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. 36 in E flat major Hob. I/36 (c.1761/65)

Symphony no. 36 is an earlier work than its relatively high number suggests. This is most evident in the second movement which, as in Symphonies 6-8, retains elements of the *Concerto Grosso* with *concertante* parts for solo violin and cello – the oboes and horns are silent. The opening of this movement seems pure baroque, with a "till ready" dotted introduction by the full complement of strings leading to a contrasting, lyrical theme from the soloists. In reality, this introduction is integrated into a sonata-form movement, though without repeats. It also introduces the second subject and combines with the soloists' more cantabile effusions in the development section.

The first movement is an expansive affair for the date, harbinger of E flat first movements in triple time still far in the future. The "second subject" begins in the minor key – nothing is to be taken for granted even in such an apparently formal structure as this. After the double bar, the music seems to go straight back to the tonic, a "false recapitulation" common in earlier Haydn. In reality, a good deal has to pass, including new material in a minor key, before the recapitulation begins in earnest.

The minuet contrasts baroque-leaning dotted rhythms with triplets. If this is reassuringly conventional, the trio, in B flat major, has surprises in store. After the opening bars which continue the triplet rhythm, there is a mysterious chromatic passage after which the first part ends, not in the expect dominant major, but in its relative D minor. No less disconcerting is the lurch to C minor with which the second part begins.

The finale is a good-natured *Allegro* – or *Allegro molto* or *Presto*, according to the source followed. It looks tempting to pitch in at a high speed, but some quite intricate imitative writing a little way in makes this unwise. The "second subject" amounts to a strange tremolo and a few chromatic touches, before a nonchalant return to the good-natured mood of the beginning.

This first recording of this symphony was a Haydn Society LP (HSLP 1019), set down in May 1950 with **Anton Heiller** conducting the Vienna Chamber Orchestra. Heiller gives splendid stature to the first movement, not least by playing both repeats, as well as by choosing a tempo that combines drive with majesty. The soloists, Edith Steinbauer and Frieda Krause-Litschauer, play with pure tone in the *Adagio*, where Heiller allows them an expansive tempo. No doubt the harpsichordist Erna Heiller, the conductor's wife, acquits herself well too but, as with so many of these Haydn recordings, her instrument is only occasionally detectable. The minuet may seem slow, but it has a nice lilt and the justification for the tempo lies in the trio, where the chromatic passages sound properly mysterious. The lively but unhurried finale lacks its second repeat – perhaps the limit had been reached for an LP side with the technology available. Nevertheless, this is a most distinguished first entry. This is just as well, since Haydn lovers were to get nothing else till the two complete cycles arrived.

Märzendorfer has a lighter, more dancing way with the first movement, while not underestimating the minor-key episodes. His oboes cut through the texture to piquant effect. With both repeats, I could be very happy with either. About Märzendorfer's second movement, I am not so sure. He takes it considerably faster. The soloists play mellifluously and it is true that Haydn indicated four beats in a bar

not eight[1], but I find a depth in Heiller's version that is not realized here. I found, too, Märzendorfer's treading bass a little unremitting. On the other hand, I love his sprightly minuet, especially the way the horns pop through in the *piano* passages. I said that the chromatic passages of the trio were the justification for Heiller's slower tempo, but Märzendorfer makes them sound suitably eerie at his faster pace. Sprightly, too, describes Märzendorfer's finale. The more complex passages only just remain clear at this speed, but remain clear they do and I think I prefer Märzendorfer here, too. This puts me in a quandary. With two movements up to Märzendorfer and equal honours in the first, do I stay with Heiller for the extra depth of his second movement? With some regret, I think I must.

Unless, of course, **Dorati** can provide the best of both worlds. His first movement has vitality and is neatly shaded, without achieving either Heiller's majesty or Märzendorfer's elation. A slight tendency to worry the phrasing produces an impression of efficient frothiness and the omission of the second repeat rather confirms that this was not one of his favourite Haydn movements. The *Adagio* begins with an attack so ragged that I had to hear it again in order to believe that such a distinguished conductor and famous disciplinarian had allowed a thing like that on one of his records. Did a wrong take find its way onto the final product? What follows is in any case humdrum, again suggesting that this is a symphony Dorati could have done without if he had not been booked to do them all. But then something happens. The minuet is quite slow, but has an attractive lilt and Dorati finds the humour in the leaping phrases in the second part. He is fully alive to the mysterious happenings of the trio. His finale, too, is steady, but makes the most of the contrapuntal exchanges as well as the sudden minor-key episodes and while keeping everything buoyant. With both repeats, this is Dorati's Haydn at his best. But I could not live with that second movement.

No live or broadcast recordings have come my way, though BBC listeners were not starved of this symphony, with performances under Graham Treacher (BBC Scottish O, 1965), John Carewe (BBC Welsh O, 1969) and Christopher Seaman (BBC Scottish SO, 1973), all of which I would hear with interest if they survive somewhere.

	I	II	III	IV
Heiller	07:22 both repeats	06:18	04:30	02:50 first repeat only
Märzendorfer	07:18 both repeats	04:21	03:54	03:51 both repeats
Dorati	05:12 first repeat only	04:21	04:21	04:16 both repeats

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[1] Haydn actually indicated cut time, so two beats in a bar, but I do not see how it could realistically be played like that.