

Haydn Inspired

NILS ANDERS MORTENSEN
PIANO

Haydn Keyboard Music

Haydn's keyboard sonatas, more than sixty in total, span almost his entire career. However, in the 1780's the genre became much less of a preoccupation for him while he concentrated more on string quartets and piano trios. An increasing number of commissions further added to his workload. Then, in the period when he was preparing for the second of his two visits to London (1794-5), we find the sonata genre crowded out by his other commitments. Nevertheless, the sonatas Hoboken XVI: 48 to 52 (1789-94) are among the most richly satisfying compositions of Haydn's full maturity.

Haydn is the most unaccountably neglected of all the great composers. Few concert-managers find any reason to accommodate one of his inexhaustibly inventive symphonies in orchestral programmes. The equally wonderful string quartets fare rather better, regularly fea-

turing in their respective repertoire. Haydn's keyboard sonatas, though still generally undervalued, are championed by more pianists than used to be the case forty years ago, when John McCabe wrote of "the shameful neglect of Haydn's sonatas. There can hardly be another such corpus of outstanding and fascinating works by one of the great masters so wilfully ignored by performers ..."

The Sonata in G major, Hoboken XVI:40 dates from 1784, three years later than Haydn's group of six string quartets Opus 33 and predating his so-called Paris Symphonies (1785-6). It is one of three two-movement Haydn sonatas published by Bossler and dedicated to the sixteen-year-old Princess Marie Hermenegild Esterházy, who in the previous year had married the future Prince Nicolaus II. The sonata's opening movement has the uncommon marking "innocente", although this term really applies to the theme only, a 6/8 melody of cantabile character. However, even in this theme itself an occasional *forzando* on a weak beat is unsettling. The variations – richly diverse – are based on two alternating themes in G major and G minor respectively, amounting to a "double variation" form which Haydn was increasingly attracted to in his later period. A familiar example is the slow movement of Symphony No 103 (Drumroll), where the alternations are between C minor

and C major. When Haydn turns to the minor key he creates a little tension with syncopated suspensions across the bar-line. On the return to G major, semiquaver figuration is introduced. While the theme remains completely recognisable, this semiquaver decoration is an example of how Haydn's inventiveness in its most elementary form may delightfully enhance a simple melody. In the manically exuberant, intoxicating Presto finale Haydn's wit is uninhibited and wilful, not least in his leaps between highest and lowest registers - even at the cadences. The second section of this 3-minute movement abruptly shifts into B flat major and a subsequent episode in E minor is steeped in restless syncopation. In the last two recalls of the opening, the additional semiquaver figuration increases the sense of bubbling over.

We should not pay undue attention to the title "divertimento" attached to the A flat major work, Hoboken XVI 46, a sonata which deserves to rank alongside Haydn's finest. Indeed the name *divertimento* diminishes the importance of this superb work, which dates from as early as 1767-8. The opening Allegro Moderato begins with irregular phrase-lengths before, from as early as the fourth bar, sextuplets become the prevalent rhythmic unit. In this movement Haydn gives an impression of spontaneity and unpredictability. The influ-

ence of C. P. E. Bach is particularly evident here in the element of fantasia. A substantial passage at the beginning of the development section is more fantasia than genuine development, as well as being toccata-like in character. Around 1749, when Haydn came across a volume of C. P. E. Bach's sonatas, he wrote "I did not come away from my instrument until I had played through them all, and anyone who knows me well must realise that I owe a great deal to Emanuel Bach, that I have understood him and studied him diligently." In its expressive richness and diversity, this music marks a tremendous advance on Haydn's earliest sonatas.

The profound central Adagio is in D flat major, an uncommon key at this time. (Around the late 1760's and early 1770's Haydn was attracted to unusual keys, as in the so-called Farewell Symphony, the only 18th-century symphony in F sharp minor.) Counterpoint is not the first compositional skill which would come to mind with regard to Haydn, but this movement contains some fine 3-part writing. Some of his most extraordinary harmonic daring occurs nine bars from the end, in the coda – first an F flat, then E double-flats and B double-flats though B double-flats had previously appeared a few bars into the recapitulation. The notation of double-flats was very rare in this period. Even the chromatic treatment of

the first theme in the development section is surpassed here. The Presto finale, another sonata-form movement, has several passages of *moto perpetuo* character. Not far into the movement the left-hand part becomes more athletic, with wide leaps in quavers. After Haydn has recapitulated both of his themes, the exhilarating spirit is reinforced by sequential passage-work in semiquavers. Sparkling though this Presto is, it could in no sense be described as insubstantial.

