

A NOTE IN A HAYDN RONDO: ON HAYDN'S SONATA IN A FLAT MAJOR (HOB. XVI:43)

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Joseph Haydn's keyboard Sonata in A flat Major (Hob. XVI:43) is a lovely piece of music, composed at some point before 1783 (when it was published). It is a joy to listen to and a joy to play; it fits under the fingers in a way that is as delicate and light as the music sounds. The last movement, the rondo, can be seen as a jewel among the sonata movements because it is a little more complex; this is because Haydn takes a rondo form and turns it into something like a rondo with variations. The movement should also be taken at great speed, which transforms the thematic lines into flourishes of energy and illustrations of dexterity. Truly, however, the rondo is of interest because it presents a curious passage whose strangeness can only sometimes be heard in performance. The listener can pick it up only if the performer really decides to lean into it. The section is brief, returns four times (including repeats), and is fairly well masked by the cadenza-like measures that come before it.

Nevertheless, when discussing certain Haydn sonatas, it is relevant to mention the issue of authenticity in Haydn's

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keyboard works. This only because Hob. XVI:43, the sonata under discussion here, is questionably an authentic work by Haydn. Even so, it is included in Christa Landon's Wiener Urtext / Universal edition[1] and is often performed in recordings as part of the Haydn oeuvre.

This discussion can be read in a text by Richard Wigmore, who described it in his notes for Marc-André Hamelin's Hyperion recording of this sonata (2007):

The A flat sonata here, No 43, published in London in 1783 but almost probably composed a decade or so earlier [...]. Indeed, with the autograph lost, some commentators have even doubted the sonata's authenticity. If it is by Haydn, it shows the composer at his most blithely *galant*. The monothematic first movement has a certain amiable charm but none of Haydn's usual sense of adventure or delight in surprise. Next comes a minuet that contrasts the mock-military dotted rhythms of the main part with a flowing, almost Schubertian Ländler trio. The most vividly Haydnesque movement is the racy Presto finale, a characteristic amalgam of rondo and variations. Near the end the main theme acquires a slightly zany twist with unscripted leaps to a higher octave.[2]

From this description, Wigmore touches on one of the issues that faces the authenticity problems of Haydn's sonatas. Not only is the autograph lost for this sonata, but moreover this is actually the case for the majority of Haydn's keyboard sonatas. It seems almost impossible to think that over fifty of Haydn's sonatas were able to be considered authentic through something like a stroke of luck: a particular publication (Breitkopf & Härtel's *Oeuvres completes* [1800]) was sent to Haydn while the editors were compiling it. Then Haydn himself, apparently, "made more minor errors in his authentication"[3] but it allowed for a great number of his keyboard sonatas to be considered rightfully composed by Haydn. The sonata in this present study, however, is not among those, and is not clearly authenticated. Further, it is not among the body of works that have dedications, or that has a mention in

correspondence, or other reference to clearly indicate Haydn's hand;^[4] as László Somfai has noted when evaluating Haydn's sonatas that not all should be regarded equally: "for one thing, we will always be uncertain about the authenticity and dating of several early sonatas; for another, the compositional skill and presence of Haydn's personality is so weak," that they do not deserve to be compared to the longer and more intricate sonatas from after 1765.^[5] In the same vein, and as Wallace Wigmore mentions, Hob. XVI:43 does not always seem as though it were written by Haydn. It often suggests Haydn's language, but not the vibrant invention or complexity of expression that can be analyzed beneath an apparent veneer of *galant* style.

Something critics often mention when discussing Haydn's compositions is precisely Haydn's "personality." This is not exactly the same thing as discussing the personality of the individual, but more like describing the *personality* of a musical work. Among complexities of form and experimentation with what we now call "sonata form" in Haydn's compositions (and only in recent decades does it include more details on the innovations from Haydn's compositions)^[6] as well as brilliance in thematic writing, is the presence of humor. This humor generally boils down to the unexpected, whether that be in thematic variation, unintuitive entrances of accompanying figures in an odd register, simply placing the theme in an unexpected register from the beginning or drawing on the peculiar sonorities of unequal tuning to make a theme more noticeable and perhaps bizarre. (As Levin has discussed, "Unlike Mozart, who was quite conservative in his choice of keys, Haydn used a broad range of tonalities, including those with a large number of sharps and flats. These produce sonorities of noticeable pungency when unequal temperaments are employed, and Haydn ... exploited the characteristic of such tunings in other ways—e.g., by presenting the principal theme in a distant key, causing the music to sound noticeably peculiar.")^[7] Thus, not only may the theme be placed in an odd register on the keyboard, the tuning will also add a second layer of strangeness to the overall sonority of the work.

