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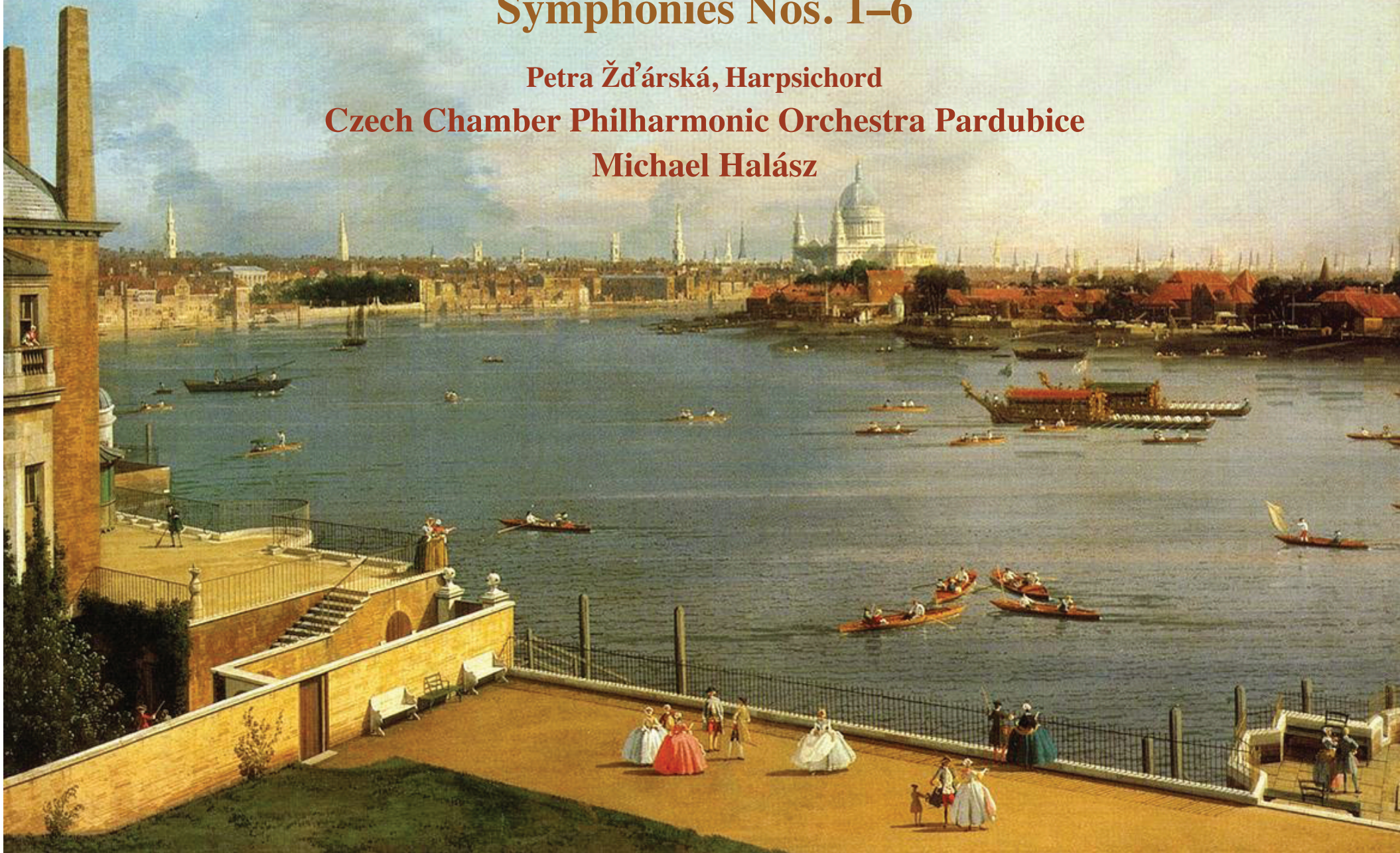
John Abraham
FISHER
(1744–1806)

Symphonies Nos. 1–6

Petra Žďárská, Harpsichord

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice

Michael Halász



John Abraham Fisher (1744–1806)

