

Program Notes

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) wrote the works on tonight's program during the last seventeen years of his life, a period when, according to the eminent Haydn scholar James Webster, the composer was "a culture-hero throughout Europe." As Webster wrote, Haydn "began his career in the traditional patronage system of the late Austrian Baroque, and ended as a 'free' artist within the burgeoning Romanticism of the early 19th century." Haydn had served the Esterházy family—who had for generations been powerful and wealthy among Hungarian nobility—since 1761, when Prince Paul Anton appointed him as an assistant *Kapellmeister* for his court at Eisenstadt. In 1766, Haydn was appointed *Ober-Kapellmeister*, in which post he served Prince Nikolaus Esterházy for twenty-five years. During that time, Haydn perfected his art in the near-isolation of the provincial court, writing symphonies, chamber music, operas, keyboard works, and over a hundred compositions for the Prince's favorite instrument, the baryton. It was only after Haydn's contract was revised in 1779 to allow him to compose for outside commissions that he began to achieve international fame. In 1785-86, he composed his Symphonies No. 82-87 for a series of concerts in Paris; they were met with such acclaim that he wrote his Symphonies No. 90-92 on a second Parisian commission in 1788-89. In 1790, upon the death of Prince Nikolaus, Haydn was allowed to move to Vienna while retaining his title as Esterházy *Kapellmeister*, on full salary but without any real duties or obligations. Learning of Haydn's availability, the impresario J.P. Salomon engaged the composer for two stays in London, 1791-92 and 1794-95. For concerts on these two visits, Haydn composed his twelve "London" Symphonies, Nos. 93-104.

With the accession of Prince Nikolaus II and the removal of the Esterházy court to Vienna, Haydn was asked to return to service as *Kapellmeister*, with responsibilities for church music alone. In fact, his main duty from 1796 to 1802 was the composition of a new mass each summer to celebrate the name day on 8 September of Princess Maria Hermenegild. The results were the six great masses of Haydn's last period of composition, all remembered by nicknames: the *Heiligmesse* (B-flat major), the *Paukenmesse* (C major), the *Nelsonmesse* (D minor), the *Theresienmesse* (B-flat major), the *Schöpfungsmesse* (B-flat major), and the *Harmoniemesse* (B-flat major). Though Haydn had already written eight masses before 1783, these six last masses were a great leap forward. Jens Peter Larsen has written:

Here, as in the London symphonies, it is no longer a question of development or progress within the group. All problems of structure and technique are left behind. The individual character of each mass as a whole and of its separate parts and the wonderfully rich and inexhaustible invention are qualities that by now can be taken for granted. The ingredients of this remarkable synthesis include the symphonic mastery of the orchestral writing, the free and varied handling of the chorus (to some extent reminiscent of Handel's choral style, which had impressed Haydn in London), and the consummate classical simplicity....

Indeed, Haydn had moved on. H.C. Robbins Landon has noted that after writing his last symphony, No. 104, in 1795, Haydn turned down commissions to write symphonies, including offers from Paris in

1802 and Vienna in 1805. With the last six masses, Haydn expanded his orchestra to include voices, and he continued to develop symphonic forms within that context.

After Haydn's triumphant return to Vienna from his second season of concerts in London in 1795, the composer could count among his greatest admirers the Empress Marie Therese, wife of Franz I of Austria. It is perhaps a mark of Haydn's international prestige at this time that when the Empress requested a liturgical work from him, he did not immediately comply (but Haydn's hesitation may also have been a sign of Prince Esterházy's reluctance to allow his renowned *Kapellmeister* to compose for anyone else). The royal couple's 1797 visit to the Esterházy estates may have been the occasion for Marie Therese's firm reminder—to composer and patron alike—of her commission. Nevertheless, as late as May 1799 Haydn was writing Breitkopf & Härtel that he could not compose new works for the publisher until he had fulfilled commissions from the Empress and Prince Esterházy (undoubtedly for the *Te Deum* and the *Theresienmesse*). The first documented performance of the *Te Deum* (“for the Empress Marie Therese”) took place at Eisenstadt in September 1800, probably as part of Prince Esterházy's celebrations—in the presence of the Empress—for the visiting Admiral Horatio Nelson, on the occasion of his victory over the French in the Battle of the Nile.

James Webster describes the work in a nutshell:

The late *Te Deum* ‘for the empress’ ... for chorus and very large orchestra, is an *ABA* construction of great power and terseness; it whirls through the very long text in little more than eight minutes, while still finding time for a double fugue and an immense climax at the end.

The first theme—concealed in the instrumentation of the introduction but then loudly proclaimed by the chorus—is the Gregorian chant “*Te Deum laudamus*,” which provides much of the melodic material for the opening *Allegro*. The music of this section climaxes on a sustained dominant seventh chord (“*Judex crederis esse venturus*: We believe that Thou shalt come to be our judge”) which resolves to C minor at the beginning of the central *Adagio* (“*Te ergo quaesumus*”). Chromatic sequences intensify the somber mood of this section (“We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants, whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood”). The final section (“*Aeterna fac cum Sanctis tuis in gloria numerari*: Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting”) returns to the brilliant manner of the opening and culminates in a Handelian double fugue (“*In te domine speravi*: O Lord, in Thee have I trusted”), whose jubilant mood is only briefly interrupted by chromatic syncopations (“*non confundar*”), introducing (as Richard Wigmore has written) “a brief moment of terror at the prospect of damnation, before the work ends in an overwhelming blaze of C major.”

