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BACH | HAYDN | BEETHOVEN

***CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH (1714-1788):** Symphony in F major, Wq.183/3

***JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809):** Symphony No. 39 in G minor, Hob. I : 3 9

***LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827):** Symphony No. 1 in C major, Op. 21

THE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA OF THE ACADEMY OF MUSIC IN GDANSK

Guest performance:

STUDENTS OF THE ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND THEATER IN TALLINN
AND HOCHSCHULE FÜR MUSIK UND THEATER IN ROSTOCK

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Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach composed his symphonies under the most external circumstances, which occurred rather seldom. The fact that Bach wrote 18 symphonies in total is a result of the general practice of the epoch, i.e. – composing a few at a time. The earliest symphonies date from Bach's time in Berlin, the latter from this group, G major, Wq 180, was composed around 1758. Bach was clearly influenced by Italian music, which can be seen both in the three-movement design of the symphonies and in the treatment of the strings (a pair of violins constitutes a single sound layer, whereas the violas and the cellos lead the bass line). Subsequently, the composer added oboes and horns, however, apart from the tone colour, they do not bring many new qualities. The situation is completely different in the case of the Hamburg Symphony in F major, Wq 183/3, that belongs to the group of four *Orchestral Symphonies with Twelve Obligato Parts* composed for the commission of an unidentified patron between 1775-76. Here the use of horns, oboes, bassoons and violas was thoroughly reflective. Contrary to what the title suggests, we do not face distinctly separate voices playing at the same time, but rather modern instrumentation. The tone colours of the instruments are used in order to emphasize the expression of the phrases, they melt with each other, thus creating new qualities resulting exactly from the consonance. Bach sounds here both modern – he naturally employs all the achievements of the Mannheim School, including entrusting the second theme of the first movement to the winds – and old-fashioned. The three-movement arrangement still prevails, and all the movements are performed *attacca* like in an Italian opera sinfonia characteristic for the 30s. The first movement is not maintained in the sonata form.

The aforementioned was written from the perspective of a historian. We know how the development of the classical symphony occurred and in the work of Bach we do not perceive almost any sign of the mainstream. However, the outstanding values of the masterpiece oblige us to take the individual style perspective. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach never opted for broad tonal areas, nor for a conflict between two themes of different expression. In *allegro* of a very individualized form (closest to the ABA form with a coda, where the B section mirrors the A section, only in another key) Baroque motivic development is substituted by a typical technique for Carl Philipp Emanuel, namely "tonal development" (subsequent portions of melodic material appear in various keys, when they are repeated, they are repeated in a different key), which excludes the creation of tonal areas, as the key is always an exclusively local phenomenon. The dark and expressive (resembling the sensitive style – *empfindsamer Stil*) slow movement, shrouded in dark tone colour of the dialogue between violas and cellos is like Bach's musical signature. The dynamic finale employs to the maximum the achievements of both the Berlin and Mannheim School, and above all, the experiences of Bach as a harpsichord virtuoso, a soloist in the concerts with orchestra who knew how to impress the audience. Despite outstanding pedagogical abilities, Bach did not create any school of composers. Therefore, the formal ideas of the composer remained his own property and did not become a part of the contemporary musical language. Due to the same reason, for the ears of a present listener the music sounds fresh and modern. It is surprising, moving and playful. Joseph Haydn's Symphony in G minor Hob.I/39 precedes Bach's by ten years. It belongs to the mainstream of the genre and comprises four parts with the third being a minuet. Both the minor key and the agitated expression of the piece (traditionally the name attributed to it is *La passione*) indicate that it should be included in the trend initiated by Christoph Willibald Gluck with the ballet *Don Juan* that premiered in 1761. Until 1780 the symphonies in minor keys with agitated, often syncopated rhythms were written by a few composers, such as Johann Christian Bach or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Following this date, this tendency in the symphony expired from one day to the next: there was the return of major keys, of beautiful, bright, wide outlined themes, of vivid, however airy, rhythm. *Sturm und Drang*, a German literary movement, which name was tried to be transferred to music, was created in the time when the symphonies in minor keys were in the decline phase, and the idea of the literary movement, actually indistinguishable from the Romanticism (with its cult of an artist as an outstanding individual that is above the society and with unlimited rights to break the rules and conventions) does not fit into the 18th century uniform of a musician and his aristocratic patron. If it be so, the agitation in literature was created under the influence of music and it is in music where the roots of *Sturm und Drang* are – at least a few years earlier than in the literary art.

