Fritz Reiner / Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Facts about this Recording

Recorded by RCA

Producer Richard Mohr   Engineer Lewis Layron

Haydn 1960 / Orchestra Hall, Chicago Transfered from a 2-track tape

Mozart 1956 / Orchestra Hall, Chicago Transfered from a 2-track tape

Haydn

Symphony No. 88

Mozart

Symphony No. 41

Fritz Reiner

conducts the

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Frederick Martin "Fritz" Reiner(December 19, 1888 – November 15, 1963) was a prominent conductor of opera and symphonic music in the twentieth century. Hungarian born and trained, he emigrated to the United States in 1922, where he rose to prominence as a conductor with several orchestras. He reached the pinnacle of his career while music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Reiner was especially noted as an interpreter of Richard Strauss and Bartók and was often seen as a modernist in his musical taste; he and his compatriot Joseph Szigeti convinced Serge Koussevitzky to commission the Concerto for Orchestra from Bartók. In reality, he had a very wide repertory and was known to admire Mozart's music above all else.

Reiner's conducting technique was defined by its precision and economy, in the manner of Arthur Nikisch and Arturo Toscanini. It typically employed quite small gestures - it has been said that the beat indicated by the tip of his baton could be contained in the area of a postage stamp - although from the perspective of the players it was extremely expressive. The response he drew from orchestras was one of astonishing richness, brilliance, and clarity of texture. Igor Stravinsky called the Chicago Symphony under Reiner "the most precise and flexible orchestra in the world"; it was more often than not achieved with tactics that bordered on the personally abusive, as Kenneth Morgan documents in 2005 biography of the conductor. Chicago musicians have spoken of Reiner's autocratic methods; trumpeter Adolph Herseth told National Public Radio that Reiner often tested him and other musicians.

Symphony No. 88 in G major, Hob I:88

Composed: 1787

Orchestration: flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

"I was cut off from the world, there was no one to confuse or torment me, and I was forced to become original," explained Haydn of the circumstances that shaped his ever-fresh voice, and nowhere does his originality shine more than in this symphony. Its history is amusing: apparently Johann Peter Tost, leader of the second violin section in Haydn's orchestra, took the scores of this and another symphony along with six string quartets to Paris in 1788 and parlayed his luck into even better fortune by selling the publisher Sieber not only these but others he falsely claimed as Haydn's. The composer answered the soon-disgruntled publisher with the crisp observation "Thus Herr Tost has swindled you." The swindle is somehow fitting for a symphony whose musical sleight-of-hand is ingenious even for history's most illustrious musical trickster. In Haydn's music, an accompaniment pattern turns out to be a theme; an old theme slyly becomes a new one; a recapitulation turns out to be false; a line disappears into the texture and pops out again unexpectedly; an offbeat pattern abruptly shifts to the downbeat. This symphony abounds in such effects.

After a slow introduction, the first movement moves into a perky Allegro in which Haydn plays with the conventions of sonata form so that every detail seems spontaneous. To mention just two: a second theme that seems to have jumped out of the first and a winsome flute solo that adorns the return of the principal theme. The second movement is a set of variations on a graceful theme - a perfect vehicle for Haydn's resourcefulness. Trumpets and drums make their first appearance here; they would be more predictable sitting out the Largo after playing in the more assertive first movement. In the Minuet, Haydn's rustic roots infuse both the robust theme and the bass drone in the trio. The Finale is a spirited rondo in which the recurrent theme's opening repeated notes are offset rhythmically (on the second beat instead of the more conventional first) and thus feel just slightly out of kilter each time the tune reappears. (Indeed, the number of themes in this symphony that begin on the upbeat and thus achieve a buoyant quality might serve as an illustration of that word's current usage to mean cheerful or optimistic.) A complicated canon in the middle of the movement might seem out of place, but only acts as another wink ("you see, I did have another trick up my sleeve") at the by-now thoroughly delighted listener.

Mozart completed his Symphony No. 41 in Vienna on August 10, 1788. No firm date for its première has been established. The work is scored for scored for flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and orchestral strings.

Mozart could not have known that the three symphonies he composed between June 26 and August 10, 1788 would be his last. It is fitting, however, that his career as a symphonist should end with three such masterpieces. They are quite different from each other: No. 39 in E-flat major is one of his most elegant creations, its successor in G minor perhaps his most pathetic. And appropriately, No. 41 is the grandest and most joyous of all his symphonies.

A number of mysteries surround these works. No commission that would have inspired their creation has come down to us. Some writers speculate that he composed them strictly for his own pleasure. Others, such as Neal Zaslaw, feel otherwise: "The very idea that Mozart would have written three such symphonies, unprecedented in length, complexity, and seriousness, merely to please himself or because he was 'inspired,' flies in the face of his known attitudes to music and life and the financial straits in which he then found himself."

Uncertainty also exists regarding their performance during Mozart's lifetime. Circumstantial evidence points to one or more of them being played on several occasions: at a series of subscription concerts at the Vienna Casino later in 1788; during Mozart's tours of Germany in 1788 and 1789; or in Vienna, conducted by Antonio Salieri in April 1791 (for which performance Mozart may have prepared the second version, with added clarinets, of Symphony No. 40). In addition, Symphonies 40 and 41 were rapidly circulated, suggesting that they were performed during his lifetime.

The identity of the person who gave No. 41 the nickname "Jupiter" has been lost. The earliest surviving published reference to it as such dates from the Edinburgh Festival of 1819. This subtitle, linking it with the most powerful of the gods of ancient Rome, seems altogether appropriate.

For some years, it had been common for the first movement of a Classical symphony to begin with an introduction in slow tempo. Mozart's friend Joseph Haydn had been doing so for quite some time. The two symphonies he composed in 1788—No. 90 and No. 91—begin this way. So do four of Mozart's five previous symphonies, the sole exception being No. 40. The "Jupiter" mirrors No. 40 in dispensing with a slow introduction. Mozart plunges us immediately into the joyous energy with which the opening movement abounds. For all its trumpet-and-drums brilliance, it still retains an unforced elegance. He drops the trumpets and drums for the slow movement. His tempo indication, cantabile ("singing"), describes this restful idyll perfectly. The minuet is truly symphonic in scale and bearing, with a quieter trio section at its heart. The finale looks not only to the future—through its increased expressive weight—but also the past, specifically to the Baroque world of Bach and Handel, by incorporating elements of fugal writing. Learnedness and joy here join hands to conclude Mozart's career as a symphonist in a burst of creative brilliance.

Reiner / Chicago Symp Orch / Haydn Symphony No. 88 / Mozart Symphony No. 41

Haydn

Symphony No. 88

1- Adagio - Allegro
2 - Largo
3 - Menuetto: Allegretto
4 - Finale. Allegro con spirito

Mozart

Symphony No. 41

5 - Allegro vivace
6 - Andante cantabile
7 - Menuetto: Allegretto - Trio
8 - Molto allegro

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