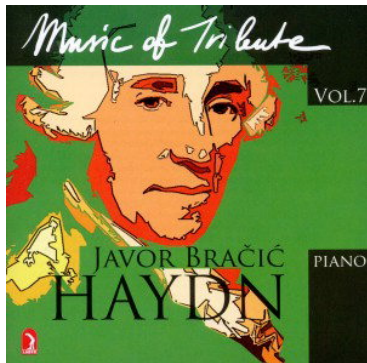


MUSIC OF TRIBUTE—HAYDN • Javor Bračić (pn) • LABOR RECORDS 7088 (64:29)

HAYDN Piano Sonatas: in D, Hob XVI:42; in G, Hob XVI:40; in C, XVI:50. HAHN Theme and Variations on Haydn's Name. RAVEL Menuet. D'INDY Menuet on Haydn's Name, op. 65. DEBUSSY Hommage à Haydn. D. KEMPF Sonatine, "Hommage à Haydn. G. BENJAMIN Meditation on Haydn's Name. DUKAS Prélude Élégiacque. HOCHSTEIN Capricietto, or "A 'Sauschneider' Sketch"



Here is Volume 7 in a fascinating series of discs dedicated to presenting works written in tribute to various composers either by their close contemporaries or by their latter day fellow counterparts. It's the first release in this series to come to my attention, but I see from the *Fanfare* archive that three earlier volumes were reviewed in previous issues. James Miller covered Volume 1, a Villa-Lobos tribute in 25:4; Peter Burwasser, Volume 2, a tribute to Debussy in 25:5; and Steven Ritter, Volume 5, a Bach tribute in 32:3. Volumes 3, 4, and 6 do not appear to have been reviewed, but for the curious, they are tributes to Fauré (3), Scarlatti (4), and Berg (6).

I must admit that when I think of references to Haydn in other composers' works, the most obvious and famous one that comes to mind is Brahms's *Variations on a Theme by Haydn* which, ironically, as we now know, the theme Brahms thought was by Haydn turned out to be by someone else, most likely Pleyel. Nor would I have imagined that so many composers paid tribute to Haydn by writing works based on the letters of his name or by composing pieces that take their cue from Haydn's style and/or an actual musical quote from one of his works.

There's so much that's intriguing about this disc, I hardly know where to begin. Perhaps the logical place is with the musical substitution cipher that represents Haydn's name. Everyone knows the Bach cipher: B = B♭, A = A, C = C, H = B♭. That one's easy, as are similar ones used by Schumann and Shostakovich. Technically, it's not even a substitution cipher, for the letters representing the musical notes B♭-A-C-B♭ actually spell B-A-C-H in German. The Haydn conversion, however, is truly a substitution cipher, apparently a secret code that has yet to be cracked—someone, call the CIA.

The musical representation of "HAYDN" is B-A-D-D-G. The first two letters are easily accounted for, as is the fourth letter: the "H," as we already know, is B♭, the "A" is A, and the second "D" is D. But no one seems to know how the first "D" and the final "G" came to represent the letters Y and N. And yet, this cipher has apparently been around since at least 1909 when Jules Écorcheville, the French musicologist and editor and publisher of the *Revue musicale de la Société*, commissioned a number of composers to write piano pieces based on the B-A-D-D-G motive in commemoration of the centenary of Haydn's death. The reason

this is significant is that of the six French composers Écorcheville commissioned, five of them—Debussy, Ravel, Dukas, D'Indy, and Hahn—are represented on this disc by the B-A-D-D-G pieces they wrote.

Not to be outdone by the French, in 1982, the BBC commissioned six British composers to do the same thing to mark the 250th anniversary of Haydn's birth. One of those composers, George Benjamin, is likewise represented on the disc by his B-A-D-D-G piece, *Meditation on Haydn's Name*.

That leaves composer Davorin Kempf (b. 1947) and composer Wolfgang Hochstein (b. 1959). Just a few issues back, I reviewed a CD of works by Croat composer Dora Pejačević, noting that before receiving that release I couldn't have named a single Croatian composer. Well now, with Kempf, I can name two. His *Sonatine*, subtitled, "Hommage à Haydn," is not only the most modernistic piece on the disc but the one that's least linked to Haydn in any discernible way. It's not based on the Haydn name cipher or on a quoted theme from any of his works.

Perhaps the best way to describe the tenuous connection is to say that Kempf's *Sonatine* is to Haydn what Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* is to Haydn and Mozart, though even that analogy requires a stretch of the imagination. Prokofiev may have introduced melodic and harmonic elements into his piece that would have cocked 18th-century wigs askew, but one recognizes in it the general outlines, contours, and mock style of a classical symphony. It's hard to make a similar claim for Kempf's *Sonatine*. One is not likely to hear in it anything other than an extremely modern, atonal work filled with tone clusters and percussive keyboard effects.

To the extent that there's any Haydn association it's to be found in the formal aspects of the piece and its claimed tonal relationships. The first movement, so Eric Salzman's program notes tell us, is an actual sonata-allegro form in which a first theme in C modulates to a second theme in the dominant, G, and then restates the second theme in the tonic, C, in the recapitulation. That may well be, but without reference to the score, and absent perfect pitch, it's impossible to hear this in such a disorienting melee of notes. Besides, even if you could hear it, sonata-allegro form was neither Haydn's sole property nor the fundamental feature that defined his style and made his music sound different from, say, that of Beethoven who also wrote in sonata-allegro form. Taken on its own, Kempf's piece may grow on the listener with repeated hearings, but insofar as the "Haydn" motif of this disc is concerned, Kempf's *Sonatine* has little cred.

Finally, we come to Wolfgang Hochstein, a German composer, organist, conductor, and musicologist based in Hamburg and specializing in the music of the 18th-century. His *Capricietto*, or "A 'Sauschneider' Sketch" is the one piece on the disc alluded to above that draws upon an actual musical quote from one of Haydn's works, namely, the Capriccio in G Major, Hob XVII:1, which, in turn, quoted a vulgar Viennese drinking song of the period, *Acht Sauschneider müssen seyn*, which roughly translates as "It takes eight men to castrate a boar." Hochstein's *Capricietto* lasts only four minutes, but it will have you rolling on the floor laughing. It's an absolute delight in the way it starts off sounding exactly like something by Haydn and then proceeds to subject the theme to a veritable kaleidoscope of musical styles and techniques.

In between all of these Haydn tribute pieces, of course, are interspersed three actual Haydn sonatas, played stylishly by the album's Croatian pianist, Javor Bračić. He's a graduate of New York's Mannes College of Music and a student in master classes given by Jerome Lowenthal and Richard Goode. He has partnered with the Hagen and Orion Quartets, and concertized globally.

This is a well thought-out collection in which Bračić finds the ideal voice for each of the pieces and plays them with genuine feeling and, where called for, a degree of impish irreverence. Aside from the Kempf *Sonatine*, which some may appreciate more than I do, this is a thoroughly enjoyable and thoroughly recommendable release.

—Jerry Dubins, *Fanfare Magazine*