

# The Virtual Haydn



IN MANY WAYS THE SUCCESS of the early music movement has been inextricably linked with that of the recording industry. A plethora of recordings were made by early music pioneers that may have helped “spread the gospel” even more than live performances. Many were truly ground-breaking, either in revealing old chestnuts in a new light through the use of “old” instruments and playing styles, or by featuring lesser-known repertoire that had fallen into obscurity once the instruments for which it had been written fell out of favor. Intimate instruments such as the lute and the clavichord, for instance, were particularly well served by recordings since listeners could bring these instruments into their living rooms for a private experience, which is what they were intended for in the first place. Many in the field embarked on ambitious “Complete Works” projects, which were far less cumbersome to release once the CD era began. The early music recording boom reached its peak in the mid-to-late 1990s, when the power of the recording industry in general seemed to have largely run its course: more and more people began downloading their music from the Internet, often piecemeal, and indeed, one is hard pressed to find a good old-fashioned record store to browse through these days. (See Craig Zeichner’s “New Ways to Get Your Music” in *EMAg*, Fall 2007, page 30) Sadly, once this shift took place, some “Complete Works” projects were stopped mid-production. In some ways, it also seems that everything has been done already: most major works in the

canon have been committed to disc on period instruments, and many of the composers whose works were a revelation a few decades ago are now well-represented on recordings.

However, in the first decade of the 21st century, three intrepid professors at Montreal’s McGill University embarked on a project that was truly revolutionary, the results of which were released on four Blu-ray discs by the equally enterprising Naxos label in September 2009, just in time for the Haydn Year. Welcome to *The Virtual Haydn: The Complete Works for Solo Keyboard* (Naxos NBD0001-04), recorded by keyboardist and musicologist Tom Beghin on seven historical instruments in nine “virtual rooms.” The recording engineer and producer (or “Tonmeister”) for this project was the legendary Martha de Francisco, who was one of the pioneers of digital recording and editing in Europe in the 1980s and who has worked with countless luminaries of classical music on a staggering 300-plus recordings. Wieslaw Woszczyk, who calls himself a “virtual acoustics architect,” was the mastermind who harnessed the power of a new recording technology that, simply put, allows one to “sample” the acoustical properties of a space and then bring the results back to a studio to create a “virtual room” in which to record. Thus, Beghin was able not only to use newly-built replicas of seven keyboard instruments that reflected more

How early keyboard specialist Tom Beghin brought together seven instruments, nine rooms, four instrument builders, a renowned recording engineer and a “virtual acoustics architect” to re-create the sound world of Franz Joseph Haydn

**By Sylvia Berry**





PHOTOS: JEREMY TUSZ

Above, McGill's Tom Beghin, who recorded the complete keyboard works of Haydn on Blu-ray for Naxos, and top, Wieslaw Woszczyk and Doyuen Ko during the technical set up for capturing the sound of Oxford's Holywell Music Room, the oldest existing concert hall in Europe, which served as a virtual venue for some of the recordings.

closely than ever before the wealth of instruments known to Haydn and those who played his music but to record them “in” spaces that are either directly associated with Haydn or are very like spaces that he and his players would have known. The studio where these recordings were made is part of McGill's Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Music Media and Technology (CIRMMT), known affectionately by people at McGill as “Kermit.” The equally ground-breaking decision to release the project on Blu-ray allows for all 15 hours of music to fit on just three discs, and for the inclusion of a fourth disc that features a wonderful documentary about the whole process as well as five video performances. I got the chance to visit Montreal last spring as the project was nearing completion and to speak with some of the people involved. To fully grasp the magnitude of this undertaking, some background information is necessary.

### The instruments

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) composed keyboard music during a roughly 40-year period during which many changes in aesthetics and instrument-building took place. In our current early keyboard landscape, the mid-18-century

French double-manual harpsichord and the Walter-type five-octave Viennese fortepiano from the 1790s reign supreme, but during Haydn's lifetime, scores of other instruments were in common use, such as the clavichord, the square piano, and the Viennese harpsichord. Previous to Beghin's project, only one other complete Haydn set came close to representing the wealth of instruments known to Haydn, that of keyboardist Christine Schornsheim (Capriccio/WDR, 2005). For this project Schornsheim used five instruments: a Saxon-style five-octave clavichord by Burkhard Zander (Cologne, 1999) after Gottfried van Horn (Dresden, 1788); a French double-manual harpsichord by William Dowd and Reinhard von Nagel (1976); an English double-manual harpsichord by Jacob and Abraham Kirckman (London, 1777); a five-octave Viennese fortepiano by Louis Dulken (Munich, 1793); and an English grand piano by John Broadwood and Son (London, 1804). All of these instruments are interesting and pertinent, and in the case of John Broadwood, we know that Haydn had access to his pianos during his time spent in London. It is a rich set and a truly welcome addition for anyone interested in Haydn's keyboard works.

