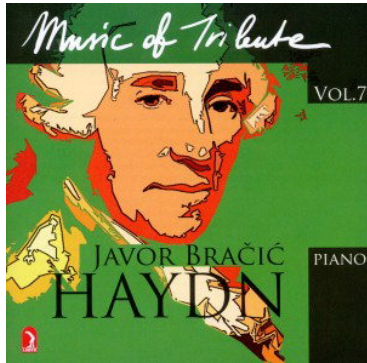


MUSIC OF TRIBUTE, Vol. 7: HAYDN • Javor Bračić (pn) • LABOR 7088 (65:30)

HAHN Theme Varié sur le nom de Haydn. RAVEL Menuet. HAYDN Sonata in D, Hob. XVI:42. Sonata in G, Hob. XVI:40. Sonata in C, Hob. XVI:50. D'INDY Menuet sur le nom de Haydn. DEBUSSY Hommage à Haydn. DAVORIN KEMPF Sonatina (Hommage à Haydn). GEORGE BENJAMIN Meditation on Haydn's name. DUKAS Prelude Élégiacque. HOCHSTEIN Capricietto.



The genesis of this unusual disc is a series of compositions from 1909, the centenary year of Haydn's death. Jules Écorcheville, a musicologist as well as editor and publisher of *Revue musicale de la Société internationale de musique*, commissioned a group of French composers to write pieces based on Haydn's last name. The H was borrowed from the German notation for B natural, but another D was arbitrarily substituted for the letter Y and a G for the N, which gave them a note sequence of BADDG. The BBC used the same series when it commissioned six British composers (three of them represented here) in 1982 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth.

Are we all confused, then? Good! I'm confused, too! Happily, the music is for the most part delightful, ranging from Hahn's surprisingly strict classical form to the airy, spacey music of George Benjamin. Perhaps most surprising among the earlier composers is the presence of Paul Dukas, who had the temerity to throw most of his compositions into a fireplace when he knew he was dying. Apparently, his beautiful *Prélude Élégiacque* was spared this indignity. Three sonatas by Haydn himself are also included, and I was pleased to see that annotator Eric Salzman agrees with me that his solo piano music has "never been as highly rated as his string quartets or symphonies." Happily, Javor Bračić's playing, especially of the D major sonata, is playful and slightly asymmetric in phrasing, which adds interest to the music.

Indeed, Bračić's piano style, largely eschewing the use of pedal, is highly appropriate for all of this music. I found myself enjoying nearly every piece, and his sequencing is both intelligent and well-contrasted. Davorin Kempf's three-movement *Sonatina* almost sounds like music from another planet. It's very good, and I'm sure it's based on the note sequence of Haydn's name, but classical in feeling it is not! Yet I liked it, a lot. I did not, however, like the Benjamin piece—it rambles and says nothing. Dukas's *Prélude Élégiacque* sounds more like Debussy than Debussy's own *Hommage à Haydn*, which is surprisingly aggressive in rhythm. The ending is particularly effective, a series of slowly diminishing bell chords. Hochstein's playful *Capricietto* begins very much in classical style, then quickly moves into whole-tone scales and other unusual melodic-harmonic constructions, but it works and is a very cool piece.

I admit being surprised to discover 22(!) other recordings of the Debussy piece, including those by such famous Debussy pianists as Gieseking, Ciccolini, and Thibaudet, not

to mention a version by Sviatoslav Richter; 38 others if the Ravel (subtract Richter and Giesecking, add the names of Casadesus, Entremont, Osborne, Queffélec, etc.); six other recordings of the Dukas piece, and two others of the d'Indy; but these appear to be the only ones of the Hahn, Kempf, Benjamin, and Hochstein. Recommended for lovers of Haydn, and those with an interest in the 1909 project.

–Lynn René Bayley, *Fanfare Magazine*