



The 18th Century Symphony

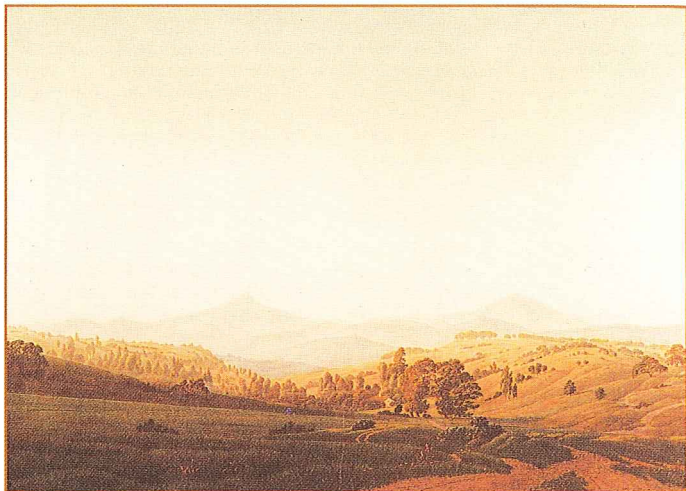
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Jiří Antonín
BENDA

Sinfonias Nos. 1 - 6

Prague Chamber Orchestra
Christian Benda



Jirí Antonín Benda (1722 - 1795)

Sinfonias Vol. 1

Sinfonia No. 1 in D Major

Sinfonia No. 2 in G Major

Sinfonia No. 3 in C Major

Sinfonia No. 4 in F Major

Sinfonia No. 5 in G Major

Sinfonia No. 6 in E Flat Major

(Solo Violin: Karel Stadtherr; cadenza composed by Sebastian Benda)

The Benda family has occupied an important and continuing place in music in Germany for some 250 years. The founder of the musical dynasty, Jan Jirí Benda, was born in 1686 in a village in Bohemia and combined the trades of weaver and musician. He married Dorota Brixi, a member of the Skalsko branch of a distinguished family of Czech musicians, and five of their six children became musicians, working in Germany. There the eldest son of the family, Frantisek, composer of some eighty violin sonatas and fifteen concertos, entered the service of the Prussian Crown Prince, continuing as Konzertmeister after the latter's accession to the throne as Frederick the Great. Frantisek Benda was a colleague of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach in Potsdam, where both showed a certain originality in an otherwise musically conservative court, the former more notably in his violin concertos. In 1742, two years after Frederick's accession, the Benda family joined Frantisek in Potsdam. The second son, Jan Jirí Benda, had also entered the service of the Crown Prince as a viola-player, continuing his service at Potsdam as a violinist, while the fourth, Joseph Benda, joined the Prussian royal orchestra in 1742 and later succeeded his eldest brother as Konzertmeister. A daughter of the family, Anna, found a career for herself as Kammersängerin in the service of the Duke of Saxe-Gotha, on the recommendation of her brother Jirí Antonín. In Gotha she married the court violinist and composer Dismas Hatas.

Jirí Antonín Benda, known in German as Georg Benda, was born in 1722 at Staré Benátky and had his schooling in Bohemia before moving in 1742 with the rest of his family to join his brother Frantisek at Potsdam, where he became a violinist in the court orchestra. In 1750 he became Kapellmeister to Duke Friederich III of Saxe-Gotha. Gotha had long and distinguished musical traditions, to which Benda contributed, breaking new ground there with his Italian opera seria *Xindo riconosciuto*, written for the Duchess Luise Dorothea. There followed a period in Italy for further study which resulted in the composition of two *Intermezzi*, *Il buon marito* and *Il nuovo maestro di capella*, performed in Gotha in 1766 and 1767. More significantly he was largely responsible for giving wide popularity to the form of melodrama. His early and very successful attempts at the genre were written after the arrival in Gotha in 1774 of the theatrical troupe directed by the Swiss actor Abel Seyler, a company which had been active in Hanover and Weimar. For the Seyler troupe Benda wrote his melodramas *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Medea* and *Pygmalion*, the first two of which aroused the admiration of Mozart, who heard performances in Mannheim and planned something of the same kind on the subject of *Semiramide*. Benda also wrote a series of Singspiel for the Gotha theatre.

Benda had been given the title of Kapelldirektor in 1770, but resigned in 1778, moving to Hamburg and to Vienna. Finding no position there, he returned in 1779 to Gotha, living in retirement at first at the nearby Georgenthal before moving to Ohrdruf. He spent his final years at Köstritz, where he died in 1795. His compositions include some half dozen other stage works, Singspiel, melodramas and a children's operetta, a quantity of church music and vocal compositions, keyboard sonatas and sonatinas and some thirty symphonies, ten harpsichord concertos and eleven violin concertos.