Beghin, however, has gone even further, commissioning seven instruments, one of which is the first replica of its kind ever made. His instrument roster contains a Saxon-style clavichord by Joris Potvlieghe (Tollebeek, 2003) after an instrument from circa 1760; a Viennese single-manual harpsichord with the so-called “Viennese short octave,” or “multiple broken octave,” by Martin Pühringer (Haslach, 2004) after Johann Leydecker (Vienna, 1775); a French double-manual harpsichord, c.1755, by Yves Beaupré (Montreal, 2007); a square piano (*Tafelklavier*) by Chris Maene (Ruisselede, 2007) after Ignaz Kober (Vienna, 1788); an “early” Viennese fortepiano with *Stossmechanik* by Maene (2005) after Anton Walter (Vienna, 1782); a “late” Viennese fortepiano with *Prellmechanik* by Maene (2005) after Walter (Vienna, c.1790); and an English grand piano by Maene (2004) after Longman, Clementi & Co. (London, 1798).



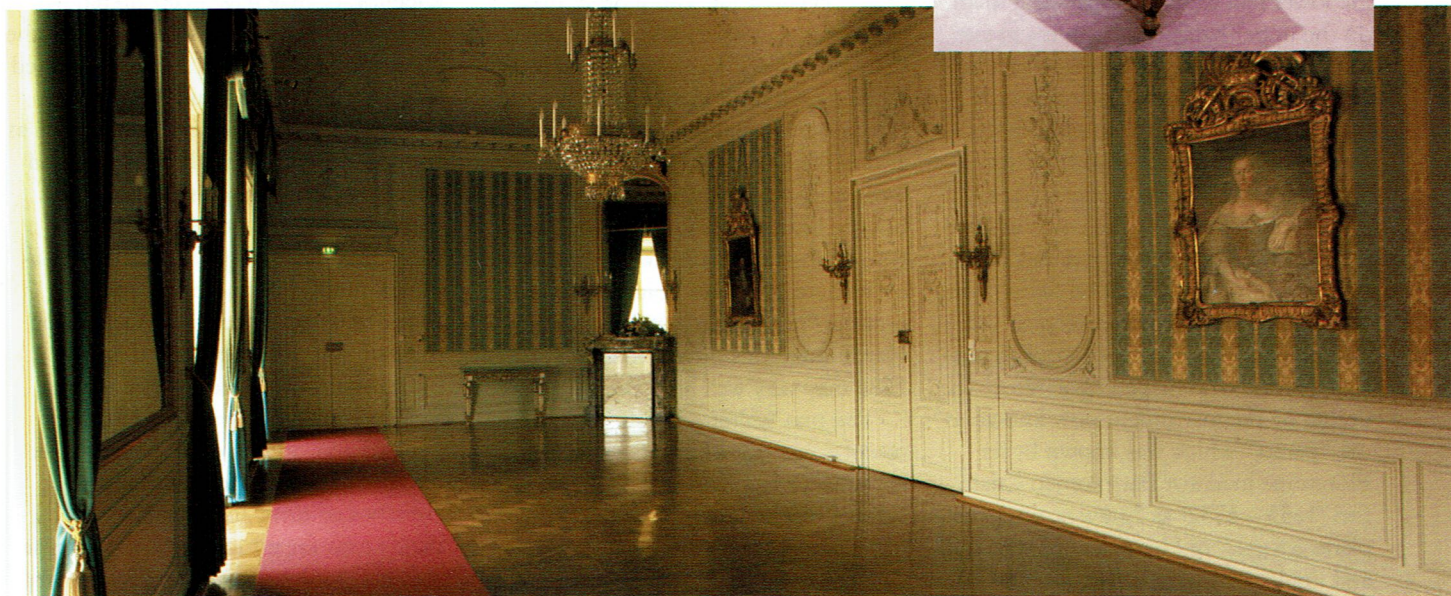
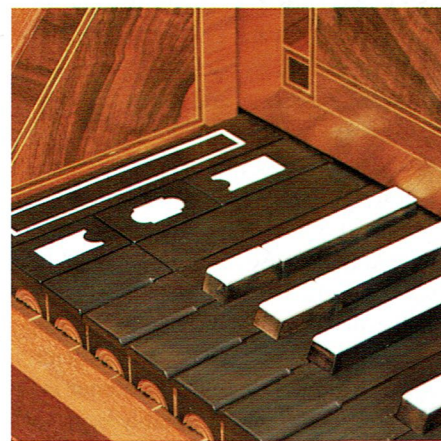
Each of these instruments is a gem, and the combination of them in *The Virtual Haydn* provides a great opportunity to travel through Haydn's expansive sound-world. Perhaps the two most fascinating instruments here are the Viennese harpsichord and the Viennese square piano. The Viennese harpsichord has never before been copied, and part of the interest of this instrument lies in the fact that there are a handful of early works by Haydn that contain chords in the left hand spanning a tenth (Variations in A Major, Hob. XVII:2, Sonata in E Minor, Hob. XVI: 47, and the Capriccio on "Acht Sauschneider Müssen sein, Hob. XVII:1), which are only realizable on instruments with this particular short octave configuration (see photo at right).

That in itself would be reason alone to want to try these instruments, but Beghin is also well-versed in the research of organologists Alfons Huber, Richard Maunder, and Michael Latham, which led him to the conclusion that these harpsichords really needed to be examined. Upon playing some of these instruments in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, he realized that the discomfort he'd felt playing Haydn on French or Italian harpsichords vanished. "I started noticing that so much of the "Viennese style" we've grown to know – the little slurs, those exquisite resolutions, the type of ornamentation we find in Wagenseil's or Haydn's scores – was clearly embedded in those earlier harpsichords already, with their low key dip

and their relatively light touch." Beghin's mastery of the intricacies of the short octave is impressive, and as we learn in the accompanying documentary, he was practicing on this instrument while it was still being built, in preparation for a concert at Esterháza!

