HAYDN
Symphonies Nos. 8 Le soir and 84
Violin Concerto in A major
Harry Christophers & Handel and Haydn Society
Aisslinn Nosky violin
“This third disc is the best of the consistently stylish series… this is the sound of a conductor and orchestra really clicking with their namesake composer… their love of the music is palpable.”
GRAMOPHONE

HAYDN
The Creation
Harry Christophers & Handel and Haydn Society
Sarah Tynan, soprano, Jeremy Ovenden tenor, Matthew Brook bass
“Harry Christophers, the artistic director, led a performance that was brilliant… From the opening through the final, buoyant chorus, Christophers emphasized both the music’s dramatic contours and its almost boundless well of character.”
THE BOSTON GLOBE

The Old Colony Collection
Harry Christophers & Handel and Haydn Society
“Of the disc’s world-premiere recordings, the anthems of James Kent and Samuel Chapple, and a glee by Samuel Webbe, richly merit a listen.”
BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE

MOZART
Violin Concerto No. 3
Harry Christophers
Handel and Haydn Society
Aisslinn Nosky violin

To find out more about CORO and to buy CDs visit www.thesixteen.com
One of the many delights of being Artistic Director of America’s oldest continuously performing arts organisation, the Handel and Haydn Society (H+H), is that I am given the opportunity to present most of our concert season at Boston’s glorious Symphony Hall. Built in 1900, it is principally the home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, but it has been our primary performance home since 1900 as well, and it is considered by many, with some justification I would add, to be one of the finest concert halls in the world. It is that classic ‘shoebox style’ reminiscent of the Musikverein in Vienna; the acoustics are quite superb and, despite its size – c.2500 capacity, perfect for playing on period instruments.

On this live recording, we present a programme devoted to Haydn and Mozart. Haydn was the Master of the Symphony and here you can witness first-hand the development from his early symphony No. 26 ‘Lamentatione’ to his much later Paris Symphony No. 86. The first concert I ever gave with H+H was at the Esterházy Palace in Eisenstadt in August 2006, where we performed some of Haydn’s early symphonies in the Haydnsaal on the very stage Haydn performed for his new employer, Prince Paul Anton Esterházy. Since then we have made a conscious decision to survey the incredible variety, drama and intimacy of his outstanding symphonic output. ‘Lamentatione’ is one of the very early Sturm und Drang (storm and stress) symphonies and its nickname refers to snippets of plainsong which Haydn incorporates into melodies in the first two movements. The one he uses latterly is the incipit from the Lamentations of Jeremiah, hence its nickname. Haydn like so many composers loved the simplicity of Gregorian chant.

Twenty years later and Haydn’s fame had spread across Europe. Although he was still employed at court, Parisians in particular had taken Haydn’s music to their hearts. Symphony No. 86 shows just how much his symphonies had transformed from those early years, not only in orchestral size but also in individuality. Here he is at probably his most inventive and indeed expansive; richly scored it tests the performers’ skill and technique to the limit.

We also begin our cycle of Mozart’s violin concertos with our inspirational concert master, Aisslinn Nosky, at the helm. The violin was an important part of Mozart’s early professional life and here we present the G major concerto written quite possibly for himself when he was still just a teenager. Aisslinn’s stylistic awareness and her inventiveness is a constant delight and inspiration to us all and her rendition certainly brings Mozart’s intentions to life.

I feel very privileged to have taken this august Society into its Bicentennial; yes, the Handel and Haydn Society was founded in 1815. Handel was the old, Haydn the new (he had just died in 1809), and what we can do is continue to perform the music of the past but strip away the cobwebs and reveal it anew. This recording of music by Haydn and Mozart was made possible by individuals who are inspired by the work of the Handel and Haydn Society. Our sincere thanks go to all of them.

"Watching concertmaster Aisslinn Nosky perform was akin to watching an expert circus artist climb, contort, fly through the air, and stick her landing. The sheer virtuosity, dexterity, and communication required for the violinist to lead Mozart’s Violin Concerto in G major was evident in the score... In the circus ring and in the concert hall, it’s necessary to nail the technicalities, but equally so to engage and entertain the audience, and the Handel and Haydn Society did both."

