

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY - TON KOOPMAN - MARCH 25015

Ton Koopman brings Haydn's 'memorial gift' to Mozart to SFS at Davies

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A hand-colored etching of the original Royal Fireworks ceremony
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Last night in Davies Symphony Hall Ton Koopman returned for another two-week visit to the podium of the [San Francisco Symphony](#) (SFS). [Last season](#) his focus was on Johann Sebastian Bach, supplemented with attention to Sebastian's son Carl Philipp Emanuel during the [first program](#). [This season](#) he has prepared [concertos](#) and [symphonies](#) by Joseph Haydn for both programs, each of which uses an orchestral suite by George Frideric Handel as an "overture."

Last night's concerto offering was a departure from the ordinary and may have a rather curious history. It was the Hoboken I/105 sinfonia concertante with solo parts for violin (Nadya Tichman), cello (Amos Yang), oboe (Mingjia Liu), and bassoon (Stephen Paulson), composed in 1792 during Haydn's second visit to London. Haydn probably knew about the K. 364 sinfonia concertante in E-flat major that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had composed for violin and viola in 1779. He may have

<http://www.examiner.com/article/ton-koopman-brings-haydn-s-memorial-gift-to-mozart-to-sfs-at-davies> heard about, if not actually experienced, the K. Anh. 9 sinfonia concertante in E-flat major with solo parts for oboe, clarinet, horn, and bassoon. He may even have known that the “Marten aller Arten” aria from the K. 384 opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (the abduction from the seraglio) amounted to a [sinfonia concertante movement with soprano obbligato](#).

When Mozart died in December of 1791, Haydn probably recalled the six string quartets dedicated to him that Mozart had composed between 1782 and 1785. This may have prompted him to write something in Mozart’s memory. The sinfonia concertante provided an opportunity to bring a variety of both solo and ensemble voices into the mix, thus honoring Mozart’s own gifts for instrumentation.

The result is some of Haydn’s most imaginative writing, couched in that rhetoric of wit that probably appealed so well to his British audiences. What is may be most interesting is how Haydn explores the different combinations of instruments for the solo passages. This particular grouping provides not only a balance of two strings and two winds but also one of two treble and two bass. What is most remarkable is that Haydn devotes the first two movements almost entirely to exploring different ways of pairing the instruments, bringing them all together as a quartet only in the final movement. That movement also has some rather amusing recitative work for the violin, perhaps a reference to how the sinfonia concertante genre had “invaded” one of Mozart’s operas.

Both Koopman and his four soloists were clearly right at home with Haydn’s imaginative wit in presenting this composition. Koopman also maintained excellent balance with the orchestra ensemble, richly endowed with flute and pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, along with strings and timpani. The result was that the interplay of soloists and ensemble was as exciting as the exchanges among the soloists. This is clearly a high point in Haydn’s music for multiple instrumental voices, and Koopman admirably demonstrated that it deserves more recognition as such.

The symphony for last night’s program came from that same visit to London, Hoboken I/103, the 1795 “Drumroll” symphony in E-flat major. The title refers to the solo roll on the E-flat timpani, marked with a fermata, on the first measure. However, Koopman decided to interpret a single note marked with a fermata as a sign for a cadenza and allowed Alex Orfaly free rein for an extended solo, not only at the beginning but also when the “drumroll measure” reappeared just before the coda of the first movement. This brought an unexpected measure of spontaneity to the performance, which was excellently offset by the energetic tempo selections Koopman made for the full ensemble. (Even the second movement is marked *Andante più tosto allegretto*.) By 1795 Haydn was known in London for the “surprises” he could inject into his symphonies; but last night Koopman served up some surprises of his own.

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Orfaly was also kept busy with the “overture,” Handel’s 1749 HWV 351, *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. The usually accurate program book also failed to mention that, for this performance, Orfaly’s extensive timpani work was balanced by an equal measure of writing for snare drum. As to the “real music,” Koopman did an excellent job of balancing the strings (probably not part of the original ceremonial performance) against winds and brass. Much of that balance was due to particular sensitivity to dynamic contours, rather than the usual alternations of loud and soft. Koopman also decided to forego the usual minuet-trio conclusion, beginning with the second minuet (the “trio”) and holding off the first minuet for the rousing conclusion. This made for a distinctively original approach to performance in an evening in which each composition was prepared with its own stamp of originality.