From this position of the bizarre and surprise in Haydn, the rondo of Hob. XVI:43 will now return to the discussion. Beginning with Wigmore's description of Haydn at his most "blithely *galant*" in this sonata, he also calls the movement: "Haydnesque." One such point behind the "Haydenesque" is with respect to the form itself; it is indeed a rondo form, but it contains many variations on the theme. It sounds more like a theme and variations yet simplified in a novel way to fit into a rondo category. A rondo itself is a work where a theme will continue to come back around at determined intervals. Although there are specific outlines on how a rondo should look, and which have been edited to include Haydn's unique rondos (especially in his symphonies), Hob. XVI:43 stands awkwardly among rondos in part perhaps due to the doubts surrounding its authenticity.

To consider the rondo from Hob. XVI:43 from the point of view of Haydn's personality—or better, characteristics of humor that can be found within the work itself—is to dive into a singularly bizarre passage. It is not really the passage that is strange, but one particular note that is rather intriguing. The main theme of the rondo is in A flat major. It has a responding theme that generally accompanies every appearance of the main theme, which is in E flat major (and considered to be part of the principal section of the rondo). At the conclusion of this theme, immediately before it returns to the main theme of the movement, there is a cadenza-like passage with fermatas over rests and over one particular note. This pattern of fermatas often seems to lead performers to greatly embellish this appoggiatura note on F to eventually resolve on E flat (now playing the role of the dominant before the main theme returns). The strangest thing, however, is how Haydn concludes this responding theme on E flat *with a sixteenth note* and resolves it harmonically at the same time in the bass (three octaves below) *with an eighth note*.

Rondo
Presto

The image shows a page of musical notation for the Rondo section of Haydn's Sonata in A-flat Major, Hob. XVI:43. The tempo is marked 'Presto'. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano (p) and forte (f) dynamic range. A specific eighth-note in the bass line is highlighted with a purple box. The score includes various musical notations such as fingering, articulation, and dynamics.

Figure 1. Joseph Haydn. Sonata in A-Flat Major, Hob. XVI:43, Rondo, mm. 1–24.[8]

This short passage can be easily recognized in recordings, as the movement is played at a presto—extraordinarily fast—tempo, but this cadenza-like passage makes it seem as though the movement pauses and takes a break to return to its original idea: the main theme, played apparently in such a hurry that seems as though the theme itself can never quite catch up to the ideal speed at which it is supposed to be executed. The question here really, though, is how to play this eighth-note in the bass. On the one hand, if it has the same duration as the note that concludes the theme, it will be too short; but, on the other hand, it will sound better to the ear if its clipped. If it is held for the length of its note (which will be hard to judge based on the previous eighth-note being held with a fermata), it will also most likely be imperceptibly longer than the sixteenth-note of the theme. And this all concludes with rests in both hands—a period of silence—to mark that inevitable return of the main theme. The difference here is a sixteenth-note at a slowed-up presto tempo—a fragment of time where the bass should sound alone and the theme would not be present.

The intrigue narrows down to this single note in the bass and its purpose. It clearly is meant to be like this; it is not an error in printing. The same figure returns at m. 82; there are two later entries of this corresponding theme but written in variations. The later entries thus only resemble the earlier announcements through a vague general shape of the

thematic line and recognizable harmonic pattern, with the bass wholly absent at the corresponding moment(s).

To see how this section of the corresponding theme works like a cadenza, consider its conclusion almost at the end of the rondo:

Figure 2. Joseph Haydn. Sonata in A flat Major, Hob. XVI:43, Rondo, mm. 199–214.

Here a change in tempo is clearly marked as “adagio” and additional ornamentation is added to the appoggiatura. Notice, also, how the bass is entirely absent. What this might suggest is that the harmonic element is already implied from the earlier announcements of the theme, and this part is meant to be clean with a single, delicate, voice resounding at an adagio pace.

In recordings of this sonata, the original problematic passage at measure 18 ranges between completely unremarkable to somewhat exaggerated. Marc-André Hamilton on Hyperion hardly emphasizes this rhythmic-duration discrepancy. Ekaterina Derzhavina (Profil Medien, 2013) and Emmanuel Ax (Sony, 2013) similarly barely make an example of this oddity. You can more easily make out the passage in, for example, Alain Planès (Harmonia Mundi, 2016) and Jenő Jandó (Naxos, 1995), but none of these are all together satisfactory for pushing that harmonic difference and purposeful bass note.

