

THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE IN 8 PARTS IV

ANTON FILS (FILTZ)

Published by Robert Bremner at the Harp and Hautboy, opposite Somerset-House, in the Strand

Issued: 5 October 1763; price 2 shillings

Source: Henry Watson Music Library – Courtesy of Manchester Libraries,

Information and Archives, Manchester City Council: BR580Fk753

Editors: Barnaby Priest & Alyson McLamore



COMMENTARY

Born in Eichstätt, Bavaria, Anton Fils (1733–1760) joined the celebrated Mannheim orchestra in 1754 at age twenty, and by the time he was twenty-four, he had acquired a house, a wife, and a baby daughter. He had been hired as a cellist, not as a composer, and while his father was also a cellist, it is not fully clear where Fils received his training in composition. In fact, in the two years before he moved to Mannheim, Fils was enrolled at the University of Ingolstadt as a law and theology student.¹ However, Fils was later described by a French publisher as being a “disciple” of Johann Stamitz (1717–1757), the pioneering leader of the Mannheim school of composition who had died before his fortieth birthday.²

Regrettably, Fils outdid his teacher by dying at age twenty-six—but not before composing an outstanding portfolio of music in numerous genres, including some forty-seven symphonies.³ Despite the brevity of his career—a mere six years in all—his output was widely admired, and six years after his passing, a journalist for a Hamburg newspaper still paid tribute to the late composer by saying, “It would have been wished that [Anton] Fils would have had a longer life. This young composer is full of spirit and fire in his symphonies, and his slow movements are full of charm and harmony.”⁴ Some critics were resistant to Fils’s blending of styles, finding his mixture of comic and serious approaches disconcerting. Others, however, embraced the freshness of his varied techniques.⁵

The high regard for Fils’s music persisted for a long time. Works by Fils were represented in six collections owned by Austrian monarchs, while inventories of various Archbishops of Olmütz included Fils as late as 1811.⁶ In 1806, the commentator Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart wrote,

His spirit and his works have long ago made him immortal. I consider him to be the best symphony writer who has ever lived. Pomp, sonority, powerful, all-trembling thunder and rage of the harmonic deluge, newness of ideas and turns of phrase, his matchless *pomposo*, his surprising andantes, his catchy minuets and trios, and finally his quick, loud, rejoicing prestos—to this hour have not been able to rob him of general admiration.⁷

In more recent years, scholars have continued to give Fils his due as an innovator of various progressive features in the eighteenth-century symphony. He was one of the first to employ a contrasting theme in his slow

¹ Eugene K. Wolf, “Fils, (Johann) Anton,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 8: 816.

² Sterling E. Murray, “The Symphony in South Germany,” in *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. Mary Sue Morrow and Bathia Churgin, Vol. I of *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 334, note 34.

³ Peter Vít, “Kompositionsprinzipien der Sinfonien des Anton Fils,” *Sborník prací Filozofické Fakulty Brněnské Univerzity* 21, H7 (1972): 43.

⁴ Rüdiger Thomsen-Fürst, “Anton Fils (1733–60): ‘The Best Composer of Symphonies Who Has Ever Lived,’” transl. Susan Marie Praeder, booklet for *Anton Fils: Symphonies*, L’Orfeo Barockorchester, conducted by Michi Gaigg, CPO 999 778–2, compact disc, p. 9.

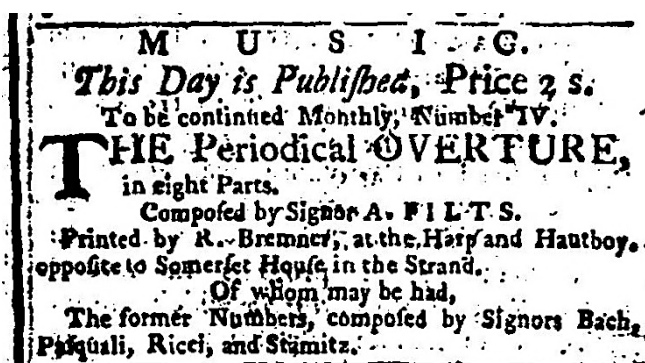
⁵ Wolf, “Fils, (Johann) Anton,” 816.

⁶ Mary Sue Morrow, “The Symphony in the Austrian Monarchy,” in *The Eighteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. Mary Sue Morrow and Bathia Churgin, Vol. I of *The Symphonic Repertoire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 421 and 424.

