

Franz Ignaz
BECK
Symphonies, Op. 2

Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra
Kevin Mallon



Franz Ignaz Beck (1734–1809)

Symphonies: Op. 2

When Franz Beck composed his first symphonies – sometime around the mid 1750s – the genre was in its infancy but it was by no means primitive. The most famous exponent of the symphony, Beck's teacher Johann Stamitz, Director of the celebrated Mannheim court orchestra, had not only raised it to new levels of technical sophistication but, together with a number of his gifted colleagues, had also evolved a new and distinctive style of writing for orchestra. Stamitz's symphonies were immensely popular, particularly in France. They circulated in both printed editions and in manuscript parts exerting a profound if localized influence on the development of the symphony. The presence of Stamitz, Richter, Holzbauer, Filtz and others at the Mannheim court created a unique musical environment that must have been intoxicating to a young and ambitious composer like Beck.

Beck began his musical studies with his father, Johann Aloys, Rektor of the Choral School at the Palatinate Court in Mannheim. He studied violin, double bass and organ, among other instruments, and displayed such impressive talents that the Elector Carl Theodor undertook responsibility for his education. If the account of Beck's pupil Blanchard is to be believed, the young musician had to flee Mannheim after fighting a duel with a jealous rival and believing that he had killed the man. Many years later, the story goes, he learned that he had been the victim of a hoax: his opponent had only feigned death. This version of events is not universally accepted and it has also been claimed that Beck left Mannheim in rather less sensational fashion in order to study with Baldassare Galuppi in Venice. Whatever the circumstances of his departure, Beck certainly did live in Venice for several years for it was from there that he eloped to Naples with Anna Oniga, his employer's daughter. After his eventful sojourn in Italy Beck moved to Marseilles and became leader of a theatre orchestra. Although the date of his arrival in France is uncertain, he must have been well-known by reputation at least by the late 1750s since four sets of symphonies were published in rapid succession by Parisian firms beginning in 1758 with the six *Symphonies, Op. 1* ('*Sei Overture*') on the title page of which Beck is described as "Chamber

Virtuoso to the Elector Palatine and pupil of Johann Stamitz." By the time the Op. 2 symphonies appeared in 1760 Beck appears to have severed his connection with the Mannheim court but he is still described on the title page of La Chevardière's print as 'Dissipolo d'Stamitz', proof of the older composer's enduring reputation in France.

Beck moved from Marseille to Bordeaux where he was appointed conductor of the Grand Théâtre. His theatre duties were combined with composing and teaching. Among his most prominent pupils were Pierre Gaveaux, Blanchard and Boscha. In October 1774 he was appointed organist at St Seurin, Bordeaux, where his improvisations were widely admired. Among the most important works of the pre-Revolutionary period is the magnificent *Stabat mater* which was given its first performance at Versailles. Like a number of other prominent composers Beck appears to have had little difficulty adjusting to the new regime and produced a substantial number of patriotic works including a *Hymne à l'être suprême*. In 1803 he was appointed correspondent of music composition for the Institute of France.

Beck's symphonies have long been regarded as among the most striking works of their kind from the mid-18th century. Their quality makes it all the more puzzling that Beck apparently lost interest in the genre as early as c. 1766. Had he brought his formidable talents to bear on the symphony for another twenty years or so he might have left a body of work equal in stature to that of Wanhall or Kraus. Even the earliest of his symphonies are remarkable for their dramatic flair, rich harmonic language and fluid, inventive part writing.

The six *Symphonies, Op. 2* were issued by the Parisian publisher La Chevardière in 1760, two years after the Op. 1 symphonies. The works were evidently popular and still considered current enough for Breitkopf to advertise copies for sale in his 1775 thematic catalogue. Although the title page of La Chevardière's edition which reads '*SIX / SIMPHONIES / A QUATRE PARTIES / Et Cors de Chasses / ad Libitum / Dediée / A MONSIEUR RUA / PAR FRANCESCO BEK / Dissipolo D'Stamitz... OPERA II...*'

implies that horns are used throughout the set, only two of the symphonies – *Op. 2, No. 1* and *Op. 2, No. 5* – employ them in their outer movements; the remainder, like the '*Sei Overture*' *Op. 1*, are scored for strings alone. The string writing is again thrilling in the best Mannheim tradition but, as in the symphonies of Richter, there is a harmonic breadth and contrapuntal ingenuity which is absent from the works of many of his contemporaries. Beck's sensitivity to the expressive possibilities of his limited forces can be seen especially in his skilful handling of texture. At times the writing is full and powerfully symphonic, at other times, delicately complex in its interplay of voices in the style that would later become characteristic of the string quartet. A favourite device – and one which features in many of his later symphonies – is the use of extended passages in which the basso is omitted and the lowest part is played by the viola. Beck also shows a fondness for deploying instruments in pairs, a notable example of this being in the finale of *Op. 2, No. 6*, which ends curiously with an exchange between the two violins and the viola and basso.

