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Symphony No.91 in Eb, Hob.I:91

Key: E b

Year: 1788

Genre: Symphony

Pr. Instrument: Orchestra

- 1. Largo. Allegro assai 9' 45''
- 2.Andante 7' 01''
- 3.Menuet: Un poco allegretto 3' 17''
- 4.Finale: Vivace 7' 18''

The second of the group of three symphonies Haydn composed for Comte d' Oigny in 1788, the Symphony No. 91 is a veritable tour de force of symphonic writing at its Classical peak, a work full of warmth and good spirits. Haydn shows off a bit more than usual in the impressive opening movement. Following the broad lines of the introduction, the movement proper commences with a theme built in double counterpoint; the contrapuntal complexity of this principal theme increases as the exposition unfolds, adding more strands to the texture, first in the strings, then in the winds. Counterpoint continues to accrue in the development, preparing the listener for the skillful simultaneous combination of all of these lines at the end of the movement—a feat akin to, and perhaps to some degree the inspiration for, the amazing contrapuntal display in the final movement of Mozart's Symphony No. 41 in C major, the "Jupiter" Symphony (1788).

The second movement is an Andante theme and variations. This otherwise typical movement takes a turn towards the unexpected at its end, where a striking, trill-laden burst throughout the orchestra gives the impression of a well-oiled machine breaking down, leaving the players unsure of what to do next. The Menuet and Trio are graceful, danceable and well-mannered; the Trio is in fact a waltz, a dance just coming into its own in the last part of the eighteenth century. The finale, cast as a sonata-allegro, is virtually monothematic; though there is actually a wisp of

a second subject, it never takes on real importance. The symphony ends as it began, bathed in sunlight and good humor.

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Symphony No. 91 (Haydn)

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The **Symphony No. 91** in [E-flat major](#) (Hoboken 1/91) is written by [Joseph Haydn](#). It is occasionally referred to as *The Letter T* referring to an older method of cataloguing Haydn's symphonic output. It was completed in [1788](#).

[\[edit\]](#) Movements

The work is in standard four [movement](#) form and scored for [flute](#), two [oboes](#), two [bassoons](#), two [horns](#), [continuo](#) ([harpsichord](#)) and [strings](#). It is the last symphony that Haydn composed that is not scored for [trumpets](#) and [timpani](#).

1. [Largo - Allegro](#) assai
2. [Andante](#)
3. [Minuet](#)
4. [Vivace](#)

The first movement opens with a slow introduction which Haydn works beautifully into the opening allegro assai. The Allegro's first theme is derived from an idea Haydn used in his cantata *Arianna a Naxos*, Hob. XXVIa/2, composed the same year. The theme is chromatic, legato and in two-part inverted counterpoint.^[3] The second theme is dancelike. Both the themes are closely linked with the opening largo.

The slow movement consists of a set of three variations on a theme. Listen to the bassoon and the accompanying string filigree in the first variation and the series of trills near the end of the movement.

The minuet includes a trio in the bassoon accompanied by plucked strings.

The finale opens quietly and builds gradually to a close.

[\[edit\]](#) References

- Robbins Landon, H. C. (1963) *Joseph Haydn: Critical Edition of the Complete Symphonies*, Universal Edition, Vienna

<http://www.amazon.com/Joseph-Haydn-Symphony-flat-Oxford/dp/B00008JL6O>

The Oxford symphony is well-known, but Haydn's symphony no. 91 in E-flat major is a gem waiting for the new listener to discover. This is a quiet, subdued and introspective work, rather unusual for an entire Haydn symphony. It also features a great deal of dance music. After a lyrical slow introduction, Haydn introduces a quiet theme which is developed with counterpoint and elaborated. The flute plays a prominent role in this movement. The second movement is a theme and variations with many surprising shifts of key, and with a new theme in the minor key introduced in mid-movement. The final repetition of the theme includes a great deal of filigree and trilling as it works to a quiet, elegant close. The minuet is based upon a graceful dance theme and the trio is a waltz with an oom-pah-pah accompaniment. The finale opens quietly but works to a spirited close. This work is one of my favorite lesser-known Haydn symphonies that I have discovered in the course of my listening. It is also available on a Naxos CD together with symphonies 69 and 89, conducted by Bela Drahos with the Esterhazy Sinfonia. I prefer Goodman's version.