

HAYDN Piano Trios: in C, Hob XV:21; in E \flat , Hob XV:22; in d, Hob XV:23 •

Trio 1790. • cpo 999 731-2 (60:38)

This is the fourth disc of a projected complete set of Haydn's Piano Trios—perhaps one should call them Fortepiano Trios in this context. Volume 1, of four early works, was greeted with rapture by Bernard Jacobson in *Fanfare* 23:6, but the second and third discs seem to have slipped through our editorial fingers. These performances of three late (1795) trios are equally delightful; they have a freshness and spirit that go beyond the classic modern-instrument performances by the Beaux Arts Trio. Haydn called these works Clavier Sonatas, and they were published as “*Sonates pour le piano forte avec accompagnement de violon & violoncello*.” Harold Hoeren's lively, imaginative playing and his fortepiano, a modern copy of a 1790 instrument, make the difference; its crisp, sparkling treble register sounds each note, as even Menahem Pressler's pearly playing of a modern grand can not. Susanne von Bauszner's violin and Philipp Bosbach's cello play small roles here, but their characteristically dry tones draw attention, as the Beaux Arts's modern instruments do not. Unfortunately, battle lines remain drawn between proponents of and antagonists to period instruments; this disc offers ammunition for both sides. In most of this music the fortepiano holds a distinct advantage, but every cadence brings out forced, clunky notes in the left hand, and even Jacobson objected to the “edge” of the string tone. Trio 1790 indulges in other practices common to period instrument performers: On the plus side, they play most if not all repeats, while the Beaux Arts play few if any. On the other hand, their range of tempos is constricted: Adagios are taken nearly Andante and Prestos at mere Allegro.

I will not give up my Beaux Arts set (a Philips bargain box), but these Trio 1790 performances, and their bright, clean recordings, strike me as the most enjoyable Haydn Trios I have heard, and I look forward to more of this cpo series. Period instruments have nearly doubled employment opportunities for musicians (at least in London and Amsterdam), and they are doing the same to our record collections: Haydn in particular must be heard both ways.

James H. North

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HAYDN Piano Trios (Complete) • Haydn Tr Eisenstadt • PHOENIX 161 (8 CDs: 583.49)

These are elegant, suave performances of some of Haydn's loveliest music. The piano trios lack the backbone and structure of his symphonies and string quartets, and that difference is emphasized here, for better and for worse: we are enveloped by charm and beauty, but at a cost in spirit and *élan*. Is this making the most of the music's inherent qualities, or does it short-change us by moving even farther from Haydn's essential character? Each of us must decide this for her or himself. I find that individual movements can be mesmerizing—the long opening Andante of the E \flat Trio, Hob XV:31, is gorgeous beyond words—but seldom is an entire trio as satisfying. The “complete set” phenomenon comes into play here: each trio should be heard by itself, in isolation, but the reviewer's duty is to hear everything, and I found myself liking these performances more and more as I proceeded through them over the course of a few days. Each of these discs mixes early, middle, and late trios, but the Eisenstadt does not distinguish each era as clearly as have some other (usually period-instrument) performances. For the record, the 1760 Trios are Hob XV: 1 and 3441; the 1780s works are Hob XV:5–17; the so-called “London” Trios of the mid 1790s are Hob XV:18–32 (No. 30 was written after he returned to Vienna).

The playing by all (Harald Kosik, piano; Verena Stourzh, violin; Hannes Gradwohl, cello) is expert and effortless. Kosik's Steinway D is warm and brilliant, but he holds it within reasonable 18th-century bounds. The overall results are similar to those of the Beaux Arts Trio, although the Eisenstadt usually chooses more relaxed tempos for Allegros (their Vivaces and Prestos are fully up to pace); both groups ignore a repeat here and there, which may be a matter of the scores they follow. The apparent ease of these performances may contribute to the sense that a few movements succumb to routine, as the pearly tones roll along. The (studio) recordings, made during the annual Haydn Festspiele Eisenstadt from 1998 to 2007 in the now familiar Haydnsaal of Schloss Esterházy, reflect that hall's lovely acoustic, including its excess reverberance, which is at times too much for the piano. Nevertheless, the instruments have a more distinct presence than those in the admirable 1970s Philips recordings of the Beaux Arts. That group put 43 trios (in as close to chronological order as was then known) on nine CDs. Some have fallen victim to the authenticity mavens; the Eisenstadt plays 39 trios on these eight CDs. The (period instruments) Van Swieten Trio spread 40 trios and one additional piece across 10 CDs in Brilliant Classics's recent, 150-CD Haydn Edition (*Fanfare* 32:4). The Eisenstadt Trio also contributed to that set, backing two vocalists in 18 discs of Scottish and Welsh songs. Phoenix Edition includes a generous 68-page booklet that discusses each and every trio in some detail, all in German, English, and French.

Despite the Eisenstadt's occasional lack of *élan*, I am captured by the charm and friendliness of its performances. If you are looking for a modern-instrument set of Haydn piano trios, I recommend this one, which may be found on the Internet for about four dollars a disc. If you already love the Beaux Arts, however, you might

miss that group's high spirits and its convincing spontaneity. **James H. North**

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