Zoë Madonna / the boston globe

This recording has been made possible through the generous support of the following:

Peacewoods Charitable Fund                         Peter G. Manson & Peter A. Durfee
The decade from the mid-1760s to the mid-1770s was a momentous one in Haydn’s career. This was the period during which his status changed from that of the unknown, newly appointed Kapellmeister to Prince Nikolaus Esterházy to an increasingly recognised position as one of Europe's finest musical minds, founded on a body of works – principally symphonies and string quartets – that for quality of construction, invention and creative personality raised him far above the level of his contemporaries. The symphonies of this time in particular often had a new and very different message from their predecessors: possessed of an emotional intensity and strength of personal utterance which until then had not been recognised as the genre’s province, they seemed to be conveying something more urgent than was the ceremonial, diverting or just plain occasional norm of the day. This upturn in seriousness was not unique to Haydn, it should be said, but was part of a general movement which affected many Austrian composers. Its distinctive and vigorous musical language – minor keys, jagged themes, lyrical melodies, dramatic silences, urgent syncopations and striking unison passages – has since acquired the name ‘Sturm und Drang’ (literally, 'storm and stress'), and Haydn was a master of it.

This highly emotional style was, however, only one way in which Haydn sought to introduce greater seriousness into his symphonies at this time, and although Symphony No. 26 opens in classic Sturm und Drang style with pulsing syncopations over a striding bass-line countered by quiet sighs, it is his subsequent implanting of plainchant...
melodies into the music that gives the work its unifying character. He had already used chant in Symphony No. 30 (1765), as well as a chorale melody in No. 22 (1764), but in No. 26, composed in 1768, the first two movements both use melodies that would have been familiar to many in his audience from their centuries-old use in Latin Passion plays. This, clearly, was a work for performance in Holy Week.

The first chant melody appears as the first movement's second subject, sounded by oboe and second violins while the first violins dance lightly over the top; comparison with the texts of the passion plays reveals that the words of the Evangelist and Jews are represented in declamatory style, those of Christ in longer and more regular note-lengths. When the theme reappears in the major key after the central development section, a horn has been added to intensify its message, and the movement ends in the same urgent mood in which it began.

The chant for the slow second movement is one associated with another Holy Week text, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and is stated right from the off, again on second violins and oboe, with even more elaborate and graceful counter-melodies from the first violins. The mood is sombre and dignified, but this time when the horns join in the chant towards the end it is transformed to one of radiance and benediction.

There are no apparent chant references in the Menuet, though its emotional restlessness – sometimes stern, sometimes consoling – may suggest some kind of dramatic intent. Unusually, this is where the symphony ends; there is no conventional finale. Perhaps Haydn wanted to leave the resolution of the Passion story for Easter Sunday.

When Haydn's contract as Kapellmeister to Prince Esterházy came up for renewal in 1779, a small change was made that was to have a profound effect on his professional fortunes. Previously, anything he composed was the exclusive property of the Prince, but from now on this was no longer to be the case. It was a concession that not only bestowed official recognition on Haydn's growing international reputation, but also enabled him to profit from it for the first time by selling his works abroad, where they were already known and admired through unauthorised publications and performances from which he had received little or no income. Ultimately it would lead to the triumphs of the London visits of the 1790s, but for the time being Haydn was happy to work from Austria, maintaining an astute business correspondence with publishers and patrons in Vienna, London and Paris.

It was from the last of these cities that, in the mid-1780s, he received the most prestigious commission of his career so far: six symphonies for one of Paris's most important and fashionable concert societies, the Concert de la Loge Olympique. Haydn's music had been enjoyed in Paris for twenty years by the time the commission came, and his high standing among his French admirers is shown by the fact that his fee was 25 louis d'or for each symphony, an uncommonly high figure which the composer himself was said to have thought 'colossal'. The symphonies (Nos. 82–87) were written during 1785 and 1786, and supplied in time for performance during the 1787 season. Their premieres must have been quite a spectacle: the orchestra wore sky-blue coats with fancy ruffles and dress swords, and the performances were directed by Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, the West Indian-born violinist, composer and swordsman whose eventful career pretty much sums up the difference between the respective musical milieux of fashionable Paris and the semi-feudal surroundings of the Esterházy palaces.

The six 'Paris' symphonies were received with great acclaim: 'beautiful of character and astonishing in craftsmanship ... Haydn's name resounds to their extraordinary merit,' wrote the Mercure de France. They were indeed Haydn's finest symphonies for more than a decade, blending an approachable and popular style with an inventiveness and broad emotional range that revealed new possibilities in what was still a relatively youthful genre. Parisian orchestras were generally larger than the little band Haydn was used to back at the Esterházy court – the Loge Olympique's orchestra employed 40 violins and 10 double basses – and it seems likely that the rich expressiveness of the new works was inspired not only by the composer's growing awareness of his respected position in the musical world, but also by the thought of a large ensemble in action.

