

PROGRAM NOTES

Missa in Angustiis (Lord Nelson Mass) H 22:11 (1798)

We owe at least part of the credit for the *Lord Nelson* Mass to Haydn's doctor, who ordered a period of rest after the sextagenarian composer had become ill from exhaustion after his heroic achievement of writing and launching his monumental oratorio *The Creation*. It was during his recuperation, from mid-July to late August of 1798, that Haydn wrote the *Missa in Angustiis*, a title that can be translated loosely as "A Mass for Troubled Times."

That, however, isn't the title by which it is usually known. Most refer to it as the *Lord Nelson* Mass, a name that probably attached to the work in September of 1800, when Admiral Horatio Nelson and his retinue visited Eisenstadt, family seat of the Esterházy dynasty that had employed Haydn as *kapellmeister* for decades. Nelson, peerless naval strategist in the pan-European struggle against Napoleon, was received as a hero by the grateful Austrians. The Esterházy court treated the honored guests to four concerts during their stay, and the odds are extremely good that the *Missa in Angustiis* was on the bill for at least one of the concerts, given how quickly thereafter the new nickname took root.

The opening *Kyrie eleison* offers up a prime specimen of Haydn's incomparable craftsmanship. By casting the *Kyrie* in sonata-allegro form—typically associated with the first movements of instrumental genres such as symphony—Haydn applies a sophisticated structure to a musical setting of a mere six words. The *Kyrie*'s taut motivic unity is notable from the beginning as a martial, tattoo-like rhythm establishes itself in both chorus and orchestra alike. *Christe eleison*, set in a contrasting major key, serves as the secondary theme of classical sonata form. After an impressively compressed development section, radiant passagework from the solo soprano marks the onset of the recapitulation, which scrupulously follows formal principles by remaining firmly in original minor key throughout.

The second movement of a musical mass setting is a far wordier affair than the downright laconic *Kyrie*. The emotional trajectory of the *Gloria* is an inverted arch that begins with the heady rush of *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, dips down to the heartfelt supplication *Miserere nobis*, then rises back again to the exultant *cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris*. Haydn, master technician of musical structure, fashioned a setting that perfectly illuminates the long trajectory of the text. For the *Gloria* proper, he gives us a blaze of D Major that is almost Bach like in its exultant optimism. The central *Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis* is more contemplative than tragic, but with *Quoniam tu solus sanctus* the mood brightens; Haydn resumes the sunny D Major materials of the *Gloria*, but now leads the listener into a superbly-crafted fugue on the concluding text *in gloria Dei Patris, Amen*.

The *Credo*—which confirms the central message of Christian faith—is particularly notable for its fusion of new and old styles, such as the opening *Credo in unum Deum* in which Haydn imparts a jaunty rhythmic swagger to a strict canon à la Renaissance. For the *Et incarnatus est*, Haydn fashions a ravishingly lyrical slow movement, and for the concluding *Et resurrexit*, he revisits the granitic fanfares of the opening *Kyrie*.

The remaining sections are no less remarkable: boldly innovative vocal writing in the *Sanctus*, a brilliant *fugato* for the *Osanna in excelsis*, then another return to that broad-shouldered *Kyrie* style for the celebrated *Benedictus*. A tender alto-solo *Agnus Dei* follows, the whole capped off with a joyous D Major *Dona nobis pacem* that brings this supremely masterful work to a radiant close.

Autumn, from *The Seasons* H 21:3 (1801)

The pastoral genre enjoys a long and honored place in music, from the ubiquitous nymphs-and-shepherds cantatas of the "Arcadian" school of mid-Baroque composers, through Beethoven's unforgettable storms and dances of his "Pastoral" Symphony No. 6, to Gustav Mahler's achingly nostalgic conjurings of a past Austria so bucolic as to approach the mythical.

Even in such exalted company Haydn's late-period oratorio *The Seasons* stands tall as one of the genre's undisputed masterworks. But it almost didn't come into being. Buoyed by the immense success of *The Creation*, librettist Gottfried van Swieten implored Haydn to take on another major oratorio project, this time van Swieten's own adaptation of Scottish poet James Thomson's sprawling evocation of country life throughout the seasons of the year. Haydn wasn't all that enthusiastic about the idea at first, nor did he ever fully reconcile himself to van Swieten's saccharine portraits of twittering birds, leaping fishes, and gamboling lambs, which he skewered as "Frenchified trash." While posterity might wish that van Swieten had written a better libretto, posterity may also be grateful for his dogged persistence: Haydn eventually yielded, rose grandly to the occasion, and gifted humanity with one of his most inspired creations.

Autumn may well be the most picturesque section of *The Seasons*, a nonstop flow of robust, stimulating, and often startlingly original music. The merrily dancing Introduction sets the scene with happy farmers contemplating an

abundant harvest, as told by the three narrators Hanne, Simon, and Lukas—each being more pastoral archetype than actual character. *So nature rewards diligent work*, they sing in a radiant trio, backed up by the chorus. The whole eventually leads to a finely-crafted fugue as chorus and soloists rejoice in the good that comes from industry and hard work.

The aria *Seht auf die breiten Wiesen hin* is sure to tickle the fancy of dog lovers, as its intrepid canine hero tirelessly tracks an increasingly frantic bird. Modern listeners might be less enchanted by the poor bird's eventual fate (dispatched by a hunter's gunshot), but the rollicking deer-hunting scene that follows is surely one of Haydn's most irresistible crowd-pleasers. It might be only in hindsight that one realizes just how much harmonic variety Haydn has been able to achieve with the sharply limited pitches of his lusty horns.

The outdoorsy exercise having run its course (so to speak), the new wine is ready for the drinking, and finger-wagging temperance advocates are most emphatically *not* invited. All might begin in a properly sober C Major, but once the party really gets going the music staggers about from key to key, sometimes skirting the very edge of harmonic coherence. Fortunately, it all lands safely—somehow—back in C Major, ending *Autumn* in a blaze of unfettered, boozy joy.

Scott Foglesong
Chair, Department of Musicianship and Music Theory
San Francisco Conservatory of Music