Symphonies Nos. 1–6

John Abraham Fisher was one of many prominent violinists and composers in 18th-century London. Once a student of Thomas Pinto, Fisher made his solo debut at the King's Theatre on 25 January 1765 and soon established himself as an important figure at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. Here he served as orchestra leader between c. 1768 and 1778 while his theatrical compositions, including the pantomime *Harlequin Jubilee* and *The Syrens*, enjoyed considerable success. Indeed, a 28 February 1776 review of *The Syrens* found Fisher's music highly commendable, stating that 'natural genius, and scientific knowledge, are happily blended in the music, and several of the airs would not disgrace the first Italian masters'. As a performer Fisher became known for playing with great temperament and technical facility, although his flamboyant style sometimes led to complaints of charlatanism. Fisher graduated with a Doctor of Music from Magdalen College, Oxford, in July 1777, the culmination of which was the premiere of his oratorio *Providence*; the work received subsequent performances in London in 1778 and 1780. After 1778 Fisher embarked on a more active performing career and undertook a series of concert tours in France, Germany and Russia before reaching Vienna in 1783, where he became acquainted with the celebrated English singer Nancy Storace. The music theatre entrepreneur Michael Kelly described Fisher's and Storace's courtship in his memoirs, and he noted that the pair were married in March 1784. Their brief and turbulent marriage, in which Fisher would regularly beat his wife, ended when the Emperor Joseph II ordered the composer to leave Austria in the autumn of 1784. Subsequent details of Fisher's career are scarce, though Lady Morgan records that he settled in Dublin, and supported himself by way of teaching and giving occasional performances at the Rotunda. In the final years of his life Fisher was largely dependent on the financial support of Sir Owen Wynn, and the June 1806 issue of *The Gentleman's Magazine* reported his death in Ireland.

Fisher's instrumental works are largely unknown and underexplored today. He wrote at least seven symphonies in total, six of which were published in London by Longman, Lukey and Co. in July 1772. The manuscript of a seventh symphony is currently held in the British Library, although the final movement is incomplete. Advertisements in newspapers such as *The London Chronicle* (dated 4–7 July 1772) indicate that the works were performed at the concerts of the Vauxhall Gardens, but exactly when Fisher wrote the symphonies and in what order is unknown. All of Fisher's symphonies are scored for two oboes, two bassoons, two horns and strings, typical of symphonic writing in the mid-18th century, and they clearly show Fisher's awareness of the most up-to-date musical trends in Europe despite having been written before he embarked on his concert tour of France, Germany and Russia. The works demonstrate a strong understanding of sonata form and a notable awareness of compositional techniques associated with the Mannheim School, including dynamic markings such as crescendo and diminuendo, and also variations in tonal colour. The presence of such Mannheim techniques in Fisher's writing indicates the popularity of the tradition in London during the 1760s and 1770s; possibly he became aware of this style through his work at the Theatre Royal in Covent Garden.

Despite the relatively small number of instruments involved Fisher varies the orchestral texture by introducing solo passages for oboes, bassoons and horns. The short duration of the first and second symphonies perhaps reflect a composer who was still trying to find his feet in the genre although they still demonstrate elements of variety, contrast and surprise. The first symphony opens with a bold, military-like dotted theme that is followed by a syncopated accompaniment in the violins and almost immediately the constant shifts between loud (*forte*) and soft (*piano*) playing become apparent. One of the standout moments of the busy and energetic third movement are the solo alternations

between the horns and the oboes, the former perhaps evoking the sound of hunting horns, a popular and familiar musical topic used by composers throughout the 18th century. The second symphony begins in a rather different way to the first, with all instruments playing together in unison throughout the opening bars and without the regular changes in dynamics. A fine example of the composer's use of surprise, even of musical wit, can be heard at the end of the third movement: here, after an almost constant flow of fast notes and generally loud playing, the sound diminishes to almost nothing in the final bars creating an almost comical effect that would not look out of place in the works of Joseph Haydn. The symphony finishes with a *ppp* dynamic marking which, according to Paul Rice, is most likely the first time a composer used such a device in a published score.

The slightly longer third symphony really showcases developments in Fisher's compositional maturity and his use of Mannheim techniques. A strong emphasis on chordal themes, as with the second symphony, can be heard here and the dynamic contrasts are even more apparent. Notable is Fisher's use of crescendo in the first movement that is supported by long held notes on the oboes, horns and bassoons. The symphony also exposes the oboe as a solo instrument as opposed to one that would merely double the violin part as seen in the earlier Baroque period, and prominent oboe solo passages can be heard near the beginning and towards the end of the first movement. The second movement continues this trend yet in a contrasting way: the beautifully lyrical first violin theme is supported by occasional melodic interjections from the oboe and a subtle yet ever-present accompanying bass line. In the fourth symphony Fisher takes these variations in orchestral colour and texture even further: roughly halfway through the opening movement a solo melody played by the oboes is passed over to the bassoons without any interjection or accompaniment from the strings. The bassoons do not solely function as doubling instruments, and passages

that are separate from the other bass instruments (a rarity in symphonic writing of the 1770s) become increasingly commonplace in Fisher's symphonies. The last movement of the fourth symphony sees the introduction of a minuet which contrasts from the brisk and often energetic finales of the previous three symphonies. Here there are fewer dynamic contrasts in comparison to previous movements but Fisher nonetheless keeps the listener's interest by way of some subtle interplay between the bass instruments and the higher parts that give the music a dance-like quality.

