

Happy Birthday, Haydn

One of the happiest trends in the recording industry is a growing interest in comprehensive editions of a composer's output. For somebody as prolific as **Franz Joseph Haydn**, born March 31, 250 years ago, this is a most important development. Only recently have all 106 authenticated symphonies, 60-odd piano sonatas, and approximately 60 string quartets become available on record. Philips is in the midst of a Haydn opera cycle and plans to record all of the composer's surviving works in this genre. (For more information on Haydn's operas, see "Hidden Haydn," *SR*, February 1981.) Only through our growing knowledge of the Haydn oeuvre can we begin to appreciate what an extraordinary composer he really was: There is very little that Haydn composed during the last 25 years of his life that is not first-rate, and it all survives a gamut of recorded interpretations.

Considering the vast amount of material Haydn wrote—more than 200 pieces for a glorified version of the viola da gamba called the baryton, for example—it is almost reassuring to discover that we have only 46 songs from his pen. Philips has now neatly captured the entire output on three discs, with soprano Elly Ameling and pianist Jörg Demus (Philips 6769 064*, \$32.94). It is one of the loveliest packages of the year. Elly Ameling is a soprano perfectly attuned to this repertoire, and she sings with grace, warmth, and exquisite taste. Demus is an impeccable accompanist. Some of the songs are admittedly minor, and Haydn's texts were often claptrap, but the majority of these works have an irresistible charm and balanced, miniature perfection. Some of the later songs prefigure Schubert and feature an almost romantic-era sense of drama. Philips provides texts and excellent notes; this stellar collaboration is highly recommended.

Also recommended is the latest installment in the continuing saga of Glenn Gould. We have come to expect the unex-

*cassette available

pected from this eccentric Canadian pianist, and nobody will be surprised that his first Haydn recordings in almost 25 years are dazzling, infuriating, and sublime, often within the same measure (Piano Sonatas Nos. 56 and 58-62, CBS Digital DAL-25758-59, two discs, no list price, about \$25). Gould's approach to the piano here is characterized by a crisp, almost harpsichord-like touch, at times suddenly exploding into a startling, violent romanticism. Haydn purists will



Haydn's music survives scholars and mavericks.

reach for their smelling salts. The pianist's tempos are often absurdly quick, just as often disconcertingly slow. He often phrases in near-pointillist fashion, finding staccato passages and arpeggiated chords where none are indicated in the score. Yet there is a sense of form here, an intelligence, integrity, and independence of thought that take my breath away. And if Gould's ideas about Haydn are sometimes offbeat, they are also always, however obscurely, brilliant.

Haydn is a rich enough composer to accommodate various interpretations. This is proved once more by two new

sets presenting divergent approaches to his symphonies. A superb chamber orchestra known as L'Estro Armonico, directed by Derek Solomons, has recently recorded the first seven symphonies, the "Morzin," and released them in an exciting three-record set (Saga Records Haydn 1, three discs, \$32.94, distributed by International Book and Record, 40-11 24 Street, Long Island City, New York 11101). L'Estro Armonico's work affords a model of what authentic performances should be: The symphonies are played on original instruments with a small ensemble and an emphasis on light, almost transparent timbres and highly subtle phrasing. Musicological reconstructions can be dreary, anemic affairs—Sir Thomas Beecham once defined a musicologist as somebody who can read music but can't hear it—but this is not the case with L'Estro Armonico. On the contrary, this is beautifully defined, thoroughly convincing Haydn-playing: energetic, zesty, passionate.

Yet I also enjoyed Herbert von Karajan's recordings of the later, "Paris" symphonies, Nos. 82-87 (DG Digital 2741 005*, three discs, \$38.94), even though they are the product of a completely different philosophy. Karajan approaches these masterworks in a hearty, lush Germanic style, employing the large forces of the Berlin Philharmonic toward a much more romantic presentation. It's not at all "authentic," but it's still brilliant music-making by a great artist at the height of his powers, and in case you needed to be told, the Berlin ensemble plays splendidly. DG's digital sound is luscious, and those in search of large-orchestra, traditional Haydn-playing will appreciate Karajan's contribution.

