

## 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. 7 in C major Hob. I/7 “Le Midi” (1761 or earlier)**

I offered some general remarks on the trilogy of symphonies, nos. 6-8, of which this forms the middle panel, in my article on Symphony no. 6. If you must seek programmatic intent in a symphony that is effectively as abstract as any other by Haydn, you will find it in the second movement where, after an introductory recitative, the solo violin and cello, accompanied by cool flutes that are all the more effective for not having played in the previous movement, lead a gorgeous, drowsy siesta-like meditation. Haydn indicates no repeats in this movement, which will be a relief to the conductors who would not have played them anyway. Unlike no. 6, this symphony basically showcases the strings, including, once again, the violone in the trio of the minuet. Robbins Landon suggests using a double bass, hence an octave lower, but older performances inevitably follow the Breitkopf score which indicates a cello, at score pitch. Though the wind instruments have some nice contributions along the way, it is in the finale that the flute suddenly leaps into virtuoso prominence.

I have to begin with a wild goose chase, involving both a non-existent recording and two – maybe three – that I have been unable to hear. Gray’s *Classical Discography*<sup>1</sup> lists a recording of this symphony set down on 21 November 1935 by Hans von Benda and the Berlin Kammerorchester (Electrola EG 3584). Unable to find any further trace of this 78 set, I finally realized that the catalogue number corresponds to a single 78 with the finale of Haydn’s Symphony 73 on one side and a Mozart march on the other. So no 1935 Benda recording of *Le Midi*.

Three recordings were made in, or came out in, 1950. The only one which is actually part of a complete trilogy is Franz Litschauer’s with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra (Haydn Society HSLP 1016, Parlophone PMA 10141 in the UK). I was able to hear a very poor copy of Symphony 6 but the coupling of nos. 7 and 8 has eluded me.

Issued in the same year was a Remington LP in which the Austrian Symphony Orchestra was conducted by Karl Randolf (Remington 199-71). The orchestra is pseudonymous but the conductor (1916-1993) had a documented if modest career. This, too, has eluded me.

I will mention here a recording issued in 1954 by “Joseph Balzer” and the Berlin Symphony Orchestra (Royale 1954), issued in 1954. Royale LPs were entirely pseudonymous – “Joseph Balzer” was one of their favourite names – and frequently consisted of outright piracy. Others were obtained, probably by devious means, from the archives of German and Austrian radio stations. In this latter case, they have sometimes preserved important recordings no longer held by the original radio station. If these missing recordings turn up, I will seek to establish whether Royale have simply filched Litschauer or Randolf or, if not, whether the performance is of a quality to justify an attempt to find out who conducted it.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://classical-discography.org/>. In spite of the odd slip such as this one, Gray’s discography has been an invaluable help in this series of articles. The vast majority of his dates and catalogue numbers do find independent confirmation elsewhere.

The earliest performance I have been able to hear, therefore, is that set down on 2 April 1950 by the Philadelphia orchestra under **Eugene Ormandy** (ML-4613). Applying the might of the Philadelphia Orchestra to early Haydn may smack of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. This proves not to be the case even if I found the bass line rather hefty, for all the players' agility. The transfer I heard, downloaded from a discontinued blog, may have been a little bottom heavy. In any case, the impression is that Ormandy was better in this repertoire than in some of the pieces he returned to repeatedly throughout his career. The *Adagio* introduction is a jaunty march, after which the *Allegro* has a bubbling vitality. Ormandy sometimes allows the soloists to slacken the tempo here and there, as old world conductors tended to do, but is able to do this without losing the overall sweep – and he plays both repeats. The “siesta” movement is just heavenly, by which I do not mean “over lush” or “soupy” – the soloists are simply given the space to soar aloft. I only query whether their cadenza near the end needed to be so aggressive. Ormandy takes the minuet at a spanking pace – so refreshing after some of the minuets I have heard while preparing this series. The finale goes at a speed that might be risky with a lesser orchestra, but if you can bring it off without sounding hectic, why not? The symphony was coupled on LP with no. 45. The only other Ormandy recordings of Haydn symphonies seem to be nos. 88, 96, 99, 100 and 101.

Karl Ristenpart and the Sarre Chamber Orchestra set this symphony down on 24 November 1955 (Club Français du Disque DF 183). It was coupled with Symphonies 21 and 48. Ristenpart recorded *Le Midi* again in 1963 with the rest of the trilogy. I have not been able to hear the 1955 recording and will discuss the later one below.

