>

One could argue that the sheer number of symphonies actually indicated just how important they were in the eighteenth-century—otherwise why would so many composers have bothered? But if you are assuming that a symphony should be substantial (not “slight”), original and innovative (not “familiar”), and lofty in aim and purpose, those large numbers are damning. After all, how could anyone—even Joseph Haydn—be expected to turn out 106 large-scale serious dramatic symphonies that could accomplish the metaphysical goal of lifting listeners onto a plane of

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<sup>2</sup> F.H. Shera, “Symphony (1),” in *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Eric Blom (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1954), 8:208.

<sup>3</sup> See Simon McVeigh and Jehoash Hirshberg’s *The Italian Solo Concerto, 1700-1760: Rhetorical Strategies and Style History* (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 2004) for a decisive refutation of this canard.

<sup>4</sup> Other assumptions and biases, e.g., the focus on the “progressive,” the disdain for the Italian style, etc., have also shaped the narrative and will be explored more fully in *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*.

<sup>5</sup> C. Hubert H. Parry, “Symphony,” in *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. J.A. Fuller Maitland (Philadelphia: Theodore Presser, 1927), 770.

universal experience? The last century of scholarship has certainly moved us away from such a breezy dismissal of all the symphonies preceding Haydn's London and Mozart's late works, but the basic disdain for "conventionality" and functionality lingers on.<sup>6</sup> As late as 2001, Ludwig Finscher could dismiss early Mozart symphonies by saying, "Until the six works from the summer of 1772 (KV 128-130 und 132-134) they were all occasional pieces (*Gelegenheitswerke*) that each time work out individual stimuli [i.e. experiences] and conform to conventional expectations or stylistic conventions."<sup>7</sup> For this reason, Finscher argues, these works do not have much significance for the history of the genre.

I would counter that precisely such "*Gelegenheitswerke*" should play a central role in the history of the symphonic genre, and that by immersing ourselves in what we might call the ideology of convention, we will enrich our understanding of the eighteenth-century's approach to the genre. We seem to have a visceral appreciation of the aesthetic effect of originality and innovation—and we certainly need to retain it—but we should also attempt to reinstate an appreciation for the aesthetic effect and the compositional advantages of convention. *Both* are essential elements of a successful eighteenth-century symphony,<sup>8</sup> and exploring their interaction can perhaps help us understand why, as Parry observed, eighteenth-century symphony audiences and composers seemed quite content with the music.

To do that I would suggest we shake up our thought processes by choosing a different and perhaps unexpected model for our conceptual framework—not the exalted, metaphysical work of art favored by the nineteenth century but a genre of entertainment from the twentieth: the American television situation comedy, or sitcom. Before the howls of indignation erupt, let me point out that I intend no disrespect to either symphony or sitcom, and that I recognize the many obvious differences between them. Nonetheless, certain parallels between these two seemingly disparate genres of entertainment, particularly with regard to the constitution of the audience and its expectations, can guide us toward an appreciation of the intersection of convention and creativity. First of all, American television sitcoms air every week and—if successful—develop a loyal audience that tunes in regularly and expects to be entertained. Each episode is self contained, however, so that a viewer who happens to catch one or two episodes can still enjoy the show and understand the jokes. In similar fashion, until very late in the eighteenth century, most composers wrote their symphonies for a specific location (usually a court or aristocratic household) and usually for a regular audience that expected to be entertained with concerts at least weekly. Even if the symphonies were later published or distributed in manuscript copies, most would originally have been performed for audiences that had heard the composer's other works in the weeks and months before, and expected to continue to hear new works. Nonetheless, a visitor would certainly have been able to enjoy the concert, though perhaps on a different level. Thus audiences for both symphonies and sitcoms expected regular entertainment, and composers/writers targeted their material for a specific audience. In format, both genres had restrictions of time and format—sitcom writers can count on only about twenty

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<sup>6</sup> In his "Mozart as a Working Stiff," in *On Mozart*, ed. J.M. Morris (New York, 1994), 102-12, Neal Zaslaw recounts the consternation that greeted his contention that Mozart wrote for cold hard cash. Many of my students have reacted in similar fashion when I have assigned this article in my graduate classes.

