

## Arrangements of music

In the past, attitudes towards arrangements of music have oscillated between disapproval and appreciation. In the Middle Ages, troubadours and minstrels often performed within a master-apprentice relationship, using each other's compositions and making their own variations. Between noble and church courts that employed musicians, rivalry around musical performances was the norm, and exchange of compositions was sometimes prevented or forbidden.

Within this period a universal music notation method was developed, enabling uniform performances of church music at different religious events and places. Up to the Renaissance, music was often adapted to individual instruments as they were specific in tuning, tone color and range. The definition of intellectual or commercial property of compositions became gradually more important. Was it the property of the composer, his employer or sponsor, or the publisher?

Halfway through the baroque period some conventions began to emerge. In the classical period it became common practice to arrange compositions requiring large forces, such as operas and symphonies, for smaller ensembles (for example the wind octet or 'Harmoniemusik'), enabling performances at locations with smaller resources. When keyboard instruments became widely available, a lot of music was arranged, composed and published for them. Most arrangements are still re-instrumentations now.

The regulation of copyright by law started at the beginning of the eighteenth century (England, Statute of Anne, 1710). In the Netherlands the first development of copyright by law was in 1817, after the "Boekenwet" in 1803 and the laws from the French invaders. The current Dutch law is on <http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0001886/>.

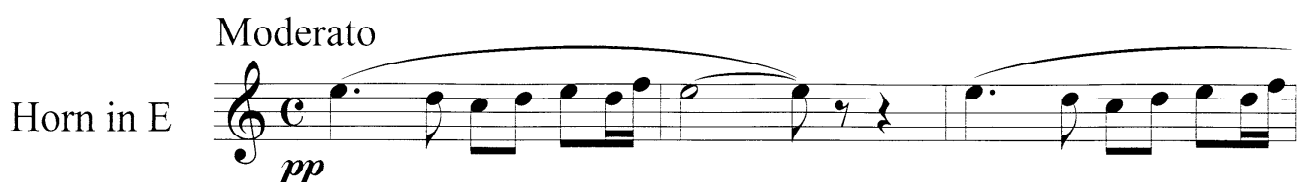
From an artistic point of view in the composition process, it would be ideal if the musical ideas were not restricted by available or chosen instrumentation. But in practice that is always the case. Initially a composer will probably choose instrumentation that will enable the realization of his or her musical ideas. But as soon as the instruments have been chosen, that forms a limitation. Then the composer must mold the musical ideas into the features of the chosen or available instrumentation. That limitation of artistic expression restricts the composer as well as the arranger. Only their musical craftsmanship will define if a masterpiece can be created. Additionally, some composers have a blind preference for specific instrumentation (4 horns, 4 saxophones, 4 strings, piano, orchestra etc. 😊).

Due to the availability of user-friendly music notation software nowadays, many arrangements are of poor musical quality. The disposition of notes between parts and instruments often becomes a rather mechanical routine. But the structure and relationship that makes notes into music requires musical and artistic craftsmanship, and that is something quite different. Sometimes however music is simplified on purpose so that it can be performed by pupils or amateurs: this is a reasonable and practical approach.

The elitist and condescending rejection of arrangements of music by those only favoring original music is not realistic. The greatest experts in this field (all famous composers) have made arrangements of their own music as well as the music of others, and history shows that arranging music does not necessarily result in a decrease of quality. Countless arrangements have found worldwide acclaim. In addition, there will always be interest in original versions, for instance the piano score of *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Modest Mussorgsky; a masterpiece remains a masterpiece.

For arranging music, permission is required of the composer or their heirs, and that ends only after a period of 70 years (in most countries including the EU and the US) after the death of the composer. Below are three striking examples of well-known and successful arrangements.

**Antonín Dvořák** (1841-1904) composed a Serenade in September 1873 for an octet of clarinet, bassoon, horn, 2 violins, viola, double bass and piano. This composition was listed in the thematic catalogue of Jarmil Michael Burghauser (1921-1997) with the reference number B36. However, according to Otakar Šourek (1883-1956), the father-in-law of Burghauser and author of the first catalog of the work of Dvořák, the composer destroyed this music. In that period Dvořák destroyed several his compositions because he was not content with them, later reusing some of them from copies that were left behind with friends. Two years later, in 1875, Dvořák composed his famous opus 22, the Serenade for Strings (Burghauser gave this Serenade the catalogue number B52). It is interesting that the opening theme of this serenade is perfectly aligned with the harmonic series of the E horn, which he had used in previous compositions, possibly in the Serenade B36 as well. This may have sounded as a heavenly echo from the Bohemian forest:



Also, because Dvořák composed his Serenade opus 22 in a very short time, it is possible that he used at least some material from the Serenade B36. However, according to Kateřina Nová, director of the Antonin Dvořák Museum in Prague, the connection between B36 and B52 cannot be established as the manuscript of B36 has been destroyed.

# SERENÁDA

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## SERENATA

### I

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK, OP. 22  
(1841—1904)

Moderato

I  
Violini

II

Viola

Violoncelli

Contrabassi

*pp*

In my view, some of the music of the lost octet B36 now can be heard in this Serenade for Strings. We should be grateful to Dvořák for this magnificent arrangement.

**Modeste Mussorgsky** (1839-1881) composed his *Pictures at an Exhibition* in 1874 for piano solo. He was a member of the Russian group “The Five” with Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, César Cui and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. They studied each other’s music and the music of well-known contemporary composers. From this distinguished fivesome only Balakirev had musical training. They critically examined and freely arranged each other’s compositions. For instance, in his arrangement for piano of the *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Rimsky-Korsakov changed some harmonies in certain passages because in his opinion there were some errors. Looking back, there are several question marks on his changes. As well as editions for piano solo, *Pictures at an Exhibition* has been arranged for orchestra, for instance by Mikhail Tushmalov (1891), Henry Wood (1915), Leo Funtek (1922), Maurice Ravel (1922), Giuseppe Becce (1922), Leonidas Leonardi (1924), Lucien Cailliet (1937), Leopold Stokowski (1939), Walter Goehr (1942) and Sergei Gorchakov (1954). Apart from Stokowski all others used the piano version of Rimsky-Korsakov as a source for their arrangements. Nowadays, arrangements of this piece have been made for the most obscure instrumentations, undoubtedly inspired by the great expressiveness of the original music. The most popular arrangement, preferred by leading directors and a wide audience, is the version for large orchestra by Maurice Ravel. He makes refined use of all features of the orchestra for the realization of the many musical details in the music of Mussorgsky, and this arrangement is programmed by orchestras worldwide.

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791) composed several serenades for wind. There are the two serenades for ‘Harmoniemark’ (2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons and 2 horns), *Serenade in C-minor* (KV 388) and *Serenade in E-flat* (KV 375). And there is the *Gran Partita* in B-flat (KV 361) where Mozart added 2 basset horns, 2 extra horns and a double bass or contra-bassoon to the score. He composed this piece with seven movements around 1783 in Vienna. The sixth movement is a theme with variations which is clearly an arrangement of the second movement of a *Flute Quartet in C* (KV 285b), composed by Mozart in Mannheim at the end of 1777.

*THEMA*  
Andantino

Including this arranged element of the flute quartet, the *Gran Partita* it is a masterpiece in all aspects, well-balanced in playing time and musical depth. Later Mozart used material from the *Gran Partita* for his *String Quartet* KV 46.

Hence, a wide appreciation of a musical composition is not dictated by the fact that it is or isn’t an arrangement. In the final analysis, only the quality of the result is important!

Arie van Hoek, Andelst, 2017

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