The next recording available to me is **Max Goberman's** with the Vienna State Opera Orchestra, recorded between 1960 and 1962 as part of his attempt, aborted by death, to record the entire Haydn cycle. He takes a grander view of the opening *Adagio*, treating it as a ceremonial march rather than a jaunty one, as Ormandy did. It sounds fine and I loved the way the oboes cut through the texture – I get the impression that a very small nucleus of the Vienna strings were actually used. My only reservation is that, played like this, there seem to be eight beats in the bar, not four. His *Allegro*, too, is a tad slower than Ormandy's, with a rather stately baroque feel, though with a lot of steely inner energy. Goberman takes considerably longer over the second movement compared than Ormandy or, indeed, anyone else that I have heard. The opening recitative is spacious and grave. The *Adagio* itself is deeply felt and seems to have all the time in the world to unfold. As with the *Adagio* that opens the symphony, I am a little concerned that it has eight beats to the bar not four – Haydn could have written it with doubled note values and twice the number of bar-lines if he had wanted it this slow. On the other hand, Goberman demonstrates that the music has the substance to take this tempo – there is something much more intimate and personal than a gentle post-prandial snooze. The only part that did not entirely convince is the cadenza. I criticized Ormandy's players for taking it too aggressively, but there are places where the Vienna soloists (Ludwig Dobrony and Gerhard Zatchek) are playing very slowly and reverently arpeggio patterns that do not have the musical interest to support the approach. Goberman gives the minuet a rather ceremonial air and, to my surprise, he has the violone solo in the trio played by the cello not the double bass. Since he used the double bass in the trio of Symphony 6, I have to assume he disagreed with Robbins Landon here. The finale is strong and energetic at a tempo that sounds rather sober after Ormandy's devil-may-care ride. As issued, the outer movements have first repeats only<sup>2</sup>.

On 3-4 July 1962, **Vilmos Tátrai** led – not conducted – the Hungarian Chamber Orchestra in the second panel of their complete trilogy (Qualiton SLPX 1103). They begin with an *Adagio* that is definitely in eight, but has an air of mock-seriousness that is rather attractive. As elsewhere with recordings by this group, the wind are more backward than you might expect with a small complement of strings, though the sound is full and

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<sup>2</sup> As remarked elsewhere in this series of articles, Goberman almost certainly played the repeats.

rounded. The *Allegro*, with just the first repeat, has a joyous verve, the interchange between the soloists demonstrating the advantages of a conductorless performance that is, to all effects, an expanded string quartet. Tátrai finds notable variety of expression in the recitative that begins the second movement, rising from the grave opening to tones of high tragedy. Contrary to the usual balance, in the *Adagio* the flutes are brought well forward to become partners in the argument. Whereas Tátrai found possibilities for deep meditation in the *Adagio* of Symphony 6, here the music is allowed to move on. With extremely detailed phrasing, the mood created is one of unease. The cadenza is highly volatile and causes us to marvel at the way in which Haydn could provide a written-out cadenza that not only offers opportunities for display but also takes its place in the argument of the music. The minuet has an attractive swing and the trio is nicely played, by the cello inevitably. I only wish they had not separated the trio with a pause – a small one, but why do it? The finale, with both repeats, comes within four seconds of Ormandy's. No problem for the string players, but I got the impression the flute was only just managing it. All the same, a thoroughly likeable performance.

**Karl Ristenpart** and the Sarre Chamber Orchestra made their second version of the symphony as part of a complete stereo recording of the trilogy on 29 January and 2 February 1963 (Nonesuch H-71015). Like Goberman, Ristenpart takes the *Adagio* introduction in eight, but with a less granitic air. The *Allegro* goes at a relatively steady tempo, but the effect is remarkably free-flowing and joyful. His second movement proffers neither an idyllic, Arcadian siesta nor a deep meditation. In the recitative, while beginning gravely, he seizes the opportunity to insert moments of drama. In the *Adagio*, he has the flute interjections played with a certain passion rather than a gentle background and the solo violin and cello, without straying beyond a classical style, are encouraged to lyrical flights. The cadenza is freer and swifter than with Goberman – though without the aggressive touch of the Philadelphia performance – and, like Tátrai's, convinces me that the music sounds better this way. Ristenpart's minuet is ceremonial but, with sharper staccatos and well separated pairs of quavers, the effect is more bouncy than under Goberman. The finale may be a tad slower than Ormandy's but it is still fast enough to dazzle – and the flautist is brilliant. Whereas Goberman tended to emphasize the baroque leanings of the music, it is interesting that Ristenpart, mainly noted for his Bach, brings it into the rococo classical world. More importantly, this performance takes wing as a joyous experience in a way I have not found with the other Ristenpart performances I have heard so far. I suspect it will take a lot of beating. Just first repeats in the outer movements.

