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HOFFMEISTER Piano Sonatas: in A; in G; in B \flat . Variations in C • Biliana Tzinlikova (pn) • GRAND PIANO 666 (68:52) - **Fanfare Review Vol. 1**

Primarily known to history as a prominent Viennese music publisher who issued works by Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, Franz Anton Hoffmeister was also a prolific composer, producing over 50 symphonies, dozens of concertos and chamber works, and 12 keyboard sonatas. His viola concerto is a standard-repertoire work; much of the rest of his output is unfamiliar to contemporary listeners. The current disc is the first volume of a three-disc series to be released over the next year or so that will provide first recordings of Hoffmeister's keyboard sonatas and two large-scale cycles of variations.

The repertoire on this disc is thoroughly enjoyable and each piece is finely crafted. There are moments in each sonata, moreover, that demonstrate a unique and interesting musical personality. The slow movement of the Sonata in B \flat , for example, lingers unexpectedly on dissonances and [?] includes a gentle minor-key episode punctuated by harsh octave statements. Similarly, the Sonata in A's slow movement presents an ornate, idyllic melody that alternates with austere, dignified chords in dotted rhythms. The opening measures of the Sonata in G feature an interesting echo effect in which the main theme is stated and then immediately repeated an octave lower. Two factors prevent these works from reaching the level of Haydn or Mozart's keyboard sonatas, though. First, Hoffmeister relies a bit much on literal repetition of thematic material rather than on thematic development. Second, unexpected gestures occasionally seem arbitrary rather than inevitable. The ominous bass octaves and triplet figuration that begin the development section in the Sonata in A's first movement bear no relation to the material presented in the exposition and are not revisited in the remainder of the movement. Similarly, Hoffmeister's manipulations of the theme in his Variations in C are often interesting, but are episodic rather than progressive. The piece as a whole leaves the impression of being a collection of variation techniques rather than a cumulative argument.

That said, sonatas that are not quite as good as those by Mozart and Haydn are nonetheless quite good, unfailingly charming, and often substantial in emotional content, and it is inexplicable that pieces of this quality by a composer with even middling name recognition should only now be recorded. Biliana Tzinlikova is an expressive, capable pianist who plays Hoffmeister's works with conviction and stylistic understanding. She repeats both the exposition and development/recapitulation of each sonata's first movement, which makes these movements disproportionately long in relation to the remainder of the sonata, but she varies her ornamentation, phrasing, and dynamics in the repeated sections. She is highly

adept at conveying the energy and wit of Hoffmeister's final movements, offering playful accents and skilled postponements of harmonic resolution. I would prefer slower tempos in the slow movements; that of the Sonata in A, in particular, would benefit from a greater expansiveness and a freer, more operatic treatment of the melody. And Tzinlikova's approach to the final measures of each sonata strikes me as rather abrupt; it is not always clear that the sonata is actually over. But these quibbles notwithstanding, Tzinlikova has given a sympathetic, effective introduction to Hoffmeister's keyboard music—enough so that I look forward to the remaining two volumes of the series. Flawless sound engineering is a welcome bonus. **Myron Silberstein**

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Franz Anton HOFFMEISTER (1754-1812) - MusicWeb Review Vol. 1

Piano Sonata in A major (1790) [17:30]

Piano Sonata in G major (1792) [20:26]

Piano Sonata in B flat major (1792) [19:13]

Variations for Piano in C major [11.47]

Biliana Tzinlikova (piano)

rec. 3-5 October 2013, Schloss Weinberg, Kefermarkt, Austria

World première recordings

GRAND PIANO GP666 [68:52]

Franz Anton Hoffmeister was born in Rottenburg am Neckar, Germany in 1754 and at the age of fourteen went to Vienna to read law. Following his studies, however, he decided on a career in music. By the 1780s he had become one of the city's most popular composers with an extensive and varied catalogue of works to his credit.