Symphony No. 86 is considered by some to be the greatest of the 'Paris' symphonies. Certainly it has the most strikingly unusual music in its Capriccio, a movement whose
title signals a relationship to the free-thinking keyboard rondos of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach; in fact it shows element of both sonata and rondo forms, with a main theme derived from the bass-line of the symphony's very opening. That opening is itself a slow introduction, a device Haydn was coming to use more and more in his symphonies, in this case to form a carefully shaped lead-up to an exhilarating release of energy in the main body of the first movement. There is striking contrast, too, in the third movement – where a playful but courtly Menuet frames a sweetly bucolic Trio in which a solo bassoon joins with the first violin – and also in the opening bars of the Finale; like Mozart in the last movement of his single 'Paris' symphony ten years earlier, Haydn teases his listeners by beginning quietly before bombarding them with exuberant orchestral sound. Yet whereas Mozart's attempt to woo the French had been only partly successful, Haydn's six symphonies managed to score a resounding hit. Of the two composers, it was he who more consistently managed to combine compositional mastery and integrity with the knack of pleasing his audiences.

Although the prevailing image of Mozart the performer is that of a pianist, the part played by the violin in his early development as a musician was an equally important one. Accounts of the child-prodigy's triumphs throughout Europe suggest that, at that stage at least, he was equally proficient on violin and keyboard, and right into the mid-1770s his letters home to his father contained reports of appearances as a violinist. 'In the evening at supper I played my Strasbourg concerto which went like oil,' he wrote from Augsburg in 1777. 'Everyone praised my beautiful, pure tone.'

Despite these peripatetic successes, Salzburg was really the spiritual home of Mozart's violin music. It was there – where violin concerto movements were as likely to be heard as outdoor evening entertainment music or as an embellishment to a church service as in a concert hall – that he first played a concerto at the age of seven, later toiled in the court orchestra, and, between 1773 and 1775, composed his five violin concertos. They may not probe the depths of his later, Viennese piano concertos, but it is true to say that they all show some degree of Mozartian inspiration, often of the most ravishing kind. 'I am no lover of difficulties' he once wrote to his father after hearing another violinist play, and indeed the accent here is not on technical brilliance but on lyricism and an eloquent personal expressiveness which we now recognise as being unique to the composer, but which at the time marked a new stage in his artistic development.

Mozart's first violin concertos were, as might be expected, skillful and charming works, but the appearance of the Third only weeks after the Second in September 1775 marked a significant advance. Suddenly, we are hearing the 19-year-old Mozart as we know him from the great piano concertos of the 1780s – elegant, witty, beguilingly changeable, and above all capable of writing music of surpassing beauty. The first movement finds him in the rare act of borrowing material from another work, the opening orchestral section being based on an aria from his recent opera Il re pastore, ('The Shepherd King') in which the main character sings of his love for the shepherd's lot, unaware that he is of royal blood. The implied mixture of nobility and carefree contentment could not be a more apt way of characterising the concerto movement. It is the slow movement, however, which has won this concerto a place in people's hearts. 'An adagio that seems to have fallen straight from heaven' is how the Mozart scholar Alfred Einstein described it, and indeed this is a movement that exhibits to an outstanding degree that God-given talent for serene melodic perfection that was Mozart's alone. The nocturnal sound-world, too, is new to the violin concertos, with the orchestral strings muted and the oboes giving way to softer-toned flutes.

The 'rondeau' finale demonstrates another feature that was to colour many of Mozart's later concertos, namely a greater independence given to the wind section, which even has the work's final say. More noticeable, however, is the element of knowing skittishness that it introduces, nowhere more so than when, after the cheerful main theme has made its third appearance, orchestral pizzicatos accompany an exaggeratedly powdered French-style gavotte, and then a more rustic tune is heard with bagpipe-like drones from the soloist. Scholarship has revealed this tune to be a popular song of the day known as 'The Strasbourger', and that this concerto is therefore the one that Mozart performed 'like oil'. The music lovers of Augsburg were fortunate indeed!