Helmut Müller-Brühl's 1966 trilogy with the Cologne Chamber Orchestra (Schwann VMS 2007) continues to elude me.

**Wilfried Boettcher's** 1968 Turnabout recording (TV 341505) is the first I have heard since Ormandy to treat the opening *Adagio* in four not eight, as a jaunty, good-humoured *entrée*. The *Allegro* is steadier than most. Once I had adjusted to it, I found certain advantages in enjoying the unfolding view and the unnamed soloist play beautifully. But, as with Symphony 6, Boettcher does not play even the first repeat, which definitely leaves one wanting more. The opening recitative of the second movement is played with considerable tragic drama. Boettcher, unlike all others so far, plays the last two chords sharply and *forte*, rather than with hushed reverence. Haydn has not specifically indicated the dynamics of these chords but his last dynamic marking, three bars back, was *forte*, so logically this still applies in the absence of contrary indications<sup>3</sup>. His *Adagio*, by contrast, transports us to the Elysian Fields. The flutes spread their balm and nothing is allowed to disturb the gentle atmosphere – not even the cadenza, which begins very gently, though it becomes more volatile as it goes on, so does not hang fire as Goberman's did. The minuet has a nice swing, very similar to Tátrai's but with better horn players. The important thing here is the trio, which catches the sleeve-note writer, R. D.

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<sup>3</sup> As far as this is concerned, there is no difference between the Robbins Landon edition and the old Breitkopf score, so the conductors who opt for a soft ending are not influenced by a corrupt edition.

Darrell, by surprise – he describes it as “a serene song for the cello”. Instead, we are allowed to hear it on the double bass at last. I had been worried as to whether this instrument could project as well as the cello and it obviously has a more mellow sound an octave lower, but Haydn’s orchestration is very spare here, so it comes across perfectly well. The horn phrases after the double bar assume greater relief with this balance. The finale is steady in tempo, but the flute’s beautifully even staccato tonguing quickly convinced this listener that it was the right tempo. How I would have enjoyed the missing repeats .... That apart, a lovely performance.

In my article on Symphony 6, I discussed the dubious nature of the trilogy issued under the name of Hanns Reinartz and I do not propose to investigate Symphony 7.

I thoroughly enjoyed the version of Symphony 6 by **Ferdinand Leitner** and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (Hanssler 1972). Perhaps I was not in the mood today for a steady-as-she-goes traversal but one point is clear. In Symphony 6, Leitner used an Urtext edition, so with the double bass taking the violone part in the trio of the third movement, and with all repeats. I think he uses an Urtext edition here – the solo instruments carefully place their ornaments as per the Robbins Landon – but the second repeat of the first movement is missing and the cello plays in the trio. This would not in itself prevent me from appreciating the performance, but somehow the sense of beaming enjoyment by all concerned is not here. The introduction is grand and solemn and, as expected, the *Allegro* takes its time. It is pleasant enough, but for “beaming enjoyment” I would have to go to Boettcher at much the same tempo. The recitative of the second movement goes through its paces and the *Adagio* is fairly fluent, but establishes no particular character. Symptomatic is the cadenza, which is nicely played but, instead of taking its place in the argument of the music, it sounds like the typical cadenza where the music stops and the soloists splash around until it is time for the orchestra to come in again. The minuet is slow with little swing and the trio, while starting at the same tempo, gets slower as it goes on, so the tempo has to be corrected when the minuet returns. Was the elderly conductor getting tired? The finale is not all that slow, probably no more so than Boettcher, but the flautist sounds as if he is practising his scales rather than playing music. A disappointment.

