

PROGRAM NOTES – *LAST WORDS*

We often think of Mozart in light of his role, the role he never asked for, as "the eternal youth" of genius - and why not, as he was taken from us so early - but it's also good to reflect on the final statements of the great composers, as a window to "what was" and "what might have been". And the final symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, the bookends of this concert, never cease to fascinate in their comparison. With Haydn's last symphony, composed to a hearty commission, we get one of the great exemplars of old age: a summing-up of a long and productive career, but also, as with Verdi and Stravinsky (and, lest we forget, Wisconsin's own Frank Lloyd Wright), a never-ending openness to new paths; with Mozart's, on the other hand - a symphony composed for no apparent reason - we get the opposite: an eerie self-awareness that, all too soon, the party is over.

Joseph Haydn: Symphony No.104 in D Major, "London" (1794-5)

In 1790 Haydn's patron of long standing, Prince Nicholas Esterhazy, died; finally freed from decades of what could only be called enlightened servitude at the Esterhazy palace (and, to be fair, enriched by the Prince's bequest of a generous pension), Haydn left the Hungarian marshlands for Vienna, fully establishing himself in old age as the great public composer of Europe. Having now truly earned the luxury of entertaining competing offers from Europe's greatest impresarios, he settled on that of Johann Peter Salomon, one of London's musical potentates; and the rest, as they say, is history. Making the long, hazardous journey to London in 1791 (when Mozart implored his "dear old friend" to take care of himself on the voyage, not realizing that it would be he, the young genius, who would be dead upon Haydn's return), Haydn frankly charmed England into submission, following Handel and preceding Mendelssohn and Max Bruch in a steady stream of "honorary British" composers.

The twelve symphonies Haydn produced for Salomon's concerts for newly-emerging London middle-class, known collectively as the "Salomon" or "London" set, effectively made Haydn's reputation as we know it today. With the vast majority of his earlier 90-odd symphonies, Haydn was writing for a small chamber orchestra and probably the most intimate and erudite audience in history; with the symphonies for London, as with those for Paris a decade earlier, Haydn was now composing for public subscription concerts, with a large, newly-bankrolled, thrill-seeking audience, and the large, brilliant orchestras they craved. Here, in a kind of symphonic "second youth", the profound introspection and gentle tone-painting of Haydn's middle years gives way to a wash of sonic color, ebullience, and bubbling good humor. In other words, Haydn was perhaps the ultimate genius at musically adapting to his circumstances; it is not for nothing that Rimsky-Korsakov, the author of that greatest of all essays in symphonic coloring, *Scheherazade*, wrote in his famous treatise on instrumentation that Haydn was the greatest orchestrator who ever lived.

The symphony opens with a startling, solemn call to arms by the full orchestra; soon after, the charming main subjects appear, all succinctly developed in sonata form. The

andante, a graceful and elegant set of theme and variations, aims overall to please; here indeed is Haydn the courtier, but the courtier supreme. With the minuet, one notices a symphonic *breadth* of vision that is almost startling - we could be in the musical future, with Beethoven or Schubert.

And as for the legendary finale, Haydn seems to magically return to his youth, as a peasant's son on the Hungarian plain: we hear nothing more than a simple folk tune, possibly of Croatian provenance, over a rude drone bass - but then expanded and developed with a subtlety, color and nobility that could only come from a master composer, summing up his career. Haydn's shining humanity and sense of humor are everywhere in this score; as it was famously said, "Haydn's sense of fun could be personal, but it was never back-biting, when he wanted to laugh, he wanted you and the rest of his friends to laugh with him. He made no jokes against his neighbors, and if he smiled now and again at the whole human race, who can blame him?"

Daron Hagen: *Seven Last Words*, concerto for piano left hand and orchestra (2001).

At the center of our concert is the area premiere of a bracing and profound new work, the newest addition to a small but utterly treasurable repertoire - that of works for piano left hand. Aside from a few earlier and small instances - Johannes Brahms, for example, making a haunting left-hand arrangement of Bach's great "Chaconne" for an ailing Clara Schumann - it is a repertoire born in tragedy: the Austrian pianist Paul Wittgenstein, brother of the great philosopher and scion of one of Vienna's wealthiest families, lost his right arm to a Russian sniper in the early days of World War I. That he was back on the Italian front within two years would be an example of his incredible tenacity, and at the war's end the undaunted virtuoso proceeded to commission major works for piano left hand from the greatest composers of the day --the greatest of them all being Maurice Ravel's heartbreaking *Concerto for the Left Hand* of 1931.

