PROGRAM NOTES
by Phillip Huscher

Joseph Haydn
Born March 31, 1732, Rohrau, Austria.
Died May 31, 1809, Vienna, Austria.

Cello Concerto in C Major, Hob. VIIb:1

Haydn composed this cello concerto in C major between 1761 and 1765. The date of the first performance is not known. The score was lost during the composer's lifetime and only rediscovered in 1961. It was performed on May 19, 1962, in Prague, by cellist Miloš Sádlo, with Charles Mackerras conducting the Czech Radio Symphony. The orchestra consists of two oboes, two horns, and strings. Performance time is approximately twenty-five minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first subscription concert performances of Haydn's Cello Concerto in C major were given at Orchestra Hall on December 3 and 4, 1964, with János Starker as soloist and Jean Martinon conducting. Our most recent subscription concert performances were given on March 9, 10, 11, and 14, 1989, with Natasha Gutman as soloist and Christopher Keene conducting. Our most recent performance was given on a musicians' pension fund concert on April 23, 2004, with Mstislav Rostropovich as soloist and William Eddins conducting. The Orchestra first performed this concerto at the Ravinia Festival on July 15, 1972, with János Starker as soloist and István Kertész conducting, and most recently on August 6, 2006, with Yo-Yo Ma as soloist and Miguel Harth-Bedoya conducting.

Until 1961, there was just one cello concerto, in D major, by Haydn. It was long treasured by audiences and cellists alike as the single work of its kind from the great Viennese classical triumvirate—neither Mozart nor Beethoven wrote cello concertos. An earlier cello concerto by Haydn, in C major, thought to have disappeared during the composer's lifetime, had been given up for lost. That concerto was listed—along with the opening snatch of music—in both of Haydn's own catalogs: the "draft catalog" he began in 1765 and added to periodically; and the comprehensive 1805 catalog disarmingly titled "A list of all the compositions which I can at present recall having composed from my eighteenth until my seventy-third year" (which does not exactly inspire confidence in its comprehensibility).

Then, in 1961, Oldřich Pulkert, the archivist of the Prague National Museum, uncovered a set of parts for the C major cello concerto that had been lost for nearly two centuries. The parts were apparently written by Joseph Weigl, the principal cellist in Haydn's orchestra from 1761 to 1768. (The run on Haydn discoveries continued. A mass dating from 1768, and lost for more than two hundred years, turned up in 1983. It was widely considered the most exciting event in modern Haydn scholarship since the discovery of the C major cello concerto. Then in 1993, six keyboard sonatas—turned over to a local music teacher by an elderly woman in Münster, Germany—were immediately proclaimed as genuine and then, almost as quickly, deemed fakes.)

The frequent revelations of modern Haydn scholarship have not dimmed our pleasure in the newly found music itself. This score is as engaging as any concerto Haydn wrote, including the popular E-flat trumpet concerto, and it is a welcome and worthy companion to the D major concerto. Unlike either of those pieces, the C major concerto is an early work, written during Haydn's first four years working for the Esterházy family, when he often favored his players with prominent solos in his symphonies and treated his best musicians to concertos written with them in mind. This cello concerto was composed for Weigl, a good friend, and, by all accounts, an excellent musician. We do not know when he first played it.
Although Haydn never found the concerto form as congenial or stimulating as Mozart, his best works in the genre, like the C major cello concerto, are supremely assured pieces, always sensitive to the capabilities of the solo instrument and every bit as brilliantly crafted as the symphonies. Certainly this expansive Moderato, with its winning energy and lyricism, is as impressive as the opening of any early Haydn symphony. And the slow movement, an eloquent aria for cello with string accompaniment, would be welcome in any of the operas Haydn would soon write for the Eszterházy court. If it is the finale that sounds most like Haydn to us today, it is because we recognize the quick wit and down-to-earth charm that characterize so much of his best-known music.

*Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.*