Truth be told, it is easier to play the work on a fully chromatic keyboard, and when it was published in an unauthorized edition in 1788, the chords with the tenths were easily reconfigured. (However, the fact that the last page is fiendishly difficult on the Viennese short octave may also serve to represent the difficult task the eight castraters face!) Many believe that these instruments were the rule rather than the exception in Vienna; in fact, Viennese musicians at the time often referred to instruments with fully chromatic keyboards as "French," heightening the sense that they were foreign and unusual. It is also interesting to note that the early Viennese harpsichord clearly has its roots in the Italian school of building rather than the Franco-Flemish, evidenced by its scaling and the fact that it is a single-manual instrument with only two 8' registers, whose hand stops are *inside* the case (making it much harder to make quick register changes) rather than at the front, as on a French instrument. It is still debated whether or not Haydn had access to French double-manual harpsichords, and in the absence of concrete evidence, it is hard to say. It seems quite likely, however, that Haydn's employer, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy,

Bottom, the "Spiegelsaal" in the Esterházy Palace, once used as the main reception room but imagined by Beghin as a salon where music lessons might have been held. Middle, a Viennese single-manual harpsichord (after Johann Leydecker, 1775) made by Martin Pühringer, used for the recordings in the Spiegelsaal. Below, a detail of the short octave configuration on this instrument.





# The Virtual Haydn

who had a penchant for French culture, would have had one at Esterháza, his opulent summer home that was modeled after the magnificent palace at Versailles. Beghin has chosen to use both kinds of harpsichord, but the Leydecker replica is a real revelation; its back 8' has a beautifully luminous tone, and when the two 8' registers are coupled, the instrument has a wonderful tangy sound.

Similarly, the Viennese square or *Tafelklavier* (literally “table piano”) is interesting because it differs in some key ways from the better-known English square. It differs sonically from the English, having a much clearer and sweeter tone, but a more obvious difference is in the construction, most notably in its various registers or “mutation” stops. For starters, on the *Tafelklavier* the hand stops are at the front of the case instead of inside, which, as already stated, makes it easier to do quick register changes. The registers include a “Pantalon” stop that enables the player to raise *all* the dampers at once, imitating the undamped effect of the large hammerdulcimer of the same name, which was invented around 1697 and performed on across Europe to great acclaim by its inventor, Pantaleon Hebenstreit. (On an English square, one needs to engage two stops to raise all the dampers, since there is one stop for raising the dampers on the lower half and one for raising them on the upper half.) Although many cite the harpsichord as the forebear of the piano, the hammer dulcimer certainly bears more paternity in some respects, most obviously because both instruments use hammers to strike strings. Hebenstreit worked at the court in Dresden where the famous organ and fortepiano builder Gottfried Silbermann was responsible for the upkeep of his instrument. Silbermann, of course, was also the one who helped disseminate the design of the instrument now known as the “piano,” which was known by its Florentine inventor Bartolomeo Cristofori (1655 – 1732) as “gravecembalo col piano e forte,” or “harpsichord with soft and loud.” Cristofori’s instruments had

no mechanism to lift the dampers, so Silbermann’s addition of this device on his squares was a radical change to the Cristofori model, and one that became a well-loved feature of square pianos throughout Europe.

The Viennese *Tafelklavier* also has a “register” not found on English squares, the moderator, which slips a strip of felt cloth between the hammers and strings to create a breathtaking muted effect. When the Pantalon and moderator are combined, the sound is truly ethereal, as it is on Viennese grands. Most fortepianists have not taken the humble square piano too seriously; it was the instrument of amateurs, mostly women, who played in their parlors, and it has a small

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sound, not to mention some difficulty with repetition largely due to the lack of a backcheck rail. But indeed, these instruments were actually more prevalent than grands, and Beghin makes a convincing case for it musically. Historically, too, we know that Haydn was very attuned to his buying public, so he was well aware that many of the players who bought his music would play it on this type of instrument. In fact, new research by Richard Maunder points to the fact that the “new piano” by Schanz that Haydn mentions buying in a letter of 1788 may very well have been a square.

The two Walter copies used here represent a real feat of engineering, for they are in fact one piano with two actions; veteran instrument builder Chris Maene has made one case that can accommodate an earlier *Stossmechanik* and a later