<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Finscher, *Symphonie*, MGGPrisma (Bärenreiter: Kassel and Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 50. "Bis zu den sechs Werken vom Sommer 1772 (KV 128-130 und 132-134) waren es Gelegenheitswerke, die jeweils punktuelle Anregungen verarbeiteten und konventionellen Erwartungshaltungen bzw. Stilkonventionen entsprachen."

<sup>8</sup> One could perhaps argue that a combination of convention and originality underlies successful nineteenth-century music, but the aesthetic expectations and the rhetoric of the nineteenth century clearly favored originality.

minutes of air time, broken up into two or three segments divided by commercial breaks, so that scripts all must have a similar rhythm. Composers of symphonies were also subject to time constraints—coincidentally, also around twenty minutes—so as to allow time for the other events of the evening.

Simply observing these similarities would not amount to much more than parlor-game musicology, but exploring the way in which patterns and conventions intersected with originality in sitcoms can perhaps provide a provocative model for rethinking how the process worked in eighteenth-century symphonies. In so doing, I would like to focus on the periods in both genres when the birth pangs had subsided and conventional practices had emerged, e.g. the 1960s and '70s for sitcoms, and the 1760s through the 1780s for symphonies.<sup>9</sup> By the 1960s, a standard set-up for the American sitcom had emerged; it generally featured a family of one sort or another, and the comedy arose as a result of fractious interactions among family members or with the larger community. Originality of the set-up was certainly important, and each season brought new spins on the formula, from the father-son-aunt of “Andy Griffith” to the supernaturally-endowed females of the family in “Bewitched.” But originality of the set-up itself was no guarantee of either excellence or success. For example, a sitcom called “My Mother the Car,” starring Jerry van Dyke as Dave Crabtree, ran for a single season in 1965-66. Its premise—that Crabtree’s mother (the voice of Ann Sothern) had returned from the grave as a 1928 Porter convertible that drove itself and talked only to its (her) son—was so completely idiotic, and the dialogue so lame, that even I (as a twelve-year-old besotted with our first television) only watched a few episodes before tuning out. The show’s creators, Allan Burns and Chris Hayward, went on to produce a number of highly acclaimed sitcoms, among them “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” but this one—despite a talented cast—has gone down in television history as one of the worst TV shows ever.<sup>10</sup> Originality of set-up helped not at all.

By way of contrast, Norman Lear’s “All in the Family” featured an extended working-class family with no supernatural bells and whistles, and the comedy arose—as convention dictated—from the comical interactions among family members or with the larger community. “All in the Family” ran from 1971 to 1979, garnering eight Golden Globe awards and numerous Emmys, and has been called one of greatest sitcoms ever (an opinion with which I concurred then and now).<sup>11</sup> Many factors contributed to the show’s popular and critical acclaim (including a talented cast, which of course had not saved “My Mother the Car”), but I would argue that its basic appeal lay in its successful exploitation and manipulation of sitcom genre conventions. Lear and his writers took the conventional family set-up and enriched it by capitalizing on contemporary political and social tensions: The arch-conservative working-class father, Archie Bunker, would routinely (and conventionally for the genre) get exasperated with his wife, Edith (whom he called “the dingbat”) but would also (less conventionally for the genre) explode at the incipient feminist consciousness of his daughter, Gloria, and even more frequently and furiously at the leftist politics of his educated son-in-law, Michael Stivic (whom he dubbed “Meathead”). Thousands of households all over the United States could instantly identify with the generation gap, and thus Lear made the conventional set-up seem quite new and modern.

Even with the new and modern characters, the script writers did not scorn standard comedy routines, and made effective use of tried-and-true techniques like the running gag—a

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<sup>9</sup> I am, for the moment, sidestepping the tricky question of defining convention, but will return to that essential topic in *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*.

<sup>10</sup> [www.tvparty.com/recmothercar.html](http://www.tvparty.com/recmothercar.html), accessed 7-26-2006.

