

DISCOVERY

From Crate to Concert Hall

Haydn, waiting in line at the supermarket, an inherited crate, and a premiere in England. All in all they add up to a true story that shows how curiosity, chance, and the joy of discovery can lead to a **Haydn symphony** in an old guise being heard by new ears. An investigation.

By Christoph Vratz

Translated by Rebecca Davies Wilson



Just running a couple of quick errands at the shop around the corner. Stocking up on some necessities. That's what Veronika Lindenmayr headed out to do in her new home, Cologne. Everything was still new to her: the office, the job, the apartment, the people. The line at the supermarket was long; next to her stood a woman who, like her, had a bottle of wine in her cart. Impulsively, Lindenmayr spoke to her and by the time she had reached the cash register, she was spontaneously inviting the stranger over for a glass of wine. Today she calls Tordes Tesmer her friend, the first one she made in Cologne.

"After we met, she [Tesmer] invited me over to her house to eat and when we were finished, she said, 'I have something here for you.'" Tesmer pulled out a crate that had been left to her by a centenarian and cofounder of a Cologne music foundation. The crate was overflowing with sheet music. Tordes Tesmer, herself unfamiliar with the material, asked her new friend for advice. Veronika Lindenmayr went through the crate and found sheet music for individual vocal parts from the

time of National Socialism, multiple editions of folksongs—and a bound book that looked out of place: “Horizontally-bound, made of old paper, the printing plate still recognizable; and noted on the back was its value in a currency that had been long abolished by the 1850s.” The edition had cost “two thalers and ten silver pennies.”

The content: symphonies by Joseph Haydn, arranged for piano. Now Lindenmayr’s curiosity was finally peaked, especially as a promoter of different classical music labels. Admittedly, she’d gone down this road so many times before—but it had never been like this. “I had no idea that there was a piano transcription of Haydn’s symphonies. Mozart and Beethoven yes, but Haydn?” She called up the pianist Ivan Ilić and asked him to inspect their find more thoroughly.

The title page reads: “J. Haydn’s Symphonies for Pianoforte, arranged by K.D. Stegmann. N°XIX [No. 19] Bonn chez Simrock.” – Karl David Stegmann was born in 1751 in Dresden, and he was, like the later [Albert] Lortzing, an all-around musician: an organ student, actor, instrumentalist, and singer. Hamburg, Danzig, Königsberg, Frankfurt—Stegmann lived a protean life. In 1789 he sang in Mainz as the title role in the first German-speaking performance of “Don Giovanni.” He composed operas in the still young genre of *Singspiels* and acted in all of them. In 1811 he withdrew from the stage and moved to Bonn. He became friends with the publisher Simrock; perhaps this gave Stegmann the idea to start arranging music for the piano: He transcribed string quintets by Mozart and the Adagio of one of the String quartets (for piano four hands). There is also an transcription from the “Magic Flute” (Mozart and Stegmann were both Freemasons), and eventually Beethoven’s String Trios Opus 9 and even a series of symphonies by Joseph Haydn.

“Of course I was curious about what was behind it,” said Ivan Ilić, who we met with at Schoke Piano-House in Cologne. “We knew about Franz Liszt’s piano transcription of Beethoven’s symphonies, how they weren’t intended for study purposes, but rather for the concert hall. And so I wanted to know how to classify these Haydn transcriptions.”

The first thing one notices is that Stegmann’s Symphony No. 19, which appears first in the volume, is not Haydn’s No. 19—which raises the question of where Stegmann’s symphonies numbered 1-18 are. Obviously there must have been two volumes. In the catalogue of the British Library in London there is a volume with Stegmann arrangements, recorded with the note “circa 1814”. And the catalogue in Bonn’s Beethoven-House mentions two printed and more handwritten arranged collections of sheet music. The evidence of a planned collection of over 31 arranged symphonies—greater than any before —originates in the year 1845. By then Stegmann was long dead. He died on May 27, 1826 in Bonn.

