

Franz Xaver DUSSEK Four Symphonies

Helsinki Baroque Orchestra Aapo Häkkinen



Franz Xaver Dussek (1731–1799) Four Symphonies

Franz Xaver Dussek (František Xaver Dušek) was one of a number of eighteenth-century composers of Bohemian birth who excelled in the composition of symphonies. Most of these composers sought employment outside Bohemia, among them Johann Stamitz and Johann Baptist Wanhal, but Dussek, who was also a highly respected pianist and teacher, spent the latter part of his career in Prague.

The son of a peasant, Dussek revealed his musical gifts at a very early age and was fortunate to come to the attention of Count Johann Spork whose patronage enabled him to attend the Jesuit Gymnasium at Hradec Králové. He undertook further musical studies in Prague with Habermann and completed his training in Vienna with the harpsichord virtuoso and court composer, Georg Christoph Wagenseil, Wagenseil was an influential figure in Viennese music and numbered among his pupils Leopold Hofmann and Joseph Anton Steffan, both of whom achieved great success as performers, teachers and composers. In addition to taking keyboard lessons with Wagenseil, Dussek probably studied counterpoint and composition with him. Little or nothing is known of his activities in Vienna at this time, but as he gained in experience he may have begun to perform (or had his works performed) in private concerts in the houses of the nobility. By about 1770 Dussek was back in Prague and already well established as a composer and teacher.

Judging from the current distribution of manuscript copies of his works, Dussek seems to have had a close professional association with the orchestras of Counts Pachta and Clam Gallas, the latter a relation by marriage of his early patron, Count Spork. The presence of the manuscripts in these collections does not necessarily prove that Dussek enjoyed the direct patronage of these two wealthy noblemen but it is likely that some of the works were written on commission. Dussek enjoyed an impressive reputation as a teacher and among his most important pupils were Leopold Kozeluch, Jan Vitásek and Vincenc Mašek. His wife Josepha, a celebrated soprano, was also a former pupil and it was through her close family connections with Salzburg that the Dusseks became very

friendly with Mozart, Leopold Mozart, ever watchful for signs of incipient rebellion in his brilliant son, suspected their influence in Wolfgang's growing determination to escape from the stifling musical and intellectual environment of Salzburg. Dussek's obvious success as a freelance virtuoso, composer and teacher working in Prague and Vienna must have made a strong impression on him The Dusseks were probably instrumental in persuading Mozart to visit Prague to witness the phenomenal success of the local production of Le nozze di Figaro. In October 1787 he completed the composition of Don Giovanni in the charming Villa Bertramka at Smíchov, the Dusseks' summer residence, and he probably wrote much of La clemenza di Tito there in September 1791. Dussek's home was an important centre of musical activity and the composer himself, according to his obituary in the Leipziger Allgemeine Zeitung, afforded visiting virtuosi a warm welcome and used his influence to introduce them to leading members of the nobility.

Like most composers of his generation. Dussek wrote the majority of his symphonies during the 1760s and 1770s. The middle decades of the eighteenth century were a period of enormous economic vitality in the Habsburg dominions and wealthy aristocratic families, many of whom maintained sizeable musical establishments and vied with each other to present concerts of orchestral music. More often than not the music was composed especially for the occasion by the house Kapellmeister or was commissioned from prominent freelance composers such as Dussek and Wanhal. When economic conditions began to deteriorate towards the end of the 1770s the market for new orchestral music began to dwindle. Even Wanhal, that most inventive, prolific and popular composer of symphonies, abandoned the genre by 1778 in order to concentrate on writing music better suited to the demands of the changing economic landscape.

Although Dussek's symphonies and string quartets were composed before the emergence of the fully-fledged classical style in the 1780s, they exhibit a number of quite progressive stylistic tendencies. The quartets in particular

have attracted a good deal of scholarly attention since the earliest of them were written more or less contemporaneously with Haydn's first works in the genre. In spite of their strong local reputation his compositions do not seem to have been disseminated very widely. The Breitkopf Catalogue, a generally reliable indicator of a composer's popularity, contains very few Dussek works. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the extant copies of his works are preserved in and around Prague. The paucity of copies and the general lack of external corroborative evidence make it a very difficult matter to authenticate many of his works let alone establish reliable composition dates for them. With one exception, the four symphonies featured on this recording are no different.

