Joseph Haydn - Complete Violin Concertos (1993)

Concerto for violin and orchestra in A major, 'melk', Ohb. VIIa:3 Concerto for violin and orchestra in C major, Hob. VIIa:1 Concerto for violin, harpsichord and orchestra in F major, Hob. XVIII:6 Concerto for violin and orchestra in G major, Hob. VIIa:4 Rainer Kussmaul, violin • Robert Hill, harpsichord Amsterdam Bach Soloists Recorded on 9-12 January 1993 at the English Church, Begijnhof, Amsterdam

Haydn's three surviving violin concertos (a fourth is lost but might still resurface) were probably composed between 1765 and 1770. The music from this portion of Haydn's career has lately been subjected to a major re-evalution that's all to the good, rescuing many works from the limbo of halfhearted performances. It's especially helpful in the case of these concertos, which were composed for Haydn's lead virtuoso at Esterháza, Luigi Tomasini (one of the manuscripts even bears the note "fatto per il Luigi," "done for Luigi"). Haydn was not a skilled violinist himself, and the works are not virtuosically conceived. But he likely had input from Tomasini, and the sizable Violin Concerto in A major, Hob. 7a/3, especially benefits from the gutsy approach adopted here by Finland's Virtuosi di Kuhmo and violinist Elina Vähälä, whose playful flair makes an attractive contrast with the rather hard-edged orchestral playing (made even harder-edged by church sound whose lack of naturalness can't be disguised by the high-tech super audio multichannel recording). Vähälä, who is nothing if not photogenic, is a fine Haydn interpreter with a strong sense of the composer's humor. Sample her confident playing in the finale of the Violin Concerto in G major, Hob. 7a/4, where the violin extracts a jolly line from the orchestra's mock-weighty quasi-fugal texture at the beginning. ---James Manheim, Rovi

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