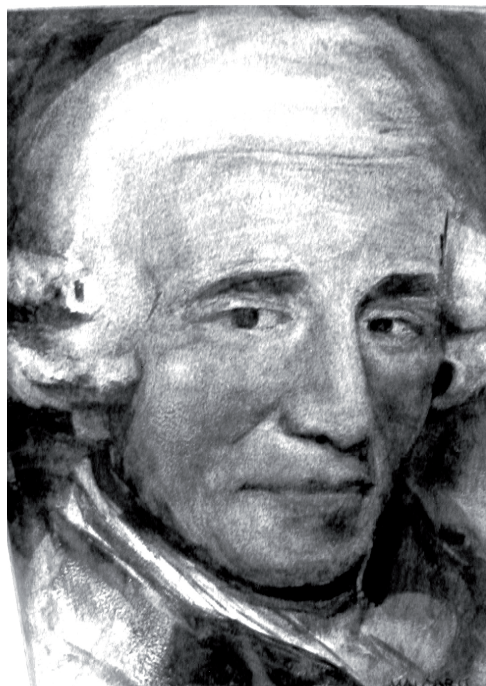


A CELEBRATION OF HAYDN  
BY JAN NARVESON



portrait of Haydn by B.C. artist Maloarit  
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Chamber music patrons hold the name of Joseph Haydn in high esteem, generally. Perhaps, in this writer's opinion, not high enough, for too often it's by way of acknowledging his pivotal role in the development of music in the classical era. I'm devoting this article to Haydn's music - especially his string quartets - because of that very pivotal status, and because the Chamber Music Society is devoting a good deal of attention to him this spring - for this is Haydn's 275th birthday year.

Last year was Mozart's 250th, and it was the occasion of a great deal of celebration, notably in the highly appropriate form of a huge number of concerts devoted to his music. Haydn's 275th won't get anything like that level of attention, partly because half a century counts for more than a quarter, and partly because Haydn gets generally rather less press than his young colleague. That's where I come in.

Many serious composers after Haydn learned from him, and music simply wouldn't be what it is without his contributions. That said, however, I want to devote this space to a more specific appreciation. Whatever his influences on others may be, Haydn's own work is of superb quality, and as it is quite consistent, that means that his total body of work for string quartet is really unexcelled by anybody. Calling him one of the greats isn't just pro forma!

Unlike the other great classical composers, Haydn came from the peasantry. He was born in a rural village in Austria where his father was a wheelwright - not a Kappelmeister or court musician. He had a lucky break, as his fine soprano voice was spotted early on and he became a member of the Vienna Boys' Choir for a decade. But that ended suddenly in his later teens, and after that he made it entirely on his own - no court connections for this lad. He had not only genius but the habit of hard work and concentration. The combination got him far: at age 30, he landed one of the best musical jobs in Europe, as director (assistant, at first, but soon the top position) of the musical establishment of the Esterhazy family, one of the richest in Europe, and known for their musical taste.



Haydn's house at Esterházy

Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy didn't like city life much and built a magnificent palace way out in the countryside, where his musicians were obliged to live some ten months out of the year. (Haydn's famous "Farewell" symphony, #45, put into musical form the complaint of his long-suffering musicians when the Prince overstayed his sojourn there one year.) In consequence, as Haydn once explained to someone, "I was forced to become original, for there was no one else to work with or talk to" - it was a couple of days' journey by very bad roads to the nearest sizable city (Vienna), and keeping the Boss supplied with not only quartets and baryton trios, but symphonies and operas and a fair bit else as well was a full-time job. But among the hard workers, it still takes talent to excell, and that's what Haydn had in superabundance.

Haydn's chamber music consists mainly of piano sonatas (54 or so), string quartets, and two types of trios. There are 57 known full-form string quartets, plus ten "divertimenti" for that combination (two violins, viola, and cello) and an amazing tour de force of a work, the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross in seven successive very slow movements, bringing the total of pieces for string quartet to 68. Of piano trios (piano, violin, cello) there are 45; and then there is a great deal of music for a very odd instrument called the "baryton", which is a bit like a cello only with something of a guitar tacked onto the back. Prince Nikolaus played this cumbersome instrument, and so of course Haydn wrote music for it, in combination with two other normal instruments - viola and cello. There are no fewer than 126 of those. Assorted other items for various combinations exist as well, but to no category did he devote more attention, or get better results, than in the string quartet.

