This month we bring you an electric guitar arrangement of *Rondo Alla Turca* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91). This well-known piece (also known as *Turkish March*) is actually the last movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 11 in A Major – a 20-minute 3-movement piece for solo piano. It's unclear exactly when this was written, but scholars believe it was around 1781, in the composer's mid-twenties. This uncertainty of the date is rather typical with Mozart, his life was disorganized and chaotic, and by this point had already produced well over 300 works, including a staggering 32 symphonies. His first piece was written at age five, and by the end of his short life he had composed 626 - and these are just the ones that have survived to this day - considering that many have been lost, and that he was prone to composing melodies to sell on the street for quick cash, the true figure is probably nearer 1000. If you take account of this enormous output (180 CDs are required to record just his authenticated works), and the fact that Mozart was a virtuoso on both the keyboard and violin, could memorise entire works on one listen, composed complete pieces in his head so that his scores were rarely revised, could improvise effortlessly (even taking part in *extemporization displays* – the rap battle equivalents of the day), infused his music and life with passion and humour and spent many hours slacking off, drinking and playing billiards, you start to appreciate why he remains such an iconic figure of the musical world.

*Rondo Alla Turca* is one of Mozart's best-known solo piano works, and it has been widely recorded, performed and arranged for a variety of instruments. Its memorable melodies and flamboyant quality has led to its use in dozens of films and TV shows (including *The Truman Show*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Out of Africa*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Bleak House*, *Arsenic & Old Lace* and *Jane Eyre*). It is also characterized by an energetic, driving and entertaining virtuosity and so it seems quite fitting that it eventually found a home as an electric guitar showpiece. You may recognize a snippet of the melody in the intro to Extreme's 1989 track *Play With Me* - which was subsequently used both in *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* and in the *Guitar Hero* video game. It has since been adopted by the wider guitar virtuoso community, for example Uli Jon Roth includes a complete arrangement - with quite a classical accompaniment - on his 1999 album *Transcendental Sky Guitar*. Others have gone to extreme measures in order to perform the many piano notes on one guitar: YouTube user PARTyzanT's 8 finger tapping version on a double-neck guitar is quite terrifying, and the Polish guitar duo Los Desperados' performance with 4 hands on one guitar is thoroughly impressive and entertaining. In this arrangement we take a traditional rock approach: the electric guitar plays much of the material that Mozart wrote for the pianist's right hand, while the backing track adopts the left-hand chordal accompaniment into a rock context.
A *rondo* was an 18th century musical form that usually had a fast lively tempo and often incorporated folk elements. In the case of *Rondo Alla Turca*, Mozart chose to emulate the marching music of the then-popular Turkish *Janissary* bands and this insistent stomping march rhythm is evident throughout. Incidentally this rhythmic feature also helps explain its use in the early 90s *Lemmings* computer game, where the piece provides a soundtrack to the endlessly marching suicidal rodents. The TG arrangement keeps the march-like melody with its strong downbeats, but updates the accompaniment with rock drum-kit elements.

The structure of a *rondo* consists of a main theme at the beginning of the piece which repeats and alternates with contrasting themes called episodes. The TG arrangements adapts the original form but you can identify the main theme (A) that appears in bars 1-17 and returns in 43-58, as well as an ‘answering’ secondary theme (B) in bars 18-25 and 59-66. There are additional episodes C, D and the ending E - which is based on B, and the form ends up being a quite complex ABCDCBABE. However, you may notice that the first 7 sections (ABDCB) read the same forward and backward (also known as a *palindromic* form). It's worth taking some time understanding the structure of this piece in this way as it will help in memorization and performance.

The harmony of the piece is both sophisticated and accessible: the A sections are in the key of A minor: You'll see there are no sharps or flats in the key signature. The B and E sections are however in the *parallel key of A major* (parallel means sharing the same root note) - you'll see 3 sharp notes appear in the key signature in bars 18 and 59. In this way, the piece starts in a 'serious' minor key and ends in a more 'joyous' major key with the same root. The C section incidentally is in F# minor, which has the same key signature as A major but a different root note - this is known as a *relative* key. The transition in one piece from a minor to a relative major key was quite unusual at the time, and the fact that Mozart makes it work so naturally is testament to his genius.

The melody of the piece is technically challenging and uses both ‘Turkish’ and classical elements. The memorable opening bars uses a technique common in Turkish music called an *approach figure*, you'll notice that a group of four notes (B,A,G#,A) are used to approach the note C, and then this same pattern is used starting at a higher pitches (D,C,B,C), (F,E,D#,E) and (B,A,G#,A) to approach other melody notes. Another Turkish implication is the ‘raked’ notes in Bars 4 and 5 that add a quaint flourish to the melody. You'll also need to spend some time with the challenging C section with its more ‘classical’ beautiful long flowing melodic line that carves its way perfectly through the chord sequence, as well as the rock tapping techniques in the last B section.
Flight of The Bumblebee Rimsky-Korsakov  
Isaac Stern (2004 Sony *Humoresque-Famous Violin Encores*)

Like *Rondo Alla Turca*, the Flight of the Bumblebee is classical virtuoso showpiece with an eastern European character, which has now been adopted by the electric guitar community.

Symphony No.40 in G Minor  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
*Best of Classical Music: Mozart*  
2010 AP Music

There are hundreds of exquisite Mozart pieces to explore, but this piece – and the others in this collection are a good enough place to start as any!

Eugene's Trick Bag Steve Vai  
*The Elusive Light and Sound Vol. 1*  
2002 Favored Nations

From the 1986 film *Crossroads* this neo-classical showpiece is performed by the main character in order to beat the devil in a shred battle. He wins.