However, Hoffmeister's reputation today rests equally on his activities as a music publisher. By 1785 he had established one of Vienna's first music-publishing businesses, second only to Artaria & Co, which had ventured into the field five years earlier. He published his own works as well as those of many important composers of the time, including Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Clementi, Albrechtsberger, Dittersdorf and Wanhal (Vanhal), and who were also among his personal friends. Mozart's String Quartet in D, 'Hoffmeister', K 499, was published by Franz Anton, and he was addressed in a letter by Beethoven as 'my most beloved brother'.

Hoffmeister's publishing activities reached a peak in 1791 but thereafter he

appeared to have devoted more time to composition, with most of his operas composed and staged during the early 1790s. This, however, combined with an apparent lack of business sense, led to his subsequent noticeable decline as a publisher.

He wrote a number of works for keyboard with another instrument, notably the flute, while some twenty sonatas and sonatinas are also listed for keyboard alone. The *Sonata in A*, described as 'pour Fortepiano ou Clavecin', has been initially dated to about 1785, and is conservative in design. There's a sonata-form opening 'Allegro' followed by a slightly improvisatory-sounding 'Adagio' in the tonic minor (A minor), with a jaunty 'Presto' finale providing an effective finish.

The *Sonata in G major* again is hardly ground-breaking, although the development section does show more interesting harmonic juxtapositions and modulations. The 'Poco Adagio' slow movement is pleasantly lyrical at times with cantilena melodies sung in the right hand over a rippling left-hand hand accompaniment, and where the writing owes a debt to the composer's earlier eight or so operas. Again there is almost something of a concerted operatic-finale to the triple-metre closing Rondo, with its effective use of silences, and short recitative passages, all of which makes this one of the most attractive movements of the CD thus far.

The *Sonata in B flat* is again cast very much in the style of the times – indeed the sleeve-note confirms 'how his (Hoffmeister's) sonatas might be mistaken or even misappropriated as works of Haydn'. The middle 'Adagio' in the relative minor (G minor) has some melodic originality and interest, and still with a nod in the direction of the composer's operatic side. The rondo-finale is essentially a lively 'Presto' in 6/8 'hunting' mode, though with moments of repose along the way. This gives it a more expressive and sensitive feel overall than a mere showy conclusion – and there's a little surprise to come at the very end.

The final work is a set of *Variations in C* which certainly make far greater demands on the performer, particularly in coping with a variety of scale-patterns, from double-thirds to the less frequently-encountered scales in similar motion, but two octaves apart. While some of this initially brings to mind Beethoven's Sonata Op. 2 No. 3 in the same key, it also looks forwards to the writing of Hummel and his later contemporaries. The sleeve-note comments that 'The *Variations* bring the present recording to a final climax'. This may well be true overall, as there is probably more substance and individuality in the final work, than the three sonatas themselves. The ending is effective, though perhaps rather understated for a work with recognisable virtuosic tendencies. Structurally speaking Hoffmeister's *Variations* are in the manner of Handel's 'Harmonious Blacksmith' set. Their figurations and note-divisions are the order of the day, rather than harmonic manipulation as is the case in parts of Brahms's 'Handel' Variations, which is only to be expected in a

work from the Romantic period.

The sleeve-notes are reasonably informative, although the English set by Keith Anderson isn't a translation of the German ones by Gottfried Franz Kasperek that follow on. While Anderson's are slightly more concerned with biographical details, Kasperek's are musically more perceptive, and his comments, for example, on the sonatas (albeit in German) are more helpful from the historical and musical standpoints. It seems a pity that his weren't translated into English, as is often the case, rather than apparently commissioning an additional set in English.

In assessing whether this new CD of world première recordings really adds a great deal to the catalogue, there are a number of points to consider. In terms of originality, these works could be mistaken for examples by Haydn. However, when you consider that they are roughly contemporary with the Austrian composer's last four sonatas (Hob. XVI: 49 in E flat, 50 in C, 51 in D, and 52 in E flat major respectively), while the difference isn't quite chalk and cheese, Haydn's would rank more as a finely-matured Cheddar, or its national equivalent. Hoffmeister's would surely be somewhat further down the pecking order.