**Ernst Märzendorfer** plays the introduction fairly slowly but not heavily. With the oboes rasping through the texture the effect is of a rustic, open-air band arriving. The *Allegro* spins along at a swift tempo and the soloists cope splendidly – no slackening is allowed for their passages. At the beginning, Märzendorfer keeps the strings at a relatively low dynamic level – Haydn does not actually mark anything here – so we hear clearly that the oboe is sharing the tune with the lower strings. One curious feature – at bar 43 and similar points, Märzendorfer incorporates the trills in a dotted rhythm. This sounds odd to me, perhaps because I have not heard it done like this elsewhere. I wonder if there is a source – not considered reliable by Robbins Landon, evidently – in which they appear like this. Only the first repeat is played. After a grave opening, the recitative of the second movement achieves considerable drama. He opts for soft final chords. The *Adagio* has a nice flow but in the cadenza the soloists rush away immediately, so this is not so well integrated in the whole as it was with Boettcher. The minuet is ceremonial though with a perky swing and the double bass makes a welcome appearance in the trio. The finale is fast and brilliant though there are signs that this is a shoe-string operation – the flute, basically excellent, has a few smudged notes that could have been cleaned up. Märzendorfer’s insertion of echo dynamics in the violin’s bird-like phrases from bar 38 is imaginative and plausible, if unscripted, but how odd not to do the same thing when the same phrases return towards the end of the second part. It is for the second movement, though, that I would judge this performance a notch below Märzendorfer’s best.

Space for **Dorati** to shine at last? Well, with the Robbins Landon Urtext, all repeats and double bass in the trio, he gets off to a flying start. The introduction is rather heavy and solid, after which the *Allegro* bursts off like a rocket. One might be bowled over by the sheer energy of it, but I came to find it increasingly pressurised

and joyless. Moreover, in the minor key passage from bar 111 he just has to put the brakes on. The music proceeds for a few bars at a very nice tempo and he seems uncertain as to how or when to resume his original pace. The recitative is very finely done – indeed, the last ten bars, ending with two *forte* chords, are done with more imagination than in any other performance I have heard. The *Adagio* also differs from all other performances I have heard since each, in its different way, has emphasized the long line in this wonderful early slow movement. Dorati chops it up into little phrases, seeking elegance and even, in the flutes' interjections, a touch of cheeky humour. Oddly enough, care for the long line is to be found in the cadenza, arousing the unkind thought that things went better when Dorati put his baton down. The minuet is a surprise from Dorati – upfront and bouncy. The downside comes in the trio, where the double bass, while struggling gamely, has difficulty in getting through. This instrument needs its space and the slightly slower tempi of Boettcher and Märzendorfer are proved to have been right. My doubts as to whether the double bass can really project sufficiently to be effective in this trio would seem to have been confirmed if this had been the first version I heard. In the finale, Dorati goes all for brilliance, apparently under the impression that he is conducting "The Flight of the Bumble Bee". Ormandy, for one, showed that virtuoso flights are not incompatible with poetry in this movement.

The situation re commercial issues of this symphony up to my cut-off date was not, therefore, entirely satisfactory. If you want Urtext – in particular, double bass in the trio, which is the major difference from old editions – and all repeats, there is only Dorati. For the reasons given above, I would not be very happy with it. From Ormandy, you get a lovely performance with all repeats but cello in the trio – and it was recorded seventy-six years ago. With double bass in the trio but shedding a repeat, Märzendorfer is in the running. I would like Boettcher even more, but the lack of even first repeats is a lot to take. If you close an eye to editions and repeats, Ristenpart and Tátrai are lovely. Do any of the live/broadcast versions improve the situation?

By this second stage of the trilogy, **Harry Blech**, on 24 January 1961, clearly had the Orchestra Alessandro Scarlatti di Napoli della RAI with him all the way. Useless, I suppose, to expect an Urtext and all repeats – we do get first repeats in the outer movements. The introduction is ceremonial, but somehow not too serious. There are some adjustments to Haydn's dynamics – the drop to *piano* is anticipated by a bar, followed by a crescendo<sup>4</sup>. The *Allegro* goes at a fine pace with splendid playing from Giuseppe Prencipe, Mario Rocchi (violins) and Giacinto Caramia (cello) – there is *real joi de vivre* here. The recitative finds a detailed response to all its moods from the solo violin, though a few *portamenti* might cause a frown today. I think it is a considerable plus that Prencipe and Caramia were not just section leaders but also, at least in Italy, frequent and acclaimed soloists in their own right – Caramia did the Schumann Concerto with Celibidache, for example. There is a sense of solo presence to their work in the *Adagio*, a feeling that they have the space for lyrical flights within Blech's fairly flowing tempo. Their cadenza is exceptional for its combination of musical values and display. Before the cadenza a harpsichordist, hitherto unheard though presumably playing, offers a few flourishes. Blech's minuet is bright and bouncy. This tempo might have been a problem for a double bass in the trio, but Caramia's cello playing is so splendid that I forgive him for the fact that he should not be playing it at all. The finale goes at a real lick and everyone, flautist Jean Claude Masi included, copes splendidly. This sounds like one of those live occasions when the performance simply flies off the page, with everyone giving a little more than their best.

