

THE PERIODICAL OVERTURE IN 8 PARTS VIII

ANTON FILS (FILTZ)

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

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Editors: Barnaby Priest & Alyson McLamore



COMMENTARY

In the course of publishing the first six symphonies that launched the *Periodical Overtures*, Robert Bremner (c.1713–1789) sometimes jettisoned a minuet movement from a continental source in order to conform to a standard three-movement model. However, Bremner deviated from that pattern in “Opus II,” the second group of six works. *The Periodical Overture in 8 Parts No. 8* is a four-movement composition, as had also been true for the seventh symphony issued a month earlier. In addition to this new trend, Bremner also “repeated” a composer, Anton Fils (1733–1760), who had been previously featured as the author of *Periodical Overture No. 4*. Posterity now regards Fils as one of the innovators of the expanded four-movement symphonic structure, which he used in approximately sixty percent of his symphonies, and he also was one of the first to employ a contrasting theme in the slow movements—another trait that is present in *Periodical Overture No. 8*.¹ It is likely that his earlier work in Bremner’s series had been well received, since Britain was rapidly developing an avid taste for the flashy orchestral effects introduced by the Mannheim school of composers.

The Bavarian-born Fils had joined the celebrated Mannheim orchestra as a cellist in 1754 at the age of twenty, but died only six years later, leaving behind a widow and a young daughter. Historians assume that he learned the cello from his father, a court instrumentalist in Eichstätt, but Fils spent two years at the University of Ingolstadt studying jurisprudence and theology before being hired at Mannheim, so the source of Fils’s compositional training is unclear.² However, the Mannheim orchestra leader, Johann Stamitz (1717–1757) was a noted teacher as well as ensemble leader, and so it is likely that a French publisher of the 1760s was correct when it advertised Fils as being a “disciple” of Stamitz.³

However Fils came by his compositional skill, he made good use of it in his short six-year career, producing an outstanding portfolio of music in numerous genres, including some forty-seven symphonies.⁴ Despite the brevity of his working life, his creativity 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 A 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.”⁵ 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.⁶

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 1811.⁷ In 1806, the commentator Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart wrote,

¹ 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.

² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ Peter Vít, “Kompositionsprinzipien der Sinfonien des Anton Fils,” *Sborník prací Filozofické Fakulty Brněnské Univerzity* 21, H7 (1972): 43.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Wolf, “Fils, (Johann) Anton,” 816.

⁷ 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.

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.”⁸

When Bremner issued *Periodical Overture No. 8* in February 1764, he again used the “Filtz” spelling that had appeared on the cover of *Periodical Overture No. 4*, but unlike his earlier publication by Fils, *No. 8* employs the standard two oboes that characterized the majority of pieces in Bremner’s series. His decision to feature Fils a second time seems to have been shrewd, judging from the records of the eighth overture’s ten

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performances in the concerts of the Edinburgh Musical Society over an almost twenty-year span from 1768 to 1786, while an unspecified overture by “Filtz” was played as late as 1799. In some of the Edinburgh concert seasons, *Periodical Overture No. 8* was the only work by Fils performed (even though the Society owned the other two Fils prints by Bremner), and in two seasons—1770 and 1786—*Periodical Overture No. 8* was performed twice.⁹ During the first of those seasons, the eighth overture is known to have been performed across the Atlantic: it closed the first half of the 9 February 1770 benefit concert at “Mr. Burn’s Room” on behalf of a Mr. Stotherd, a very active French horn player in New York.¹⁰

Nearly all of the elements that Schubart applauded can be found in *Periodical Overture No. 8*—and the symphony also reflects the young composer’s full awareness of the Mannheim orchestral conventions. The rhythmic unison that characterizes the robust *premier coup d’archet* also showcases a descending E-flat triad that is heard at the opening of numerous other symphonies; historian Jan LaRue points to works by Johann Christian Bach, Carl Friedrich Abel as well as symphonies by Wagenseil, Montoro, and Kreusser.¹¹ Fils immediately makes the familiar motif his own, however, with an abrupt switch to *piano* for a staccato ascent. The shifts between *forte* and *piano* occur more rapidly during the bridge (m. 17), which is filled with measured tremolos and upward arpeggios. When the bridge reaches the dominant key, B-flat major, the second theme (m. 27) sustains a *piano* dynamic for a full four measures, during which the first violins invert the staccato scalar motif heard in the first theme. The second theme then makes its own sudden dynamic switch to *forte* (m. 31) and introduces the short-long Scotch snaps (or Lombardy rhythms) that will be a unifying device for the majority of the symphony. The last portion of the “Allegro’s” exposition presents a short “Mannheim crescendo” (m. 35), and—as is true for most of Fils’s opening movements—the sonata form continues without a repetition directly into the development (m. 45) and onward to the recapitulation (m. 61).