The symphony *La passione* is sometimes compared with two G-minor symphonies by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. All three of them bear similarities in the expression, their *concitato* character, the tone colour resulting from the use of the lowest empty string of the violin (G) and the inability to use the highest empty string (E). The violin in G minor is a dark instrument and so is the tone colour of the orchestra based on its sound. Only in the interwar period did they attribute to the key of G minor a special role. It was considered to be an expression of a "Romantic crisis" of not only a given author, but the whole generation! The "G-minor mania" reached its peak just after World War II, when each composer who was lucky enough to create a symphony in this key was immediately promoted in the musicological hierarchy: such composers as Vanhal and Koželuh started being appreciated. In order to show how far this spree went, we can see the example of the rocketing career of Pierre van Maldere, whose Symphony in G minor dating back to 1776 put him for

a short time in the mainstream of music history.

In the case of Haydn it would be difficult to speak about Romantic crisis. He was comfortable in the Esterházy uniform, he gained a stable professional standing, the economic problems did not concern him. He would be considered mad if he turned into a revolutionary. In addition to that, Haydn was free to choose what he wanted to compose and how he wanted to do this. The Symphony in G minor is an expression of this creative freedom. It is an experiment with the minor mode and a very successful one. As far as the instrumentation is concerned, it is the four horns that draw the attention: a pair of each in B-flat and G. This unusual pairing of the instruments enabled the precise dating of the composition to 1765, as only then did Haydn have four musicians who played the horn.

The introductory *allegro* is maintained in the sonata form thrown on the paper as if Haydn was in a hurry. The whole movement comprises only 115 bars. The initial motive, common for the tonic and the secondary theme, amazes with the rhythmic invention. However, it is not a monothematic form, as the continuation is always completely different; the crucial change of keys cannot go unnoticed as well: G minor and B flat major. The richness of varied articulation overlaps the stable movement of quavers with a rhythmical counterpoint consisting of changeable accents that decide the restless, astir and stimulated character of not only this motive, but the whole first movement of the symphony. The second movement brings relief. It is maintained in the galant style, gracious and delicate, tenderly caressing the ear and not provoking violent nor hurtful feelings. It is as if it were extracted from one of the lute concertos of Karl Kohaut, popular at that time in Vienna. The minuet following this movement is a model example of this dance, including entrusting the Trio to the winds: a pair of oboes and horns. In the end, Haydn returns to the agitated style. *Presto* in G minor is maintained in the sonata form, the first theme employs huge jumps in the violins, the winds are perfectly used and the reduction of the orchestra to the violin duo at the beginning of the development is a brilliant instrumentation move.

After the extravagancies of the 60s and the 70s, Haydn turned to the beauty, goodness, and truth. The art was not to be a reflection of the interior experiences of the author, but the universal ideas towards which both the composer and his audience should strive. The perfect, symmetrical edifice of classical music was created. Haydn himself composed his best symphonies exactly in the mature style, reigned by moderation and proportion. The London symphonies are such a perfect crowning achievement of his work that it would be difficult to add to them something new. At least such was Ludwig van Beethoven's conviction. He was already a composer of a certain reputation: He wrote cantatas, piano music, including two concertos, great chamber music (string trios), but until the end of the 18th century he did not venture to compose the genres brought to perfection by Haydn: the string quartet and the symphony. Therefore, Beethoven created his first symphony as a mature, 30-year-old man, when his experience with all other music genres gave him some self-confidence; such an approach would not be strange to Brahms, who in turn would feel his work as an unseemly continuation of Beethoven's and would wait with his first symphony even longer – he would show it to the world as a 40-year-old man. In order to understand the importance of this decision, we have to realize that at this age Mozart had already composed all his symphonies, except for the ultimate triad.

