Haydn and the Lute, or, who is the Theorbo Player in the Copperplate Engraving by Michele Benedetti?

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In 2009, the 200th anniversary of Haydn's death, the International Mozart Foundation in Salzburg exhibited the copperplate engraving reproduced below with the following short description:

Photo 2

Willoughby Bertie, 4th Earl of Abingdon (1740–1799) & Joseph Haydn (London 1796) Engraving by Michele Benedetti (1745–1810) after a painting by Jean Françis Rigaud (John Francis Rigaud) (1742–1810). (© *Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum*)

> *Abingdon was a good amateur musician, and also tried his hand at composition. Many of Haydn's social contacts with the English aristocracy and with the educated class came about through Haydn's friendship with Lord Abingdon. He was the main initiator of the Professional Concerts, and attempted to entice Haydn away from Salomon.*

This picture – which also appears on the title page of Karl Scheit's edition of Haydn's D-Major Quartet[3] – raises the questions of whether Haydn played lute himself, and whether the theorbo player is really Haydn.

There are many theories concerning the persons in this engraving. The wildest speculation is that it shows Haydn (with the theorbo) and Mozart (sitting).[4] There are reproductions of this engraving that specify Willoughby Earl of Abingdon, but do not mention Haydn.[5] It seems certain – also on the basis of other publications – that the seated person is indeed Lord Abingdon.[6, 7] The figure of the theorbo player does, in any case, bear a close similarity to Haydn. And Haydn's friendship with Lord Abingdon, who invited him to London in 1783, is documented.[6]

However, the important biographical studies on Haydn do not provide information as to whether he actually played the lute. The most significant pointer in this direction might be that Haydn knew the theoretical work *Unterricht im Generalbass* (1732) by the lutenist David Kellner (1670–1748) and referred to it as a notable *oeuvre*.[8]

As mentioned above, the engraving is based on a painting by John Francis Rigaud. The only documented and reliable information about the picture – in which the theorbo player is also mentioned by name – comes from Rigaud's son Stephan Francis Duthil Rigaud (1777–1861). A manuscript essay by Rigaud Jr., based on his father's memoirs, provides the following information: "In the autumn of this year [1792] my Father received an invitation from the Earl of Abingdon to visit him at his seat at Rycott, where he commenced two portraits of his Lordship, one in a large family picture; the other in which he is represented in the act of composing a piece of music; with his Uncle Mr. Collins, trying the effect of it upon the Lute."[9]

Thus, although the engraving reproduced above has repeatedly been cited as an indication of Haydn's relationship to the lute, Stephan Francis Duthil Rigaud's manuscript allows us to state with reasonable certainty that the theorbo playing is not Haydn, but a Mr. Collins. And the question of whether or not Haydn played the lute still remains unanswered.

Anhang/Notes:
1. Georg Feder, *Joseph Haydn Werke XII/I, Frühe Streichquartette, Kritischer Bericht* (G. Henle Verlag), S.67.
2. Tim Crawford, *Haydn`s Music for the Lute,* Le Luth et sa musique II (Paris : Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1984), S. 71.
3. Doblinger GKM 32
4. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Mozart und seine Welt in zeitgenössischen Bildern* (Kassel, 1961), S. 287.
5. David van Edwards: – *Lute of the Month* - December 1998
6. Derek McCulloch, "The Musical '*Oeuvre*' of Willoughby Bertie, 4th Earl of Abingdon (1740-99)," *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 33 (2000), S. 6
7. Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum, Salzburg.
8. Karl Geiringer, *Haydn – A creative life in Music,* 2nd Edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), S.14.
9. Stephen Francis Duthil Rigaud, *Facts and Recollections of the XVIIIth century in a memoir of John Francis Rigaud*, ed. W.L. Pressly (London: Walpole Society, 1984), S. 86–87. Manuskript datiert 1854.