It is not only in their orchestration that the symphonies of *Op. 2* resemble Beck's earlier works. In many aspects of their musical structure and syntax they bear a close kinship to the *Op. 1* set and perhaps more remarkably to some of the symphonies that followed. Indeed, the stylistic unity of Beck's published symphonies seems to have encouraged the practice of interchanging movements. A copy of *Op. 2, No. 1* (Callen 7), preserved in the University

Library, Basel (ex Sarasin collection), includes a spurious timpani part and replaces the first and second movements of the work with those from *Op. 4, No. 4* (Callen 22). In the same collection there is a mix-and-match pastiche of *Op. 2, No. 2*: the first and second movements are replaced by those of the *G minor Overture, Op. 1, No. 1* (Callen 1). This practice continued into the 20th century when in Robert Sondheimer's edition of *Op. 2, No. 5* (Berlin, 1927) he substituted the first and third movements from *Op. 3, No. 4* (Callen 16) and added a Minuet (from Callen 28). Unlike the symphonies of Opp. 3 & 4, however, the *Op. 2 Symphonies* are all cast in three movements with duple and triple metre finales distributed evenly throughout the set. There is no internal repeat in the first movement of *Op. 2, No. 1*, a structural characteristic which would feature in some of the composer's later symphonies, and none of the first movements makes use of strongly differentiated secondary themes in the manner of Opp. 3 & 4. Beck's ability to create tightly organized musical structures is seen to particularly good advantage in the first movement of *Op. 2, No. 2* with its clever referencing of the opening thematic material at important structural points rather in the manner of Haydn's highly concentrated monothematic sonata form movements. Small in scale these works might be but they reveal at every turn the hand of an exceptionally gifted composer.

Allan Badley

Recording Patrons

Executive Producers: John Burge, Helen MacDonald, Robert & Claire MacDonald, Andrée & Torrance Wylie

Donors: Julian Armour, Colin & Jo Ashford, John Beedell, Susan Bell, Anna Bilsky, Jean Boudreau, Dr. Carol Bream, Barrie Burns, Benjamin & Shannon Chalmers, Kaila-Lea Clarke, Rob Clipperton, Janos & Jerry Csaba, Barry Davidson, Ute & Michael Davis, Jim & Allison Dingle, Jessica Draker, Lisa Drouillard, Martine Dubé, Norman K. Enns, Jean-Maurice Filion, Pierre Gratton, Helen Griffin, Sheila & Paul Jenkins, Valerie Jerabek, William Johnson, Dr. Elaine Keillor, Cynthia King, Louise Laporte, Guylaine Lemaire, Thérèse Lemieux, Christina Lubbock, Kevin Mallon, Ian McAndrew, Peter & Chloe McLellan, John McPherson, Keltie & John Mierins, Eugenio Milani, Lilianna Milani, Lise Ouimet, Fred & Dorothy Perry, Marielle & Denis Petit, Margaret Pippy, Kenneth J. Ross, Barbara Shuh, Janet Still, Maria Soulis, Dr. Benedykt Syposz, Nicolas Tremblay, Mary Wilson Trider, Rod Trider, Bill & Peggy Tyson, Jonathan Wade, Allen R. Wells, Paul Wells, Peter Zanette, Linda Zaremba

The orchestral parts and scores of the following works are available from:

www.artaria.com

Sources

The sources upon which the editions used in this recording have been made are:

Sinfonia in D major, Op.2 No.1 (Callen 7)

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE189
Oxford, Bodleian Library (La Chevardière, 1760)

Sinfonia in G minor, Op.2 No.2 (Callen 8)

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE190
Oxford, Bodleian Library (La Chevardière, 1760)

Sinfonia in A major, Op.2 No.3 (Callen 9)

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE191
Oxford, Bodleian Library (La Chevardière, 1760)

Sinfonia in Eb major, Op.2 No.4 (Callen 10)

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE192
Oxford, Bodleian Library (La Chevardière, 1760)