A transcription of Haydn’s Symphony No. 44 especially appealed to Ivan Ilić. “Stegmann was quite loyal to the original,” he asserts, playing excerpts from the Finale. It throbs and vibrates, one recognizes Haydn, the *tutti* with all its colour, while at the same time giving a little wink. “It’s very modestly notated, there are

hardly any performance indications, little dynamic markings, and nothing for the pedal.” The last is perhaps because Stegmann was a successful harpsichordist and he would have had the opportunity to learn, over the years, to trust the possibilities of the modern fortepiano. But even that is mere speculation.

This E-minor symphony dates from 1770/71 and is rather sparse when compared to Haydn’s later works: two oboes and horns, along with the strings and, as needed, a bassoon in order to help ground the bass line. “The fact that the instrumentation of this time period wasn’t yet so lush makes transcription easier, of course, especially for two hand piano. You can see how the transcription problems can multiply in later periods with Liszt, who had to arrange Beethoven’s Ninth in two versions: for two and for four hands.”

The third movement in particular—the Adagio, which would later be called the “Mourning Symphony”—is especially mesmerizing to Ilić. “It actually sounds like it was composed for piano,” he says and plays the first theme in the right hand, which is flanked by the left with a subtle bass line. For anyone who is unfamiliar, it could seem like this music originally came from one of Haydn’s Sonatas, especially when the accompanying voices accelerate in gentle waves, later in the piece. **Taken on its own, the repeated notes, the nuances, the sudden mood swings—that’s typical Haydn.** *(Highlighted quote from the article)*

Ilić flips through the pages, pausing here and there as if wanting to caress each one. “Because of their age, these pages have an aura that, with the thicker paper and even the horizontal format, just isn’t very common today. In some places it makes it easier to read and even to turn the pages.” Meanwhile, Veronika Lindenmayr and Tordes Tesmer are sitting a ways away from the piano. Even they have so far only been able to listen to fragments of this music. Indeed it is unprecedented and compelling, and “above all, anything but dry.” Put differently: one does not actually miss the orchestra. That is perhaps the most astounding thing. Despite forgoing additional effects, Stegmann has succeeded in creating a transcription which comes across as a homogenous whole and which one would not characterize as a barren arrangement. Particularly in excerpts from the Finale, where both hands play in unison, it does not sound like a skeleton of the original, but rather fits seamlessly into the dramatic context—just like the orchestral version.

As Ivan Ilić continues to pick out examples that are meant to underscore the charms of this discovery, the thought arises of how this music would sound on a forte piano, where the already quick runs can string together even faster, where the hammer mallets of the pianoforte can bring out the unadorned lines to the listening ear. At one point there is a tremolo passage, the Achilles heel of piano transcriptions: often the piano version is but a poor substitute for what string instruments are able to achieve. “In this case, the pulsation of the rhythm is conveyed throughout this tremolo without it appearing static. That is always awkward for a pianist, even later for Liszt and others.” Yet Ilić flips back to the first page to a similar excerpt where the left hand playing on its own accomplishes it

using a repeating chord progression. “Here one has to play it slower than in the final Presto. For that reason there is a much greater danger of the notes sounding static, especially since it is technically relatively easy to play. Under no circumstances is the melody to be endangered.” Here again the advantages of the modern piano return to the fore; the finely adjusted pedal playing permits an elegant mélange of primary and supporting voices, which more clearly approaches the sound of an orchestra. “That’s how I’d play it, even in concert,” Ilić says.

To him, this musical discovery belongs not just in private quarters, but also on the concert platform. Shortly after our meeting he actually dared to do just that, in England during a performance at Ludlow’s Henderson Hall. Haydn/Stegmann was flanked by two works by Beethoven. He has even already played excerpts from the transcription on several radio stations. Haydn’s symphonies for piano—a spontaneous action in the supermarket made this discovery possible. And it raises old questions once again: why in the wake of the piano arrangements of the 19th century were Haydn’s works almost completely forgotten? Where is the boundary between a pragmatic arrangement and a transcription with artistic merit? Should transcriptions like these – even when they don’t carry Liszt’s name or Liszt – belong in contemporary concert programming?