The recording which makes this passage most evident is Richard Burnett's (Amon Ra, 1979); he plays the work on a Viennese Fortepiano by Michael Rosenberger c. 1798, which is quite pleasant on the ear compared to modern pianos (at

the same time as having a particular sharpness in timbre that is rather typical of instruments of this kind). In the recording from *Haydn Sonatas on Early Pianos*, Burnett lets the bass note linger well into the harmonic area of the tonic, divided as it is by the fermatas over the rests. Nevertheless, this emphasis seems to align more with the strangeness of the harmonic overhang. It seems that Burnett may have also found this passage to be quite bizarre. What is curious about this is that the performer recognizes the strangeness in the score; the performance will then express how much interest the performer has in this by how much they emphasize it. The slight overhang of a sixteenth-note will barely catch the ear of a spectator who doesn't otherwise know the score; modern pianos also may have a lag, the punishing weight of their harp and the spectrum of sonority they can perform will bleed through this miniscule rest where the bass sounds alone (especially if this section is taken at an incredible speed); whereas on a historical instrument the articulation is sharper, requiring a different touch and leaves each note with less resonance.

Considering the bizarre little passage, it would seem that it is an example of Haydn's humor: it is unexpected; it is somewhat oddly placed in the work; and it can often go unnoticed unless the performer is determined to make it known. If this is Haydn himself or someone writing as Haydn, that is another question. The relevance of this problem seems to pale when the score is examined at such a close range. It may be like a comedian from today presenting the punchline of a joke, but in the voice of Johnny Carson; or simply Johnny Carson doing a bit where he goes over the top to *sound like* Johnny Carson. In any event, the passage, every time it comes around, challenges the listener to imagine *why* there is that harmonic overhang: is it simply a musical joke for the performer to be in on? Is it a way to explicitly smooth the transition from the dominant into the tonic? Or is it just an example where genius is revealed in art within the tiniest square-inch of a canvas or score? The style of the work may indeed be "blithely *galant*," but even so, one would argue, it is possible to find depth within that style—within the framework of the art—to determine value beyond a pretty picture.

- [1] “Sonate Hob. XVI:43” in *Joseph Haydn: The Complete Piano Sonatas*, Volume 2, edited from the sources by Christa Landon, revised by Ulrich Leisinger (Vienna: Wiener Urtext Edition, Schott / Universal Edition, 2009), 56-67.
- [2] Richard Wigmore, liner notes for Joseph Haydn, *Piano Sonatas*, Marc-André Hamelin, [Volume 1], recorded in Henry Wood Hall, London, on December 13-15, 2005, Hyperion Records, CDA67554, 2007, [4]-[5].
- [3] Ulrich Leisinger, “Preface,” in *Joseph Haydn: The Complete Piano Sonatas*, Volume 2, edited from the sources by Christa Landon, revised by Ulrich Leisinger (Vienna: Wiener Urtext Edition, Schott / Universal Edition, 2009), xi.
- [4] A. Peter Brown. *Joseph Haydn's Keyboard Music: Sources and Style* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1986), “Essay III: Authenticity” published on <https://publish.iupress.indiana.edu/read/joseph-haydn-s-keyboard-music/section/4cd6e1c4-1898-49b9-ae98-f2631813dd2f> (accessed July 28, 2024)
- [5] László Somfai, *The Keyboard Sonatas of Joseph Haydn: Instruments and Performance Practice, Genres and Styles*, translated by the author in collaboration with Charlotte Greenspan (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1995),153.
- [6] See Matthew Riley, “The Sonata Principle Reformulated for Haydn Post-1770 and a Typology of his Recapitulatory Strategies,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 140, No. 1 (2015), 1-39.
- [7] Robert D. Levin, “Notes on Interpretation” in *Joseph Haydn: The Complete Piano Sonatas* (Vienna: Wiener Urtext Edition, Schott / Universal Edition, 2009), xiv.
- [8] Measure numbers correspond to the Wiener Urtext edition (2009).

Recordings

Joseph Haydn, “Sonata No. 35 in A flat maj (Hob. XVI/43–cat 1771/73?)” on *Haydn Sonatas on early pianos*, Richard Burnett, Amon Ra – CD-SAR 5 (1979, LP).

Joseph Haydn, “Piano Sonata No. 35 in A flat Major (Hob XVI:43) on *Haydn Sonatas Nos. 1–62*, Ekaterina Derzhavina, Profil Medien – PH12037, 2013.

Joseph Haydn, “Piano Sonata in A flat major Hob XVI:43” on *Haydn Piano Sonatas*, Vol. 1, Marc-André Hamelin, Hyperion – CDA67554, 2007, CD.

Joseph Haydn, “Piano Sonata No. 35 in A flat major, Hob XVI:43” on *Haydn: Piano Sonatas Vol. 7, Nos. 29 and 33-35*, Jenö Jandó, Naxos – 8553800, 1995.