Together with the Sonatas Hoboken XVI 36–39 and No 20 in C minor, Haydn's Sonata in C major Hob. XVI 35 marked the beginning of his business relationship with the publishing house Artaria, a collaboration which extended to twenty-five years and more than 300 of his works. Founded in 1766 in Vienna, Artaria originally specialised in art and maps but expanded to include music in 1778. Having approached Haydn in 1779, they published the sonatas mentioned above the following year. Letters from Haydn to Artaria – about sixty of them – provide valuable insight into both the publisher's business practice and into Haydn's character regarding self-promotion. The Sonata Hob. XVI 35 was one of a set of six which Haydn dedicated to the talented Auenbrugger sisters – (Katharina) Franziska and Maria Katherina (also known as Marianna). He wrote: "Their way of playing and genuine insight into

music equal those of the greatest masters." Leopold Mozart also was an admirer – "Both of them, and in particular the elder [Katharina], play extraordinarily well". XVI 35 begins with an Allegro con brio of infectious elan, to which the fourth-beat *forzandos* add extra spice. The triplet accompaniment, introduced as early as bar 8, gives terrific impetus and continues to dominate throughout the development section. The recapitulation begins with the first theme an octave lower than originally, before soon moving into C minor. Haydn might well have marked the central Adagio "innocente", as he did for the beginning of the G major sonata (see above). In its simplicity it certainly would not have stretched the abilities of the Auenbrugger sisters. The opening melody is immediately repeated in embellished form, before the second theme follows, accompanied by an Alberti bass. This characteristic accompaniment continues throughout nearly all the second section. While this is one of the emotionally lightweight slow movements in Haydn's sonatas, its serenity and delightful ornamentation combine to charming effect. A genial minuet-like finale has a second section in which a 3-bar fortissimo passage of triplets in the bass suggests a more robust character. Subsequently there is a brief taste of canonic writing, then a passage in C minor – hardly disturbing – with a "walking bass" in broken octaves.

Haydn's Adagio in F major XVII 9, published by Artaria in Vienna in 1786, was included in a collection of ten "Différentes petites pièces faciles et agréables" for "Clavecin ou Piano Forte". It was the only original keyboard piece, the other nine being arrangements of movements from Haydn's symphonies. This spacious Adagio, contemporary with Haydn's so-called Paris Symphonies Nos. 82–87, exudes a serene timelessness belied by its innocent simplicity.

The group of six Variations in C major XVII 5 is believed to date from 1790, just before Haydn departed for his first visit to England. Undemanding for both performer and listener, this is a lighter work than Haydn's great F minor Variations, more charming and decorative. Nevertheless, the way in which the variations take wing demonstrates that Haydn's inventiveness was fully engaged. The theme itself, marked Andante, dolce, and already beautifully embellished, gives rise to variations of delightful unpredictability. Variation 1 includes a humorous touch in Haydn's brief nod (one bar only) towards the Alberti-bass tradition, before the exuberant opening and general *joie de vivre* of the next variation. Variation 3 begins in mock-dramatic fashion, then the fourth variation has little rising arpeggios in the bass in its seventh bar. Variation 5 in C minor introduces some gentle pathos, before Haydn's high spirits return in the

final variation. In common with Beethoven's sets of keyboard variations, Haydn's are a particularly neglected area full of delights.

Philip Borg-Wheeler



Nils Anders Mortensen

Nils Anders Mortensen is a Norwegian pianist renowned for his versatility and expressive performances. Born in Flekkefjord in 1971, he began playing the piano at the age of three. He won the Norwegian Young Pianist Competition in 1986 and pursued his studies at the Norwegian Academy of Music, École Normale in Paris, and Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hannover.

In 1996, Mortensen was awarded the “Debutant of the Year” by Concerts Norway, leading to an extensive national tour. He has since performed internationally, including in the United States, Germany, Russia, Hungary, and the Baltic states. Notably, he was a soloist with the Norwegian Radio Orchestra at the Bergen International Festival in 1998.

Residing in Alta since 1998, Mortensen has embraced a diverse musical career, engaging in classical and contemporary music, jazz, folk, and cross-over. He has collaborated extensively with mezzo-soprano Marianne Beate

Kielland, violinist Arvid Engegård and double bassist Knut Erik Sund-quist, producing several acclaimed recordings. The album *Veslemøy synsk*, on which he collaborated with mezzo-soprano Marianne Beate Kielland, was nominated for a Grammy Award. His solo discography includes works by Grieg, Brahms, Debussy, and Bach, with his 2023 album *J.S. Bach: Partitas Nos. 1, 5 & 6* receiving critical acclaim.

Mortensen's contributions to music have been recognized with the Robert Levin Memorial Prize in 2004 and the Nordlys Prize in 2013.

Joseph Haydn

(1732–1809)

Keyboard Sonata in G major,
Hob.XVI:40

- 01. Allegro innocente – 07:14
- 02. Presto – 03:11

Divertimento in A-flat major,
Hob.XVI:46

- 03. Allegro moderato – 12:47
- 04. Adagio – 10:17
- 05. Finale. Presto – 04:30

Keyboard Sonata in C major,
Hob.XVI:35

- 06. Allegro con brio – 07:13
- 07. Adagio – 06:55
- 08. Finale. Allegro – 02:41

Adagio in F major,

- 09. Hob.XVII:9 – 04:43

Variations in C major,
Hob.XVII:5

- 10. Thema – 01:13
- 11. Variation no 1 – 01:04
- 12. Variation no 2 – 01:00
- 13. Variation no 3 – 01:04
- 14. Variation no 4 – 01:21
- 15. Variation no 5 – 01:53
- 16. Variation no 6 – 01:06

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