<sup>11</sup> [www.imdb.com/title/tt0066626](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066626), accessed 7-26-2006.

comic situation that recurred in multiple episodes. In one incarnation of the gag, the family would sit down to a meal, but almost immediately the conversation would veer into contentious territory, an argument would erupt—always carried to comic excess—and one by one they all would storm off until no one was left at the table. (I’m not sure if they ever actually finished a meal on camera.) It was funny the first time you saw it, and the second, and after a while you were conditioned to expect something funny to happen every time they sat down to eat. Instead of being boring or predictable, however, the very recurrence of the situation in different episodes made things even funnier because of your anticipation of what was to come, and because you could recollect all the other versions of the dinner-table argument that you’d seen in past episodes, and perhaps even similar dinner-table arguments in other sitcoms. Of course, you could get the joke even if you’d never seen an episode of the show, but you actually enjoyed it on multiple levels if you were a regular viewer.

How do these things give us insight into the eighteenth-century symphony? In a similar fashion, originality of set-up did not always guarantee quality or aesthetic success in eighteenth-century composition. Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf’s programmatic symphonies, after Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, and his “Sinfonia nazionale nel gusto di cinque nazioni,” are quite clever and original in their conception, but are actually rather dull in comparison to some of his more “conventional” works. In fact, most successful composers of late eighteenth-century symphonies worked inventively within conventional patterns, using them to play on their listener’s expectations. For example, after the rhythmic and harmonic tension built up during a transition section, the listener might well expect a medial caesura leading to a secondary theme, since similar transitions in past symphonies had frequently followed that pattern. If the composer chose to frustrate that expectation and simply continue the transition until almost the end of the exposition, then the audience would understand and enjoy the passage as a manipulation of convention. Or the composer might begin a theme and break it off without completion, or unexpectedly veer to the minor mode in a major mode piece, or any number of variations of the pattern. Those variations were then given extra meaning by the underlying pattern—and the more experience the listeners had with the composer’s works, the more complex their experience was. Too regular an adherence to a pattern in multiple works could become boring, but too much disruption of the pattern could disrupt the rhythm of the listening experience and result in a less successful work.

But in addition to the degree of sophistication in the manipulation of convention, excellence in both sitcoms and symphonies also depended on the quality and depth of the basic material. Many of the episodes of “All in the Family,” for example, tackled weighty, hot-button subjects that earlier sitcoms had never touched upon—racism, homophobia, violent crime, etc.—but all within the framework of comedy. The shows made you laugh, but they also made you think, a characteristic that gave the series its reputation as path-breaking. Nevertheless, some of the most memorable moments came from pure conventional sitcom fluff, as in the episode where Archie and Mike got into a screaming fight over whether, when dressing, you should put both your socks on and then your shoes (Archie) or whether you should sock and shoe one foot before proceeding to the other (Mike).<sup>12</sup> In a way, these moments threw the others into sharper relief, but they also provided viewers with a sort of comforting normalcy—a respite from the edgier bits, an opportunity to enjoy the purely visceral pleasures of uncomplicated laughter.

Precisely this example can illuminate the reactions that my class and I had to “normal” and predictable symphony movements. By listening to so many Haydn symphonies in a short

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<sup>12</sup> I am indebted to my colleague, Dr. Hilary Poriss, for reminding me of this episode.

period of time, we had immersed ourselves in his style, and were primed to listen for and appreciate all the finer points of his deviations from expected patterns. But, after having our musical minds teased and challenged with formal feints and exhilarating resolutions, we relaxed with that much more enjoyment into the pure and simple pleasure of regular phrasing and sonorous orchestral play. The seductive quality of repetition with slight but inventive variation continues to be recognized in twenty-first century popular culture—in sitcoms, in various popular music genres, in mystery novel series, etc.—but our “high” culture has long since committed itself to the road of individuality and originality. Artists and composers who “repeat themselves” or “crank out” work after work on recognizable patterns, get relegated to the lower rungs of their fields: How can those works be masterpieces if they’re all alike? How can true artists allow themselves to be boxed in by such patterns and conventionality?