⁷ Ted Alan DuBois, “Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart’s *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*: An Annotated Translation” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1983), 192–3.

movements, and roughly sixty percent of his symphonies employ four movements, putting him in the forefront of composers who were moving to the “sonata-cycle” model.⁸

It is small wonder that the British publisher Robert Bremner (c.1713–1789) would be eager to include Fils in his new series, and Number IV of the *Periodical Overtures* was issued in October 1763. Bremner’s newspaper advertisements called him “Signor A. Filts,” while Bremner used the spelling “Filtz” on the printed parts. It seems to be the first time that *any* orchestral music by Fils was published in Britain. It was also the first time that Bremner’s “Eight Parts” included a pair of flutes rather than the more usual pair of oboes. Fils may have selected this performance medium in deference to the Mannheim orchestra’s patron, Elector Carl Theodor (1724–1799), who had studied the flute in his youth.⁹



As he would do with many of the *Periodical Overtures*, Bremner made some alterations to Fils’s symphony. Most significantly, he dropped the minuet movement that had been present in the French print by Chevardière, *Simphonie périodique a piu stromenti No. 4* (the apparent source for Bremner’s publication), and as was his rule, Bremner included figured bass. He evidently knew his customers, since *Periodical Overture No. 4* seems to have sold quite well. Bremner’s version of Fils’s symphony was featured in programs of the Edinburgh Musical Society in 1766, 1769, 1770, 1778, 1781, and 1785 (and sometimes was played more than once per season).¹⁰ It closed the first acts of at least two benefit concerts in the American colonies: for Josiah Flagg in Boston on 4 October 1771 and for William Selby (again in Boston, at the Concert Hall) on 26 October 1772.¹¹ The Moravian community in Fairfield, England, held a copy of Bremner’s print in 1785, and the London publisher Samuel Babb issued a keyboard arrangement of “The Favorite Periodical Overture No. 4” by “Sigr. Filtz” late in the eighteenth century.¹²

Fils’s knack for colorful orchestration is apparent from the opening measures of the “Allegro.” The upper strings launch a vigorous measured tremolo in cut-time, emphasized by a loud tonic E-flat from the horns, while the lower strings play a quarter-note motif that arpeggiates the tonic chord. The flutes soon rise above the mass of sound with a light-hearted motif that starts slowly but ends with a flurry of sixteenth notes. The upper strings get a brief respite from their nearly continuous tremolos during the quiet start of the second theme (m. 29), but *forte* tremolos resume four bars later in the second violins, the violas, and the cellos/basses. Above them, the first violins play a series of staccato climbing arpeggios punctuated by flute flourishes. Numerous members of the ensemble race through upward scales during the closing theme at m. 45.

Fils crafts an unconventional form with these materials. The simple quarter-note arpeggio from mm. 1–2 is thrust into prominence in an imitative duet that launches the movement’s second half in m. 59. After considerable harmonic wandering, Fils restates the second theme at m. 128, now in the tonic E-flat, but only four measures of the theme are heard before the noisier closing-theme scales return (m. 132). James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy would likely call this binary-sonata structure a “Type 2 Sonata,” in which the first theme’s material—bravely represented by the tiny quarter-note motif—is heard only in the dominant during the second section.¹³

Although the “Andante” shares many features with the “Allegro”—the key of E-flat, the Type 2 sonata form—the mood is completely different. It is a soothing interlude of gentle appoggiaturas, far removed from

⁸ Eugene K. Wolf, *The Symphonies of Johann Stamitz: A Study in the Formation of the Classic Style* (Utrecht: Bohn, Scheltema & Holkema, 1981), 156; Wolf, “Fils, (Johann) Anton,” 816.

⁹ Eugene K. Wolf, “Introduction,” in *The Symphony at Mannheim*, Series C, vol. III of *The Symphony* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), xlii.

¹⁰ Jenny Burchell, *Polite or Commercial Concerts?: Concert Management and Orchestral Repertoire in Edinburgh, Bath, Oxford, Manchester, and Newcastle, 1730–1799*, Outstanding Dissertations in Music from British Universities, ed. by John Caldwell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 306, 311, 315, 323, 330, 342.

¹¹ O. G. Sonneck, *Early Concert-Life in America (1731–1800)* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1907), 263, 273.

¹² Karl Kroeger, “An Unknown Collection of Eighteenth-Century Instrumental Music,” *Fontes Artis Musicae* 35, no. 4 (October–December 1988): 277, 280; The British Library h.721.r.(27).