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Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra
Harry Christophers Artistic Director

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Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra
Harry Christophers Artistic Director

Appointed Artistic Director of the Handel and Haydn Society (H+H) in 2008, Harry Christophers began his tenure with the 2009-2010 Season and has conducted H+H each season since September 2006, when he led a sold-out performance in the Esterházy Palace at the Haydn Festival in Eisenstadt, Austria. Leading up to the organisation’s 2015 Bicentennial, Christophers and H+H embarked on an ambitious artistic journey with a showcase of works premiered in the United States by H+H since 1815, education programming, community outreach activities and partnerships, and the release of a series of recordings on the CORO label.

Christophers is known internationally as founder and conductor of the UK-based choir and period instrument orchestra, The Sixteen. He has directed The Sixteen throughout Europe, America, and the Asia-Pacific region, gaining a distinguished reputation for his work in Renaissance, baroque, and 20th- and 21st-century music. In 2000 he instituted The Choral Pilgrimage, a tour of British cathedrals from York to Canterbury. He has recorded over 150 titles for which he has won numerous awards, including a Grand Prix du Disque, numerous Preise der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik (German Record Critics Awards), the coveted Gramophone Award for Early Music, and the prestigious Classical Brit Award (2005) for his disc entitled Renaissance. In 2009 he received one of classical music’s highest accolades, the Classic FM Gramophone Awards Artist of the Year Award; The Sixteen also won the Baroque Vocal Award for Handel Coronation Anthems, a CD that in addition received a 2010 Grammy Award nomination.

* = concertmaster  § = principal

Harry Christophers
Photograph: Stu Rosner
Harry Christophers is also Principal Guest Conductor of the Granada Symphony Orchestra and a regular guest conductor with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. He is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and has Honorary Doctorates from the Universities of Canterbury Christ Church and Leicester. He was awarded a CBE in the 2012 Queen’s Birthday Honours.

Handel and Haydn Society

The Handel and Haydn Society (H+H) is internationally acclaimed for its performances of baroque and classical music. Based in Boston, H+H’s Period Instrument Orchestra and Chorus delight more than 50,000 listeners each year with a nine-concert subscription series at Symphony Hall and other leading venues in addition to a robust program of intimate events in museums, schools, and community centres. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Harry Christophers, the ensemble embraces historically informed performance, bringing classical music to life with the same immediacy it had the day it was written. Through the Karen S. and George D. Levy Education Program, H+H also provides engaging, accessible, and broadly inclusive music education to over 10,000 children each year through in-school music instruction and a Vocal Arts Program that includes six youth choruses.

Founded in Boston in 1815, H+H is the oldest continuously-performing arts organisation in the United States, and is unique among American ensembles for its longevity, capacity for reinvention, and distinguished history of premieres. H+H began as a choral society founded by middle-class Bostonians who aspired to improve the quality of singing in their growing American city. They named the organisation after two composers - Handel and Haydn – to represent both the old music of the 18th century and what was then the new music of the 19th century. In the first decades of its existence, H+H gave the US premieres of Handel’s Messiah (1818), Haydn’s The Creation (1819), Verdi’s Requiem (1878), and Bach’s St Matthew Passion (1879). Between 2014 and 2016, H+H celebrated its Bicentennial with two seasons of special concerts and initiatives to mark two centuries of music making. Since its founding, H+H has given more than 2,000 performances before a total audience exceeding 2.8 million.

In addition to its subscription series, tours, and broadcast performances, H+H reaches a worldwide audience through ambitious recordings including the critically acclaimed Haydn The Creation, the best-selling Joy to the World: An American Christmas, and Handel Messiah, recorded live at Symphony Hall under Christophers’ direction.
Canadian violinist Aisslinn Nosky was appointed Concertmaster of the Handel and Haydn Society in 2011. With a reputation for being one of the most dynamic and versatile violinists of her generation, Nosky is in great demand internationally as a director, soloist and chamber music collaborator. She has appeared with Holland Baroque, the Utah Symphony, the Staunton Music Festival, the Calgary Philharmonic, La Jolla Summerfest, and Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra.

Aisslinn is also a member of I FURIOSI Baroque Ensemble. For over 15 years this innovative Canadian ensemble has presented its own edgy and inventive concert series in Toronto and toured Europe and North America turning new audiences on to baroque music. With the Eybler Quartet, Nosky explores repertoire from the first century of the string quartet literature on period instruments. From 2005-2016, Aisslinn was a member of Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and toured and appeared as soloist with this internationally renowned ensemble.