The problem emanates partly from the name of the label itself, 'Grand Piano'. According to its publicity blurb – essentially it's part of HNH International Ltd that produces Naxos recordings – it has, since its launch in 2012, 'quickly gained a reputation for producing high quality recordings of rare keyboard gems'. It goes on to say, 'Dedicated to the exploration of undiscovered piano repertoire, the label specialises in multi-volume recordings and complete cycles of piano works by many lesser-known composers, whose output might otherwise have remained unknown and unrecorded'. Now there's absolutely nothing wrong with this laudable philosophy, even if it might often depend on one man's gem being another man's pebble. While the label has already released some significant piano music CDs, these were always intended for the 'grand piano' whereas Hoffmeister's weren't.

Yes, it's good to have some of his keyboard music on disc now, with the promise of at least a second volume to come. For it to have, perhaps, the desired impact, it really cries out to be played on a contemporary keyboard instrument. This could then identify Hoffmeister more as his own man, rather than someone who sounds like Haydn, but isn't. Performing it on a full concert grand admittedly does something for the dynamic range, but it can't make Hoffmeister's music any bigger or more gem-like than it is, however well-played and recorded. Here, there are definitely no complaints at all. Biliana Tzinlikova's admirable performances and well-honed technique, especially in the decidedly more tricky *Variations*, might just rescue the rest of the CD from relative obscurity.

Philip R Buttall

HOFFMEISTER Piano Sonatas: in D; in C; in B \flat • Biliana Tzinlikova (pn) • GRAND PIANO 668 (53:17) - **Fanfare Review Vol. 3**

Readers who saw my reviews of the first two volumes of Biliana Tzinlikova's survey of Franz Anton Hoffmeister's piano sonatas or who scanned my Want List for 2015 will be unsurprised by my comments in this review. I have listened to all three volumes of this series with great pleasure, and, though I cannot claim that Hoffmeister's piano sonatas rival those of Beethoven, Mozart, or Haydn, I believe Hoffmeister's music is a significant addition to the Classical period playlist. His works show complete mastery of sonata form and of the Classical idiom, though I find that his development sections rely too much on sequences and do not truly develop his musical material. His fast movements are boisterous and witty, and there is a wealth of melodic expressiveness in his slow movements. His voice is unique, if not particularly adventurous, and deserves a wider hearing than it has received over the past two centuries or so.

Biliana Tzinlikova is an excellent advocate for Hoffmeister's music. Her playing captures the energy and sparkle of Hoffmeister's style, and she has a winning combination of an agile technique and a warm, singing tone. My only general criticism of her approach to Hoffmeister is that I believe his lyrical writing would benefit from a more expansive, operatic rubato. Finally, sound engineer Eric Pintar has provided a pleasing concert hall sound on all three discs, with just slightly more resonance than I find ideal.

As for the specifics of this disc: This final volume contains three sonatas. The program notes highlight the Sonata in B \flat for its experimental structure, as the only Hoffmeister sonata to begin with a slow movement. This sonata is the most ambitious work on the disc, longer than the two others combined. It is also, in some ways, the most personal sounding of the sonatas, containing more harmonic twists and turns than the others and frequent excursions into the minor mode, suggesting an undercurrent of melancholy beneath its generally tranquil surface. The sonata is notable also for its final movement, a series of variations on an infectious, rustic-sounding theme.

The Sonata in D is a superb example of Hoffmeister's cheery, graceful musical demeanor. The musical material is unfailingly ingratiating and the sonata itself is a virtual textbook of Classical-period techniques: Alberti bass abounds, as do imitative exchanges between the hands and ornate melodic embellishments. The second movement involves a particularly searching melody with enough emotional depth for a much longer piece. The third movement is a charming six-eight dance, interrupted unexpectedly by stormy sequences of diminished seventh chords. My favorite sonata on this recording, and perhaps in the series as a whole, is the Sonata in C. I believe it is a true gem that deserves a place in the performance

repertoire. It is an extraordinarily unified piece; all three movements begin with and heavily feature an ascending fourth. The first movement is brisk but quite serious, treating the fourth as an *idée fixe* subject to various contrapuntal accompaniments. The slow movement is a courtly triple meter dance with a sensitive, elegant melody. The final movement is a busy, brilliant toccata involving many imitative exchanges between the hands. The fast movements rely almost entirely on two-part writing, suggesting to the disc's annotator that the sonata may originally have been conceived as a duo for transverse flute and harpsichord. It is extremely successful in its current form.

