

# Schnabel Reappraised

By SANFORD STELE

“FOR twenty years I have refused to be part of this destruction by preservation. . . . The coupling of the increasingly changeable man with the permanently insensitive machine is wrong. . . . My body is too weak for this process. I was close to a breakdown and almost wept when on the street alone. . . . My conscience torments me. This is the surrender to evil, treason against life, the marriage with death.”

These gloomy sentences were written approximately thirty years ago by Artur Schnabel. He had committed himself, early in 1932, to a recording project for HMV, which was to encompass Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas, the *Diabelli* Variations, the concerti, and several smaller works. These remarks, contained in a letter written during the first year of that project, are most directly reflective of his concern that recordings, by fixing interpretations in time, would deprive them of their right to continuously evolve. Beyond the specific issues that prompted it, his letter also suggests a deeply humanistic commitment; it can, in fact, be considered a fragment of a larger dialogue that Schnabel carried on most of his life, in which he upheld with all his eloquence, as a musician and as a man, the cause of personal responsibility.

Angel Records, under the aegis of its *Great Recordings of the Century* series, has recently rereleased, in a thirteen-record album, Artur Schnabel's celebrated performance of the Beethoven sonatas (GRM 4005, COLH 51-63, \$77.98, mono only). The sonatas are presented in chronological order, proceeding from one side of a record to its reverse, with none of the sonatas occupying more than a single disc. The accompanying brochure containing biographical data and analyses of the sonatas is helpful, with the exception of an essay by Eric Blom, *Interpretation in Beethoven*.

Quite beyond the fact that it is well produced, this album affords to a new generation of listeners, matured subsequent to the Victor release of the sonatas in the Fifties, an opportunity to experience Schnabel's art; it permits those familiar with the performances to reconsider them with contemporary standards.

Before turning to these records, however, we might briefly consider the mu-



—Dora Harvey, Vienna, 1933

Artur Schnabel—"upheld . . . the cause of personal responsibility."

sic they serve. A single concept appears to prevail, to varying degrees, in most of Beethoven's music. It is the ambivalent conception of *humanitas*, the recognition of those qualities in man that distinguish him from what is both greater and lesser than himself.

Sonata form is particularly suitable for such cosmic themes. Approximately ninety per cent of Beethoven's music employs it. Although this Renaissance conception of *humanitas* is present in the earlier sonatas, it exists in progressively intensified form from Opus 81a (*Les Adieux*) through Opus 111, for Beethoven resolves the resultant musical conflict with an increasingly subtle command of what Donald Tovey referred to as "long-range tonality."

With the idea, therefore, that Beethoven's esthetic embraces, musically, a total conception of man, it is reasonable that his music should require from an honest, sensitive interpreter a total commitment of being. Artur Schnabel, alone, of all the pianists of this century, combined the means and will to make the necessary commitment—a point of

view strengthened by discussions with Adele Marcus (who knew him well and to whom I am indebted for many favors relative to this investigation).

The strength of that commitment manifested itself in every aspect of his life. He was concerned as a teacher that his pupils concentrate, not on the mechanical aspects of piano playing, but rather that they develop experimental curiosity to discover the manifold ways in which strong fingers or rapid octaves might assist the liberation of a musical conception. His edition of the Beethoven Sonatas is useful, not for the solutions it provides to problems of fingering, tempi, or dynamics, but because it suggests the attitude of ceaseless and exhaustive inquiry necessary to any meaningful projection.

Listening to Schnabel's performances, one is aware that his fingers had generally lost their maximum dependability in these works. In the third movement of the F-major Sonata, Opus 10, No. 6, the hands do not play together, the passagework is jerky, the rhythm unsteady. The first movement of the D-major Sonata, Opus 10, No. 3 is rushed and notes are swallowed. Similar technical lapses occur in the first movement of the *Waldstein* Sonata and in the corner movements of the *Appassionata*—all of which damage Schnabel's repose and rhythmical security. The late sonatas, notably Opus 106 and Opus 111, suffer not only from limitations of finger control, but from a deficiency of strength and endurance.

