

1975

Dorati, Stern ...And Haydn

By Paul Hume

Antal Dorati, preeminent among the world's Haydn conductors, opened the Kennedy Center's Haydn Festival last night as he led the National Symphony Orchestra in the first of Haydn's symphonies.

Neither Haydn nor anyone else, hearing that first work, could have known where the path he was newly traveling would lead. In the end, more than a hundred times later, the symphonic path was one among several he took that led him to musical immortality.

Dorati chose with great care in planning this first of nearly 50 Haydn programs that will follow in the next three weeks, and his choice brought a sold-out audience to the Concert Hall.

That audience heard the first of the symphonies, and the last, and—choosing by the numbers, as Dorati admitted — the Symphony No. 52, which is precisely half of the total of 104. The evening also brought Isaac Stern to demonstrate the great art that lies in the seemingly simple Violin Concerto in C that is so generally neglected by violin virtuosos, even though Haydn wrote it for one of the greatest of his day, Luigi Tomasini

THE WASHINGTON POST

Tuesday, Sept. 23, 1975

B 9

"Haydn's harmony seems simple, but it is perfection. And it is succeeded by a melody of utter tranquility, supported by whispered pizzicatos."

By the time Dorati and Stern finished the concerto, the audience's enthusiasm was so great that it would not let them go for the intermission until conductor and violinist returned to the stage and repeated the final movement. It was interesting to note the several points at which the repetition surpassed the initial performance.

The concerto is built of those things at which brilliant violinists in Haydn's day excelled: rapid-fire arpeggios, quick leaps to what was then the top of the instrument's range, and the clear laying out of melodic lines. Nowhere is this last gift more tellingly used than in the slow movement.

In this entire section—a dream of a passage for a great musician—Haydn opens and closes with the simplest traversal of the F major scale. But, as the Marschallin says in "Der Rosenkavalier," it is in the

"how" that the difference lies. Haydn's harmony seems simple, but it is perfection. And it is succeeded by a melody of utter tranquility, supported by whispered pizzicatos.

For that movement, as much as for anything else in the concerto, Stern and Dorati deserved the encore the audience demanded.

Within the evening's three symphonies lie the seeds of most of Haydn's symphonic genius. The first may be naive, but, as Paul Henry Lang's perceptive commentary on Haydn notes, it is a naivete that glows with genius. That opening symphony is touched with inspiration, as much in its melodic content as in the sounds Haydn got out of his small ensemble. How different the horns sound when there are fewer instruments, and how the sustained oboe carries across the entire texture.

The harpsichord too, which has its place in so much of Haydn, filled out the whole, both in the first symphony and the concerto.

But move ahead with Haydn to the Symphony No. 52 and you find him passing through his "storm and stress period," writing in the ominous key of C Minor and paring away some attitudes that had earlier seemed "nice."

By means which, by then—he was 40—had become a part of his basic technique, Haydn could introduce tension and release into his music. Dramatic pauses occur, of which Dorati makes the most. Key changes appear, unsuspected and, in the traditional sense, unprepared. But he also finds a new device for creating calm: His slow movements often turn into slightly expanded string quartets, with the strings muted.

As for that last symphony, in D Major, it is one, though far from the only one, in which all Haydn's symphonic art is summed up, showing fresh mastery though the composer was by then in his 60s.

