

# Whippoorwill E-Comment

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## It Was a Miracle

**D**uring my first semester as a freshman student at Eastern Kentucky State College in 1949 I made two discoveries that changed my life. I had a double major, chemistry and biology, which meant that I took all of these courses the school offered. Science courses have laboratories which met at least twice a week in addition to three lecture periods. Students had classes six days a week, MWF, and TTS. Organic chemistry labs met most of the day Saturday. As a consequence, I had very little free time, unlike many of my classmates who majored in areas other than science. Most of the time when I went to the grill area in the Student Union Building, many were there playing cards, ping-pong, billiards, or dancing to jukebox music. I sought a different diversion from the demands of academics, and often could find a remote music practice room and play a piano for a while.

The first important discovery was found in the college library where I unearthed a small collection of piano music scores which I checked out rather indiscriminately. I began to learn what the music I was learning to love actually looked like on paper, and began practicing some of the Beethoven piano sonatas.

My second discovery was a small music listening room I wandered into by accident one day. It was used only by music majors who had to satisfy a

required music literature course by listening to selected compositions from an ancient Carnegie Collection of one hundred 78 rpm records. The room also contained a rather large record player and a few chairs. Long Playing (LP) vinyl records had recently been invented and a single disk could hold an entire symphony, but on the ancient 78 rpm records a symphony required as many as five records. Most of the time the listening room was unoccupied, so whenever I could, I would sneak in and listen undisturbed. My family did not own a record player, so the music on every record I listened to was new to me. My classical music listening had previously been limited to music on the radio, and music programs were very few and far between. Most Kentuckians had little or no interest in classical music.

And what music! I discovered for the first time more the works of Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart, which I have enjoyed all of my life. During that semester I memorized the entire collection, though not in any systematic fashion. There were a number of Haydn symphonies and many of their melodies were particularly contagious. One day I stumbled upon a Haydn symphony that had a movement so clever that I almost wanted to dance. I listened to it repeatedly, but failed to note the title, and

soon had to leave to go to a biology lab. I was determined to listen to it again and noted to what album it was in and on which shelf it occupied. It was about two weeks before I again found time to return and to my dismay, all the albums had been moved to different positions on the shelves and I couldn't find the special Haydn symphony movement which intrigued me so much. I continued to listen to the music frequently, but always searched for that elusive record but never found it. I searched for about 55 years, listening to every Haydn record I could find. Many times I felt that I was listening to the movement but learned that many of Haydn's allegro and vivace symphonic



movements sounded very much alike. Haydn wrote 104 symphonies and there was much music to hear. I thought it might be a late symphony, perhaps one of the London Symphonies, so named because he had been invited to visit London late in life and while there, wrote 10 symphonies, each of which was a masterpiece. I am of the opinion that he was a much greater composer than many have given him credit for. One of my friends once commented after hearing the news that a new Haydn composition had been discovered, "Oh, no! Who needs another piece by Haydn?"

After listening to all the Haydn symphonies to which I had access, I realized that the elusive mystery movement was the 4<sup>th</sup> movement of his Symphony Number 96, subtitled *The Miracle*. It was so named because legend has it that during an intermission in a Vienna performance of the piece, a

massive chandelier fell from the top of the concert hall, and because the audience had left their seats, no one was injured or killed. So people proclaimed, "It is a miracle!" A nice story, but historians now know that the fall of the chandelier did happen, but during the performance of his Symphony Number 104 some years later.

So my search for this music has happily occupied most of my life, which has been frustrating but interesting. I have heard many of Haydn's symphonies I probably wouldn't have ever listened to. And he wrote some of the most jovial, pulse-stimulating music one can hope to hear. He is credited with inventing the symphony in the first place, when most of music was restrained and very formal, but in his later years he greatly expanded the form, writing truly innovative, rollicking pieces that have been described as "unbuttoned." Haydn in an "unbuttoned" mood wrote music that was hypnotic and immensely interesting. My quest has been somewhat embarrassing to me in that I couldn't find the mystery music for such a long time, but the quest has greatly enriched my life. Perhaps it is a miracle that I finally found it.



This issue was created on Microsoft Word and reproduced here in Cheltenham type, a much maligned, though needlessly so. face. Joseph Haydn is an inspiration to me. He wrote all of his really important music after he turned 70 years of age and unlike many composers, grew in his art his entire life. This is the work of J. Hill Hamon who lives in the backwaters of Kentucky at 1515 Evergreen Road, Frankfort, 40601. [KyHamon@AOL.COM](mailto:KyHamon@AOL.COM)