The opening work on the recording, Sinfonia G4, is preserved in a single set of manuscript parts in the Narodní Muzeum in Prague. These parts formerly belonged to the orchestra of Count Pachta and the wrapper records either the acquisition date or performance date "[?] / 5 1763" thus establishing a convenient terminus ante guem for the work. The parts are sloppily copied and unattractive in appearance. There are numerous careless slips (only some of which have been corrected) and inconsistencies in notation that collectively point to this source not being the work of a professional copyist. Given its relatively early date it is possible that Dussek composed Sinfonia G4 while still living in Vienna. It bears some of the hallmarks of the mid-century Viennese symphony but there are other features that are relatively uncommon. The truncated recapitulation in the first movement (from which the principal theme and transition material are omitted) is unusual although it is encountered occasionally in the symphonies of Dussek's fellow Wagenseil pupil, Leopold Hofmann. The use of divisi violas throughout the entire symphony is also atypical of the Viennese symphony although not without precedent. It lends richness to the middle register of the orchestra and also serves as an effective foil for the obbligato oboes in the outer movements.

The remaining works on the recording share the same provenance – the music library of Count Clam Gallas – and unfortunately cannot be dated. Only one of the symphonies (*Bb3*) carries a number on the wrapper ("No. 8") and it unclear whether this represents a catalogue number

or an acquisition number. Where the other unnumbered works sit in relation to it is equally uncertain although there are stylistic reasons to suspect that Sinfonia Bh2 another compact three-movement work, may have been composed at an earlier date but possibly after G4. The case for Sinfonia A3 is complicated by the fact that although it is cast in three movements it has a slow (Largo maestoso) introduction to the first movement. The omission of the Minuet & Trio does not in any way imply that the work is early or primitive since three-movement symphonies continued to be written alongside four-movement works until comparatively late in the century. It might even reflect a local preference for this type of work since Mozart's 'Praque' Symphony K.504, composed in late 1786, is also written in three movements with a slow introduction. Nonetheless, the smaller scale of the work is perhaps an argument for favouring an early composition date for it.

Dussek is not generally numbered among the Viennese symphonists since most of his career was spent in Prague. Nonetheless, it is against the background of works composed by close contemporaries such as Dittersdorf, Wanhal and Hofmann that his works should be measured. Dussek's symphonies display all of the stylistic and structural characteristics of the mid-eighteenth-century Viennese symphony, a reflection not only of his own professional training and experience in that city but also of the cultural hegemony inevitably imposed by Vienna throughout much of the Habsburg territories. In the eighteenth century, except in very rare and self-conscious expressions, there was no great national stylistic divide between Bohemia and Austria.

The symphonies of Dussek compare very favourably with those of his better-known Viennese contemporaries. He was a skilful composer, an efficient and effective orchestrator and more than capable of writing attractive, well-crafted works as these four symphonies demonstrate. His preoccupation with achieving a high degree of musical unity – a characteristic he shares with Ordonez – can be seen in the way in which he incorporates earlier motivic material in later themes. The comparatively long development sections are not simply phases of modulatory extension; important thematic material from the exposition is developed and both transitional figures and secondary

themes are subjected to the same developmental processes. Dussek varies his recapitulations by employing both the full (double return) and truncated variant which omits the principal theme. He even employs a slow introduction on occasion (a technique pioneered by Hofmann) but as is generally the case during this period, he does not make an obvious thematic connection between it and the ensuing Allegro.

The slow movements also resemble those of Dussek's Viennese contemporaries. The inclusion of wind instruments in some symphonies (on this recording, in Sinfonia Bb2) is a progressive tendency, but the instruments are rarely assigned an important thematic role. The phrase morphology of Dussek's slow movements firmly roots them in the mid-century style of Hofmann, Dittersdorf and Wanhal. The Minuet & Trio movements, when present, are generally enterprising and attractive, with particularly

charming Trios sections in which the wind instruments feature more prominently. The fast, sonata-form finales are lighter in character than the first movements but employ most of the same structural devices.

It is a mystery why these lovely, spirited symphonies did not reach a wider public in the eighteenth century. The obvious conclusion to draw is that patrons such as Clam Gallas and Pachta put restrictions on the composer's freedom to distribute his works and enforced it with some strictness. This, however, implies a rather different contractual arrangement for Dussek than, for example, for Wanhal, who is also believed to have written music for Clam Gallas but whose works circulated throughout Europe. Whatever the reason, it is pleasing to see a composer of such obvious accomplishment emerge from the shadows of history.

