Haydn - The 12 London Symphonies (Bernstein) CD4 [2003]

Symphony in G major, Hob.I No.100 "Military" *1. Adagio-Allegro 2. Allegretto 3. Menuet (Moderato)-Trio 4. Finale (Presto)* Symphony in B flat major, Hob.I No.102
5. Largo-Vivace 6. Adagio 7. Menuet (Allegro)-Trio 8. Finale (Presto)
Symphony in D major, Hob.I No.104 "London"
9. Adagio-Presto 10. Andante 11. Menuet (Allegretto)-Trio 12. Finale (Vivace)
New York Philharmonic Leonard Bernstein – conductor

In No 100, the ‘Military’, premiered on 31 March 1794, Haydn set out to cap the popular success of the ‘Surprise’ two years earlier. He triumphantly succeeded, thanks to the Allegretto second movement that reworks and enriches a march-like Romanze from one of the lire concertos written in 1786 for the King of Naples. In 1794 Britain was at war with revolutionary France; and for the first time, Haydn writes music that makes overt reference to the contemporary political situation. The C major opening is all pastoral innocence, with picturesque scoring for woodwind, including clarinets which Haydn omits from the other movements; and even the battery of ‘Turkish’ instruments (triangle, cymbals and bass drum) that reinforce the C minor central episode is initially more exotic than menacing. But the ‘war’ topic gradually infiltrates the music, culminating in a trumpet fanfare that quotes the Austrian General Salute, and a fortissimo crash in the remote key of A flat. ‘It is the advancing to battle’, pronounced the Morning Chronicle after the premiere. ‘And the march of men, the sounding of the charge, the thundering of the onset, the clash of arms, the groans of the wounded, and what may well be called the hellish roar of war increased to a climax of horrid sublimity.’

Another reviewer, in the Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung, wrote that the symphony was ‘rather less learned and easier to take in than some other recent works of his, yet equally rich in new ideas’. One inspired novelty is the ‘fairy’ scoring for flute and oboes of the Allegro’s first theme, whose outline had been prefigured in the slow introduction. This turns up in the key of the dominant, D major, before Haydn introduces an even catchier melody, the inspiration for

Johann Strauss the Elder's famous Radetzky March composed in the wake of the 1848 Viennese Revolution. Like the equivalent, popular-style tune in No 99, this late-arriving theme then proceeds to hijack the musical argument, through the notably explosive development and the truncated recapitulation, to the most glittering, orchestrally virtuosic coda of Haydn's career.

The courtly opening of the minuet (whose leisurely pacing offsets the symphony's 'fast' slow movement) is deceptive. The music later grows truculent with cross-rhythms, and then chromatically wistful. Even the exquisitely well-bred trio is momentarily disrupted by military-style fanfares. The bellicose 'Turkish' battery returns at the end of the finale, raucously capping a tarantella-style movement that develops its 'kittenish' (Tovey's word) main theme and a comically sparring second subject with fantastic intricacy and harmonic sleight-of-hand, not least in the development's mysterious mock fugato in the far-distant key of C sharp minor.
---Richard Wigmore, hyperion-records.co.uk

No 102 in B flat major, was introduced on 2 February. This was the concert where a great chandelier crashed to the floor, though since the audience in the parterre had crowded forward to see Haydn at close range, no one suffered more than minor bruises.

In the second set of London symphonies, Haydn's arguments become even more intricate and engrossing. And the first movement of No 102 is arguably the most challenging of all. It begins with an ethereal slow introduction whose initial five-note phrase (following a long-held unison B flat) will play a crucial role in the main Vivace. From its explosive opening, this is Haydn at his most combative and Beethovenian. The drive and intensity of the music, peppered with violent offbeat accents, never abate; and even the main theme of the second group, heralded by a disruptive unison, is tense and restless where Haydn's audience had come to expect a catchy, popular-style tune. The development ratchets up the tension even further: first in a rebarbative three-part canon, then, after a solo flute proposes the main theme in the alien key of C major, in a stupendous fortissimo build-up to the recapitulation.