Captions:

Under the photo of the 3 people: The happy discoverers: Veronika Lindenmayr, Ivan Ilić and Tordes Tesmer

On the second page: The beginning of Haydn’s Symphony No. 91, original edition (Robbins Landon Edition), and the transcription for piano by C. D. Stegmann.

Piano Arrangements in the 19th Century

The field of piano transcription in its entirety is hard to overlook, so large the terrain, so remarkable the qualitative differences, so diverse the formats: from individual pieces, something by Schubert that was arranged for solo piano, to entire symphonies. Towering alone above this terrain is the name Franz Liszt, who arranged all nine of Beethoven’s symphonies, as well as orchestral works by Berlioz and others. With the technical demands concerned, Liszt’s arrangements stood out amongst the average masses. His arrangements belong(ed) in the concert hall without a doubt.

But the actual reason for many piano transcriptions was actually quite different: as music wasn’t yet reproducible with audio equipment, and the nearest concert couldn’t simply be reached by car or subway, arrangements served to publicize and distribute new works. As pianos became a fixture in middle class living rooms, the number of transcribers and transcriptions rose to dizzying heights. Today most of the names of the arrangers have been forgotten, though even famous composers busied themselves with this genre, like Johann Nepomuk Hummel, who arranged Mozart’s G-Minor Symphony for solo piano.

It is utterly impossible to keep track of all the opera themes that were arranged for the piano, be it in close resemblance to the original, or as free paraphrases. It is similar when it comes to arrangements for piano for four hands. Several composers transcribed their own works, sometimes as a precursor to their orchestrations, sometimes as reduction for household use, after the fact: Beethoven arranged his Great Fugue (originally written for string quartet), Mendelssohn his first symphony, Dvorak his “New World Symphony.” In the lead stands Johannes Brahms, whose piano arrangements today fill 18 CDs: the symphonies, the German Requiem, the Piano Concerto, Quartet, Serenades, Sextets—he arranged everything himself. The “Requiem” showed that for him, the transcriptions were not just practical arrangements for use at home. His main focus was—in particular while keeping an eye to the further incorporation of a choral score—to generate a complete second score that reflected the microcosmic vocal structures adequately. Brahms evolved from originally a struggling transcription artist into an arrangement specialist with his own high artistic aspirations.

The piano transcription boom lasted until the early 20th century. Gustav Mahler transcribed Bruckner’s third symphony; Bruno Walter adapted Mahler’s first and second; Arnold Schönberg transcribed overtures, some by Schubert and Rossini; Max Reger awakened new life into the Brandenburg Concertos and Bach’s orchestral suites. And Alexander Zemlinsky arranged the complete “Fidelio”, the complete “Magic Flute,” and—watch out, Haydn!—the entire score of “The Four Seasons”. The scope is truly vast and is luckily increasingly in focus, thanks to different record labels.

CD Recommendations:

Beethoven/Liszt: Symphonies; Yury Martynov; Zig Zag respectively. Alpha (until now only available in individual sets)

Berliz/Liszt: Symphony Fantastique; Roger Murano; Decca

Brahms/Brahms: Symphonies, Piano Concertos etc.; Silke-Thora Matthies, Christian Köhn; Naxos (singles available)

Haydn/Zemlinsky: The Four Seasons; Maki Namekawa, Dennis Russell Davies; Ruhr Piano Festival Edition

Mozart/Zemlinsky: The Magic Flute; Maki Namekawa, Dennis Russell Davies; Ruhr Piano Festival Edition

Bach/Reger: Brandenburg Concertos, Suites; Sontraud Speidel, Evelinde Trenkner, MDG