The twelve symphonies, not published as a set, are all in three movements, developed from the Potsdam style of the Graun brothers. The *Sinfonia No. 1 in D major* opens with characteristic panache, proceeding to a minor key slow movement, its theme punctuated by plucked notes. Any passing melancholy is dissipated in a rapid final movement. The horns assume some importance in the opening theme of the *Sinfonia No. 2 in G major*, a lively movement that is followed by a moving minor key *Andante*. The horns return for the last movement with its recurrent refrain. An energetic opening theme marks the energetic *Allegro* of the *Sinfonia No. 3 in C major*. There is again a minor key slow movement dominated by the violin thematic material. The last movement brings a return to the key of C major in a solidly rhythmic final *Allegro*. The *Sinfonia No. 4 in F*

major summons attention in its first notes, followed by music of the expected brilliance and energy. A note of poignancy is added in the minor key *Andante*, dispelled in the final *Allegro*. The *Sinfonia No. 5 in G major* has the expected vigorous opening, a call to the attention of the listener, in a lively movement with the necessary elements of thematic and dynamic contrast. A minor key *Andante molto* follows, capped by a cheerful final *Tempo di Minuetto* in which a flute adds contrast. *Sinfonia No. 6 in E flat major* is distinguished by its use of a solo violin, making of the opening and final *Allegro* concerto movements in a style that must suggest Mozart's violin concertos of 1775.

Prague Chamber Orchestra

The Prague Chamber Orchestra was established in 1951 and during the forty years of its existence has won a distinguished international reputation, with appearances at major European festivals and tours abroad to the Americas and throughout Europe, as well as to Japan. The orchestra has collaborated with soloists of the greatest distinction, including Accardo, Badura-Skoda, the Beaux Arts Trio, Gilels, Gulda, Hendricks, Holliger, Michelangeli and others of similar eminence. There have been more than a hundred recordings, with a Golden Record award after selling a million discs and on three occasions the Grand Prix du Disque de l'Académie Charles Cros as well as the Austrian Wiener Flötenuhr.

Christian Benda

The cellist and conductor Christian Benda belongs to a family of Czech musicians whose earlier members established in the eighteenth century a dynasty of composers, musicians at the court of Frederick the Great. His early musical training was at home. Supported by Paul Tortelier, he was launched on a solo career by Pierre Fournier, at first in Bohemia with the Prague Symphony Orchestra and the violinist Josef Suk, with whom he played the Brahms Double Concerto and later collaborated as soloist and conductor with the Suk Chamber Orchestra. Engagements with major orchestras in Eastern Europe were followed by appearances elsewhere. He has recorded for broadcasting the concertos of Lalo, Haydn, Boccherini and Villa-Lobos, with Bloch's Schelomo, the Double Concerto of Brahms and the Triple of Beethoven, with a number of other recordings on compact disc.

Sinfonias Nos. 1 - 6

Prague Chamber Orchestra

Christian Benda

Playing
Time:
55'20''

Sinfonia in D Major, No. 1

- | | | |
|---|------------------|--------|
| 1 | Allegro | (2:49) |
| 2 | Andante | (4:58) |
| 3 | Allegro di molto | (2:14) |

Sinfonia in G Major, No. 2

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|---|---------|--------|
| 4 | Allegro | (2:15) |
| 5 | Andante | (3:04) |
| 6 | Allegro | (2:28) |

Sinfonia in C Major, No. 3

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|---|----------------------|--------|
| 7 | Allegro | (2:39) |
| 8 | Andante sempre piano | (2:02) |
| 9 | Allegro | (2:04) |

Sinfonia in F Major, No. 4

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|----|---------|--------|
| 10 | Allegro | (2:23) |
| 11 | Andante | (2:58) |
| 12 | Allegro | (2:00) |

Sinfonia in G Major, No. 5

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|----|-------------------|--------|
| 13 | Allegro | (5:32) |
| 14 | Andante molto | (3:25) |
| 15 | Tempo di Minuetto | (3:11) |

Sinfonia in E Flat Major, No. 6

- | | | |
|----|---------|--------|
| 16 | Allegro | (4:55) |
| 17 | Andante | (2:55) |
| 18 | Allegro | (3:07) |

(Karel Stadtherr, Solo Violin)
(Cadenza composed by Sebastian Benda)

Recorded in cooperation with Bohemia Video Art at the Chapel
of the Brethren Church, Prague, from 23rd to 27th January 1995.

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