Clearly the eighteenth-century did not think along those lines, and, if we can allow ourselves to view its symphonic output through our sitcom-inspired aesthetic lens, perhaps we will be better able to construct a more appropriate genre history, and generate a better understanding and appreciation of those works that don’t fit into the nineteenth-century mold. As a test case, I decided to revisit Mozart’s early symphonies, to see how they might fit into a genre history oriented toward the imaginative use of convention. To this end, I embarked on another chronological listening tour, making notes on forms and procedures, but also noting the ones that I especially liked. Even while recognizing his obvious genius, I had to admit that Mozart’s earliest childhood works frequently have an awkwardness of phrase and conception that prevent them from being successful works, no matter how fascinating they may be as a window into his development. Not until I reached K. 74 in G Major did I write, “At last—the first good one.” With its rambunctious opening movement that flows imperceptibly into an appealing andante, followed by a spirited finale, it struck me as musically effective in a way that the earlier works had not.

A brief and somewhat random perusal of scholarly commentary revealed how much of an outlier my opinion appeared to be. The article on the symphony in the 5th edition of *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, the discussion of Mozart’s symphonies in Vol. 7 of *The New Oxford History of Music*,<sup>13</sup> and Julian Rushton’s biography<sup>14</sup> don’t mention it at all; Simon P. Keefe’s article on the symphonies in the *Cambridge Mozart Encyclopedia* refers only to its undisputed authenticity, and Ludwig Finscher mentions it only in a list, in order to dismiss it and its chronological companions as “*Gelegenheitsstücke*” (see above). In the second edition of the *New Grove*, Jan LaRue and Eugene K. Wolf simply note its Italianate characteristics, i.e. the three-movement cycle with a connection between the first and the second, and the first movement’s lack of repeat signs and exposition-recapitulation form.<sup>15</sup> A. Peter Brown, Neal Zaslaw, and Stanley Sadie also remark on its Italianate characteristics, and all make special note of the minor-mode episode in the third movement (Zaslaw spends two-thirds of his description on it).<sup>16</sup> Only Sadie, however, appears to have heard what I did, calling the first movement

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<sup>13</sup> F.W. Sternfeld, “Instrumental Masterworks and Aspects of Formal Design,” in *The Age of Enlightenment*, Vol. VII of *The New Oxford History of Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 629-35.

<sup>14</sup> Julian Rushton, *Mozart, The Master Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Jan LaRue and Eugene K. Wolf, “The Symphony I, 14, ii,” in *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, accessed August 8, 2006 at <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

<sup>16</sup> A. Peter Brown, *The First Golden Age of the Viennese Symphony: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert*, Vol. II of *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 356; Neal Zaslaw, *Mozart’s Symphonies: Context Performance Practice, Reception* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 177-80.

“spirited and effective on its own terms” despite the “themes that are not much more than fragments of figuration succeeding one another in two- or four-bar phrases” and praising its “witty and resourceful” finale.<sup>17</sup>

I suspect that Sadie’s and my reactions may in part derive from a greater affinity for the Italian instrumental style than commonly found among eighteenth-century scholars. Upon reflection, however, I think that my own instinctive appreciation of K. 74 has mostly to do with its successful exploitation of convention. As a composer, Mozart had the advantage of working with a clear and well-established set of conventions from the Italian opera overture, which freed him to pay attention to the compositional details that formed the essence of an eighteenth-century composer’s style. As a listener I knew what to expect, and could then enjoy and appreciate how he manipulated the conventional pattern. It was a pattern not much beloved of eighteenth-century German critics, but nonetheless a clearly recognized one, disparagingly described by the *Wöchentliche Nachrichten und Anmerkungen die Musik betreffend*: “After a riotous Allegro you hear a short Andante that perhaps has two ideas, and then another bravely riotous Allegro or Presto that staggers around in the main key.”<sup>18</sup> From the outset, there is no doubt that Mozart chose this model ([Example 1](#)): the primary and transition sections of the first movement contain just about every Italian overture cliché—scalar and chordal figures, drum bass, string tremolos, accented upward slides, and lots of V-I progressions. The listener’s delight comes from his treatment of them and from the unflagging energetic drive they create. Mozart adds spice to the simple ascending/descending chordal/scalar figure of P by letting the winds finish what the strings began (m. 2), and increases the energy (mm. 9-18) both by using string tremolos and then by speeding up the harmonic rhythm over a tonic pedal. Even within the calmer and contrasting S (m. 27), he keeps the motion going with the sustained winds and the syncopated accompaniment in the second violin line, building to a noisy and satisfying PAC in the new key at m. 37. K continues the syncopation, with short-range dynamic contrast (the sort of technique that Agricola damned as “feverish attacks of alternating *Piano* and *Forte*” in Italian works)<sup>19</sup> and also builds to another rousing cadence at the end of the exposition m. 54. Not everything works—even with the orchestration, the opening measures are a little too square to bear repetition (as Sadie points out)—but the overall effect is satisfying.

