

Program Notes: MOZART FOR PALM SUNDAY  
By Alexander Platt

Mozart: Adagio and Fugue in C Minor, K.546;  
Haydn: Symphony No.49 in F Minor, "La Passione"

Following a performance of Mozart's noble and arresting *Adagio and Fugue* - in which, as a mature Viennese master of the Classical style, Mozart internalizes the contrapuntal genius of the North German Baroque masters, Bach and Handel - we present two Austrian masterpieces associated with the Holy Week observances of the Christian year. One of them, Haydn's Symphony No.49, has long been well-known - indeed, this was even so in the 19th century, long before the revival of serious interest in more than the usual handful of his works. Ironically, it is the second of them, a sprawling early masterwork by the far more popular Mozart that has lingered in complete obscurity.

Mozart, the ultimate "boy genius", wrote his first symphony at the age of nine; Haydn, one of history's late-bloomers, didn't write his until he was about thirty-five. Such comparisons are ultimately meaningless, for it was Haydn who soon mastered the symphonic style more than anyone else in the Classical era. It's not for nothing that your high-school music teacher repeated to you the old cliché that "Papa" Haydn was "The Father of the Symphony", for like most clichés, it was largely true; indeed, while the majority of Mozart's 40-odd symphonies are little more than charming exercises in the Classical style, Haydn's 107 are rather like what they say about the Bach Cantatas - in their own way, each one is a masterpiece. And while no one would pretend that Haydn was a true man of the theatre, it bears repeating that the genius behind *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro* essentially learned to write sonatas, symphonies and string quartets from his musical older brother. So it's probably high time we finally stepped away from our image of "Papa Haydn" or, even worse, "Franz Josef Haydn", either (false) name conjuring a genial old thing in breeches, powdered wig and buckle shoes, ever happy to play musical footman to enlightened despots, while Mozart, the proto-Romantic Era hero, supposedly left the old church-and-court patronage system completely in the dust; Haydn was "Joseph Haydn" - that's how he signed his name, in honest simplicity. He was a man of flesh and blood, the son of peasants, of incredible stamina, endless patience, boundless good humor, and shining humanity: "simple" in the greatest sense of the word. And he was every bit Mozart's equal, in his own right.

Haydn's Symphony No.49, which its nickname of "La Passione", has long existed with his Symphonies Nos.44 ("Mourning") and 45 ("Farewell") as a kind of holy trinity of his celebrated " Sturm und Drang" ("storm and stress") style, one which was actually cultivated by many composers in the 1760s and 70s. Following a movement in the dramatic arts (there was actually a German play called "Sturm und Drang" in that signal year of 1776), many Austrian composers sought to break away from the dainty constraints of the pre-Classical "galant" (gracious) style, and compose turbulent minor-key symphonies, full of sudden, dramatic shifts of mood. Such symphonies soon became wildly popular, and

Mozart's own two works in this style, his Symphonies Nos. 25 and 40 (the second of which we recently performed), are two of the most transcendent of their kind.

Haydn's "La Passione", however, goes perhaps a step deeper. The nickname, whether original to the composer or not, appeared soon after its premiere in 1768, and for good reason: it may well have been literally a work written for performance on Good Friday, and at any rate was soon being widely performed during Passiontide, with sold-out printings in London and Paris and hand-written copies landing as far afield as Spain. The key to the Symphony's unique identity lay in its formal construction. Haydn marries the then cutting-edge " Sturm und Drang " style to that of the already-antiquated "sonata di chiesa" (or "church sonata") of the Italian Baroque: four movements, in the archaic slow-fast-slow-fast pattern, and startlingly all in the same key, the gun-metal gray of F-minor. The two slow movements have a somber austerity that seems born out of Spanish Catholicism; even the minuet, for once, seems far more of the church than of the castle. And the finale is fury itself, a fury born of the gods of ancient Greece and Rome and only intensified through the augurs of the Crucifixion.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: *Litaniae de venerabili altaris sacramento*, K.243

