
CONCERTINO FOR CLARINET AND ORCHESTRA BY CARL MARIA VON WEBER.

Carl Maria von Weber was a prominent German composer, best known for his opera “Der Freischütz.” Occasionally labelled the “father of romanticism,” he composed several works for woodwind instruments that are still popular today, including a horn concerto, a bassoon concerto and several important works for clarinet, including two concertos, a quintet and the concertino. Weber was born the 18th of November 1786 into a musical household, with most of his family members having an involvement in music. His father hoped to turn him into the next Mozart, and sent him to study with Joseph Haydn’s brother Michael as well as Abbé Vogler. In 1811 while travelling through Germany he met Heinrich Bärmann, a clarinettist for whom he wrote his concertino and other clarinet works. Weber wrote the concertino in 3 days, and its first performance was very successful, and led to the two concertos being commissioned. He was influenced greatly by opera as well as Bärmann for his clarinet pieces.

Weber uses a theme and variations structure in this piece to provide more opportunity for the performer to demonstrate his technical skill. It features a minor 3/4 introduction, followed by a statement of the theme in cut common time. The theme is stated in a major key at an *Adagio* tempo, and following a brief orchestral interlude a bridging section of rapid semiquavers. The first variation on the theme has flowing triplet passages and a *meno mosso* tempo marking. The second variation consists of a fast collection of semiquavers to demonstrate the technical ability of the player. A longer orchestral interlude precedes a *lento*, minor incarnation of the theme in a low register for the clarinet. The dramatic finale has a 6/8 time signature and an *allegro* tempo, introducing new material but giving the soloist a demonstration of his aptitude with the instrument.

The image shows the beginning of the Concertino for Clarinet and Orchestra by Carl Maria von Weber. It features five staves for string instruments: Violine I, Violine II, Viola, Violoncell, and Kontrabaß. The tempo is marked "Adagio ma non troppo". The music starts with a tutti orchestral melody in a minor key, marked "ff" (fortissimo). The strings quickly fade to "p" (pianissimo) for the entry of the solo clarinet. The strings then take on a harmonic role with repeated quavers. The clarinet enters on a long Bb, playing a melody with descending steps and large leaps. The score shows the first few measures of this introduction section.

The piece’s opening, with its dramatic introduction in a minor key, features a tutti orchestra melody. Played at a *fortissimo* dynamic, the orchestra quickly fades to *pianissimo* for the entry of the solo clarinet as shown above. The strings then takes on a harmonic role, with repeated quavers continuing for the rest of the introduction section. The clarinet enters on a long Bb, the following melody incorporating both descending steps and large leaps from the bottom of the clarinet range to a high a. Each bar has a distinct downbeat, which combines with the thin texture (just strings and solo clarinet) allowing the complex rhythms to come through clearly. The ornamentation contributes to the early-romantic style, and the virtuosity of the player.



The second section introduces the audience to the theme with a bright playful style. Weber uses mostly the second register of the clarinet, allowing the performer to project effortlessly. The modulation from the minor key of the introduction to the major theme, as well as the change to a more relaxed cut common time signature helps create this playful style. A simple rhythm, consisting mainly of minims and quavers, leaves lots of room for ornamentation as well as future development in the variations. Smooth phrases in the accompaniment voices provide a flowing feeling to the music and allow for *rubato* in the clarinet part. The violin 1 then take over the melody, with fast semiquavers ascending in steps with accents on each beat at a *fortissimo* dynamic. The clarinet answers with ascending semiquavers of its own in a rapid crescendo marked *con fuoco*. Following this, rapidly articulated ascending semiquavers demonstrate coordination over a sparse accompaniment.

This leads into the first variation, with varied repetition of the original theme at a moderate tempo and smooth triplets as a contrast to the furious semiquavers. This section has a generally lower dynamic, centring on *piano* instead of *forte*. The part is played expressively, with legato tonguing producing a mellow tone colour. This is enhanced by the entry of long horn notes to create the mellow tone, with an unchanged string accompaniment. The orchestral interpolation showcases the syncopated rhythm of the introduction in a call-and-response across the orchestra.

Variation two introduces a faster tempo, with relentless semiquavers moving in steps covering the full range of the clarinet. Varied articulation contributes to the pace and style, from two-slurred-two-tongued to longer slurs. This virtuosic display of skill is played over an incredibly simple harmony in the string section, with short repeated quavers. Regular 4 bar phrases dominate the clarinet part, which features only simple rhythms, but the major key makes this movement incredibly joyous in sound.



The following section is played with a full texture of the entire orchestra without the soloist to create contrast with the preceding movements. High strings have arpeggiated ascending and descending semiquavers which are answered by woodwind, brass and lower strings syncopated quavers from the introduction. This rhythmic contrast is also a change from the simple rhythms of the clarinet part. The long minims and semibreves of the woodwinds and brass following this serve to slow the tempo down to the *lento* of the following section.



In *Lento*, the theme is transformed into a melancholy low and minor melody played by the clarinet near the extreme of its lowest register. It is played *piano*, with frequent leaps to a middle register. This creates a sombre tone colour, and is accompanied by a very thin texture to allow the part to be heard. 4 bar phrases provides unity with the original theme, however the long note duration adds to the glum mood.

The final movement, labelled *Allegro*, is a substantial contrast from the *lento* with a fast tempo and constantly moving notes. The major tonality, and rhythmic diminution of harmony provide movement to the piece as it leads to the grand finale. The *risoluto* clarinet line features many fast scalic



passages as semiquavers, and is repeated immediately afterwards as an echo as *pianissimo*. A new theme is introduced by Weber in bar 185 and is played *con passione*. This melody features both steps and leaps, but remains in the middle range. A semiquaver cello accompaniment adds interest and movement to this theme as it leads into the finale of brisk semiquavers, then into ascending demisemiquavers. The piece ends with a descending and ascending chromatic scale and a trill from E to E, resolving at the end on the tonic of F major.

This piece remains a valuable piece in the clarinet repertoire after 200 years, and is a good example of early romantic music and its emphasis on virtuosity. Its frequent displays of technical skill, as well as more subdued *lento* and playful theme make this a memorable piece and an excellent representation of theme and variations structure.

Suggested recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SR9oxnm66bY&list=UU6-qklv8jqO1ijHYAO8rYg>

Performance by Stanley Drucker with NYPO

Bibliography

Biography of Weber:

<http://www.allmusic.com/artist/carl-maria-von-weber-mn0002134208/biography>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Maria_von_Weber

www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/638531/Carl-Maria-von-Weber

Other information:

www.books.google.com.au/books?id=W-OdxnRth3IC&pg=PA172&lpg=PA172&dq=carl+maria+von+weber+concertino+clarinet+information&source=bl&ots=pQDHB_NrTG&sig=eGTcdJtEuoJEmqB7exLD_0gl4ek&hl=en&sa=X&ei=gpHcU6TfOM3d8AWUqoHICg&ved=0CCUQ6AEwATgU#v=onepage&q&f=false

<https://www.clarinet.org/Anthology1.asp?Anthology=11>

Full score from IMSLP

[http://imslp.org/wiki/Concertino_in_E-flat_major,_Op.26_\(Weber,_Carl_Maria_von\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Concertino_in_E-flat_major,_Op.26_(Weber,_Carl_Maria_von))