The final two symphonies on this recording show an even greater exploitation of Mannheim devices as well as a more varied approach to sonata form. The opening passage of the fifth symphony, with the chordal texture supplemented by rapid triplets in the violins and the alternating loud-soft phrases, sounds almost Mozartian in style. The prominent use of trills in the first violin part in the second movement shows signs of looking back towards the bygone Baroque period, yet at the same time the regular phrasing, dynamic changes and slightly more upbeat nature of the movement are indicative of a more mature Classical style that can be heard in much music of the 1780s and 1790s. Fisher's sixth symphony in many respects represents the culmination of his development as a symphonic composer. The imaginative and delicate use of texture is apparent from the very beginning, where a loud tutti passage is immediately contrasted by a lighter, more tuneful oboe passage accompanied only by the basses. Indeed, the oboes act as replacements for the first violins in several places throughout the symphony. The third and final movement, a minuet, is constructed in a way that typifies the Classical style and is a fine exponent of Fisher's wide use of dynamic contrasts. The horns have a particularly prominent role in this finale, again showing Fisher's careful concern over every aspect of his composition.

Sam Girling

Petra Žďárská

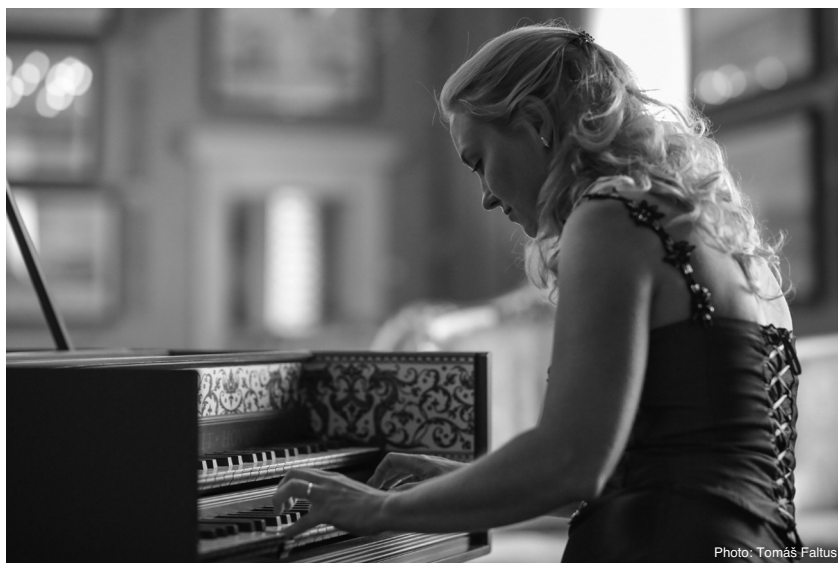


Photo: Tomáš Faltus

Petra Žďárská graduated in piano from the Conservatory of Pardubice, but after developing a passion for the harpsichord decided to continue studies at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (HAMU) with Giedrė Lukšaitė Mrázková, and the Conservatoire National Supérieur Musique et Danse de Lyon as part of the Erasmus programme. Žďárská has been mentored by numerous world-renowned musicians. In 2012, she completed her Master's degree, and in the same year won The Gideon Klein Foundation prize for best Czech participant at the Prague Spring International Music Competition. In 2018, she earned her doctorate from HAMU and established herself as a professor of the harpsichord at the same institution. She also teaches at the Conservatory of Pardubice. Žďárská regularly collaborates with ensembles Pro Arte Bohemica and Project FANDANGO.

www.zdarska.com

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice



Photo: František Renza

The Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice is valued for its stylistic interpretations and the extraordinary quality of its orchestral sound, and it is rightly ranked amongst the world's leading representatives of Czech musical culture. It often performs at the most prestigious festivals in the Czech Republic and venues throughout Europe such as the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, the Herkulessaal and the Gasteig, Munich, the Musikverein, Vienna, the Brucknerhaus, Linz, and the Meistersingerhalle, Nuremberg among many others. Outside Europe the orchestra has performed in Japan and toured extensively around America. The first principal conductor, Libor Pešek, quickly raised the orchestra to a high standard, and subsequent principal conductors have included Marco Armiliato and Mariss Jansons. The orchestra has also welcomed numerous world-renowned soloists such as Isabelle van Keulen, Vladimir Spivakov, Ludwig Güttler, Radek Baborák, Gábor Boldoczki and Sergei Nakariakov. Aside from concerts, the orchestra regularly engages in operatic and theatre projects and has recorded dozens of successful albums on record labels including Naxos, ArcoDiva, Supraphon, Classico, Monitor-EMI and Amabile.

