

BMC 43 - HAYDN: Divertimenti Op. 31, Vol.2. & Symphony 49

Franz Joseph Haydn was born on March 31, 1732 in Rohrau, Austria, the son of Matthias, a master wheelwright and amateur harp player, and Anna Maria Koller, a cook and music lover, who was gifted with a fine singing voice. At the age of five he was taking violin and harpsichord lessons from his cousin Johann Matthias Frick, a singing master. At six he started singing in the local church choir, and when he was eight, he was invited after an audition to Vienna to sing in the Austrian capital's most important church, St Stephen's Cathedral. During this period he was an Altar Boy at the funeral of a famous Italian musician who died in poverty in Vienna – Antonio Vivaldi no less. When his voice broke he moved into a small leaky garret without heat and with very little to eat, taking on a few pupils. Always a keen keyboard player, his most valuable possession was "*an old worm-eaten clavier.*" When he returned to that instrument after a hard day's work, as he later recalled, "*I would have scorned to change my state for that of a king.*"

Struggling to support himself, he made contact with the Italian composer and singer Niccolò Porpora for whom he acted as personal servant and musical accompanist. As his skills as an accompanist and a composer developed, he was employed by Austrian nobleman Karl Joseph von Furstberg for whose musical soirées Haydn composed his first string quartets. Furstberg then introduced him to Count Ferdinand Maximilian von Morzin, where and he was taken in as the musical director and court composer. This period in his life provided him with an anecdote he later enjoyed retelling. One day, as he was accompanying the beautiful Countess Morzin, she leaned over him to see the music more clearly and her gown fell open, revealing her bosom. "*It was the first time I had beheld such a sight. It confused me. I stopped playing, my fingers remained glued to the keys. 'What's the matter, Haydn, what are you doing?', the Countess exclaimed. Full of dignity, I replied: 'But my gracious lady, who could help losing his composure?'*"

Unfortunately the Count had financial difficulties and was forced to dismiss Haydn in 1761 along with the court musicians in the orchestra. However Haydn obtained a post in the service of Prince Paul Anton Esterházy, one of the wealthiest of families in the Austrian Empire. There, in Esterházy's castle at Eisenstadt (a little town 30 miles from Vienna), he was appointed as the Assistant Conductor to the Orchestra, becoming Musical Director in 1766. In that same year he acquired and lived for 12 years in a Baroque house built on the site of today's Haydn-gasse 21. He was to remain at the Court of Esterházy until his death in 1809.

In 1762 Paul Anton had been succeeded by his brother Nicolaus "*The Magnificent*", an enthusiastic patron of music. The prince often took Haydn with him to Vienna. It is here that Haydn met Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a friendship developing between the two composers. Prince Nicolaus was himself an accomplished musician; his favorite instrument, which he played with expertise was the *baryton* – a cello-like instrument already obsolete. The *baryton* thus features in much of Haydn's music, including the *Six Divertimenti* for eight instruments comprising *baryton*, two violins, viola, cello, double bass, and two horns composed in 1775 and becoming known as his Opus 31.

With the increasing popularity of Haydn's music and the consequent popular demand for scores, the Viennese publishing house Artaria, with which Haydn was on good terms, published a number of Haydn's works, including a revised edition of the *Divertimenti* in 1781. Not surprisingly, Haydn recast these works, substituting a flute for the cumbersome and outdated *baryton*. For these recordings of the *Six Divertimenti* Opus 31, Leslie Jones prepared and edited scores from the printed editions in the Henry Watson Music Library, Manchester.

Haydn had by now become well known all over Europe. His compositions of divertimenti, string quartets, sonatas, concertos and religious music were widely sought after, notably by libraries and churches. His works of the 1780s that carried his name further afield, include Piano Sonatas and Piano Trios.

Symphonies, Nos. 76-81 (published in 1784-5), and Nos. 82-7 were written on commission for a Concert organization in Paris in 1785-6) as were the String Quartets. Other works that carried Haydn's reputation beyond central Europe include Concertos and *Nottornos* for a type of hurdy-gurdy, written on commission

for the King of Naples, and “The Seven Last Words”, commissioned for Holy Week from Cadiz Cathedral and existing not only in its original orchestral form but also for string quartet, for piano and (later) for chorus and orchestra.

In 1790, Nicolaus Esterhazy died; Haydn (unlike most of his musicians) was retained by his son but was free to live in Vienna and to travel. He was invited by the impresario and violinist J P. Salomon to visit London to write an Opera, Symphonies and other works. In the event he went to London twice, in 1791-2 and 1794-5. He composed his last 12 Symphonies for performance there, where they enjoyed great success; he also wrote choral pieces, piano trios, piano sonatas and songs (some to English words) as well as arranging British folksongs for publishers in London and Edinburgh. He was honored with a Doctorate of Music by Oxford University, returning the compliment by naming his G Major Symphony “*The Oxford*”. He also played, sang and conducted before the Royal Family. He was much impressed, and influenced by performances of Handel's choral music in Westminster Abbey.

In 1792, he went to Bonn, Germany, and met Ludwig van Beethoven – then 22 years of age. It was arranged that Beethoven would study with Haydn in Vienna. During the last years of his life, Haydn worked for the new head of the Esterhazy family, Prince Nicolaus II. Haydn's compositions in this period included six Great Masses, and String Quartets of which the most famous was the ‘Emperor’ Quartet.

When listening to the great symphonic and choral works of the classical repertoire one often takes it for granted that there should be some “good tunes”. But a memorable tune or catchy musical phrase is at the heart of all music, and great classical music is no exception. Haydn's forebears had been of Slavonic origin, and Haydn was always known for his good humor and Slavic peasant jokes.

Rather as Domenico Scarlatti absorbed the folk rhythms and melodies of Spain and reflected them in his Keyboard Sonatas, Haydn frequently incorporated Slavic and Croatian melodies in his compositions. His “Emperor's Hymn” was suggested by admiration of the British National Anthem, and became both a National Hymn of Austria and later a rallying call to German unity. It was based on a Croatian folk tune. Haydn later used it as the basis for his Emperor Quartet.

As we move into the 1800s, Napoleon was engaged in his destructive rampage through Europe, occupying Vienna in 1809. Though a guard of honor was placed outside Haydn's house by Napoleon as a mark of respect, his beloved city was still under foreign occupation. Haydn, by then old, feeble and ill, had himself carried to the piano, and as a gesture of defiance solemnly played his Emperor's Hymn. It was the last time he touched an instrument, and a few days later, on May 31st, he died peacefully in his home.

Our front illustration shows a genial Haydn, relaxed and good-humored, as indeed he was always known to friends and musical colleagues. His Six Divertimenti provide relaxed and enjoyable listening. Their inherent tunefulness is greatly enhanced by the variety of instrumentation, and the masterly way in which Haydn combines alternating instruments in unusual ways. These are pieces in which each musician is given a turn to shine, especially in the sets of variations.

Composition of Haydn's 108 Symphonies spans the years 1759-1795. Our present Symphony No. 49 dates from 1768. The title '*La Passione*', which became associated with this symphony early in the 19th century as a reflection of its mood, does have historical relevance, for it is likely that this was a Passion-tide Symphony, intended for performance at Esterhazy during the Holy Week of 1768. That would explain its overall mood, and the opening and closing superscriptions: *In Nomine Deo* and *Finis Laus Deo*. In addition, to begin a symphony with a somber *Adagio* was unconventional, but appropriate in a sacred or semi-sacred work. The combination of horns and strings in this Concerto follows smoothly from the Divertimenti with similar scoring.