Daron Hagen, born and raised here in New Berlin and since then one of America's most prominent younger composers - a new score for the Seattle Opera is now in the works - follows firmly in this tradition, but from a different viewpoint. Hagen has said, "I have been a bit reluctant to comment on "Seven Last Words" because the piece itself is devoted to the mystery of faith. And while listeners will naturally infer an influence here from Haydn's oratorio on the same theme, I have endeavored to let music express what perhaps cannot truly be conveyed by other means - especially words. Moreover, although the concerto is an evocation of the meaning and power of the crucifixion of Christ, it is not as a link to a particular religious view." So now, Ravel's ambivalence in mixing classical and jazz elements in a dark paean to all that was lost in World War I has been replaced by a new ambivalence, equally tragic and searching.

The seven movements are performed without interruption:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34)

"Today thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43)

"Woman, behold your son; son, behold your mother" (John 19:26-7)
"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:45-6)
"I thirst" (John 19:28)
"It is finished" (John 19:30)
"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46)

As Bill Rhoads has said, "Through each of the seven continuous movements, the spirit, persona and voice of Christ is borne by the piano. In contrast, the divergent elements of the Passion - the voice of God, the presence of Mary, the crowds, and so on - all of these are represented by the evolving tenor and timbre of the orchestra." Thankfully, the great pianist of our time who inspired the concerto did so in circumstances less tragic than Wittgenstein's: the wonderful Gary Graffman, who abandoned playing with both hands after a 1979 hand injury, who then went on to be Director of the legendary Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where Daron studied. It was Graffman who gave the work's premiere in 2002, with the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra, Guillermo Figueroa conducting.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K.551, "Jupiter"
(1788)

In one of those twists of fate, Johann Peter Salomon would also figure into the early days of Mozart's final symphony - but under different circumstances. It was Salomon who coined the name "Jupiter" for this mighty opus after Mozart's premature demise, rightly touching on how the work seemed to bring together in a cosmic stroke the entire gamut of the composer's gifts. He definitely touched a nerve, as the "Jupiter", along with its two companions the Symphonies Nos. 39 and 40, does indeed seem to sum up not only Mozart's entire symphonic career, but that of the entire Classical era. With the No. 39, Mozart gave us the gentle, warm-hearted Austrian chamber symphony "par excellence"; in the No. 40, the ultimate minor-key Classical symphony in the "sturm und drang" ("storm and stress") style, that Haydn had so perfected in his middle years; and with the "Jupiter" he sums up all that had been said via that third pillar of the Classical style: the jubilant C-major symphony with trumpets and drums, a mix of "learned", "martial" and "gallant" styles. That this "holy trinity" of final Mozart symphonies were, to our knowledge, written for no specific subscription offering or commission - something heretical in that aristocratic age - makes their profound beauty all the more mysterious.

From the symphony's very beginning, that quintessential Mozartian ambivalence, ever swaying between triumph and tears, comes to the fore. A joyous peal of C-major chords, announced in full martial style with trumpets and timpani, is instantly juxtaposed with a second idea, of gentle, radiant melody: a musical "call and response", if you will, in which, strangely, the "answer" precedes the "question" - a "serene anxiety" which Beethoven and the Romantics would exploit.

Throughout the vast and perfect symphonic developments of the first and second movements - presaging Schubert and Bruckner, even the minuet is in proto-sonata form - we see, on page after page, this masterful and yet totally unforced mingling of styles: from his mastery of chamber music, the "learned" contrapuntal development of thematic material; from his mastery of opera, the full-bodied lyricism, subtle shadings, and sudden shifts of mood; and from his late piano concertos, the effortless mix of delicate "solo" passages with resounding "tuttis" for the full ensemble. And through it all, Mozart's "gallant" sense of charm never leaves him; notice the graceful closing theme of the first movement, culled from one of his comic-opera arias.

This consummate diversity of language reaches its zenith in the final movement, the work that surely earned the symphony its nickname: a miraculous combination of fugue, rondo and sonata, all based on a simple four-note theme that, eerily, goes all the way back to the slow movement of Mozart's very first symphony, written at the age of nine. But that this little theme can also be traced to the kernel of the "Credo" movement of one of his earliest Masses gives the symphony an even more "cosmic" touch. By musically saying to us, "This, I believe", in the form of a giant fugue - not a hierarchical form, but one in which several voices, all equal in standing, engage in noble discourse - Mozart was not only paying the ultimate musical homage to the values of the Age of Enlightenment, but summing up for us his entire musical life - whether he wished to or not. That Mozart's personal thematic catalogue, drawn up by him at around the same time, is clearly dated so as to run well into the nineteenth century, only makes the miracle of the "Jupiter" Symphony all the more poignant.

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