HAYDN STUDIES

The advances in Haydn scholarship made in the past forty years or so, and in particular in very recent times, would have been unthinkable to earlier generations, who honoured the composer more in word than in deed. *Haydn Studies* deals with many new aspects of a composer who is perennially fresh, concentrating principally on matters of reception, style and aesthetics and presenting many striking new readings of the composer's work. Haydn has never played a major role in accounts of cultural history and has never achieved the emblematic status accorded to composers such as Beethoven, Debussy and Stravinsky, in spite of his radical creative agenda: this volume attempts therefore to broaden the base of our understanding of the composer.

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Haydn Studies

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Preface

The advances in Haydn scholarship that have been made in the past forty years or so would have been unthinkable to earlier generations, who honoured the composer rather more in word than in deed. The composer has once more become what he became in his lifetime, a big player on the musical stage – especially in the last ten to twenty years – and the industry surrounding his works shows no signs of a slump. Because of the late start suffered by Haydn in musicological terms, a sense of evangelizing zeal still surrounds much of the scholarly and performing activity on his behalf, informed by a confidence that the composer is 'on the up'. However, for all the advances made in our knowledge of Haydn, the balance of this progress has been rather uneven. Not surprisingly, most attention has been devoted to all the musicological problems surrounding such a vast and widely dispersed creative output – matters of authenticity, chronology, documentation, performance practice, and the establishment of reliable and scholarly editions. On the other hand, in hermeneutic terms, the Haydn industry is still young, perhaps in obedience to the old unwritten law of musical research that demanded a full tally of 'facts' before proper aesthetic interpretation could begin. This may be somewhat unfair, since work that answers this need has begun to appear in more than isolation, but there is no doubt that the general thrust of Haydn research has been highly positivistic. When some of this work has crossed the line into aesthetics, the results have often been disappointing, strikingly below the level of thought evident elsewhere. The result is that our perception of Haydn as a creative figure is quite undeveloped compared with the historical and aesthetic resonance that has accrued to all other comparably great composers. Certainly no major composer can have inspired less fanciful prose.

Accordingly, the chapters that make up this volume deal principally with matters of reception, style and aesthetics. Every contribution represents a quite fresh approach to an existing area of research or opens up new territory – in the very spirit of the composer himself. The first chapter treats

a topic that has but rarely been touched on, and yet the image of Haydn today still has much to do with that created for him by the nineteenth century. Certainly compared with the extensive literature on the reception of Mozart and Beethoven during the Romantic era, Haydn has been scantily dealt with, this in itself proof of how tenacious the nineteenth century's imagery and priorities have been. It is just this imagery, as articulated by Leon Botstein, that has dictated the lack of fanciful prose. For all the comparatively bullish state of the Haydn industry – the marked increase in high-level scholarly thought about the composer and the growing exposure of many of his works in performance and recording – there is no doubt that the composer is a long way from being embraced by the wider musical public at the level which is his due. For this wider musical public the image of Haydn continues to be somewhat mundane and flat. There is another unwritten law, one more particular to Haydn, that seems to stipulate that one doesn't claim too much for the composer. Haydn is too rarely understood as the revolutionary he was; many 'insiders' know him to be an incomparably original composer and thinker about (or in) music, but this is far from being the public perception. This state of affairs, whose roots lie again in the ideology of nineteenth-century musical thought, was articulated not so long ago by Geoffrey Wheatcroft, when he described Haydn, without too much licence, as the composer 'who[m] concert promoters have always regarded as box office death, even if true musicians have a passion for him almost beyond any other composer'.[1]

Personal experience bears out the force of Wheatcroft's remarks. Among these 'true musicians', a large proportion of the Haydn devotees I have encountered have been composers. The mere mention of the composer's name has often been enough to prompt the most enthusiastic of testimonials. And yet, consistent with the previous unwritten law, this Haydn worship has always had an underground character – something passed on by word of mouth rather than practised in public. This testifies to some lingering nineteenth-century associations. Haydn must seem too slight a figure to place at the pinnacle of musical art; the traditional imagery would not allow him to be profound enough in thought or comprehensive enough

[1] Geoffrey Wheatcroft, 'Profile (Schiff's Unfashionable Talent)', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 September 1988, p. 14.

in range to occupy such a position. And so he remains something of a secret addiction.

Those who have declared their allegiance in one form or other have been of the most diverse creative proclivities, going well beyond those who might be thought to share common artistic concerns. Take the seemingly surprising example of John Williams, the maestro of film composers; for Williams, Haydn 'occupies pride of place' in his 'pantheon' of composing gods.[2] Two composers have been enlisted here to express themselves publicly on the subject. In Chapter 9 George Edwards investigates a neglected field – Haydn's recapitulations – and evokes the sheer technical command and resource that fascinates so many composers in particular. Chapter 10, by Robin Holloway, explores the significance and stature of the composer in the broadest terms. As has already been outlined, Haydn has never played a major role in accounts of cultural history, has never achieved the emblematic status accorded to such composers as Beethoven, Debussy and Stravinsky, although his creative agenda can be said to have been finally just as radical. This chapter sets the seal on the attempt of this book to broaden the base of our understanding of the composer.