The quartets begin with "Opus Zero," as it's now called, written perhaps in about 1755. Despite Haydn's prodigious voice and years as a choirboy, we know of no actual written compositions of his from his early teens, as we do in the famous cases of Mozart and Mendelssohn. His career as a composer is almost entirely that of an adult (especially by the standards of the day.) I believe this is reflected in his music. If you compare the earlier quartets of Mozart, such as K155 in D Major, with any of Haydn's early divertimenti, there is a real sense of the juvenile spirit about Mozart's, whereas Haydn's sounds the early work of a mature composer. It's hard to put one's finger on this, but the music makes it quite clear. (For comparison, try Haydn's Op. 0. Even that early piece is pure Haydn. Listen to the counterpoint in it - not something you find in early Mozart.)

However, those early works were written at first in the spirit of their official title, divertimenti. One mark of the divertimento type is that almost always they had five movements or more; of the five, generally, there were outer fast movements, then the second and fourth were minuets, and the middle movement an andante or even, sometimes, an adagio. But somehow Haydn got the idea of dropping one of the two minuets - he never did stick with a rule here, for his minuets are sometimes second and sometimes third among the four movements of what became The

tle enough so that only connoisseurs will see the joke - but then, that's the point. Haydn's quartets are a world you can get into, and there's a lot to learn.

Besides the actual humour, it is fair to say that Haydn's work in general is good-natured. Not in the sense of shallow, but in the sense of reflecting an optimistic, forward-looking view of the world. Again, the peasant mentality is at work here: Yes, it's rained for three weeks, but the sun will be out again - just wait and see! In the meantime, though, there's hard work to do, and in Haydn's case the work consists of finding no end of ingenious ways to vary a theme, to effect a transition from one section to another, to round off a phrase, to sum up a point. There is a wonderful saying about Haydn, from a short biography by the fine music-writer Michael Steinberg: "*The trouble with Haydn's music is that there is nothing to do about it except listen to it. Haydn has neither Mozart's sex appeal nor Beethoven's way on the soapbox, and he does not invite daydreams. His life was not colorful, and he was sufficiently successful for us not to be tempted to feel sorry for him. His marital unhappiness is too prosaic to titillate .. He was not deaf, neither did he die young. ... His seductiveness is that of a great musical intelligence. Not all are susceptible to such blandishments, but the deep and perhaps uniquely refreshing delight of his music is there for those who will listen, really listen, stretching perception and memory to the full.*" [in *Brief Lives*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1971, p. 356.]



String Quartet. The six quartets of Op. 9 are the real thing in that sense. There is no longer the air of "divertimento" about it, but rather the full seriousness of the symphony. Of course, with Haydn, 'serious' here doesn't imply humourless! Rare is the Haydn work that doesn't have a touch of humour in it somewhere or other - often sub-

the excitement, the inimitably adventurous, exploratory character of this music, will be missed by those wanting Muzak, and overlooked by those seeking political statements, psychiatric profiles, or missions in life.

see Haydn, p.4

Unless, that is, one's mission is to discover wonderful music that doesn't shout from the rooftops. Haydn wrote to make people happy, but it is not a trivial happiness - not drug-induced, for instance. He asks a lot for what he has to offer, and repays richly those who are willing to seek it out.

I first heard Haydn's music on the phonograph when I was about 13 or so, and while I liked it a lot (it was the Symphony no. 101, "The Clock"), it was not until years later, after much exposure to the romantics and the rest, that I realized what a rich vein is Haydn's music. But especially, the string quartets are what excited me, and still do. The art of making wonderful silk purses out of something close to sow's ears is Haydn's art especially. One note-writer observes that in the case of Haydn, calling the parts of a sonata-form movement by their conventional names, 'Exposition', 'Development', and 'Recapitulation' is misleading, for with Haydn, development begins around bar three! Start your CD player on the opening bars of almost any quartet, and you'll see what he meant. And it continues, often right to the end. He is possibly the most consistently original of all composers. But you have to listen to notice that!