After hearing the *Te Deum*, it is hard to believe that at the time of his first visit to London, Haydn was accused in the press of lacking talent for writing vocal music. The 27 January 1792 edition of the newspaper *The Oracle* printed the following statement: “HAYDN, though in instrumental composition so *various* and *original*, has yet but slender merit as a Writer for the *Voice*.” Though having every reason to be proud of his earlier masses and works such as the 1775 oratorio *Il ritorno di Tobia*, Haydn—as revealed in a letter he wrote on 24 April 1792—clearly accepted the anonymous slander as a challenge. His response was a setting of the English poem *The Storm* by the pseudonymous Peter Pindar (John Wolcot, 1738-1819). This “madrigal” for four vocal soloists, chorus, and orchestra, was first performed on J.P. Salomon's second concert of the 1792 season on 24

February. The next day *The Morning Herald* declared that “the new Chorus and Quartetto of Haydn is the first attempt of that great Master on English words, and he has succeeded admirably in representative harmony—his *storm* and *calm* being wonderfully expressed in the composition....” Both the poem and its musical setting are examples of a popular English genre—originating as far back as the turn of the 18th century—of depictions of the terror and wonder of nature. *The Storm* was scored for the strings and woodwinds Salomon had in his band, but after returning to Vienna in 1793, Haydn revised the scoring to add brass and timpani, arranged for the text to be translated into German, and retitled the work *Der Sturm*. James Webster has written of *Der Sturm* that “as in so many works of this type, minor-mode fury is followed by ‘calm’ in the major,” which is to say that it is part of a tradition of musical tempests that extended well into the 19th century.

Haydn completed his last and longest mass, the *Harmoniemesse*, at the age of 70 in 1802. The term *Harmonie* in German signifies a band—an orchestra of wind instruments—and Haydn's last mass is so named because of its large wind complement: flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two French horns, and two trumpets, in addition to timpani, strings, and organ. This instrumentation is most directly due to the decision of Prince Nicolaus II of Esterházy to retain more wind players for his chapel, but their availability was an opportunity of which Haydn, near the end of his career, was especially well poised to take advantage.

The *Harmoniemesse* contains more “rich and inexhaustible invention” (see Jens Peter Larsen above) than can be adequately described within the space of this program booklet, but a few details are certainly worth mentioning. Nothing in the beautiful 16-bar orchestral introduction, whose overall dynamic level is soft, leads us to expect the thunderous entrance of the full chorus (“Kyrie eleison”) on a diminished seventh chord rather than the tonic triad of B-flat major. James Webster has written that this outburst “is as astonishing as it is inexplicable; it resonates long afterwards, both in our inner ear and in its consequences for the music.” Structurally speaking, this first statement from the choir functions as a powerful upbeat to the real start of the movement's exposition, the bass solo's entrance on the word “Kyrie.”

The first theme of the Gloria is sung by the solo soprano, but thereafter its grand opening section unfolds with the forces of full chorus and orchestra. The principal theme of the slower middle section of the Gloria (“Gratias agimus”) is sung by the solo voices in succession, starting with the alto. A remarkable instrumental feature of this section is the quick descending quadruplet which follows each singer's completion of the first phrase of the melody; this quadruplet expands into a continuous figure running through the string and wind sections when the choir enters to declaim the words “Qui tollis peccata mundi.” The Gloria is capped by another section for massed chorus and orchestra, culminating in a stunning fugato with subject (“in gloria Dei Patris”) and countersubject (“Amen”) in contrary motion.

The opening section of the Credo is distinguished by the vigorous instrumental writing which contrasts with the less complicated rhythms of the choral statements. The tender lyricism of the ensuing “Et incarnatus est” is rivaled by the chorus's searing chromatic chords beginning with the word “Crucifixus.” In the “Et resurrexit,” horn, and tympani introduce the words “judicare vivos,” one of Haydn's evocations of the trumpet of the Last Judgment. This grand gesture contrasts sharply with the hushed choral declamation of the word “mortuorum,” almost a stunned silence, which precedes the brilliant fugue (“Et vitam venturi”) which concludes the Credo.

In the Sanctus, the violins comment upon the chromatically inflected choral harmonies with a figure which rises suddenly and falls gently. The suddenly jaunty close of this section features the full wind section in antiphony to the choir's "Hosanna." The sonata movement which is the Benedictus opens with a surprisingly sprightly tune over another "walking" bass line; when the full choir sings the tune pianissimo, it creates a sense of what David Wyn Jones has called "nervous awe." This section is capped by the same "Hosanna" chorus which concluded the Sanctus. The quartet of soloists sings the quietly lyrical Agnus Dei in G major; its pause on the dominant chord of D major prepares a transition to the final section—Dona Nobis Pacem, for full chorus and orchestra—which is startling in the context of harmonic practice in the classical era. The D-major dominant never resolves to the tonic of G; rather, the full wind section loudly repeats the pitch D in the manner of a victorious military fanfare. This unison becomes an interval which includes the pitch F-natural, then the kettledrum pounds the pitch B-flat to usher in the full chorus in B-flat major. This joyful chorus, written during a brief lull in the Napoleonic wars, radiates faith in the achievement of ultimate peace. In its final phrase, the choir sings the word "pacem" on a B-flat major arpeggio which traverses the full register of each voice, from top to bottom.

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