www.kfpar.cz

Michael Halász

Michael Halász's first engagement as a conductor was at the Staatstheater am Gärtnerplatz, Munich, where, between 1972 and 1975, he directed all operetta productions. In 1975 he moved to Frankfurt to work as principal Kapellmeister with Christoph von Dohnányi, and here he conducted the most important works of the operatic repertoire. Many engagements as a guest conductor followed and in 1977 Dohnányi took him to the Staatsoper Hamburg as principal Kapellmeister. From 1978 to 1991 he was GMD (general music director) of the Hagen Opera House and in 1991 he took up the post of resident conductor at the Wiener Staatsoper for 20 years. Michael Halász's recordings for Naxos include ballets by Tchaikovsky, operatic excerpts of Wagner, symphonies by Beethoven, Schubert and Mahler, Rossini's overtures, three volumes of Liszt's symphonic poems (the latter critically acclaimed by the *Penguin Guide*), *Fidelio* (8.660070-71), *Don Giovanni* (8.660080-82), *Le nozze di Figaro* (8.660102-04), *Die Zauberflöte* (8.660030-31), and a pioneering recording of Schreker's opera *Der ferne Klang* (8.660074-75). He has also recorded Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* and *Orfeo* (8.550766), Richard Strauss's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (8.553379), Rubinstein's *Don Quixote* (8.555394) and, for Marco Polo, ballet music by Rubinstein (8.220451) and Schmidt's *Symphony No. 1* (8.223119).

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:

Symphony No. 1 in E major

Edited by Paul Rice – Artaria Editions AE281
Longman, Lukey & Co., 1772;
London, Royal College of Music

Symphony No. 2 in D major

Edited by Paul Rice – Artaria Editions AE282
Longman, Lukey & Co., 1772;
London, Royal College of Music

Symphony No. 3 in E flat major

Edited by Paul Rice – Artaria Editions AE283
Longman, Lukey & Co., 1772;
London, Royal College of Music

Symphony No. 4 in B flat major

Edited by Paul Rice – Artaria Editions AE284
Longman, Lukey & Co., 1772;
London, Royal College of Music

Symphony No. 5 in D major

Edited by Paul Rice – Artaria Editions AE285
Longman, Lukey & Co., 1772;
London, Royal College of Music

Symphony No. 6 in C major

Edited by Paul Rice – Artaria Editions AE286
Longman, Lukey & Co., 1772;
London, Royal College of Music



Described as having ‘natural genius’, John Abraham Fisher was a significant figure in London during the second half of the 18th century. A virtuoso violinist, he also wrote admired stage works for the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. His orchestral works are largely forgotten today, but his symphonies display a surprising awareness of contemporary continental trends in their use of dynamic variations, revealing the influence of the Mannheim School. Possessing a richness of colour, contrast and surprise, these symphonies typify Fisher’s expanding Classical style.



John Abraham FISHER

(1744–1806)

Symphonies Nos. 1–6 (pub. 1772)

Symphony No. 1 in E major

5:34

- 1 I. Maestoso
- 2 II. Andantino
- 3 III. Prestissimo

2:23

1:43

1:28

Symphony No. 2 in D major

6:13

- 4 I. Allegro di molto
- 5 II. Largo e pomposo
- 6 III. Presto assai

2:43

1:55

1:33

Symphony No. 3

in E flat major

10:56

- 7 I. Con molto spirito
- 8 II. Andantino amoroso
- 9 III. Presto assai

3:12

5:38

2:06

Symphony No. 4

in B flat major

13:04

- 10 I. Allegro di molto
- 11 II. Adagio molto affettuoso
- 12 III. Tempo di minuetto

4:29

5:21

3:14

Symphony No. 5 in D major

10:20

- 13 I. Allegro con molto spirito
- 14 II. Andantino
- 15 III. Allegro di molto

2:53

5:17

2:10

Symphony No. 6 in C major

11:00

- 16 I. Allegro di molto
- 17 II. Adagio
- 18 III. Tempo di minuetto

3:59

3:30

3:29

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Petra Žďárská, Harpsichord

Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice

Michael Halász

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from *Richmond House* (1746) by Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto) (1697–1768)

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