Symphonies Nos. 26 Lamentatione and 86
MOZART: Violin Concerto No. 3

Harry Christophers & Handel and Haydn Society
Aisslinn Nosky violin

“Symphonies, nos. 26 (Lamentatione) and 86… are rendered with vigor and style”

THE ARTS FUSE

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

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

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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. 49 La Passione to his much later Paris Symphony No. 87. 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. La Passione is one of the very early Sturm und Drang (storm and stress) symphonies and its title is more than a nickname; it is quite possible that it may have been a work for Good Friday and indeed it was immensely popular throughout Europe in the 18th century.

20 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. 87 shows just how much his symphonies had transformed from those early years, not only in orchestral size but also in individuality. It was most probably the first of this set to have been written and it is often regarded as one of the ‘sunniest’ of all his symphonies. The conversation between the flute, oboe and bassoon underpinned by the horns at the close of the second movement is pure genius.

We also continue our cycle of Mozart’s string concertos with our inspirational concert master, Aisslinn Nosky, at the helm. This time however it is his Sinfonia Concertante where violin and viola take equal importance. Aisslinn is joined by Max Mandel whom she has known for the past 25 years. They just fire off each other with great passion and, moreover, great humour. Their stylistic awareness and inventiveness is a constant delight and inspiration to us all and their 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.

“The music crackled with a feeling of playful rivalry and delight. With the two vigorous virtuosi leading the performance, the strings were initially divided into two sparring factions, the violins following Nosky and the other strings Mandel as they traded the spotlight. The soloists kinetically engaged with their fellow players, sometimes looking behind as if to rally their allies, and some section players were visibly smiling at the musical magic in the making.”

Zoe Madonna / the boston globe

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Of Haydn’s 107 symphonies, most of the first 80 or so were composed to be performed before a select audience at court, initially that of his first patron Count Morzin in Bohemia, and thereafter in the palaces of his longer-term employers, the Esterházy princes. But symphonies were also performed in church in Haydn’s time, and it seems not at all unlikely that La Passione was one of them. Indeed, its serious nature and its title (not given to it by Haydn, though in use by the 1780s) may well indicate that it was first heard in a church somewhere one Good Friday.

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 expressive intensity and strength of personal utterance that until then had not been recognised as the genre’s province, they seemed to be conveying something more emotionally pressing than was the ceremonial, diverting or just plain occasional norm of the day. This upturn in seriousness was not unique to Haydn, but it was part of a general movement which affected many Austrian composers at that time, and its distinctive and vigorous musical language – minor keys, jagged themes, plangent melodies, dramatic silences, urgent syncopations and striking unison passages –
has since acquired the name *Sturm und Drang* (literally, ‘storm and stress’). It was an easy style to imitate, but Haydn was a proper master of it.

The style is certainly evident in *La Passione*, though not quite in the manner we usually encounter it. Composed in 1768, this is the last symphony Haydn wrote using the format known as the *sinfonia da chiesa* (literally ‘church symphony’), in which the customary four-movement of fast-slow-minuet-fast is altered by swapping round the first two movements. The switch allows the composer to write a weightier slow movement than usual to open the work, and then to follow it with a faster and more nervously energetic quick one. In the case of *La Passione*, the first movement is a dark, brooding Adagio with an appropriately sombre and penitential feel, and the second a driving Allegro in true *Sturm und Drang* style. The Menuet relaxes the atmosphere, especially when high horns shine a cool light on its major-key central Trio, but the Finale brings a return to the fiery mood of the second movement.

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 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 even the composer 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 since the *Sturm und Drang* days, 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. 87, the last to be composed, opens vigorously and assertively, but it is its hushed, straight-up-and-down second theme, so contrasting in its apparent aimlessness, that is subsequently used to good effect in the developmental central part of the first movement. Sublime writing for the wind instruments enhances the second movement, a warmly expressive and intricately coloured Adagio, and a solo oboe also gets a chance to shine in the third movement’s lightly scored central Trio. The work is rounded off with a Finale that is lithe and playful, but never loses its poise.

Despite the fact that in his early career Mozart was a performer on violin as well as keyboard, his period of devotion to the violin concerto was a disappointingly short one. The considerable promise shown by the concertos of 1773 and 1775 was not followed up, and the great concertos of his mature years were either for piano or for his
new love, the clarinet. After the age of 20 his only significant return to the violin as a solo instrument was in the shape of the Sinfonia Concertante for violin, viola and orchestra.

Chronologically, then, this work stands outside the cycle of violin concertos, but in terms of quality and emotional depth, too, it is a work apart. We do not know why or for whom it was written, and there is no record of any performance (though it is worth noting that, as Mozart got older, he was increasingly fond of playing the viola). Neither is the date of composition entirely certain, though it probably comes from some time in the summer or autumn of 1779, a period when Mozart was particularly interested in concertos for more than one soloist, no doubt as a result of his recent visits to Paris and Mannheim, where such works were popular and where he himself had composed the Concerto for flute and harp and at least begun others for the combinations of flute, oboe, horn and bassoon, and violin and piano.

But the effects of his travels ran deeper than that: he had intended the Paris sojourn as a new start, an opportunity to forge a career in a city with a teeming concert life where musicians were respected as independent professionals rather than court servants. In the end, however, he failed to make the intended impact, and, to compound matters, personal tragedy struck when his mother, who had accompanied him there, died of an undiagnosed illness. These misfortunes, together with his humbling return home to the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg in 1779, perhaps contributed to a new maturity and seriousness in his music, nowhere better shown than in the Sinfonia Concertante, arguably his finest composition before his move to Vienna in 1781.

The first movement is a masterly mixture of noble strength and tender lyricism, with the orchestra providing most of the former and the dialoguing soloists most of the latter; their emergence playing in octaves at the end of the opening orchestral section is a typically Mozartian marvel, as are the movement's frequent turns to the minor. The C minor Andante is again pure Mozart; elegiac and richly beautiful, it is perhaps the single most profound movement he had composed yet hints at the expressive power he would unleash in the great operas of the 1780s. The work ends, however, with a cheerful, suavely dancing and generously tuneful Rondo.
Harry Christophers

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.

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 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.
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.

Aisslinn Nosky violin & leader

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.
Violist Max Mandel enjoys a varied and acclaimed career as a chamber musician, soloist, orchestral musician, and speaker. He is the Co-Principal Viola of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and a member of the trailblazing new music ensemble FLUX Quartet. He has appeared as guest principal viola with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Academy of Ancient Music, and the Handel and Haydn Society, amongst others. Other group affiliations include the Smithsonian Chamber Players, Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra, and the Silk Road Ensemble. This recording is part of an ongoing musical relationship with violinist Aisslinn Nosky that started with their student group, the Metro String Quartet, and is now in its 25th year. Born and raised in Toronto, Canada, he divides his time between New York and London.