

Franz Joseph Haydn
Cello Concerto No. 1 in C

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN was born at Rohrau, Lower Austria, on March 31, 1732, and died in Vienna on May 31, 1809. He probably composed his C major cello concerto about 1765, to judge from the relative location of the entry of its main theme in Haydn's own thematic catalogue of his works. It was most likely written for, and performed soon after its completion by, the principal cellist at Eszterháza, Joseph Weigl.

IN ADDITION TO THE SOLO CELLO, the score calls for two oboes, two horns, and strings. Ton Koopman conducts from the harpsichord at these performances.

Haydn wrote relatively few concertos compared to most composers of his day, and most of those few have survived only by accident, often in a single copy. One dramatic example of this is the C major cello concerto, which was completely lost and known only through a two-measure entry of its principal theme in Haydn's personal thematic catalogue of his works until an old copy turned up in Prague in 1961, one of the most significant and exciting rediscoveries of Haydn research in the twentieth century. For here was a prime example of Haydn in his early maturity, a work almost certainly written for and played by the principal cellist in the Esterházy establishment, Joseph Weigl.

The concerto was the most popular and successful instrumental form of the Baroque, coming out of Italy, where it had been stamped with the signature of Vivaldi; its very success meant that composers tended to use the traditional techniques even as a new approach to harmonic organization, texture, and thematic structure was having a powerful effect on the nascent symphony and string quartet. The concerto thus became somewhat old-fashioned and retained far longer than the symphony the beat-marking rhythms of the Baroque and the concatenation of small rhythmic motives to build up a theme rather than classically balanced phrases. Formally, too, the concerto still built upon the Baroque ritornello form, which stated the principal material as blocks in a series of different keys linked by virtuosic passages for the soloist, although the ritornello arrangement gradually achieved détente with the sonata-form layout that became standard in the symphony.

Haydn's C major concerto is a splendid example of this transitional period; we can almost hear Haydn breaking the ties with the Baroque and becoming more "classical" as the work progresses, since the first movement has a great deal more of the small rhythmic cells and the standard syncopation that became such a cliché in the late concerto, although it also makes a bow to sonata form. But the last movement comes from the world of the contemporary symphonies, with scarcely a glance backward. In between comes a serenade-like Adagio that focuses attention on the graceful lyricism almost throughout.

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THE FIRST BOSTON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE of Haydn's Cello Concerto No. 1 took place at Tanglewood on July 9, 1965, with BSO principal cellist Jules Eskin under the direction of Erich Leinsdorf, Eskin subsequently giving additional performances under Leinsdorf, as well as with Joseph Silverstein, Michael Tilson Thomas, Klaus Tennstedt, and Leonard Slatkin. The first subscription performances, in October 1965, featured Mstislav Rostropovich under Leinsdorf's direction; Rostropovich later performed the second and third movements as part of the BSO's Centennial Gala in October 1981 with Seiji Ozawa conducting, and a complete Tanglewood performance under Hugh Wolff in August 1998. Other BSO performances have featured Yo-Yo Ma (with Gunther Herbig, Ozawa, Charles Dutoit, and Donald Runnicles), Wendy Warner (with André Previn), Steven Isserlis (the most recent subscription performances, in February 2002 with David Robertson conducting), and *Daniel Müller-Schott (the most recent Tanglewood performance, on July 13, 2007, with Previn).*