¹³ James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 353–4.

the muscular tremolos of the first movement. The horns are tacet throughout, and the flutes are silent for the first ten bars. However, in mm. 15 and 17, when the unison strings play *forte* sextuplets, the flutes respond with short interjections, and they then embellish the string melody in much of the second half of the movement.

Since Bremner omitted the minuet, the overture shifts gears to the rapid-fire “Presto,” again in E-flat major. Fils’s Mannheim affiliation is clear in various regards: the first theme repeatedly includes the quick rising-and-falling motif known as the *Bebung*, while the lower strings accompany with steady “drum 8ths.”¹⁴ After a stretch of measured tremolos (m. 13 and onward), a brief *tutti* silence signals the second theme (m. 32) in the dominant key, featuring the violins and flutes in what jazz musicians might call “trading fours.” The violins and flutes then jointly present the closing theme at m. 50, a series of rising scales harmonized in thirds. In the manner of a Type 2 sonata form, the second half of the finale repeats the three themes but reverses their tonal centers: the first theme (m. 70) remains in the dominant, while the second (ms. 122) and closing themes (ms. 140) both shift to the tonic. The “Presto” is an exhilarating whirl, and listeners are likely to agree with Fils’s peers in regretting that he did not live a longer life.



EDITORIAL METHODS

Transposing instruments: Transposing instruments are written in conventional modern format indicating original key—parts in original keys are available [e.g., Horn I in F (orig. in D)].

Slurs and ties: Editorial slurs are indicated using dotted lines; editorial ties are indicated by brackets.

Triplet/rhythmic grouping indications: In general, modern practice is followed. Occasionally (especially in slow movements), original subdivisions are used. Where groupings are inconsistently realized in the original source material, modern groupings are adopted.

Grace notes and appoggiaturas: These are generally treated as appoggiaturas and are given a value of half the note they precede; in cases where it seems clear that grace notes are intended in the original, a slash is added.

Alternate notes/ossia passages, etc.: When a written note is unplayable, an alternative octave substitution is indicated in smaller font and within brackets.

Accents/articulations/fermatas: There is considerable inconsistency in articulation throughout the set of periodical overtures. Following the Bremner edition, a wedge is used rather than a staccato mark. In some cases, the printed edition uses wedges and staccato markings within a movement (usually the slow central movement). When this is the case, both marks have been used. Where parallel passages indicate the use of articulations, these have been included between brackets.

Dynamic markings: In the original edition, the placement of dynamic marks can be inconsistent within the bar and sometimes across the barline. Where the correct placement of the dynamic is clear from the musical phrasing, the dynamics have been repositioned without comment. Where dynamics are less clear, or missing, the editor’s dynamics occur within square brackets.

Crescendo / diminuendo markings: “Cresc.” and “dim.” markings are generally used, but there are rare exceptions to this with the use of hairpins. Where these are editorial, they are enclosed in square brackets. Other markings such as *rinf.* have been retained except where it seems clear that this refers to a crescendo.

Realization of notational shorthand: For spacing reasons, some use of notational short-hand has been used. When this is the case, the first full beat has been written out.

Altered note values: In the sources, there are occasional errors and inconsistencies in note values. Where these occur, the altered note values are given within brackets.

Accidentals: As is standard modern practice, accidentals remain valid until the next barline. This differs from eighteenth-century practice where this convention was not consistently employed. Wherever this is the case, accidentals are added in brackets.

Figured bass: Although the eighteenth-century parts usually position the figured bass numerals above the relevant bass notes, the modern score and parts show them below the basso line.

¹⁴ Hugo Riemann, ed., *Sinfonien der pfalzbayerischen Schule (Mannheimer Symphoniker)*, in Year 7, Vol. II, of *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Bayern*, in Series 2 of *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1906), xvii.

Missing music: Where music is missing in the original, alternative sources are sought (e.g., when a bar is missing due to a printer's error or when music is unreadable). When eighteenth-century concordances are unobtainable, editorial notes are added in smaller font within brackets.

CRITICAL NOTES

The notation of dynamics and articulation has been standardized throughout. Where these are missing in the original source, they have been reconstructed from parallel passages. These are indicated by the use of dotted slurs and brackets. Where there is inconsistency in the use of staccato articulation marks, the editors have taken decisions based on the collocation of the markings. As is common with music printed in this period, *appoggiature* are inconsistently notated. These have been standardized. Copyist errors have been corrected in brackets (see notes below), along with errors in accidentals. The horn parts have been transposed into F in the score. Metronome marks are a suggestion for performance only. Rehearsal letters, cues in parts, and bar numbers have been added for convenience.