**Ernest Bour** (1913-2001) was Hans Rosbaud's successor as conductor of the South-West German Radio Symphony Orchestra of Baden-Baden. Like Rosbaud, he was a pioneer of contemporary music who also conducted older music with strong intellectual conviction, including an interest in Haydn that was not

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<sup>4</sup> There is no difference, so far as this is concerned, between the Robbins Landon edition and the old Breitkopf one, or for that matter the undated Eulenberg score, so Blech was "doing his own thing".

confined to the best-known works. Also like Rosbaud, he enjoys a considerable underground reputation among collectors. A bundle of his Haydn performances has been issued by South-West German Radio, but without dates. The recording I have of no. 7, from another source, was given on 13 February 1965 – I have not checked if it is the same one. The radio issue also has no. 8, but not no. 6. Bour begins no. 7 with an introduction that is purposeful, though not heavy. There is something of furrow-browed Beethoven to his *Allegro*. It responds well to this treatment but it is immediately clear that, while the leading violin is a real soloist, the leading cellist, if able enough, does not have the projection of a concerto player. This is particularly obvious coming immediately after Caramia in Naples. The recitative is strongly characterized, with an emphasis on passionate drama, and the *Adagio* is not allowed to languish. Unfortunately, the fact that the solo violin projects his part splendidly while the solo cellist just about plays it detracts considerably from the overall effect. The minuet is ceremonial and rather heavy. The trio is played by the cello, adequately as far as the notes are concerned, but if you prefer the cello here, better have a real solo artist like Caramia. The finale is on the slow side. Boettcher has shown that this can work perfectly well, here it sounds laboured. First repeats only in the outer movements. I expected more from this conductor.

1973 is theoretically just outside my cut-off date, but the curiosity aroused by a great conductor, **Rudolf Kempe**, directing the Munich Philharmonic on 26 September in a work and a composer he did not often visit could not be resisted. This performance circulates only privately, so far as I know. Robbins Landon's edition was published in 1965, so Bour, early in that year, can be excused for not using it. One would have thought that, by 1973, Kempe could have used the Urtext – apart from the question of who should play in the trio, there are various tell-tale details of phrasing that sound better as Haydn wrote them. That said, this can join the likes of Ristenpart and Tátrai as a very nice performance of the old text, with just first repeats in the outer movements. The introduction is slowish but light on its feet, suggesting the arrival of a group of serenaders. The *Allegro* goes at a good speed and Kempe has better balanced soloists than Bour. In the second movement, Kempe allows himself a few romantic *rallentandos*, but these do not seriously disturb. The recitative mostly avoids overt drama while the *Adagio* is of the Elysian Fields variety, with a deliciously cool-sounding pair of flutes. The cadenza is well balanced between expression and display. The minuet has a pleasing lilt that carries though to the cello-led trio. The finale is very fast and brilliant. It is perhaps significant that this concert ended with Beethoven's Fourth Symphony. Was Kempe aiming to demonstrate that Haydn anticipated Beethoven in writing a *perpetuum mobile* finale?

I am happy to add Kempe and, especially, Blech to my stock of "inauthentic" but enjoyable performances, but the situation remains that, up to that time, there was no completely satisfactory "Midi".

	I	II	III	IV
Ormandy	07:48 both repeats	09:03	03:31	03:45 both repeats
Goberman	05:57 first repeat only	11:42	03:58	03:04 first repeat only
Tátrai	05:41 first repeat only	09:08	03:49	03:49 both repeats
Ristenpart 1963	05:52 first repeat only	09:02	03:57	02:55 first repeat only
Boettcher	04:24 neither repeat	09:02	03:46	02:17 neither repeat
Leitner	06:23 first repeat only	09:26	04:39	04:21 both repeats
Märzendorfer	05:22	09:06	03:50	04:00

	first repeat only			both repeats
Dorati	07:36 both repeats	08:30	03:33	03:53 both repeats
Blech H	05:40 first repeat only	08:50	03:43	02:47 first repeat only
Bour	05:52 first repeat only	08:29	03:52	03:16 first repeat only
Kempe	05:57 first repeat only	09:24	03:57	02:41 first repeat only

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