*Prellmechanik*, both after those by the famed Viennese builder Anton Walter. *Stoss* literally means “push,” and in these actions a hopper (jack) attached to the end of the key flings the hammer, which is attached to a rail, up to the strings. In a *Prellmechanik* (*Prell* means “flip”), the hammers are held in a *kapsel* (bracket) attached directly to the backs of the keys, making more dynamic gradations available to the player, as Beghin demonstrates in the documentary. A further difference in these actions is the amount of leather covering the hammers: in the early instrument, we find only one layer, and in the later instrument, three. Sonically, this makes the earlier instrument sound a bit more percussive and “speech-like,” and the later instrument a bit more mellow and singing. Beghin’s ability to have “two” pianos by simply substituting one action for another has allowed him to easily explore the sonic and aesthetic differences between these two actions, and it has been very informative. I have elsewhere referred to this instrument as a “two-in-one Walter” (see Sylvia Berry, “Haydn Recordings in the Bicentennial Year” in *Keyboard Perspectives*, Vol. II; Westfield Center for Historical Keyboard Studies, 2009), but Beghin has called it “the double action Mozart piano.” The seeds for the idea of exploring both were planted in 1997 after organologist Michael Latham published a seminal article in *Early Music* (Vol. 25, No. 3) that posited that Mozart’s much-copied Walter, with a *Prellmechanik* and knee-levers, may have been altered by the builder after Mozart’s death upon the request of his widow. Latham surmised that Mozart’s piano, built in 1782, may have had a *Stossmechanik* action, as well as hand stops for raising the dampers and engaging the moderator, which makes them more easily accessible, offering altogether different performance possibilities than when these registers are accessed by the knees. This means that one will play “damped” for the most part, instead of “pedaling” frequently, and that when one wants to have an “undamped” effect, one has to choose wisely and commit to it for longer stretches of time. Interestingly, with hand stops for raising the dampers, one may also raise half the dampers, leaving



the other half of the piano damped.

In a Mozart disc recorded on this instrument in 2006, Beghin made a stunning discovery by recording one of the works, the D minor Fantasia (K. 397) twice, using both actions. The instrument sounded significantly different depending on which action was used, revealing that the action has as much to do with the “voice” of the instrument as the case and soundboard. Interestingly, the earlier *Stossmechanik* is what is found in square pianos, and perhaps not surprisingly, the “early” Walter bears a striking sonic resemblance to the Viennese *Tafelklavier*. The presence of handstops for the “registers” on the early Walter also mirrors the *Tafelklavier*, making for similar register use. The *Prellmechanik* with knee levers is what most fortepianists play these days, and it’s a more powerful, but less intimate instrument. While we do not know which kind of piano Haydn had the most access to, it is nonetheless clear that both types of pianos were in use during his lifetime, and having the chance to hear both is illuminating.

Though less revelatory, the remaining three instruments in the set are all wonderful: the Saxon-style clavichord has a warm sound and a wide dynamic range, while the French double-manual harpsichord literally sparkles. The Longman, Clementi & Co. piano holds a certain fascination, since Maene owns the original and restored it himself before making a copy of it. Luckily, in *The Virtual Haydn*, we get to hear both: on the audio disc we hear the replica “in” the virtual

Holywell Music Room, and in the documentary we hear the original in the real Holywell Music Room. It is amazing to see how sonically close Maene came in his replica to the original.

### The rooms

Beghin had already asked Martha de Francisco if she was interested in working on the Haydn project when Wieslaw Woszczyk approached him with the idea of using “virtual acoustics.” As Beghin explains in his notes, he initially felt skeptical: “My focus had been on Haydn, his dedicatees, and their instruments. Now also their rooms? What about their clothes, also relevant for a specific composure at the keyboard? Candles?... We want to be inspired, not enslaved, by history.” When asked later if his plan had been to use a conventional studio or to record in spaces with fairly live acoustics, he elaborated: “I had indeed intended to go to places where I would find the best instruments. Going to proper historical spaces hadn’t been my priority. In retrospect, I’d say: rather naively. (I once recorded C.P.E. Bach’s character pieces on a clavichord in a huge concert hall – true enough: for recording it’s important to be in spaces that allow vibrations to develop at their fullest, but the danger is that one loses touch with the actual environments that these instruments were initially designed for.) My main fear was

regarding the trap, as I would call it, of historical reconstruction.... [But] the interesting part is that ‘rooms’ started entering my interpretations as a parameter completely on par with instruments.”

Malcolm Bilson likes to tell the story of the revelatory experience he had playing in the Ceremonial Room at Esterháza for the first time in 1972. The acoustics were perfect, and after returning from his trip, he called the pioneering fortepiano builder Philip Belt and exclaimed, “Philip! Stop building instruments and start building rooms!” Most early music enthusiasts in North America would have to agree that we have a dearth of venues that truly come close to the spaces this music was performed

*Bottom, Haydn’s study in his house in Eisenstadt near the Esterházy Palace. Below, a Saxon-style clavichord (after an instrument from 1760) used by Beghin for recordings in Haydn’s house. The clavichord was made by Joris Potvlieghe in 2003.*





in. And while a number of exquisite churches exist in which Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music can be suitably heard and played, one still finds that many groups are performing in spaces that are too big for the music. Indeed, even when some period orchestras play Classical and early Romantic repertoire, the concert halls in which they are playing are still too big. In many ways, this project addresses that issue, for Haydn's keyboard music, and indeed most keyboard music from that period, was not conceived of as "concert music" in the way that concertos and symphonies were, or in the way that sonatas from the mid-19th century onward were. While we know that many composer-pianists such as Mozart, Beethoven, Clementi, Dussek, *et al.*, performed solo music in concert, we return again to the point that the spaces they would have played in are still more intimate than most dedicated concert spaces here.

