

Pioneering Haydn On Record

An occasional series dedicated to commercial and live recordings of Haydn symphonies up to and including those of the first two complete cycles by Ernst Märzendorfer and Antal Dorati

by Christopher Howell

Symphony no. 25 in C major Hob. I/25 (c.1760-1764)

When I started writing these articles, I made a few enquiries as to whether any of the symphonies had not been recorded at all before the arrival of the complete cycles by Märzendorfer and Dorati. Nobody knew, so the answer will have to emerge case by case as I proceed. Symphony 25 is the first I have come across where no source consulted listed a previous recording. Dorati's was set down during sessions from 29 November to 9 December 1971¹. No documentation concerning Märzendorfer's cycles is known to survive beyond the generic fact that it was comfortably on the market while Dorati still had some way to go. So we will probably never know who got there first in individual cases. In addition to these two, the box of early Haydn performances issued by Cameo Classics from the Itter Collection has brought to light a performance set down for the BBC by Reginald Jacques and the Jacques Orchestra on 2 August 1953.

Reginald Jacques (1894-1969) was in the first place a choral trainer – he was at the head of the Bach Choir from 1932 to his retirement from conducting in 1960. I particularly remember his recording of Vaughan Williams's Cantata "In Windsor Forest" which, in its Classics for Pleasure incarnation, graced my teenage record collection. This was originally made for World Record Club in 1960, so it is a fine memorial to his art. More widely, he is remembered for his collaboration with Kathleen Ferrier in some of her earliest records. Unlike some choirmasters, Jacques was comfortable with orchestral conducting and founded the Jacques String Orchestra in 1936. By the 1950s, "String" had been dropped from the name and wind instruments were called upon when needed. The leader for the 1953 Haydn broadcast was Emanuel Hurwitz, who was contemporaneously leader of the Goldsbrough Orchestra, later renamed the English Chamber Orchestra. The Jacques Orchestra survived its conductor's retirement, though I am not sure for how long. During my schooldays in Ashford, Kent (1961-1971), the orchestra visited the area at least twice. My recollection is that it was led by Ivor MacMahon who, like Hurwitz, spread his talents over many ensembles, and conducted in a rather laid-back manner by Alan Barlow. Both these names are confirmed by a 1969 LP called "Serenade for Strings"². Of more permanent value, perhaps, is their 1968 LP under David Willcocks containing the first recording of Vaughan Williams's "Oxford Elegy" plus "Flos Campi" and the "Dives and Lazarus" Variants.

Though Symphony 25 had to wait till the 1970s for a commercial recording, Jacques was not the only conductor to broadcast it. The BBC Programme Index shows a performance by W. K. Stanton on 4 April 1939 and two outings in 1965 – under Rae Jenkins on 10 January and Graham Treacher on 28 March. There may have been more, since so many programmes listed composers not works, or even just the performers³. I would not hold out any hope for the 1939 broadcast, but I would be interested to hear from anyone with a tape of the Jenkins or the Treacher. Elsewhere in Europe, France's Inathèque drew a blank but I see that Mario Figuera conducted the symphony in Turin on 23 October 1949.

¹ Information from Gray's Classical Discography: <https://classical-discography.org/>

² Details here: https://www.discogs.com/master/1054332-The-Jaques-Orchestra-Alan-Barlow-Serenade-For-Strings?srltid=AfmBOoqHt0a_slUWYsk3Gk4sayhe8e1zpoKekMcJflxMVE7qcp6tJXz9, found 25.3.2026.

³ Even the Jacques broadcast did not show up. I found it only by looking under the conductor and date, after which I could link to the scanned Radio Times. A search function that, in many cases, finds things only when you know they must be there is perhaps in need of refinement.

