

## PROGRAM NOTES

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart *Litaniæ de venerabili altaris Sacramento*, K. 243

The phrase *Miserere nobis* runs through the Sacramental Litany, a series of prayers that are punctuated by formulaic, repeated responses by the congregation, often in connection with a procession. Feast days in Salzburg were particularly characterized by the use of litanies; thus a goodly number of Salzburg-based composers had written musical settings intended to be used in the cathedral. Certainly Wolfgang Mozart would have known those litanies composed by his own father Leopold, by Michael Haydn (younger brother of the famed Joseph), and perhaps those by Johann Ernst Eberlin and Anton Cajetan Adlgasser.

Mozart wrote four such litanies—two “Loreto” litanies dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and two “Sacramental” litanies that venerate the Eucharist on the altar. K. 243 is his last litany, written in 1776 and standing as one of his finest, if relatively unknown, sacred compositions. It was intended to be used on March 31, 1776—Palm Sunday—at Salzburg Cathedral, very likely with an unusually large ensemble.

A sacramental litany is bookended, like a Mass, with an opening *Kyrie* and a closing *Agnus Dei*. But there the similarity ends, for between those two relatively familiar texts come a variety of prayers that in Salzburg were set with a mix of aria, choral, and fugal styles. Mozart blended the modern style of virtuoso operatic arias (*Panis vivus*, *Dulcissimum Convivium*) with the *stile antico* of learned counterpoint, here in the massive and complex double fugue *Pignus futurae gloriae*. The ancient church style of the Renaissance puts in an appearance with the Gregorian plainchant *Pange lingua* (used by Josquin des Prez, among others) as a *cantus firmus* in the *Vaticum*. The symphonic idiom, so crucial to the Viennese Classical, is not ignored: both the opening *Kyrie* and the exquisite *Agnus Dei* are as much orchestral as choral, while the final *Miserere nobis* is hymn-like in its reverence and poise.

Emperor Joseph II's 1783 decree limiting devotional services and prohibiting the use of instruments during Vespers seems to have put a halt to any further litany composition in Salzburg. Nonetheless, Mozart's litanies saw significant usage (even outside of Salzburg) well into the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Mozart biographer Alfred Einstein tells us, K. 243 might have been Mozart's last Litany, but it represented an important first step that “swept away a dam that obstructed Mozart's writing for the church.”

### Joseph Haydn *Mass in Time of War* (“*Paukenmesse*”), H.XXII:9

When Joseph Haydn signed on as vice-*kapellmeister* to the aristocratic Esterházy dynasty in 1761, he couldn't have foreseen that he would remain on the payroll for the rest of his life. All in all he served four Esterházy princes. The courtly and cultivated Paul Anton I, who hired Haydn, died in 1762 and was followed by his son Nikolaus I, lavish patron of music and builder of the Versailles-like Eszterháza palace in western Hungary. Haydn, promoted to full *kapellmeister* in 1766, served Nikolaus I faithfully for 28 years until the prince's sudden death in 1790. Paul Anton II (1790–1794) disbanded most of his father's lavish musical establishment while keeping Haydn under salary. (That freed Haydn for his two spectacularly successful visits to England.) Haydn's last prince, Nikolaus II (1765–1833), may have been musically less cultivated than his predecessors, but he reactivated Haydn's position as *kapellmeister* and instituted a tradition of having a new mass performed every September—a series that began with Haydn and was continued by Fuchs, Hummel, and Beethoven.

Music history texts usually claim that Haydn composed his late masses for the nameday of Nikolaus II's wife, Princess Marie Hermenegild, but it is by no means certain that all six of them were actually intended as such. In 1799 Haydn wrote that “my present young Prince issued the moderate command four years ago that in my old age I must compose a new mass once a year.” No mention of Princess Marie. A September deadline appears to have been among the specifications, which made sense given that September was the month when the Esterházy's opened their Austrian residence in Eisenstadt, with its season of entertainments—operas, balls, concerts, and the like. Furthermore, the family typically combined the princess's nameday with one of the September Marian feasts—the Nativity of Mary (*Maria Geburt*) on September 8 and the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary (*Maria Namen*) on the following Sunday. So while every single one of those late six masses may not have been a nameday gift for Princess Marie, the association with the Esterházy family is at least clear enough.

Haydn may have discontinued symphonic composition with the last of his “London” symphonies of 1795, but as has been pointed out by numerous commentators, the late masses are notably symphonic, not just in their heightened and enlarged orchestrations, but also in their use of instrumental elements such as sonata-allegro and rondo forms. Given the secularized tenor of their era, they are also distinctly Italianate, almost operatic in places—an aspect which sometimes rankled listeners in Haydn's day and has been known to ruffle critical feathers even today. Charles Rosen, in his magisterial *The Classical Style*, is unsparing in his distaste: “The masses ... contain much writing of great power. They remain, however, uncomfortable compromises. The *Kyrie* of the *Mass in Time of War* opens with an

expressive Largo introduction, but the Allegro moderato that follows has passages that can only have sounded as trivial to Haydn's contemporaries as they do to us today."

Rosen's appears to be the minority opinion. Most listeners are likely to respond happily to Haydn's gracious Italianate lyricism and naturalistic, unobtrusive polyphony. That aforementioned *Kyrie* provides a prime example of Haydn's late art at its finest, structured as it is in his signature *monothematic* sonata form—i.e., the first-movement form common to most instrumental works such as symphonies and sonatas, but eschewing the usual thematic contrasts.

Consider the *qui tollis peccata mundi* (midway through the Gloria), a heartfelt supplication for compassion amidst human sinfulness. Haydn's exquisite setting of the text begins with a ravishingly lyrical cello solo that introduces the baritone solo, soon joined by the chorus for the *miserere nobis*. A gently chromatic setting of *suscipe deprecationem nostram* (hear our plea) provides the necessary context: no breast-beating anguish here, but instead a dignified and sorrowful expression of the heart's desires.

The *Credo*, as the central affirmation of the Christian faith, requires scrupulous attention to the text. It is indeed difficult to imagine a more effective *et incarnatus est* than Haydn's adumbrated, mysterious setting that hands off phrases from voice to voice with poignant aid from the orchestra. The *resurrexit* and *et vitam venturi saeculi* are appropriately joyful and celebratory, culminating in a scintillating polyphonic *Amen*.

A short but surprisingly dark *Sanctus* ends with a dynamic *pleni sunt coeli et terra* dominated by thundering timpani. Then comes the *Benedictus*, a tender cradle song that passes gently from mournful minor mood to consolatory major. The movement belongs to the vocal soloists; the chorus enters only at the final repeat of the *osanna in excelsis*.

One particular evolutionary path taken by some Viennese Classical composers was an increasing emphasis on "back-loading" – i.e., placing the most substantial material in the later movements of a work. That's the case with the *Mass in Time of War*, as Haydn brings the sounds of war into the *Agnus Dei*—almost certainly in recognition of Napoleon's encroachments into Austrian territory. Haydn biographer Georg August Griesinger tells us the "the words '*agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi*' are played in a curious fashion with the kettledrums, 'as if one heard the enemy approaching in the distance.'" After a hushed and reverent opening, those ominous kettledrum rhythms—they are the source for the German label "*Paukenmesse*"—are joined soon enough by stern trumpet fanfares, adding to an overall sense of impending strife that gives way, first to victory, and then finally to reassurance.

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