As it happens, the stunning Ceremonial Room at Esterháza (see cover) where Bilson had his epiphany is one of the nine rooms that was sampled for *The Virtual Haydn*, and it seems only fitting that Beghin, who was one of Bilson's students in the 1990s, would have the opportunity to record "in" this space with the aid of this nascent, groundbreaking technology. The McGill team

chose the other eight rooms based on their ties to Haydn, or their similarity to spaces he and keyboardists at the time would have known. Taken together, these nine spaces range from extremely intimate to sumptuously grand, and within the scope of this project, Beghin is able to demonstrate that Haydn's very scores often point towards which type of spaces or "performances" Haydn was considering. There are intimate sonatas that point to the small salon and grander sonatas whose big gestures and public nature points towards larger spaces. In the end, it seems clear that the decisions Beghin had to make about which works to play on which instrument segued beautifully and very sensibly into what rooms they should be "recorded" in.

Save for his two London sojourns, Haydn spent his entire life in the Hapsburg empire, in a small region near Vienna that spanned only 31 miles (50 kilometers) across. In 1761, he was hired by Prince Anton Esterházy, a plum job since the Esterházy's were the richest and most influential members of the Hungarian nobility and had long been avid patrons of the arts. The main residence of the family was the Esterházy Palace in Eisenstadt, a small town outside Vienna. Haydn bought a house there in 1766, and two of the "rooms" used in this project are in this house, which is now a museum. Designated as "Room Five" and "Haydn's Study," they are small rooms with hardwood floors and low ceilings; "Room Five" is the larger of the two and is treated as a middle class drawing room. Beghin chose to play early works on the clavichord in both rooms, which works well not only in the spaces but with Haydn's circumstances in the early part of his career. We are reminded of Haydn's own comment on this time: "When I was sitting at my worm-eaten clavichord, I envied no king his fortune." It is fairly certain that by *clavier* he means clavichord. Indeed, the quiet-voiced clavichord consoled and charmed many a musician, and it is easy to imagine Haydn playing for himself in these spaces. From the Esterházy Palace, we have the ornate "Spiegelsaal," whose walls feature bas-reliefs of musical instruments. Though this was a public space once used as the Prince's main

Bottom, the "Prunkraum" in the Albertina Museum in Vienna. Using the sound envelope captured from this room, Beghin recorded three sonatas Haydn dedicated to Princess Liechtenstein on a square piano (below) built by Chris Maene in 2007 after a 1788 instrument by Ignaz Kober.





reception room, Beghin treats it as a salon where one of the ladies of the Esterházy clan might have had lessons, using the Viennese harpsichord.

Prince Nikolaus, successor to Anton, had grand dreams and proceeded to build another palace in what is now modern-day Hungary, in the town of Fertöd. Called Esterháza, it started out as a summer palace but eventually became the family home for 10 months of the year. Nikolaus, who in his day was known as “The Magnificent” (*Der Prachtliebende*), consciously set out to create Esterháza in the image of Versailles. With this in mind, Beghin chose to play the French double-manual harpsichord in this room and to record the six sonatas that comprise Haydn’s first authorized publication in *any* genre, Hob. XVI: 21-26. Published in 1774, they are dedicated to his royal employer and are often referred to as the “Esterházy Sonatas.” They are grand works with big gestures, and the opening sonata of the set is in C major, itself a very “public” key. The opulence and magnificence of the Ceremonial Room is heightened by the six large mirrors on the walls, which also create a highly reflective and “live” acoustic. The adjoining room, separated only by tall French doors, is treated in this set as the “Esterháza Music Room.” It is also visually stunning, and the liner notes state: “An almost exact cube, the room has extraordinarily luscious acoustics. We use the room as a generic salon of the high aristocracy.” In this room Beghin plays one of three programs on the “early” Walter piano, this one featuring six sonatas (Hob. XVI: 35–39, 20) published in Vienna in 1780 and dedicated to the extremely talented Auenbrugger sisters, whose musicianship Haydn praised as “equal to the finest masters.” This room, while large, has a less cavernous acoustic than the Ceremonial Room.

The remaining four rooms do not have a direct relationship to Haydn, though we can be fairly certain that he would have visited the Lobkowitz Palace during his visits to Vienna. It was the scene of much music-making, and Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian Lobkowitz, an amateur violinist, cellist, and singer, greatly admired Haydn’s



music. In 1808, the composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt noted that it was a “true residence and academy of music.” Both professional musicians and aristocratic amateur musicians (many of whom would be quite talented by today’s amateur standards) performed chamber music and oratorios in this grandiose hall, and Beethoven’s *Eroica* was premiered there in 1804. (Thus, the hall is usually referred to now as the “Eroica-Saal.”) Like many rectangular rooms with marble walls and parquet floors, this room has very sympathetic and lively acoustics, which are in many ways friendlier than some spaces built today that are designed specifically for concerts. Adorning the ceilings are allegorical scenes depicting various arts and sciences. Beghin plays the “late” Walter with *Prellmechanik* in this room for a program entitled “Viennese Culture,” which presents four late works with Viennese ties. The free-spirited and utterly virtuosic C major Fantasia (Hob. XVII:4) was published there in 1789, and the other works were not only published there but dedicated to Viennese ladies who were well-known as performers in the salon



Above, in conversation with his recording colleagues, Tom Beghin discusses the sound of Holywell Music Room in Oxford, England (where Haydn received an honorary doctorate in 1791). Below, an English grand piano built in 2004 by Chris Maene after one made by Longman, Clementi & Co. in 1798, an instrument restored by Maene. Beghin recorded a Blu-ray video on the original instrument in the Holywell Music Room and recorded Haydn works associated with London in the captured sound of the room back in the studio in Montreal.