Nevertheless, Schnabel's performances of these sonatas remain, perhaps, the most vital recorded testament to his art. First, they offer many examples of superlative artistry: the Adagio and Scherzo of the C-major Sonata, Opus 2, No. 3; the first two movements of the E-flat Sonata, Opus 27, No. 1; the sublime slow movement of the G-major Sonata, Opus 31, No. 1. We witness in these and other sections of the sonatas a pianism unmarred by any obtrusive characteristic, a sense of proportion so acute, with respect to tone quality, rhythm and dynamics, that the listener is aware only of the music. Second, from the completely random pattern of his technical lapses, we gain insight into the marvelous improvisatory nature of his performances.

But beyond these considerations is the knowledge that with these performances his commitment achieves its fullest expression—the hallmark that eclipses his most sure-fingered competition. This very characteristic makes the release of this album the recommencing of a dialogue between Schnabel and a listening audience irrespective of generation. For some time to come Artur Schnabel's generation will remain the present.

# Haydn Quake, Second Tremor

By RICHARD FREED

**A**BOUT three years ago we had occasion to comment in these pages on the depletion of the Haydn symphony discography ("Score Sheet on Haydn," SR, February 25, 1961). After the Haydn eruption of the early Fifties, it had seemed but a matter of time until every one of the symphonies could be had on records, but by 1961 the number of them listed in the *Schwann Catalog* had dwindled from a promising high of sixty-eight to a disappointing low of thirty-one, with, as we noted then, "some of the big ones . . . among the missing."

Now there has been a second Haydn "eruption," not only of greater dimensions than the earlier one quantitatively, but also far more exciting in terms of musical quality. Within the last few months we have welcomed a polished album of the entire set of six "Paris" symphonies (Nos. 82-87) by Ansermet on London; the six so-called *Sturm und Drang* symphonies (Nos. 44-49) by Janigro on Vanguard [see page 50]; the disc debut of David Blum and his Esterhazy Orchestra in Nos. 52 and 60 on the same label; and Nos. 89 and 90 (the latter an LP premiere) by László Somogyi on Westminster.

Still, the full proportions of this resurgence are barely hinted at in Schwann, which now lists a total of forty Haydn symphonies; there are almost that many more available now on labels either missing from the catalog or not fully represented. Among the thirty-nine symphonies performed by the late Max Goberman and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra on the Library of Recorded Masterpieces label, the twenty-nine by various conductors recently reissued on Haydn Society, and the eight on Vanguard mentioned above, there are thirty-eight titles *not* represented in Schwann. And Goberman recorded another five symphonies, not yet scheduled for release by LRM, which will add four more numbers to the list, for a total of *eighty-two!*

Both the new Goberman series and the Haydn Society reissues earn high marks for "contemporary Haydn scholarship," for both were prepared with the participation of H. C. Robbins Landon. Since Robbins Landon's research has continued on, some of the Goberman recordings of symphonies recorded more

than a decade earlier by Haydn Society reflect still further corrections in the scores. Reproductions of the scores, by the way, are packaged with all the LRM discs.

Goberman's performances show that he spent more time in rehearsal with the ubiquitous Vienna State Opera Orchestra than many other conductors who have recorded with it. The sound captured by LRM is also outstanding, in both the mono and stereo editions. Goberman had planned to record not only all one hundred and six of the symphonies but Haydn's operas as well. The forty-four symphonies he completed include not only early and obscure works but also superior versions of the *Oxford*, the *Miracle*, and the great No. 98 in B flat. One of the two symphonies added by Robbins Landon to the conventional numbering of 104 is among the five awaiting transfer from tape to disc.

