

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)—*Lord Nelson Mass* in D Minor

Franz Joseph Haydn was born in Rohrau, Austria, to a middle-class family of trades people; his father Mathias and grandfather were master wheelwrights and his mother Anna Maria had been a cook at the Harrach castle. Joseph's parents were music lovers; Mathias played the harp (though he couldn't read a note) and Anna sang the melodies he accompanied. Joseph and his two brothers inherited their parents' love of music; his brother Johann Evangelist became a professional tenor, and Johann Michael also became a historically significant composer.

By the time he was seven, Joseph displayed great abilities in singing, harpsichord and violin, and was recruited as a choirboy in St. Stephan's Cathedral in Vienna, where he was one of the best boy sopranos. He sang often in church and court, and was later entrusted with the education of the younger choirboys (including his brother Michael). However, when his voice broke at the age of 17, he was put out on the street, forced to make a living as a freelance musician. He played violin, taught pupils, and worked as the personal servant to the Italian composer Nicolo Porpora.

"I was forced to eke out a wretched existence by teaching young people," wrote Haydn later. "Many geniuses are ruined by this miserable need to earn their daily bread, because they lack time to study . . . I carried on with my zeal for composition during the night. I composed diligently, but not quite correctly, until I finally had the good fortune to learn the true fundamentals of composition from the famous Porpora."

Haydn landed his first post in 1757 as Director of Music for Count Ferdinand Maximilian von Morzin. His talent and a few Morzin Court connections bolstered his reputation as a musician and earned him a post in 1761 as vice-Kapellmeister and assistant to Gregor Joseph Werner, who served as Prince Paul Anton Esterházy's Kapellmeister in Eisenstadt. The Esterházy family loved music and had made Eisenstadt a center of culture. Werner, who served the Esterházy's for 33 years, was a sound Music Director, so when he retired in 1766, Haydn acquired a composer's dream job. Haydn was named orchestra director and court composer, earned a handsome salary, and had complete artistic freedom under Prince Nikolaus (Paul Anton's successor).

"My Prince was satisfied with all my works," he told a friend. "I could try things out, observe what creates a good effect and what weakens it, and thus revise, make additions or cuts, take risks . . . I had no choice but to become original."

When Nikolaus passed away in 1790, his son Anton dismissed most of the court musicians. He kept Haydn on the payroll, though, giving him the freedom to accept work offers in England. The fame of Haydn's symphonies had eclipsed that of his other works by the time he went to London, where he composed his greatest symphonies (Nos. 93-104, the "London Symphonies"). Haydn wrote 104 symphonies in his lifetime,¹ earning him the unofficial title of "Father of the Symphony." He toyed with and finally established the musical form that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) inherited before passing the torch to Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827).² Haydn's contributions to the evolution of the string quartet are no less important, and there are reams of concertos, divertimentos, and instrumental chamber pieces.

Even so, fully one half of Haydn's output was vocal music. During the first half of his career his vocal music was as famous as his instrumental. In 1794, when Prince Anton Esterházy died and the younger Prince Nikolaus invited Haydn back to service,

Haydn leapt at the chance to devote himself to Prince Nikolaus' chief interest—church music. In 1795, Haydn returned to Eisenstadt, turned his back on the symphony form, and dedicated his last 14 years to composing his greatest oratorios (*The Creation* and *The Seasons*) and his last six Masses.

In 1793, disputes over territories and trade routes, coupled with growing unrest in France, led to war between France and Britain. Under the command of General Napoleon Bonaparte, the French army wreaked havoc on Europe. The war spread quickly, ravaging the continent from Spain to Turkey, and fierce battles took place in European colonies as far as South America, South Africa and Sri Lanka, destabilizing governments around the globe. The world did not know what Napoleon's growing power meant for the future, and many glorified him as a hero and liberator while others despised him as an imperialist tyrant, bent on conquering the world. Fears of violence and terrorism gripped the public, dominated the press, and incited social, political, and emotional friction. These anxious times closely resembled today's international scene and, like today, many artists felt the need to express their views.³

In 1798, Haydn, who was greatly troubled by current events, penned the great *Missa in angustiis* ("Mass in the Time of Distress").⁴ The piece was already well-known in 1800, when Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), the general who had recently dealt Napoleon great defeats in Egypt and Italy,⁵ stopped in Eisenstadt for a four-day visit to the Esterházy Court. Haydn was anxious to meet the famed war hero, but when Haydn and Nelson met, the latter was star-struck, and asked if he could have the quill with which Haydn wrote the *Missa in angustiis*. Haydn humbly complied, and in return Lord Nelson gave the composer his valuable gold watch. The *Missa in angustiis* has since been nicknamed the *Nelsonmesse* ("Lord Nelson Mass").

All of the six late Masses are rather conservative in form, but possess a breadth that Haydn could only have acquired after composing 104 symphonies. Of his fourteen Masses, the *Lord Nelson Mass* is Haydn's only in a minor key, and the orchestration is peculiar; it is scored for only three trumpets, timpani, organ, and strings—no woodwinds. It begins with a dark *Kyrie* marked by powerful fanfares and brooding martial rhythms, congruous with the original title of the piece. The *Gloria* consists of three sections (*Gloria*, *Qui tollis*, *Quoniam*), and a bright choral fugue banishes the sinister nature of the *Kyrie*. The *Qui tollis* features a slow bass solo with choral interjections, with a brief soprano solo in the middle, and the *Quoniam* recalls the music of the *Gloria*. The *Credo* is similarly divided into three sections (*Credo*, *Et incarnatus*, *Et resurrexit*).

The *Sanctus*, *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei* are organized into a fast-moderato-fast schematic (with slow introductions for the fast movements, much like a symphony). Lord Nelson's decisive triumph over Napoleon at the Battle of the Nile supposedly inspired the striking trumpet lines in the *Benedictus*—the news of the victory arrived while Haydn composed it, some two years before their meeting. The *Agnus Dei* begins slowly with an alto singing sweetly until the soprano takes over. The alto returns, followed by the bass and tenor, and the quartet cadences serenely before the orchestra and chorus launch into a jaunty fugue setting of the *Dona nobis* text. The Mass, begun in the ominous D minor, cascades through a joyous fugue and heroic finale in D major.

Haydn lived a long and artistically fruitful life. In his last years, the French occupation of Austria contributed to his growing depression. But when he died in 1809, the French mourned alongside the Austrians. Napoleon himself ordered a special honor

guard placed at Haydn's house, and two important high-ranking French officers escorted his body to its final resting place.

—Silas Nathaniel Huff

¹ Recent scholarship claims there are four unknown symphonies from his youth—making the total 108.

² In his lifetime, Haydn was a friend and mentor to Mozart, who coined the famous nickname “Papa Haydn,” and he briefly taught the very young Beethoven, from whom he predicted “great things to come.”

³ The French Revolutionary Wars, as they were called, lasted from 1793 to 1802, and were a prelude to the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15).

⁴ Unlike Haydn, Beethoven celebrated Napoleon as a champion of human freedom, and dedicated his *Symphony No. 3* (“The Heroic”), to Napoleon in 1804. But when Napoleon crowned himself Emperor of France later that year, Beethoven furiously scratched the dedication off his work.

⁵ In 1798, Lord Nelson liberated Naples from the French and trapped and destroyed the French fleet in Cairo at the Battle of the Nile. Lord Nelson continued to fight Napoleon for years, but was killed in battle aboard his ship, the *Victory*, in 1805.