Sinfonia in G major, Op.2 No.5 (Callen 11)

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE193
Oxford, Bodleian Library (La Chevardière, 1760)

Sinfonia in D major, Op.2 No.6 (Callen 12)

Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE194
Oxford, Bodleian Library (La Chevardière, 1760)



Photo: Emily Lockhart



Kevin Mallon

The Irish conductor Kevin Mallon studied composition, conducting (with J. E. Gardiner) and singing, and specialized in baroque violin. He became concertmaster with Le Concert Spirituel and Les Arts Florissants in Paris and led and directed The Irish Baroque Orchestra before moving to Canada to take up posts with Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and the University of Toronto. In 1999 he founded the Aradia Ensemble, with whom he has toured widely and has made over 50 recordings for Naxos. With Toronto's Opera in Concert he has conducted ten baroque operas. From 2004–2009, he was Artistic Director of the Irish company Opera 005. In 2009 Kevin Mallon undertook an engagement with the Odessa Opera, conducting in Odessa, then on tour in Europe. In 2010 Mallon was appointed Music Director of Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra in Ottawa. He was appointed Music Director of Orchestra Toronto in 2013 and Artistic Director of Opera Lyra, Ottawa in 2014. Kevin Mallon fulfills a wide range of guest conducting engagements, is an Irish fiddler as well as a composer, most recently writing music for the TV series *Camelot*.

The Players

Kevin Mallon *Artistic Director*

Violin I: Manuela Milani • Martine Dubé • Sara Mastrangelo • Geneviève Petit

Violin II: David Thies-Thompson • Solange Tremblay • Maria Nenoiu • Brigitte Amyot

Viola: Peter Webster • Catherine Ferreira

Cello: Julian Armour • Thaddeus Morden

Bass: John Geggie

Harpsichord: Marie Bouchard

Horn: Lawrence Vine • Elizabeth Simpson

Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra

Founded in 1976, Thirteen Strings is one of Canada's leading chamber orchestras, consisting of thirteen professional string players and directed by award-winning conductor, Kevin Mallon. The orchestra's repertoire is diverse, covering music from the baroque era to the 21st century. The orchestra has a strong focus on celebrating and promoting Canadian talent, having commissioned more than a hundred new works from Canadian composers. The orchestra also supports the development of the next generation of local talent through its youth programme, the Junior Thirteen Strings, by providing local high school students with mentorship and performance opportunities. Thirteen Strings can be heard at its six annual concerts held in Ottawa, at local festivals and events, and on recordings and broadcasts. The 2015-2016 season will mark the orchestra's 40th Anniversary. Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra is a registered charity, and is supported by government grants, corporate sponsorships and individual donors. More information on the Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra is available at www.thirteenstrings.ca.

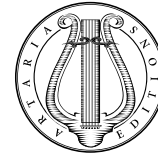


Photo: Paul Couvrette, Ottawa

Franz Ignaz Beck is increasingly acknowledged as one of the most forward-looking and inventive of mid-eighteenth-century symphonists. A student of the celebrated Johann Stamitz, Beck was trained in Mannheim, a focal point of new approaches to orchestral writing. Although small in scale, his *Op. 2* set includes some of the most striking and harmonically daring works of their kind from the period. Further Beck Symphonies may be heard on Naxos 8.553790, 8.554071, 8.570799, 8.573248 and 8.573249.



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Sinfonia in D major, Op. 2, No. 1 (Callen 7)		10:56	Sinfonia in E flat major, Op. 2, No. 4 (Callen 10)		10:16
1 Allegro assai	3:27	10 Allegro	3:37		
2 Andante grazioso	4:09	11 Adagio	3:46		
3 Presto	3:18	12 Presto	2:51		
Sinfonia in G minor, Op. 2, No. 2 (Callen 8)		12:09	Sinfonia in D major, Op. 2, No. 6 (Callen 12)		10:27
4 Allegro moderato	4:32	13 Allegro	4:35		
5 Andante	4:25	14 Andante	3:41		
6 Presto	3:10	15 Presto	2:09		
Sinfonia in A major, Op. 2, No. 3 (Callen 9)		13:29	Sinfonia in G major, Op. 2, No. 5 (Callen 11)		12:08
7 Allegro moderato	6:03	16 Allegro assai	4:37		
8 Andantino	3:56	17 Andante	4:56		
9 Presto	3:29	18 Presto	2:32		

Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra • Kevin Mallon

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DDD

Playing Time
69:45



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