Haydn follows this high-pressure symphonic drama with one of his loveliest meditations, an arrangement of the rhapsodic Adagio from his recent Piano Trio in F sharp minor. It is just possible that the symphony movement came first, though the evidence of the autograph, and the music's delicately ornamental style—typical of his late keyboard slow movements—suggest otherwise. When the exposition is repeated, it is re-scored with almost impressionistic subtlety,

its misty colourings enhanced with muted trumpets and muffled drums. This movement was surely in Rimsky-Korsakov's mind when he pronounced Haydn the greatest of all orchestrators.

The stomping minuet brings us down to earth, making riotous play with a three-note figure that invades all sections of the orchestra. Haydn spices the comic antics of the finale with a streak of cussedness that brings it into line with the opening Vivace. An early review commented admiringly on the rapid, unpredictable tonal shifts within the main theme. This is another movement that left its mark on Beethoven, not least the coda, where the main theme disintegrates and stammers to a halt before the madcap final send-off—an idea Haydn's one-time pupil took up in the finale of his Symphony No 4, in the same key.---Richard Wigmore, hyperion-records.co.uk

Haydn's last symphony, No 104, was premiered to the usual ecstatic acclaim at the benefit concert on 4 May 1795 that brought him the colossal sum of four thousand gulden. ('Such a thing is only possible in England', he recorded in his notebook.) Whether or not he intended the work as his symphonic testament, its mingled grandeur and earthy vigour, argumentative power and visionary poetry make it a glorious final summation.

One of the more plausible explanations as to why this, of all the last twelve symphonies, became known as the 'London' is that the main theme of the finale reminded listeners of a London street-cry to the words 'Live cod!'. The slow introduction of the 'Drumroll' might have seemed an impossible act to follow. Yet No 104's D minor opening rivals it in tension and mystery, evoking a cosmic vastness within its two-minute time frame. The Allegro resolves minor into major with a heart-easing melody. This tune returns, varied, as a 'second subject'; and there is another delightful variation, airily scored for flute and oboes, at the beginning of the recapitulation. The magnificent development is perhaps the most powerful and rigorous in all Haydn's symphonies, worrying obsessively at a six-note fragment of the theme and building inexorably to a climax of white-hot intensity.

The tranquil opening of the G major Andante is deceptive. The second half of the melody expands with an unsuspected breadth and profundity, while the ferocity of the G minor central episode eclipses even the comparable outburst in the Andante of the 'Clock'. But the apotheosis comes after the varied reprise of the opening tune, where the music floats towards unearthly tonal regions before slipping magically back to the home key. The final bars, as so often in

these late slow movements, are suffused with a nostalgic, valedictory glow.

The boisterous minuet trades on aggressive offbeat accents and rude dynamic contrasts. There is a typical Haydnesque joke when the laughing trill that ends the first half later breaks off for two bars of silence and then re-enters in a conspiratorial piano. After all this fooling Haydn begins the pastoral trio with a more subtle joke, feinting at D minor before opting for a more remote key, B flat major. While the finale's main theme, announced over a rustic drone, evoked 'Live cod!' to early London audiences, its origin has also been traced to a Croatian folk tune. Offsetting the swashbuckling energy is a yearning contrasting theme in sustained notes, of a kind unique in Haydn's finales. This melody reappears near the end of the development, where it seems to become hypnotized. Then, with a breathtaking harmonic sideslip, the recapitulation takes us unawares—perhaps the subtlest transition in all Haydn, at once witty and poignant. True to form, the composer continues to mine the potential of the opening folk tune, right through to an incandescent coda which Brahms—a fervent champion of Haydn's music—was to remember in the finale of his own D major symphony, No 2. ---Richard Wigmore, hyperion-records.co.uk

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