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# The Virtual Haydn

scene, Barbara Ployer and Magdalena von Kürzbock. Ployer was one of Mozart's star students and the recipient of K. 459 and 453, and the work Haydn dedicated to her is the transcendental Variations in F Minor, Hob. XVII:6. Kürzbock was the lucky recipient of one of Haydn's most famous and beloved works, the Sonata in E-flat, Hob. XVI:52. A Viennese reviewer at the time noted that the sonata spoke to the abilities of the dedicatee, which is surely true, but this work had actually been dedicated earlier to another powerhouse pianist, the "Celebrated" Therese Jansen Bartolozzi, a student of Muzio Clementi whom Haydn befriended in London. Therefore, Beghin cannily chose to record this work twice, once on the Viennese piano to represent Kürzbock, and once on the English piano for Jansen.

The Albertina in Vienna, once a vast royal palace, now serves as an art museum and library. The "Prunkraum" in the Albertina was once the reception room for the private apartments of a princess, the young wife of the Archduke of Austria. Beghin explains that silk wall coverings and a large carpet "contribute to intimate acoustics defined by a heavy absorption of sound." He plays the square piano in this room and features the three sonatas that Haydn dedicated to Princess Liechtenstein (Hob. XVI: 40-42) as a wedding present after her marriage to Prince Nikolaus II Esterházy. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the only room of the nine that was originally conceived of as a public concert space, the Holywell Music Room in Oxford, England. Built in 1742, it opened for public concerts in 1748 and is thus the oldest concert hall in Europe. Haydn received an honorary doctorate of music at Oxford University in a two-day ceremony in July 1791, and it seems quite likely that he could have

heard or participated in a concert here. It is a large rectangular space with a curved back wall, hardwood flooring and wooden benches, and plastered walls and ceiling. It is acoustically very vibrant, and as an added bonus in this collection, one of the video performances was filmed here, using the original Longman, Clementi & Co. piano that Maene restored and subsequently replicated. In this way, we hear and experience not only the "real" room, but a "real" instrument as well. Beghin records Haydn's works associated with London here, save for the Sonata in D Major, Hob. XVI: 51, which he records on the English piano, but in the "Salles des Nantes" in Montreal.

The McGill team returned home to the New World for one room, the exquisite "Salle des Nantes" at the Château Ramezay in Montreal. Built in 1705, it was originally the mansion of Montreal governor Claude de Ramezay but it subsequently had many owners, the American Revolutionary Army

being one of them. (Benjamin Franklin is said to have stayed here.) The "Salle des Nantes," as Beghin writes, "... has its own 'virtual' feature: surrounding mahogany panels, carved with images of musical instruments,

[which] were imported

from another 18th-century mansion in Nantes, France." He explains further: "We use the room as a 'far away' location. The 'Anno 776' Sonatas (Hob. XVI: 27 - 32) had already made it into print in Amsterdam and Berlin. Surely a copy reached the faraway Province of Quebec, too." In point of fact, we do know that Haydn's music had made it to the New World by the 1780s, specifically to the city of Philadelphia via Alexander Reinagle (1756 - 1809), an English musician of German descent who moved there following the American Revolution. A keyboardist, he arrived in 1786 and began programming Haydn's music on a series called the "City Concerts,"

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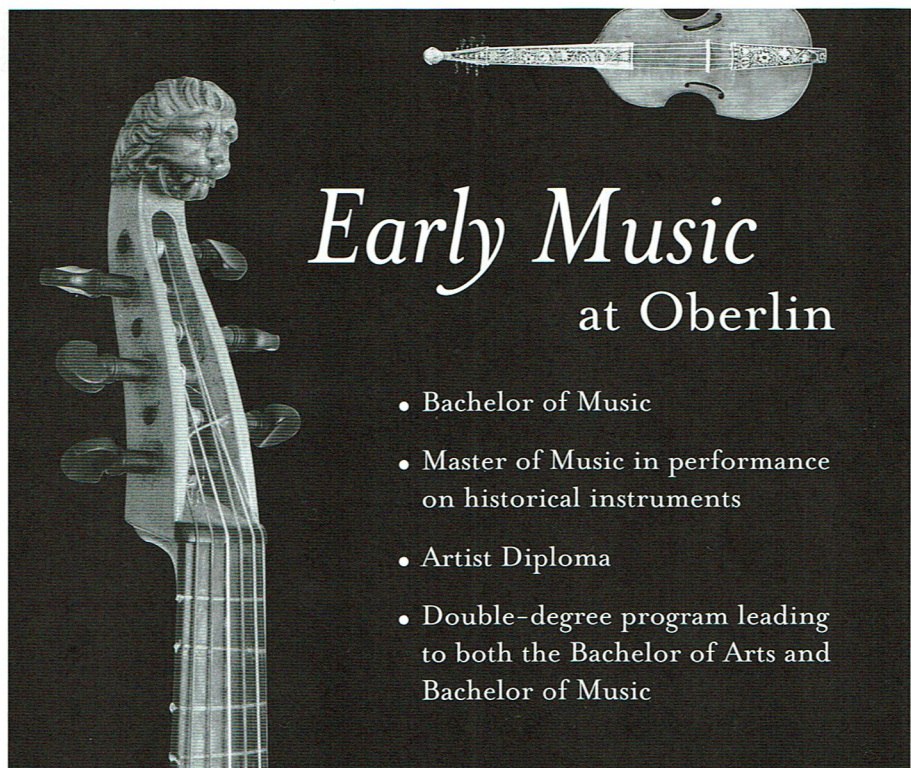
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and on a number of programs we find listed sonatas “For the Piano Forte, by Mr. Haydn.” Interestingly, the rooms of the City Tavern, where Reinagle’s concerts took place, are covered in wood paneling like the “Salle des Nantes.” We do not know what piano Reinagle played, but Beghin’s choice to use the Viennese *Tafelklavier* perhaps reflects the fact that square pianos were prevalent on this side of the ocean as well.