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<sup>17</sup> Stanley Sadie, *Mozart: The Early Years, 1756-1781*. (New York and London: Norton, 2006), 204.

<sup>18</sup> *Wöchentliche Nachrichten und Anmerkungen die Musik betreffend* III:14 (3 October 1768): 107-08, “Zehnte Fortsetzung des Entwurfs einer musikalischen Bibliothek.” “Wenn man aber das beständige Einerley, und die große Aehnlichkeit unter allen diesen Stücken betrachtet, wenn man nach einem schwärmenden Allegro ein kurzes und etwan aus zween Gedanken bestehendes Andante, und sodann wieder ein wacker schwärmendes, und immer im Haupttone herum taumelndes Allegro oder Presto gehört hat, so findet man wohl, daß eine solche Sinfonie zur Eröffnung einer Oper, so lange das Auditorium noch nicht ruhig geworden, gut genug ist; aber zur Kammer musik taugt sie so wenig, als wenig sie eine Beziehung auf das Stück hat, vor welchem sie aufgeführt wird.” In the same journal (III:19 (7 November 1768): 150) see the review of Gaudenzio Comi’s VI Sinfonie per due Violini, Alto e Basso, con Corni et Oboe ad libitum: “Man weis in welchem Geschmacke die Italiäner ihre meisten Sinfonien setzen. Man wird des beständigen Einerley, des betäubenden Schwärmens immer über einen oder zween Accorden müde; der Mangel an Modulation macht ihre Sinfoniensätze steif und monotonisch, und man würde kaum ein bischen Melodie gewahr werden, wenn das rauschende Ganze nicht bisweilen durch kleine melodische Stellen unterbrochen würde.”

<sup>19</sup> *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* II/1 (1766): 270-72, review of Ferdinand Fischer’s *Six Symphonies a II violins Haut-bois, ou flutes traversieres Cors de Chasse, Fagots, Violettes, et Basses*: “Daß er aber einem deutschen Helden, Sinfonien zueignet, welche alle das Lahme, das Unmelodische, das Niedrige, Das Poßierliche, das Zerstückelte, alle die (wie Telemann einsmal gesagt) fieberhaften Anfälle des beständigen geschwinden Abwechsels des Piano und Forte u.s.w. der neuesten Italienischen Modecomponisten an sich haben; — darüber wundern wir uns wirklich.”

Again, following a pattern found in many Italian overtures, Mozart connects the end of the first movement with the beginning of the andante (which has “two ideas”) in an ingenious yet simple manner: He continues the oboes’ double thirds and the repeated sixteenth-note figure in the second violins and violas into the new meter, then introduces a (again scalar) violin theme that flows smoothly from the thirds ([Example 2](#)). Only after the theme emerges do you realize how he has imaginatively configured a standard pattern, and he continues to keep you guessing. The andante theme itself begins, as one would expect, as an absolutely regular phrase, though small touches, such as the off-beat entrance of the accompaniment in m. 7, keep it from being lead-footed. The initial regularity, however, dissolves as the expected cadence fails to arrive, deflected through the unexpected minor subdominant chords in m. 18 and m. 23. The rumbling accompaniment beginning in m. 24 finally reaches a harmonic PAC in m. 33, but the melodic motion continues to delay closure until the very end of the exposition in m. 39. Having thus kept the harmonic tension intact for so long, Mozart can turn to an almost immediate recapitulation, thus keeping the middle movement to a manageable length. The final allegro (a five-part rondo) indeed dashes (not staggers) around with barely a feint to the dominant in the very short B section and stays with the tonic G—albeit in the minor mode—throughout the C section, simultaneously confirming and tweaking the pattern. In both these movements, as in the first, Mozart succeeds precisely because he embraces convention.