It is not clear why this work attracted so little initial interest from recording companies. It is unusual in its shape, but so are many Haydn symphonies. The date above is that in the Urtext edition edited by H. C. Robbins Landon⁴. Other Haydn scholars have preferred not to date it before 1761⁵, placing it as one of Haydn's earlier works for the Esterhazy court. It begins with an *Adagio* introduction so extensive that some have considered it a separate movement⁶, though since it closes on the dominant it is evidently intended to lead straight into the following *Allegro molto*. This introduction is improvisatory, consisting of a series of thematic fragments rather than a formal argument. The body of the movement is brilliantly festive. The lack of trumpets and drums is compensated, in **Märzendorfer's** performance, by the biting, almost rasping, quality of the forwardly recorded oboes – a reminder that, in Haydn's day, trumpets and oboes often played alongside one another without apparent mismatch. **Dorati's** oboes are of a less abrasive modern breed. **Jacques** was, inevitably, using the old Breitkopf edition edited by Eusebius Mandyczewski. This replaces the oboes with flutes, often playing quite different notes. It is unlikely that Mandyczewski rescored the symphony on his own initiative; more plausibly, he followed a source rejected as inauthentic by Robbins Landon, but I have found no discussion of this. The movement contains an early example of Haydn teasing listeners with a "false recapitulation". A mere eight bars after the central double bar, the music plunges back into a statement of the original theme in the original key, leading us to suppose we are already home and dry. Instead, Haydn has still quite a lot to say before the real recapitulation arrives.

The second movement is a minuet with a trio in which the oboes (flutes in the old edition) and horns are accompanied by pizzicato strings. There is an interesting textual point here. Haydn indicates a dotted rhythm on the third beat of the first bar, but not in bars 19 and 23 when the same motif returns. In the interests of consistency, Robbins Landon editorially suggests dotting these too. Dorati does this, Märzendorfer does not. Possibly, Märzendorfer took his cue from the third beat of bar 5, where Haydn did not indicate a dotted rhythm and Robbins Landon does not suggest playing one, and supposed that Haydn thought the music would be more interesting if the tune were not played exactly the same way each time. The Mandyczewski edition applies dotted rhythms consistently, even in bar 5, so that is how Jacques plays it.

A *Presto* based on a pithy four-note subject concludes a symphony that has no slow movement other than the slow introduction.

Märzendorfer's introduction emphasises the strangeness of the music, apparently groping his way forward. Dorati shapes each phrase elegantly, while Jacques adopts a flowing, rather Handelian style. All three are effective in their way. As said above, Märzendorfer's tangy oboes bring out the festive air of what follows, but if this is over the top for you, Dorati's strings are no less sizzingly vital than Märzendorfer's. Jacques, with euphonious flutes, offers a slightly slower tempo but, once you have adjusted to this, he is hardly less vital and adds several dynamic gradations along the way. Märzendorfer and Jacques play both repeats. Dorati omits the second, a serious blot on his escutcheon when the movement is so short anyway. Märzendorfer has a bracing, stomping minuet. Uncharacteristically, Dorati, whose slow minuets tend to be a problem throughout his cycle, is faster still, though still emphasizing courtly elegance. I have complained about too-slow minuets several times in these articles but I have to say I find Jacques's slower, gracious reading sounds exactly right. With flutes instead of oboes, his trio provides Elysian balm. In the finale, I do not care for the way Dorati separates the notes of the opening

⁴ Published in 1963.

⁵ For example, Anthony Hodgson: *The Music of Joseph Haydn: The Symphonies*, Tantivy Press 1976.

⁶ Deryck Cooke provided a note on Jacques's programme for the Radio Times of the day in which he described the symphony as in four movements. The Haydn was the first work, followed by Vaughan Williams's Variants on "Dives and Lazarus", Sibelius's "Suite Mignonne", Debussy's "Danse sacrée et Danse profane" with Sidonie Goossens as soloist and Mozart's 28th Symphony.

motif – Haydn does not indicate legato, but he does not indicate staccato either. That apart, he and Märzendorfer are both splendidly vital, though I continue to prefer the latter’s pungent oboes. Jacques is again slightly slower, though not less vital, his flutes creating a warmer sound-picture.

Märzendorfer, as so often, gives us a more challenging, bracing Haydn. Jacques will have to be one of my guilty pleasures. I have an uneasy feeling he is more likely to make you love this symphony than either of the other two, and the sound is pretty good for the date.

	I	II	III
Märzendorfer	07:52 both repeats played	03:39	03:10 both repeats played
Dorati	05:29 second repeat omitted	03:03	03:05 both repeats played
Jacques	07:19 both repeats played	03:52	03:25 both repeats played

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