### The recording process

The accompanying documentary, entitled “Playing the Room: The Making of the Virtual Haydn,” shows very clearly how the entire recording process took place. Here we meet Martha de Francisco and Wieslaw Woszczyk, as well as all four instrument builders. We see each of the rooms as well as the studio at CIRMMT, and in the sequence shot at the Holywell Music Room, we see how the rooms are sampled. In his essay in the accompanying booklet, Woszczyk describes the process in detail: “We ‘excite’ the real room through an 80-second logarithmic sine-sweep ranging from 18 Hz to 48 kHz. The signal is radiated through multiple loudspeakers distributed in the area of the room where we’ve decided the musician would be performing. HDIR software... allows us to register the response in eight channels of high-resolution 96 kHz/24 bit audio. Sound sources of the sweep are 10 to 14 loudspeakers covering a full frequency range from 25 to 50 kHz. The loudspeakers, arranged to approximate the radiation pattern of a keyboard instrument’s soundboard, produce strong early reflection and reverberation. Eight high-quality, low-noise and wide-frequency microphones on a spaced array tree capture a cluster of impulse responses at three different heights of 2m (meters), 3m, and 4m. In any selected room we measure 24 responses at each of the three heights.” (In the picture on page 36, we see the microphone tree set up in the Holywell Music Room.) If this all sounds very 21st-century and a bit far from the spirit of the music, then seeing the parade of equipment as it is brought into the early 18th-century Holywell Music Room while a technician from Chris Maene’s workshop (Paul



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Deduytschaever) tunes the 1798 Longman, Clementi & Co. piano reinforces this incongruity, for the loudspeakers alone resemble the robot R2D2 from Star Wars! After Woszczyk and his assistant Doyuen Ko are finished setting up, Woszczyk begins the sine sweep, and the sound is so powerful he needs earplugs. Even watching the video, the sound is a bit unsettling: it starts from a rumble of a pitch too low to hear and sweeps up to sounds that are piercingly high, again dissolving into inaudible pitches. Maybe some would feel the whole process goes too far: why not simply bring instruments to these places and record in them? In my interviews with de Francisco and Ko, both admitted that though they enjoyed this process and were pleased with the results, they still felt that they'd prefer recording in a real space. In the documentary, however, de Francisco explains that she once had

to turn down the Holywell Music Room as a recording venue because of the overwhelming amount of outdoor noise, and therein lies at least one of the reasons why this technology is worth considering.

The other is that a dedicated recording studio obviously provides a controlled environment in which to work. Once the samples were brought back to Montreal, the other half of the process involved bringing the instruments into CIRMMT and leaving them there for two entire weeks to record each of the ten programs. It is hard to imagine having the luxury of doing that in any of the spaces used for this project, as most of them are public museums. The two-week process included one or two days (usually the weekend) for the instruments to settle, during which Beghin practiced "in" the acoustical space, which was reproduced in a dome of

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speakers in the studio. After these practice sessions, de Francisco would arrive on Monday and listen intently to the instruments and consult with Beghin about microphone placement, since part of that decision was based on whether the programs were meant to be heard only by the player at the instrument (i.e. Haydn playing for himself at the clavichord) or by a few listeners positioned around the instrument, or by a larger number of listeners in a larger space. Each program was recorded in three days, after which a video-shoot was done the following weekend.

Interestingly, Beghin recorded most of the programs through headphones. When I asked Beghin if this was difficult, he replied: "I was amazed at how quickly I got used to the headphones. In fact, I felt much more in control than in a conventional recording, partly because I not only heard the ambience around the instrument, but also the very direct sounds coming from parts of the instrument one normally isn't able to hear when sitting at the keyboard. Usually, I lower or remove the stand of my instrument to better hear what's projected out from the soundboard area, but in these circumstances (since I was being fed what microphones picked up), this wasn't necessary anymore. As a result, I found I was able to concentrate on my music-making much more directly and comfortably. I also found that there was much less of a shock when going to the control room to listen to recorded takes than in a conventional recording context. Usually, you don't recognize what you've recorded, to the point of shock. Now I felt there were no surprises: I could anticipate the final result with amazing accuracy – in fact, I heard it through my headphones, just as I was playing." In the lab, de Francisco actually heard the playing "dry," without the acoustics, as she took her production notes.

