

Joseph Haydn: Horn Concerto No. 1 in D major, Hob. VIId/3 (1762)

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) completed his Horn Concerto No. 1 in D major (Hob. VIId/3) in 1762, when he was new to the Esterhazy court. The work is in three movements: Allegro in 4/4 time, Adagio in 3/4 time, and Allegro in 2/4 time. It is 14 minutes in duration, scored for solo horn with an accompaniment of 2 oboes and strings. Because of the low range writing in the Adagio, some musicologists believe the concerto was written for Thaddaus Steinmüller. Other musicologists believe it was a present for the baptism ceremony of one of the children of Joseph Leutgeb (for whom Mozart wrote his horn concertos).

When Haydn was engaged as vice kapellmeister to Prince Paul Anton Esterházy in 1761, he was put in charge of orchestral administration, among other things. One of his first hires was hornist Thaddaus Steinmüller, for whom he wrote this concerto in 1762. Although Steinmüller apparently had a wide range, he seems to have been most comfortable in the horn's lyrical upper and middle registers, and that is where most of the solo writing in this concerto hovers. The initial Allegro movement begins with a melody that ascends in firm steps over a pulsating accompaniment; this ascending figure works into every component of this subject, and can be detected in the more generic gestures of the subsidiary themes. All this is introduced by the orchestra, then taken up by the horn. In the development, interestingly enough, Haydn does send the horn down to its lower reaches a couple of times, but only for single, long-held notes. Otherwise, much of the soloist's work in this brief section involves sustaining notes and rounding them off with trills. Horn and orchestra run through all the themes in their expected sequence in the recapitulation; the soloist takes some sort of cadenza--Haydn didn't prepare one himself--between the end of the recap and the coda, which derives from the movement's secondary themes. The stately Adagio proceeds at a measured pace, the melody flowing smoothly along in the strings before being appropriated by the horn. The subject is centered mainly in the instrument's higher register, but again Haydn sends the soloist to the depths very briefly in a passage that requires good tone control but no real dexterity. The strings have a go at the melody once more, whereupon the horn returns with a highly streamlined version, all sustained notes, over the same chord sequence. There's another cadenza opportunity, and, again, a coda based on the tail end of the movement's long main theme. The concluding Allegro employs angular themes, small repeated gestures, trills, and percolating phrases for the soloist. All this goes through a rudimentary development section, then stops short for one last cadenza--this one usually a bit more brilliant and trill-laden than its predecessors, but that depends on the player and the edition used. A tiny coda rounds out the work.

Among the available CD recordings of the complete Haydn Horn Concerti, there are notable performances by Hermann Baumann (2010), Jasper de Waal (2009), and Dennis Brain (re-released in 2001).

--notes adapted from Internet sources by Stephen Larmore