

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. 12 in E major Hob. I/12 (1763)

E major was a commoner key in chamber music than orchestral in the early classical period and there is a sense of conversational intimacy to the first two movements, at least, of this three-movement symphony. We cannot call the first movement monothematic, since the “second subject” is not identical to the first, but it has the air of a continuation rather than a contrasting idea. More drama is offered at the beginning of the development section, but it is brief and leads back quite soon to the recapitulation. The second movement is a touching piece for strings only in *Siciliana* rhythm. It is in E minor, so Haydn has not entirely abandoned the baroque custom of having all movements in the same tonality. The finale is a cheery affair, but with a second subject in the minor key.

The first recording was made in 1952 by **Wilhelm Loibner** with the Chamber Orchestra of the Vienna State Academy of Music (Lyrichord LL36). I am grateful to a fellow member of a private discussion group who has enabled me to hear this. I have commented ironically in this series on harpsichord continuos recorded so distantly as not to annoy those who would rather not have them. Here the harpsichordist Christa Fuhmann, then the wife of H.C. Robbins Landon, who provided the sleeve note, clatters along merrily with the orchestra – and why be ashamed of it if you think it should be there? The recording is bright and clear, good for the date. I shall suppose that an absence of softer dynamics is down to the engineering rather than the playing, but it does make for slightly wearing listening. Otherwise the performance is excellent, with lively outer movements and a grave but not heavy-handed *Adagio*.

Max Goberman's traversal, with the Vienna State Opera Orchestra, followed about a decade later (HS 5M/5S). The recording is easier on the ear with proper dynamic contrasts though, if a harpsichord is present, the engineers makes sure we do not notice it. I have to say that the outer movements, while nicely phrased, are somewhat matter-of-fact and risk giving the impression that the music itself is so. They get both their repeats and the *Adagio* almost certainly did too, though they were not included on the LP issue, or the CD issue either, or not on the one I have heard. Goberman takes this considerably slower than Loibner, avoiding the rocking motion of the *Siciliana*. For all his patent commitment, it comes to feel rather heavy-going and I was not entirely sorry the repeats were not there. Despite Loibner's shortcomings, he was not entirely superseded by Goberman.

Leslie Jones and the Little Orchestra of London followed in 1964 (Pye GSG 4014/GSGS 14014 in UK, Nonesuch H-1083 in USA). As with Goberman, Jones's harpsichordist, if present, is inaudible, but his bassoon is a friendly presence in the outer movements. Both these movements make a cheery impression, with lively tempi, plenty of dynamic shading and clear but unforced phrasing. The bassoon pops along delightfully, contributing to a slight air of drollery. Apart from the omission of the second repeat in the first movement and an occasional raggedness of ensemble, this is sheer delight. Jones takes the *Adagio* more slowly still than Goberman, but at first it does not seem so since he nevertheless catches the rocking *Siciliana* movement. As the music proceeds, however, his careful shading and evident deep feeling do not entirely avoid the impression of six plodding beats in the bar. Granted the marking is *Adagio*, but the time signature is 6/8, which means two beats in the bar, not six. Here, I feel Loibner got it right. Still, an improvement overall on Goberman.

Märzendorfer captures well the conversational tone of the opening phrase, while the following *forte* shows that he is also concerned to emphasize the strong contrasts. This movement emerges tougher and terser in his hands, making the lack of the second repeat the more regrettable. Here and in the finale, his oboes and horns ring through the texture very nicely. His *Adagio*, somewhat faster than Goberman's or Jones's, is more successful than these in maintaining the *Siciliana* rhythm, while lacking nothing in gravity. Returning to Loibner, however, I was struck how different the music sounds – more baroque, with its prominent harpsichord (Märzendorfer, as usual, has none) and easefully flowing tempo. *Adagio*, we may remember, literally means "at ease". Märzendorfer's sprightly finale concludes a successful, if not overwhelmingly definitive, performance.

Dorati adopts a tempo for the first movement that I would define *Allegro maestoso* and seems intent on making the symphony sound "significant". The opening phrase has a big expressive bulge then tapers away to nothing. The following *forte* is trenchant. And so it goes on. The opening of the development is made to sound very ominous indeed. This sort of approach, depending on tight conductorial control, is surely anachronistic, but Dorati's concentration is convincing in its way. His second movement again goes for violent contrasts, dividing the music into tiny thematic cells each with its separate bulge and sigh. I would have thought this approach more suited to Berg, but here again Dorati's concentration shows that Haydn can take, up to a point, an expressionist interpretation. Alone of these conductors, Dorati plays the first repeat. The finale is given with repressed fire at a steady tempo.

Of the commercial recordings up to this point, I think I slightly prefer Jones over Märzendorfer for his joyful outer movements, even if I did find his *Adagio* rather slow. As for Dorati, I am reminded of my dear departed brother's phrase when he was not sure if he liked something: "it's different" or, as the mood took him, "it's interesting".

As for live/broadcast versions, the BBC Programme Index shows that this symphony was heard under Rae Jenkins (1964) and David Lloyd Jones (1965), both with the BBC Welsh Orchestra, and under Harry Newstone with the Haydn Orchestra in 1970. These sound interesting, if anybody discovers a tape in their attic. Other broadcasting stations took greater care of their historical material and a recording by the South-West German Radio RO under **Hans Rosbaud** has been issued. Only a vague date of 1952-1962 is offered for the whole set of Rosbaud's Haydn recordings. Surely this is not good enough?

Whatever the date, this is, of course, "old-fashioned" Haydn with what sounds a fairly full complement of strings, no harpsichord or bassoon continuo, only first repeats in the outer movements and none in the second. Rosbaud is presumably using the 1953 Kalmus edition edited by Fritz Kneusslin since he observes the pauses inserted in the finale by the editor – quite musical, especially with Rosbaud to do them, but not really necessary. Despite this, I found the performance wonderful. The contrast with Dorati is instructive – a perfect demonstration that less is more. Dynamics are properly observed but without exaggerated point-making. The outer movements unfold with a natural, smiling grace. The *Adagio*, though the stopwatch tells us it is poised between Goberman's and Jones's tempi, manages to express deep feeling without ever getting bogged down. There is an unobtrusive rightness about the entire performance. I often include a "guilty" pleasure choice in these articles, but why feel guilty about this?

	I	II	III
Loibner	03:38 first repeat only	04:01 neither repeat	02:03 neither repeat
Goberman	05:17 both repeats	05:13 neither repeat	03:54 both repeats
Jones L	03:41 first repeat only	05:46 neither repeat	03:45 both repeats
Märzendorfer	03:29 first repeat only	05:07 neither repeat	03:50 both repeats
Dorati	05:54 both repeats	06:46 first repeat only	04:07 both repeats
Rosbaud	03:45 first repeat only	05:26 neither repeat	02:59 first repeat only

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