This recording, and Tzinlikova's entire Hoffmeister series, is a delight through and through. Anyone interested in adding some unfamiliar Classical repertoire to their collection should consider it. **Myron Silberstein**

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Fanfare Review of Clarinet Sonatas - Two Versions Compared

HOFFMEISTER Clarinet Sonatas: No. 1 in A; No. 2 in D; No. 3 in F; No. 4 in g; No. 5 in B; No. 6 in F • Luigi Magistrelli, cl; Claudia Bracco, pn. • BAYER 100 346/47 (2 CDs: 109:15)

HOFFMEISTER Clarinet Sonatas: No. 1 in A; No. 2 in D; No. 3 in F; No. 4 in g; No. 5 in B; No. 6 in F • Csaba Klenyán, cl; Ildikó Nagy, pn. • HUNGAROTON 32058/59 (2 CDs: 101:34)

Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812) is among a number of 18th-century Vienna's brightest and best whose work has become the subject of renewed interest and is part of an ongoing reexamination by scholars and a revival by performers. In addition to composing, Hoffmeister also founded a music-publishing firm that grew to one of the finest and most respected in Vienna. There is now a Hoffmeister Society with the sole purpose of re-examining the neglected *œuvre* of this contemporary, associate, and close friend of Mozart. In spite of the quality and variety of his music, Hoffmeister's compositions have taken a back seat to his efforts as a publisher. He left posterity a large corpus of instrumental music including concertos, symphonies, serenades, and quartets for winds and strings. Among Hoffmeister's compositions for clarinet are six quartets for clarinets and strings, a quartet for two clarinets, basset horn, and bassoon, and this set of six sonatas for clarinet and piano. Hoffmeister's sonatas—termed “duos” in the first printed edition—are unique in that they explore and exploit not one, not two, but *three* members of the clarinet family, i.e., the instruments pitched in C, in B \flat , and in A. Luigi Magistrelli uses the bright-toned and whimsical clarinet in C for four of the sonatas, and the other instruments in one sonata each. However, the notes for

the Hungaroton set are mute as to which instruments are being played by Csaba Klenyán, and in which sonatas.

Five of the works on these two-CD sets are in the standard three-movement form; only the Sonata in E-flat—whose slow movement is lost—is in two movements. Even though these sonatas lack the genius of Mozart and the challenges of his chamber music for clarinet, Hoffmeister's sonatas are technically demanding works in which both of the performers are consistently spotlighted and given ample opportunities to display their wares, individually and collectively. Although second-echelon material, Hoffmeister's sonatas are well crafted, effective, and certainly worthy of the attention of today's performers.

It is unusual to find simultaneous releases of identical repertoire, especially if it is this obscure. Was this coincidence? I'd rather not speculate; the less said, I think, the better! What *is* certain, however, is that we have—on a small scale—an *embarrass de richesse* that in turn results in an *embarrass de choix*. Why? Both of these recordings are superbly played and well recorded. Both clarinetists possess a nice, warm, and woody tone, not to mention exceptional digital dexterity; each is abetted by an excellent pianist whose interpretative skills and sense of musical equality with a soloist are first-rate. There are no tempo extremes; as you can see from the total running times, there is less than an eight-minute difference between them, and spread over six works, this indicates only the slightest of tempo differences.

The audio level on the Hungaroton is a bit lower than the Bayer and the Bayer seems to have a more immediate and ear-friendly sound, which leads me to favor the latter on sonics only. Indeed, it was a tough call choosing one over the other, but the edge held by Bayer is so slim that I will intend to revisit the Hungaroton soon.

Michael Carter

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