The Chamber Music Society is celebrating Haydn's 275th birthday by presenting no fewer than three concerts devoted almost entirely to his music - two of string quartet music, one of trios. Although Haydn was born on April 1, we start a bit early with an all-Haydn concert by the Penderecki Quartet (the first quartet, op. 0, and his final completed work for quartet, op. 77 #2, as well as a middle quartet). The next of our concerts, on Haydn's birthday itself, features one of Europe's finest piano trios, the Abegg Trio, from Germany, performing three of Haydn's late trios - nos. 26, 27, and 29. These are among his wittiest compositions, and among his most experimental. The third concert, a month or so later, is by the excellent and enterprising Eybler Quartet from Toronto. Eybler was himself a classical composer of some talent, but on this occasion his namesake quartet devotes its efforts entirely to Haydn: Op. 9, no. 2; op. 54, No. 1; and op. 74, no. 3, the "Rider" - one of Haydn's most famous works. This ensemble performs on classical instruments and in classical style (so far as we know), and their concert affords a most interesting comparison with the Penderecki who play on modern instruments. Both, in my judgment, are entirely valid, but they certainly are different! But with Haydn's music, learning is a major part of the excitement.



Jan Narveson is President of the K-W Chamber Music Society.

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If you were to evenly space the orchestral concerts taking place during the next two months, you'd be able to hear an orchestra every 3.5 days, for on 17 different occasions local stages will feature orchestras. Unsurprisingly, the KWS will make the most frequent appearance, and its programs will range from Baroque music to Pops to the newest music during the Open Ears Festival.

Also thanks to the KWS we have the opportunity to hear the Youth Orchestra (April 14), as well as the renowned Montreal Symphony Orchestra (April 22).

Who else is playing?

- On March 31 the Cambridge Community Orchestra plays a concert with its new conductor, Sabatino Vaccoa.
- Conductor Simon Irving and the Guelph Symphony Orchestra will perform both a regular season concert in Guelph on March 25, and then join forces with the Liberation Choir in Hamilton on April 7.
- The WLU Symphony Orchestra on March 3 and 4 (Paul Pulford, conductor)
- March 22 there's a concert by the orchestra at the University of Waterloo ([orchestra@uwaterloo](mailto:orchestra@uwaterloo)).

... and Issue #3 will bring news of several chamber orchestras: the Waterloo Chamber Players, Nota Bene Period Orchestra, and the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Orchestra.

### Haydn and the orchestra

"The first great master whose creative work opened (the new symphonic) road was Joseph Haydn. His birth (1732) preceded by 24 years the birth of Mozart, whom he survived by 18 years, IN the later part of his life, he became Beethoven's teacher. At the time of Haydn's birth, Bach, Handel and Rameau, not yet in their fifties, were at the zenith of their creative activity; Gluck was only 18 years old. At the time of Haydn's death in 1809 Beethoven was nearly 40 and had already done a large part of his life-work.

Thus Haydn represents the direct link between the 18th and 19th centuries, the centre of the so-called classic period of music. He belonged to the same generation as the poets Gellert (b. 1715), Lessing (1709), Herder (1744), the philosophers Rousseau (1712), Hume (1711) and Kant (1724). This means, that he belonged to that generation which taught the doctrine of enlightenment by reason. Haydn himself was neither poet nor philosopher, he never wrote anything but his music. But this music is founded upon the same intellectual assumptions as the work of his poetical and philosophical contemporaries, it breathes the same spirit. It was because of these conditions, that Haydn became the founder and first universal master, the patriarch, of modern orchestral music.

There has been and still is a tendency to belittle Haydn's importance with respect not to his musical genius but to his historical significance. Certainly there were noteworthy composers before him, who prepared the way for his work in developing the sonata form as well as the efficiency of the orchestra. Certainly there came after him Beethoven, who gave these forms a greater breadth and increased the efficiency of the orchestra far above the limits Haydn kept to. There is no need to underrate the works of the great successor or the merits of the less important predecessors. But neither can diminish Haydn's fundamental importance of work. That work is perfect in itself. It acquires many a stimulus from older masters, but it absorbs and brings these to fruition in an absolutely independent manner. It runs its course to its own fulfillment, needing no later completion. All that came after Haydn started from new tendencies; nothing that preceded had yet reached the point from which Haydn started. He is an individuality closed within itself, directed by its own rules, striving after its unique aims. . . ." from *The Orchestra*, by Paul Bekker, pub. The Norton Library, W.W.Norton & Co., New York, 1963, ©1936