In arguing for the K. 74’s effectiveness, I am not claiming that it should be ranked with the best of Mozart’s symphonies, or even with the best of eighteenth-century symphonies, but simply that a relatively close adherence to convention could produce good results. Mozart continued to choose conventional motives (scales, accented upward slides, etc.), and continued to follow conventional forms in the works that followed, but learned to fashion more interesting and varied material from them. And in fact the symphonies that follow K. 74 become increasingly engaging, no matter what their model, as Mozart’s skill increased. The next point at which I made a grand pause in my listening was at K. 338, written in Salzburg in 1780 (though a more “conventional” pause—from the perspective of scholarship—would have been at K. 183). Like F.H. Shera, I find K. 338 to be “an entrancing work.”<sup>20</sup> Contemporary scholarship has generally treated it positively, though much of the enthusiasm stems from the first movement’s interplay of major and minor modes—a characteristic that generally tends to be interpreted as “progressive” and therefore worthy of comment.<sup>21</sup> But my favorite movement by far is the finale, which Sadie describes as “Mozart’s last and most brilliant essay in the rumbustious [sic] 6/8 style, with dashing scale passages, twisting little phrases from the oboes, witty *piano* passages, and a hint of fire in the development section—a happy reconciliation between traditional high-spirited jig and symphonic vigour.”<sup>22</sup> Tovey’s comment on the finale, though complimentary, has a bit of a slighting tone: “The movement is thoroughly effective and appropriate; but this adds interest to the fact that in style and technique it is very like the finales of Mozart’s earlier

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<sup>20</sup> Shera, 215.

<sup>21</sup> Scholars have also been preoccupied with the minuet movement that Mozart apparently began and then abandoned. The preoccupation results from the implicit assumption that the four-movement symphony is more “evolved” than the three-movement symphony, and therefore the removal of a minuet presents an interpretative problem. Ludwig Finscher, 53, is the most puzzled. Brown, 395; Sadie, 502-503; and Zaslav, 359-64, all discuss the minuet in detail.

<sup>22</sup> Sadie, 502-503.

symphonies. It thus serves to measure the advance made by the rest of the work. Here it does not jar, yet you could put it on to an earlier symphony without damage.”<sup>23</sup>

But why, if it is “thoroughly effective and appropriate,” does Tovey find it to be less “advanced” than the rest of the work? Could its conventionality have something to do with his opinion? In terms of formal structure, it is certainly straightforward, with its “rumbustious” P and T pausing on a medial caesura before a regularly-phrased periodic S theme that is followed by a noisy K—all to be expected in a sonata form exposition. As in K. 74, the delight is in the details, and here Mozart shows just how sophisticated he had become in his treatment of convention. This time, the opening of P is also constructed from an opening chord and a scalar passage beginning in the second half of the measure that puts the theme slightly off balance, an effect heightened by the elision into the second part of P at m. 5. At this point, the introduction of dotted quarter notes on the downbeat, and the shift from unison to melody-and-accompaniment texture, give the scales melodic shape ([Example 3](#)). P’s basic 5+5 phrase structure elided into nine measures is catchy enough to bear the weight of an immediate exact repetition (as K. 74’s was not), and the eighth note motion continues almost without pause through T until the medial caesura at m. 42. Here Mozart’s greater facility with manipulating convention declares itself again: S takes the rising scale and rhythmic pattern of the second part of P, and shapes it into a normal 4+4 antecedent-consequent phrase that builds to a 16 bar double period cadencing in the new key, thus providing a very satisfying resolution to the unsettledness of P ([Example 4](#)). From the melodic, harmonic, and formal perspective, the exposition runs along perfectly predictably, which makes the unexpected intrusion in the development section of a series of diminished seventh chords resolving to minor triads all the more startling and effective.<sup>24</sup> Mozart re-establishes equilibrium with an absolutely regular recapitulation derailed only by an unexpected pause on a minor tonic six-four chord before a trilled V/I cadence concludes the work in a jovial mood. In my view, this movement is one of Mozart’s most satisfying finales, one that I can listen to over and over with pleasure, and a large part of its appeal is the large-scale regularity and predictability enlivened by the smaller-scale deviations. Mozart was—as with K. 74—working within a well defined convention (the perpetual motion, dance-inspired finale), and the result is a movement that sparkles. How can one “advance” from this?