The first sketches of the Symphony in C major date to 1795, but the lack of belief in his own abilities caused Beethoven halted and abandoned the work. In 1800, the last year of the 18th century, he used the sketches to compose the finale, whereas he rewrote the first three parts in a single creative act. After the April premiere of the symphony, the critics praised the composition, the richness of ideas and the diligently thought-out form. After a few years, in 1806, already knowing the context of subsequent works of Beethoven in this genre, the composer was mentioned in one breath with Haydn and Mozart. It is funny enough considering the fact that in 1800 there was a critic who called the Symphony No.1 "a disgusting caricature of Haydn." However, he was a malicious person, remaining in the minority.

Nowadays we consider the Symphony No.1 as a "classical," "Haydn-like" one. From the perspective of the later symphonies it is, without a doubt, a justified view. In order to understand the innovation of Beethoven we have to experience the reality of the epoch. The instrumentation makes use of abundantly set winds (pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, trumpets and horns) that create independent sound blocks, often used antithetically towards the strings. Indeed, since Johann Stamitz's times, for half a century, a wind instrument often introduced the second theme. It used to be a single melodic line composed for a flute or an oboe, supported by a solid sound of the strings. Beethoven, however, uses the wind group as a sound block, as an autonomous creation with its own harmonic base, melody and middle voices. It was such a radical move that even a kind critic accused the composer of not composing a symphony! A symphony is a piece for orchestra (that is, for the strings and winds), and not for a harmony (that was a common denomination of the wind ensemble in the 18th century). Beethoven's talent quickly changed the perception of the orchestra. In the further development of symphonic music there was a coherent emancipation of other groups: first the brass, then also the percussion.

The slow introduction prepares the audience for the entrance of the first movement of the symphony, at the same time not preparing it at all. Beethoven deceives the public, constantly suggesting different keys (F major and G major) than the one in which the symphony is composed (C major). Indeed, in order to understand this solution introduced by Beethoven, one has to know the harmony and to have a trained ear. One who simply lets himself get carried away by the music will not see anything out of the ordinary in the introduction. And the musicians indeed appreciated Beethoven's joke, at least those whose opinions were valuable to him, because soon he identically shaped the introduction to *The Creatures of Prometheus* and even planned to repeat this move in the Symphony No.3 called "Heroic" that in fact is the "Promethean" one (as it is known, he eventually dropped this idea).

Beethoven used the sonata form three times: in the extreme movements and in the "slow" movement. The finale is also preceded with a slow joke-like introduction: the basis of the material is the ascending scale performed by the violin - the impression of the introduction is that the violinists... learn the scale. The use of inverted commas for "slow" movement is justified, as *andante con moto*, in 3/8, bears a metronome marking instructed by the composer himself: 120 to the quaver. Andante is a denomination of expression, it concerns the dancing elegance, the effect that is forced by apparently imitating appearances of the main melody and its refined counterpoint in the shape of innovative melody in the recapitulation. The minuet is totally deprived of the dancing element and it was supposedly named like that for the purposes of the editor, as it is a full-blooded Beethoven scherzo, dynamic, motoric, full of sforzatos and displaced accents.

At the end of the 18th century, Beethoven paid tribute to his predecessors, who brought the symphony to the classical perfection. In the upcoming 19th century Ludwig van Beethoven would set the symphony on new tracks and determine the direction of development of this genre that would become a point of reference for all the symphonists from Brahms to Mahler.

Krzysztof Komarnicki