Another legacy of the nineteenth century (which must be starting to assume demonic proportions for the reader) has been the strong emphasis on instrumental music as the core of the Viennese Classical style. The sacred music of the Classical era has altogether received little consideration, swept aside by the 'rise' of the sonata, symphony and other 'abstract' instrumental forms; the fact that religious vocal works preoccupied Haydn extensively during the last part of his career sits uncomfortably with the tendency to give most weight to his instrumental music. In Chapter 2 James Webster reconsiders some of the sacred vocal music, with particular attention to rhetoric, and offers a new governing idea, that of 'salvation', in the attempt to give Haydn's work in the field a stronger aesthetic profile. Chapter 3 continues the treatment of neglected vocal genres. Although literature on Haydn operas has increased modestly of late, what has been largely missing thus far is any attempt to provide readings of individual operas as artistic wholes. Jessica Waldoff undertakes this for *La vera*

[2] Edward Seckerson, 'Interview (He knows the score)', *The Independent* (weekend supplement), 25 May 1996, p. 3.

costanza. Ultimately, it can only be by focusing on particular works that any progress can be made in putting Haydn's operatic achievement on a firm footing. In the attempt to achieve this by giving Haydn a part to play in the intellectual history of the eighteenth century, the chapter shares an emphasis with many other essays in this volume, one that has not been apparent in the treatment of Haydn until rather recently.

Chapter 4 also represents an attempt to ground Haydn firmly in the intellectual history of his time, not just as a passive representative but as an active agent in creating a new understanding of the art of music. The 'aesthetic optimism' with which Daniel Chua concludes his discussion might be reinforced by recollecting Haydn's celebrated letter to the music lovers of Bergen, on the occasion of their performance of *The Creation*: 'There are so few happy and contented peoples here below; grief and sorrow are always their lot; perhaps your labours will once be a source from which the careworn, or the man burdened with affairs, can derive a few moments' rest and refreshment'.[3] Chua's optimism, though, is rather different from that normally associated with the figure of Papa Haydn. Received critical opinion has in fact only allowed for one time of aesthetic pessimism in the composer's career: in Chapter 5 Mark Evan Bonds argues for a reassessment of this *Sturm und Drang* period, primarily on technical rather than intellectual grounds. From this treatment it might almost appear that the technical features of the *Sturm und Drang* were appropriated or invented precisely so that they could function as obstacles, placed by the composer in his way so as to force a rethinking of technical habits and thereby in effect entailing a 'cours complet de la composition'. But this technical self-consciousness, as Robin Holloway reminds us, is one of Haydn's defining characteristics. In the following chapter Michael Spitzer deals with the notion of *Sturm und Drang* from a different standpoint and then argues for the continuity of the composer's approach between this and the 'lighter' *galant* style that followed. James Webster then reviews the symphonies written in these years of 'entertainment', in which Haydn was supposedly devoting his greatest artistic efforts to opera. If the *Sturm und Drang* label has given rise to many misunderstandings, so has the notion of a lighter style associated with the

[3] H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works V: Haydn: The Late Years 1801–1809* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 233.

later 1770s and beyond. The problematic image of 'entertainment' encapsulates our difficulties in dealing with some of the basic premises of Viennese Classicism, both in Haydn's and others' hands. No one can fail to notice the accessibility of the prevalent idiom, its sociability of tone, the amiability of much of its diction. While historically Mozart has been able to be rescued from any sense of superficiality that might be associated with such attributes, Haydn (as Leon Botstein explains) has not always been so fortunate. Our still largely Romantic sense of the role and function of music has tended to make the comic, amiable and social suspect in their own right, unless they are 'deepened' in some demonstrable way. We readily assume that profundity is to be equated with the overtly serious in tone or the melancholy; it is harder for us to accept that what may be modest or inviting or sociable is just as valid a tone of artistic voice as that which presents itself more earnestly.[4] Melancholia turns us inward to reflect on ourselves as individuals; comedy involves laughter which is generally shared, reminding us of our similarities with others and our position in a social community. Rather than being perceived as intrinsically inadequate, the language of comedy and amiability that Haydn did so much to imprint on his time should be heard for the novelty it was, historically speaking, and for the strength of its conviction.

The social implications of a comedic language and the immense power it can generate were recently brought home to me in the context of an undergraduate exam in Cambridge. As part of a first-year aural paper, the students had to listen to the finale of Haydn's Symphony No. 90 in C major, three times in all, and write an essay on what they heard. This is one of those movements where the composer offers the listener numerous false endings, the confusion augmented by the fact that the real final ending is less emphatic than an earlier false one, and the whole made infinitely more teasing by the repeat indicated for the second half of the movement. Anticipating the usual knowing titters from the assembled undergraduates, I found that what ensued was much more striking than that. The first few false endings, followed by fermatas, witnessed a rustling of pens on

[4] For an excellent discussion of these issues in depth see Wye J. Allanbrook, 'Mozart's Tunes and the Comedy of Closure', in James M. Morris, ed., *On Mozart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, in association with the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1994), pp. 169–86.

papers, only for the listeners to find themselves conned, their musical instincts overturned. Each subsequent false ending saw a growing reluctance to begin the writing of the essay; when the movement finally did come to a close, it was followed by a long and delicious period of inactivity and silence. Clearly no student was going to make the first move and be embarrassed all over again. The atmosphere was electric with uncertainty. Eventually through the agony the comic premise could be glimpsed once more, as one could compare a personal response with that of one's neighbours and enjoy the shared confusion and surprise. If the students felt inadequate in the light of this performance, then so did I. What I thought had been grasped from a reading of the score fell well short of the artistic reality – an intensely imaginative dramatization of the listening experience. This was one of the most inspiring encounters I have had with Haydn. It is to be hoped that the arguments presented in this volume can do some justice to the power and importance of this great artist.

Editor's note

The piano sonatas and trios are referred to according to the numbering of the Universal Edition (edited by Christa Landon) and the Doblinger edition (edited by H. C. Robbins Landon) respectively.

As a volume entitled 'Haydn Studies' is already in existence (the Proceedings of the International Haydn Conference held in Washington, D.C., in 1975, edited by Jens Peter Larsen, Howard Serwer and James Webster, and published by Norton in 1981), it is suggested that any references to the current volume should take the form of 'Cambridge Haydn Studies'.