To return to the sitcom model, I would argue that movements such as the finale to K. 338 are like the socks-and-shoes episode from “All in the Family.” Mozart takes the most ordinary material, skillfully manipulates it into ear-catching themes, and pours it all into a conventional framework that, by its very predictability, provides the listener with psychologically satisfying “normalcy.” Given the symphonies that followed, it would seem that this approach was a choice that Mozart made, both here and later. We need only to consider the Eb Major symphony, K. 543, whose position within the “final three” has secured its place in history, but whose conventionality has occasioned a considerable amount of scholarly legerdemain:

The graceful theme of the allegro . . . is a distinguished example of a familiar Mozart type; but familiarity should not blind us to the resourceful economy of its instrumentation, and of its counter-statement in the bass, with new imitations and

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<sup>23</sup> Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Vol. 1, *Symphonies* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 183.

<sup>24</sup> One could easily use this work in a discussion of 18th-century cyclicity, since the minor-mode interpolations could be seen as referring back to the first movement.

figures equally rich and convincing in the treble. . . . Of the second subject . . . Familiarity is apt to make us think this typical, not only of Mozart, but of his period. As a matter of fact no other eighteenth-century composer was capable of writing anything remotely like it. . . . After another rousing tutti the wind-instruments lead in three quiet bars back to the recapitulation, which is perfectly complete and regular. . . . All this simplicity and symmetry are essential to the bigness of the scheme. The composer who can produce it is not the man who, having got safely through the exposition, turns with relief to the task of copying it out into the right keys for the recapitulation; but he is the man who conceives the exposition with a vivid idea of what effect it will produce in the recapitulation. This is why he can tell when to let it alone.<sup>25</sup>

Here Tovey, with his typical acuity, has hit the nail on the head, but the undertone of special pleading is hard to miss. A. Peter Brown observes that, “on the surface K. 543 gives the impression of generic normalcy,” but then notes that the regularity of its melodic content is disturbed by the chromatic moments in the first movement and the distant tonal relationships in the *andante con moto* and the finale, giving the work “its special character.”<sup>26</sup> Thus he takes the sting out of the charge of conventionality by emphasizing the music’s “progressive” tonal aspects.

But in attempting to explain away and justify the conventionality, we may be missing something quite important. If it was an essential aspect of artistic success in the eighteenth-century, then it behooves us as twenty-first century scholars and informed listeners to pay it at least the respect it deserves. The sitcom model does give us permission to enjoy and value the conventional aspects of eighteenth-century symphonies, but it also compels us to examine more closely our conception of what separates the geniuses from the good composers, and from the hacks who might actually turn with relief to the easy transposition task of an exact recapitulation. We might then be able to say that the very conventionality of the melodies and forms of K. 543 constitute the essential underpinning that makes the chromatic vocabulary so effective. The psychological comfort of the symmetrical, lyrical melodies and the predictable formal structure combined with the bitter-sweet titillation of the chromatic passages and distant modulations produces a powerful aesthetic effect, but one with a different accent than that produced in the finale of K. 338 or Beethoven’s Fifth.

My symphonies and sitcoms analogy loses its usefulness as we move into the nineteenth century, when the romantic originality aesthetic came to dominate; when the symphony ceased to be written for a specific occasion and a regular, known audience; and when the overwhelming popularity of Haydn’s and then Beethoven’s symphonies began to change the rules and the playing field. But if it can help us to gain a fresh perspective on the eighteenth-century symphony, if it can invigorate our investigation of the literally thousands of works produced all over the world, and if it can give us a greater appreciation of pieces that cheerfully follow a pattern, then it will be worth the occasional raised eyebrow caused by the association of the exalted symphony with the lowly sitcom.

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<sup>25</sup> Tovey, 188-89.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, 419.