In sum, those who want scholarly and perfectly proportioned Haydn will want to purchase the Ameling and L'Estro Armonico discs—but those who quickly condemn either Glenn Gould or Karajan will be missing two distinct and pleasurable musical experiences. ■

When the Chosen Must Choose

Now that the cinema's rites of spring—the Oscars—are out of the way, we can turn our attention to an off-beat non-Hollywood non-contender that is finally making an appearance.

The Chosen, a rich and rewarding adaptation of the Chaim Potok novel, was completed more than a year ago but is only now available to the public at large. It had a one-shot world premiere last May 11 in some 1,000 theaters in this country, Canada, and 20 foreign countries in celebration of Israel's 33rd anniversary, with a fund-raising goal of \$50 million for Israeli educational institutions. But special though the appeal may have been, the film itself, with screenplay by Edwin Gordon, is of deep general interest and broad appeal.

Potok's story of the friendship between two Jewish teenagers in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn in the early 1940s emerges on screen with a remarkably dense—and rare—cultural texture that provides a fascination of its own. And its consideration of backgrounds and upbringing, of ethics and attitudes, and of generations and the gaps and bridges between them is extraordinarily satisfying in both personal and universal terms.

Reuven Malter and Danny Saunders meet as opponents in a sandlot baseball game, their rivalry exploding into violence when Danny aims a ball at Reuven and hits him in the face. Danny's later apologies lead to an unlikely friendship. Reuven is an all-American kid; Danny is a Hassid, complete with side curls and ritual garb. Reuven's father is a journalist and lecturer on Jewish cultural affairs; Danny's is not simply a rabbi but a *tsadik* (a leader considered a blessed intermediary between God and man), a hereditary title to be passed on to his son.

The boys slowly begin to share their worlds: Reuven's is one of choices and

exploration, with his father guiding his interests and his values, Danny's one of ritual, strictures, and "silence," his communications with his father restricted to their study of the Talmud. Reuven becomes, in subtle ways, a go-between for Danny and his father, enthralled by the exotic ways of a rabbinical household; Danny, in turn, is fascinated by the secular world, hungering for studies beyond the orthodox strictures, appreciating both Freud and Esther Williams. And suddenly, as the full horror of the Holocaust emerges with the end of the war and the movement for the establishment of a Jewish state gathers momentum, their relationship is shattered. Reuven's father has become an ardent public Zionist; Danny's father opposes the state on religious grounds, which hold that only with the coming of the Messiah will the Jews be allowed to return to their homeland. Finally, there is reconciliation and the resolution of the young men's futures.

The resolution is not as unexpected or ironic as the filmmakers would have us believe. But if there is, at times, a lack of subtlety in Jeremy Paul Kagan's direction, it does not vitiate the fascination of the characters or the authenticity of time and place and manners. Above all, there is overwhelming appeal in Barry Miller's Reuven, Maximilian Schell's vivid and compassionate portrait of Reuven's father, and Robby Benson's Danny, a charming naïf opening to the ways of the world. Schell is, as always, masterful in understatement. Rod Steiger's Reb Saunders is, to say the least, colorful, bogged with an accent that makes much of his speech muddy, made up to look well into his seventies (in spite of his relatively youthful wife and offspring), and all aglow with Kagan's penchant for Rembrandtesque lighting. But when emotions finally run high, Steiger is there reliably with his personal power and his major scenes are effective.

The Chosen is an intelligent film—and a pioneering one as well in its intellectual interests. ■



Top: Rod Steiger as Reb Saunders. Below: Robby Benson as Danny Saunders, and Barry Miller as Reuven Malter, in *The Chosen*, a film of rare cultural texture.