Mvt. 1	Allegro	
m. 40	Vn 2	1st beat changed to A \sharp 4 (missing accidental in original)
mm. 65, 67	Vn 1	2nd beat changed to A \sharp 4 (missing accidental in original)
m. 80	Hn 2	1st beat changed to D4 (parallel octave doubling with Horn 1)
m. 95	Vn 1	upper note of 1st beat changed to B \sharp 4 (missing accidental in original)
m. 98	Fl 1	second sixteenth note of 2nd beat changed to F \sharp 5 (parallel with m. 96)
m. 104	Vn 2	4th beat changed to E \flat 4 (parallel with Flute 2)
m. 118	Hn 1	1st beat half note changed to A4 (matching harmony with Violin 1)
m. 118	Hn 2	1st beat half note changed to A3 (matching harmony with Violin 1)
m. 137	Vn 2	3rd beat changed to B \flat 4 (unison with Violin 1)
Mvt. 2	Andante	
m. 21	Fl 2	2nd beat changed to A \sharp 4 (matching harmony with Viola)
m. 27	Vn 2	first sixteenth note changed to E \sharp 5 (unison with Violin 1)
m. 28	Vn 2	first sixteenth note changed to E \sharp 4 (unison with Violin 1)
mm. 32, 33	Fl 1, Fl 2	appoggiatura F6 added to 2nd beat (octave doubling with Violin 1)
m. 33	Fl 1	appoggiatura A \flat 6 added to 2nd beat (octave doubling with Violin 1)
m. 33	Fl 2	appoggiatura F6 added to 2nd beat (octave doubling with Violin 1)
m. 33	Vn 2	appoggiatura F5 added to 2nd beat (parallel phrasing with Violin 1 m. 32)
m. 36	Fl 1	first sixteenth note changed to D \flat 6 (missing accidental in original)
m. 36	Vn 1	first sixteenth note changed to D \flat 5 (missing accidental in original)
m. 38	Vn 1	1st beat changed to quarter note, 2nd beat changed to eighth note (rhythmic unison with Flutes & Violin 2)
Mvt. 3	Presto	
m. 26	Fl 2	third eighth note changed to A \sharp 5 (unison with Flute 1)
m. 30	Hn 1, Hn 2	half note C5 tied to 1st beat of m. 31 (orchestral rhythmic unison)
mm. 33, 41, 49	Vn 2	rhythm changed to match Violin 1
m. 45	Fl 2	rhythm changed to match Flute 1, A \flat 4 replaced by A \sharp 4 (parallel with m. 37)
m. 50, 54	Vn 1, Vn 2	first sixteenth note of 2nd beat changed to C5 (unison with Flute 1)
m. 120	Hn 1, Hn 2	half note F4 tied to 1st beat of m. 121 (unison with orchestral rhythm)
mm. 140, 144	Vn 1, Vn 2	first sixteenth note of 2nd beat changed to F4 (parallel with Flute 1)

CATALOGUE REFERENCES

- RISM A/I F 774 [Répertoire International des Sources Musicales; <https://rism.online/sources/990017998>]
 DTB III/1 Es-dur 6 [Hugo Riemann, ed., *Sinfonien der pfalzbayerischen Schule (Mannheimer Symphoniker)*, Jahrgang III, vol. 1 of *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Bayern (Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst, Zweite Folge)*, ed. Adam Sandbergern (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1902)]
 LaRue 12166 (F489) [Jan LaRue, *A Catalogue of 18th-Century Symphonies*, Volume I: Thematic Identifier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)]
 Littger 110.b [Klaus Walter Littger, *Johann Anton Fils (1733–1760): Ein Eichstätter Komponist der Mannheimer Klassik* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1983)]
 Vít TK 41 [Petr Vít, “Příspěvek k dějinám mannheimské sinfonie (Contribution to the History of the Mannheim Symphony)” (Dissertationsarbeit, Brno, 1971)]

ILLUSTRATION

Publication advertisement: *The Public Advertiser*, 5 October 1763, p. 3 (courtesy of the British Library Archives)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ESSAY

<https://repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de/en/periodical-overtures-details/>



PERFORMANCE MATERIALS

Please contact *Musikproduktion Höflich, München*: <https://musikmph.de/>