In one of the most moving and astounding sequences in the documentary, we witness Beghin, Woszczyk, and Ryan Miller (another of the recording students/assistants) as they hear the virtual Esterháza Ceremonial Room through the dome of speakers at CIRMMT for the first time. What is astounding is that, as we watch them in this very small and

antiseptic-looking studio, every sound we hear – their speech, Miller whistling, the French harpsichord being played – has tons of cavernous reverb. It is moving because Woszczyk and Beghin, who of course have been to the real space, attest that this is exactly what it sounds like. Finally Woszczyk says simply, "That's the room." Beghin relayed in our interview that he imagines Woszczyk's feeling at that moment must have been "...similar to that of an instrument builder hearing his finished instrument for the first time.... That moment was his moment: his vision materialized." The wonderment continues as Yves Beaupré explains that, while tuning, he certainly feels as if he's in a huge room because the resulting sounds are so far away in space. A fine harpsichordist himself, he starts to play some François Couperin, and as the final, wonderfully rich bass note fades into the "acoustic" and the image also fades away, we hear him declare, "I'd like to have that at home." And indeed, in this moment, it is clear that one of the aims for the research being done at CIRMMT has been realized, for while Beaupré isn't yet able to have the Ceremonial Room at home, he actually is experiencing it in his home city of Montreal without having to travel to Fertöd.

### The Blu-ray decision

Originally, the McGill team had planned to release the project as a "hybrid-SACD" that would be playable on regular CD player as well. However, people in the audio field were increasingly enthusiastic about the possibilities afforded by Blu-ray, and when Naxos heard about this project, they were happy to embrace it as their first Blu-ray release. The benefits of the Blu-ray format are plentiful: for one, rather than release a 14-CD box set, we have here a handsome and slim product with just four discs: three containing five hours of music each, with individual programs accessed by menu, and one video disc containing a lengthy documentary, a beautiful photo gallery, seven video performances, and the game-like "7x9 Matrix: Andante for Musical Clock," which provides the ability to hear the short Andante Hob. XIX:10 played on

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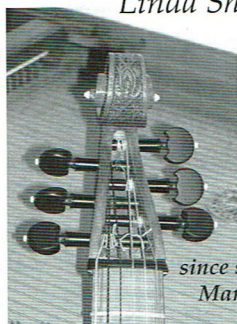
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each of the seven instruments in each of the nine rooms. If you would like, for instance, to hear the clavichord in one of the large spaces, this allows you to do so. Another element made possible by Blu-ray is that of being able to hear the audio discs in either two-channel stereo or five-channel surround sound. Interestingly, the very packaging provides the chance to have a larger booklet, and the one that comes with this set is lavish and incredibly informative, with comprehensive essays as well as detailed information on the instruments, temperaments, and rooms used. For early keyboard players and builders, for instance, the amount of information on the instruments is astoundingly thorough, including scaling, stringing, case materials, etc.

So far, *The Virtual Haydn* has received a lot of notice in audiophile-related publications and by DVD or Blu-ray film reviewers. The decision to release the project on Blu-ray has the potential to exclude those who are not ready to replace their CD and DVD players with Blu-ray players, and when it comes down to it, the situation is not unlike that faced by keyboardists in the 18th century who balked at the idea of replacing their beloved harpsichord with a newfangled fortepiano. However, Haydn himself was clearly one who embraced new situations and instruments fearlessly. His decision to travel to England (a truly distant place at that time, and also a place where he didn't know the language) at what was then the ripe old age of 58 is just one example. Furthermore, when we examine the works he wrote after encountering the English piano, which was so different from any instrument he had previously known, it is clear that in this respect as well he was open to change. Haydn was keenly aware of the changing cultural aesthetics around him, as evidenced by letters where he mentions crafting a work to suit a specific audience or situation. There is only one time he definitively "rebelled" against someone he was composing for (unless one counts the "Farewell Symphony"),

## About Blu-ray players

At the moment, Blu-ray players are beginning to offer much more than the ability to watch and listen to discs. For instance, a number of machines offer streaming capabilities with Netflix, allowing you to stream "Instant Watch" offerings directly to your TV via the Blu-ray player. Similar streaming partnerships exist with Blockbuster on Demand, Pandora Radio, and YouTube. One can also view photos by inserting a JPEG disc or a USB memory flash stick. As with all ground-breaking technology, the price is coming down considerably now that it has been on the market a few years.

and that was in 1789 when he wrote his wonderful Sonata in E-flat (Hob. XVI: 49) for his cherished friend Marianne von Genzinger. Frau Genzinger owned a harpsichord, and he wrote to her numerous times explaining that she needed a fortepiano for this sonata. In a letter of June 27, 1790, Haydn explained, "I know I ought to have arranged this sonata in accordance with your kind of keyboard" – he writes *Clavier*, but from a few earlier sentences it is clear that he means harpsichord – "but I found this impossible because I am no longer accustomed to it." When forging ahead with new technologies, there must always be a brave few who decide to embrace the new modalities unequivocally, galvanizing everyone else to go along with them. Perhaps Beghin will convince us all that we need Blu-ray players to experience his ground-breaking effort, just as Haydn eventually convinced Frau Genzinger that she needed a fortepiano. ♪

Based in the Boston area, Sylvia Berry is an active performer-scholar specializing in Viennese music of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. At the Haydn Society of North America's 2009 conference, she presented a lecture-recital entitled "Haydn at the Keyboard: Four Sonatas from Four Decades" for which she played both harpsichord and fortepiano.