The Scotch snaps that had played a secondary role in the “Allegro” move into the foreground at the start of the “Larghetto.” This triple-meter movement, in the dominant key of B-flat major, reduces the ensemble to strings alone, and is again in sonata form, this time set in two repeated sections. Fils creates another instance of tight interconnections between themes: the first melody opens with a quick leap of a third and a descent to the tonic, followed by a rising series of Scotch snaps. After repeating those opening bars at a higher pitch level, the third phrase of Theme 1 (m. 5) opens with an F, an upper-neighbor G, and then four more repeated Fs. This “inner” motif then becomes the opening of the second theme in m. 13. It, too, is followed



⁸ 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.

⁹ 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), 309, 311, 315, 323, 333, 336, 342, 346, 372.

¹⁰ O. G. Sonneck, *Early Concert-Life in America (1731–1800)* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1907), 170–171.

¹¹ Jan LaRue, “Significant and Coincidental Resemblance between Classical Themes,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1961): 229.

by a measure of Scotch snaps, but the upward leaps comprise larger intervals.

As the “Minuetto” demonstrates, Fils was not finished with Scotch snaps. The rounded-binary form (for the *tutti* ensemble) opens with a rather dramatic opening leap of a tenth from the tonic E-flat to a G, then descends more gradually. The consequent phrase (m. 5) then employs several of the familiar “snappy” rhythms, also in a descending phrase. The “Trio,” however, contains no rhythms shorter than eighth notes, and the majority of its phrases tend to ascend. Unusually, the “Trio” does not reduce the scoring, but rather retains all of the wind instruments for harmonic support throughout its binary structure.

Fils concludes the symphony with a lively gigue-like finale. This, too, is in sonata form, and “drum 8ths” support the bouncy opening theme that leaps upward sequentially for four measures, then descends more gradually through strings of eighth notes. Perhaps echoing the opening theme of the “Minuetto,” the finale’s second theme (m. 17) is launched by an upward leap of a seventh from F to E-flat, and then—after descending five steps—it rockets even higher, reaching a B-flat. Interestingly, when the second theme is recapitulated (m. 67), Fils reverses the order of its first two phrases, perhaps reserving the rocketing ascent to help drive the propulsion to the finish of this exuberant “Presto.” Bremner’s selection of this work for publication as *Periodical Overture No. 8* may have again made his customers regret the too-short life of its composer.

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.

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. 15 | VA | 2nd beat changed to G4 (octave doubling with VC) |
| m. 26 | Hn 2 | 2nd beat's two eighth notes and 3rd beat's quarter note changed to C4 (octave unison with Horn 1) |
| m. 31-2 | Basso | 4th beat figured bass changed to 6/5 (correction of harmony) |
| m. 42 | Basso | 3rd beat figured bass changed to 6/5 (correction of harmony) |
| m. 50 | Basso | 2nd beat figured bass changed to 7 (correction of harmony) |
| m. 74 | Hn 1 | 1st beat changed to B \flat 4 (octave unison with Horn 2) |
| m. 87 | Ob 1 | appoggiatura B \flat 4 changed to half note (improves consistency of layout) |
| m. 92 | Ob 2 | 3rd beat changed to A \flat 4 (correction of harmony) |

Mvt. 2 Larghetto

- | | | |
|-------|------|---|
| m. 15 | VA | 1st beat changed to eighth note C4 (octave doubling with Basso) |
| m. 23 | Vn 1 | dotted half note reduced to half note (rhythmic unison with Vn 2) |
| m. 23 | VA | final sixteenth changed to E \sharp 4 (for raised 7th) |
| m. 43 | VA | 1st beat changed to eighth note F4 (octave doubling with Basso) |
| m. 45 | VA | 1st beat quarter note changed to E4 (octave doubling with Basso) |

Mvt. 3 Minuetto

- | | | |
|-------|------|--|
| m. 8 | Hn 2 | 1st beat changed to half note (parallel with Horn 1) |
| m. 16 | Ob 2 | 1st beat lengthened to dotted half note (parallel with Oboe 1) |
| m. 20 | Ob 2 | 1st beat reduced to half note (rhythmic unison) |

Mvt. 4 Presto

- | | | |
|-------|----------------------------|--|
| m. 8 | Ob 1, Ob 2; Hn 1 | 2nd beat shortened to quarter note (parallel with upper strings) |
| m. 16 | Ob 1, Ob 2; Vn 1, Vn 2; VA | 2nd beat shortened to quarter note (parallel with Horns & Basso) |
| m. 20 | VA | 2nd beat shortened to quarter note (rhythmic unison) |
| m. 24 | Ob 1 | 1st beat changed to C5 and 2nd beat D5 quarter note added (correction to harmony) |
| m. 24 | Ob 2 | 1st beat changed to A \sharp 4, 2nd beat B \flat 4 quarter note added (unison with Violin 1) |
| m. 36 | VA | 2nd beat shortened to quarter note |

CATALOGUE REFERENCES

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ILLUSTRATION

Publication advertisement: *The Public Advertiser*, 4 February 1764, p. 4 (courtesy of the British Library Archives)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND ESSAY

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



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