"You do not sense at all the sentiment of 'Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi', 'dona nobis pacem' and other passages of the like....but as for me, initiated from earliest childhood in the mystic holiness of our religion.....when I found myself in anxious and heartfelt anticipation of worshipping in church and then parted the service uplifted and relieved in spirit.....when I knew those who knelt down to the moving sound of the 'Agnus Dei' for the Holy Communion to be joyful, and upon receiving Communion heard how the music expressed their heartfelt joy with the words 'Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini' etc; well, to me, then, there is a difference." (From Mozart's letter to Friedrich Doles, Cantor of the Thomaskirche, Leipzig, 1789)

To those of us who still see Mozart as the eternal *wunderkind*, forever flouting the authority the Austrian Church and Court, then the passage above, taken from a letter of Mozart to a pupil of J.S. Bach, may come as a surprise. Fervently disagreeing with his North German (i.e., Lutheran) colleague on the Protestant perception of the Mass, Mozart reveals himself to be a mature, devout Catholic, fully in love with the drama and sensuality of the orthodox Communion ritual. If Haydn's "Passione" symphony has an austerity that seems deeply Latin (i.e., Spanish) in its tone, then Mozart's *Litaniae* (arguably the most fabulous title in all music: it literally means "Litany for the Altar of the Blessed Sacrament") offers that of an ornate and splendid drama, fully reflective of an Austrian cathedral service in Mozart's time.

The year 1776, while being a time of " Sturm und Drang " for many an Austrian composer, found the twenty year-old Mozart still laboring in the comfortable, if somewhat somnolent service of the Archbishop of Salzburg, the also fabulously-titled Hieronymus, Graf [Count] von Colloredo-Waldsee. Often remembered as Mozart's nemesis, he famously upbraided Mozart for his church music having "too many ideas"; to be fair

Collredo was a son of the Age of Reason, and felt (as would most of us!) that the music for a Mass should not exceed three quarters of an hour. Mozart chafed under such strictures - one must remember that the Salzburg in which he'd been raised had famously specialized in lavish church music of pomp and circumstance - and yet, he proceeded to turn out a steady stream of minor masterpieces under the Archbishop's yoke.

Undoubtedly the most undeservedly obscure of these pieces is today's work - could it be that complicated title? - and sadly it seems that the worldwide Mozart year of 2006 has not produced even a small revival of interest in this neglected gem. The work's title is owed to its derivation in the Holy Week rituals, specifically the Palm Sunday service at Salzburg Cathedral. As they did with their gloriously baroque church architecture, South German and Austrian parishes of the time preferred ornate litanies of praise and supplication inserted into the Eucharist, especially on such critical days as Palm Sunday; and it was for Palm Sunday of 1776 that the young Mozart developed this *Litaniae* for inclusion in the Ordinary of the Mass.

The *Litaniae de venerabili altaris sacramento* is not only a quintessentially Austrian sacred work of its time, full of ornately Italian operatic arias, if you will, and exquisitely complicated instrumental parts; for here the young Mozart already displays a knack for formal innovation and stylistic mastery. For Mozart is able to weld the Italianate decoration of a Baroque church cantata to something more "Northern", more austere in spirit; notice how those very operatic arias for the vocal soloists are framed by the massed, block-like sound of the choir, as they continually repeat the "miserere nobis" ("Have mercy upon us"). This culminates in the amazing twin peaks of the "Viaticum", with its operatically dramatic entrance of the trombones (remember Mozart's opera *Idomeneo*, with its similar, *deus-ex-machina* entrance of the god Neptune, was composed at about the same time), and the "Pignus futurae", in which this twenty year-old genius offers us an extended fugue of such contrapuntal mastery as to make any North German master blush. And in bringing back the haunting opening music of the *Kyrie eleison* ("Lord, have mercy") at the end of the work's concluding *Agnus Dei* (yet another appeal for divine mercy -- remember the mysticism of that Mozart letter?), Mozart, unwittingly, foretells his end: it would be on his deathbed, a mere fifteen years later, that Mozart would whisper into the ear of his assistant to employ the same formal device at the end of his *Requiem Mass*.

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