The *Matin-Midi-Soir* trilogy (Nos. 6-8), *Der Philosoph* (No. 22) and the glorious *Maria Theresia* (No. 48), all outstanding on LRM, are also represented among the Haydn Society reissues. Jonathan Sternberg's *Philosoph* is especially persuasive, but these recordings do show their age now. Mogens Wöldike's disc of Nos. 43 and 50, recorded in Copenhagen instead of Vienna and somewhat later than the other symphonies on HS, qualifies as first rate on all counts, even its 1951 sound.

Other unduplicated material on the Haydn Society label includes the Symphony No. 28 in A, with a slow movement uniquely beautiful, even in so extraordinary a sequence; No. 31 in D (the *Horn Signal*); No. 38, one of the festive C-major works; and No. 39 in G minor, foreshadowing Mozart's masterpiece in the same key.

In addition to undertaking all the Haydn symphonies, Goberman also recorded *The Beggar's Opera* and the *Brandenburg Concertos* on LRM, and embarked on ambitious projects of "complete" Vivaldi and Corelli. Although more than forty records have been issued on the Library of Recorded Masterpieces label, none of them can be found in the *Schwann Catalog*. Presumably the reason is that LRM sells them by direct subscription and does not offer them generally in stores, but the same might be said of the Louisville records, which *are* listed.

As reported by the recordings editor

last spring, rights to the LRM Haydn recordings were acquired by Deutsche Grammophon for its Archive series shortly before Goberman died. So far, however, this agreement has not been activated, and indications are that the plan has been shelved. At the moment, then, Goberman's Haydn continues to be available only from the Library of Recorded Masterpieces, 150 West 82nd Street, New York City. Prices, which include the scores, are the same for mono and stereo discs: \$8.50 each on the subscription plan or \$10 singly.

The Haydn Society label, actually revived more than two years ago, made its reappearance in the *Schwann Catalog* only this month. Curiously, not all the reissued discs are listed, however, and among those omitted are thirteen of the fourteen records of Haydn symphonies. Up to now, the only outlet for these reissues in any major city has been The Record Hunter, 507 Fifth Avenue, in Manhattan, which also sells the non-Haydn LRMs. Whether the listing in Schwann actually presages a more general distribution remains to be seen.

The Vanguard omissions must be regarded a simple oversight on the part of the cataloguers, for all four discs were issued last fall. The Blum was reviewed in SR, November 30, the Janigro in this issue.

Among the twenty-four Haydn symphonies *not* on LP or about to be released now, one notes several which have been offered at some time in the past. The great No. 77 in B flat is one of these, also the jolly No. 73 in D (*La Chasse*), the ingratiating No. 67 in F, and the splendid Nos. 53 (*Imperial*) and 61, both in D. Prospects for new recordings of these now look brighter than ever.

## CURRENT HAYDN SYMPHONIES NOT LISTED IN SCHWANN

**NOTE:** *The orchestra in all the Goberman recordings is that of the Vienna State Opera, abbreviated in the Haydn Society entries as VSO. VSO indicates Vienna Symphony Orchestra. LRM numbers apply to both mono and stereo editions; Vanguard stereo numbers are in italics.*

- No. 1 in D. *Goberman* (with Nos. 17 & 57), LRM HS-13; *Sternberg*, VSO (with Nos. 13 & 28), Haydn Soc. HS-9110.
- No. 2 in C. *Goberman* (with No. 49 & Parthia in B flat), LRM HS-11.
- No. 3 in G. *Goberman* (with No. 96), LRM HS-8.
- No. 4 in D. *Goberman* (with No. 48 & Overture to *L'infedeltà delusa*), LRM HS-10.\*
- No. 5 in A. *Goberman* (with No. 34 & Overture to *Acide e Galatea*), LRM HS-18.\*
- No. 6 in D ("Le Matin"). *Goberman* (with No. 51), LRM HS-2; *Litschauer*, Vienna Chamber Orch. (with No. 21), Haydn Soc. HS-9120.
- No. 7 in C ("Le Midi"). *Goberman* (with

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