Allan Badley

The orchestral parts and scores of the following works are available from:

www.artaria.com



The sources upon which the editions used in this recording have been made are:

Sinfonia in G major (Altner G4)

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE098 Prague, Narodní Muzeum – Pachta XXII C 159

Sinfonia in B flat major (Altner Bb2)

Edited by Allan Badley – Artaria Editions AE102

Sinfonia in A major (Altner A3)

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE099 Prague, Narodní Muzeum – Clam Gallas XLII E 356

Sinfonia in B flat major (Altner Bb3)

Edited by Allan Badley – Artaria Editions AE075 Prague, Narodní Muzeum – Clam Gallas XLII E 132 Prague, Narodní Muzeum – Clam Gallas XLII E 131

Aapo Häkkinen

Aapo Häkkinen began his musical education as a chorister at Helsinki Cathedral. He took up the harpsichord at the age of thirteen, studying with Elina Mustonen at the Sibelius Academy. He studied with Bob van Asperen at the Amsterdam Sweelinck Conservatory, and with Pierre Hantaï in Paris. He was also fortunate to enjoy the generous guidance and encouragement of Gustav Leonhardt. In 1998 he won second prize at the Bruges Harpsichord Competition. He was also awarded the NDR special prize for his interpretations of Italian music. Since then, he has appeared as soloist and conductor in most European countries, in Israel, in the United States and in Mexico. He has recorded for the Aeolus, Alba, Avie, Cantus, Deux-Elles and Naxos labels. Besides the harpsichord, he regularly performs on the organ and on the clavichord. He teaches at the Sibelius Academy and at international master-classes.



Helsinki Baroque Orchestra

Founded in 1997, the Helsinki Baroque Orchestra offers audiences early music in a fresh, distinctive presentation. The orchestra's concerts and recordings, while frequently including first modern performances of unpublished, undiscovered or reconstructed masterpieces, also shed unexpected and often controversial new light on more familiar works. Appo Häkkinen started out as Artistic Director of the Helsinki Baroque Orchestra in 2003, and in 2009 Riccardo Minasi took the position of Associate Director. Recent engagements have included appearances at the London Wigmore Hall, the Cologne Philharmonie, the Berlin Konzerthaus and the Washington Library of Congress, and at the Bruges, Bayreuth, Bremen, Brühl, Dresden, Eisenach, Halle, Göttingen, Köthen, Schwetzingen, Madrid, Santiago de Compostela, Seville, Bolzano, Palermo, Brežice, Zagreb, Varaždin, Riga, Stockholm and Jerusalem festivals. Soloists and guest directors have included Franco Fagioli, Reinhard Goebel, Monica Groop, Pierre Hantaï, Erich Höbarth, Vesselina Kasarova, María Cristina Kiehr, Topi Lehtípuu, Yulia Lezhneva, Viktoria Mullova, Enrico Onofri, Skip Sempé and Nathalie Stutzmann. www.hebo.fi

Oboe: Jasu Moisio, Veli-Pekka Portaankorva • Bassoon: Jani Sunnarborg • Horn: Tommi Viertonen, Tommi Hyytinen Violin I: Riccardo Minasi, Aira Maria Lehtipuu, Irma Niskanen, Tuomo Suni

Violin II: Minna Kangas, Tiina Aho-Erola, Dora Asterstad • Viola: Antto Vanhala, John Ma

Cello: Heidi Peltoniemi, Louna Hosia • Double bass: Maria Vahervuo • Fortepiano: Aapo Häkkinen



Mozart's friend Franz Xaver Dussek (in whose summer villa he completed *Don Giovanni*) was a pianist, celebrated teacher and the leading composer of instrumental music in Prague. Like his compatriot Wanhal, Dussek completed his musical training in Vienna and, unsurprisingly, his works reflect the strong influence of composers such as Hofmann, Haydn and Dittersdorf. Dussek's symphonies, most of which appear to have been composed in the 1760s and 1770s, are works of great charm and vivacity, cleverly orchestrated and full of striking melodic ideas as this recording amply demonstrates.



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Sinfonia in G major		Sinfonia in A major	
(Altner G4)	9:54	(Altner A3)	11:16
1 Allegro	4:28	7 Largo maestoso – Allegro	4:08
2 Andante	3:04	8 Andante	4:38
3 Presto	2:14	9 Allegro assai	2:23
Sinfonia in B flat major		Sinfonia in B flat major	
(Altner Bb2)	10:53	(Altner Bb3)	21:11
4 Allegro con spirito	4:18	10 Allegro e vivo	6:05
5 Andante	3:17	11 Andante	4:48
6 Allegro assai	3:12	12 Minuetto e Trio	3:46
		13 Allegro assai	6:25

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Producer & Engineer: Sean Lewis • Publisher: Artaria Editions • Booklet notes: Allan Badley
Cover painting: Dussek's Prague villa, *Bertramka* by Adolf Kirning, 1887
(Karásek Gallery, Sienhennersdorf, Germany)