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David Wyn Jones  
Excerpt  
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## I God and country

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When Beethoven lay bedridden in his apartment in the Schwarzschanerhaus in Vienna in the last few months of his life he received regular visitors who brought him a variety of gifts. One of the most valued by the dying composer was a lithograph of Haydn's birthplace presented to him by an old friend, Anton Diabelli, whose publishing firm had just issued it. 'Look, I got this today. Just look at the little house, and such a great man was born in it.'<sup>1</sup> Beethoven had it framed and it hung on his wall for the last weeks of his life.

One could read Beethoven's comment as genuine recognition of his fundamental indebtedness to Haydn, a final accommodation of a relationship that had not always been an easy one. More directly Beethoven's remark on the lithograph image pointed to a stark difference in their respective lives: Beethoven had been born in the electoral town of Bonn, where his father was employed as a musician in the local court; Haydn had been born in the countryside, where his father was the local wheelwright and carter.

Haydn's birthplace pictured in Diabelli's lithograph, Rohrau, was a small, rather sprawling hamlet, 25 miles east of Vienna and next to the river Leitha that marked the boundary between the archduchy of Austria and the kingdom of Hungary. It was a flat area, prone to flooding, reflected in the place name, literally 'Reedmeadow'. Haydn's house was to be flooded several times in the nineteenth century and, on another occasion, the roof was badly damaged by fire. What survives

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today is a rather sanitized reconstruction set alongside adjacent properties that obscure the view to the distant Leitha mountains that can be seen on the right of the lithograph. Haydn's father, Mathias Haydn (1699–1763), was originally from the town of Hainburg, six miles to the north on the Danube where his father, Thomas, too had been a wheelwright. In Rohrau Mathias Haydn may have been the builder of the small house in the 1720s; he certainly cultivated several fields for fruit and vegetables, had a small vineyard and some animals. Together with the specialist craft of a wheelwright and carter this led to a secure standard of living characterized as much by bartering as by the exchange of cash. German was the local language; to hear any Hungarian one had to cross the river Leitha and even there it was not the dominant language. In 1728 Mathias had married a local girl, Anna Maria Koller (1707–54), daughter of a farmer, Philipp, a respected villager who became the district magistrate. Before and during her marriage Maria Koller worked as one of nine cooks in the palace of the local landowner, Count Carl Anton von Harrach. Five minutes' walk from the Haydn house in the direction of the distant mountains, this summer palace was an imposing two-courtyard residence built in the Renaissance style, surrounded by a defensive wall and a moat. Apart from paying for a lute master from Vienna to teach his young daughter, the reigning count did not particularly favour music as a recreation.

Mathias and Maria had twelve children in fifteen years, six of whom survived childhood, three girls and three boys: Anna Maria Franziska (1730–81), Franz Joseph (1732–1809), Johann Michael (1737–1806), Anna Maria (1739–1802), Anna Katharina (1741–before 1801) and Johann Evangelist (1743–1805). Joseph Haydn, the eldest boy, was baptized on 1 April 1732 but there is no document that records his birthdate. Later in his life Haydn maintained that it was 31 March, telling one friend, Joseph Carl Rosenbaum, that it was at four in the afternoon. Well into his forties Haydn thought he had been born a year later, in 1733. Confusion about birthdates in Catholic countries was not uncommon – Beethoven was similarly confused – since celebrating the name day, the feast day of the saint after which the

child was named, was much more important than the birth date and, consequently, age. As was frequently the practice in Austria, Haydn's parents gave their children two Christian names, the second of which was routinely used. Haydn's names were taken from two proximate saints' days, Franz (Francis of Paola, 2 April) and Joseph (husband of the Virgin Mary, 19 March) and, following practice, Haydn hardly ever used Franz. The baptism records the names formally in Latin, *Franciscus Josephus*. Later in his life Haydn often used the form *Josephus* instead of *Joseph*, especially on documents and letters, but much more common than either was the Italian form, *Giuseppe*, which he routinely wrote on his music.

The local church in Rohrau was situated five minutes away, in the opposite direction from the Harrach palace, in what is now Joseph-Haydn Platz. Holding no more than about fifty people or so and plainly decorated, the church and its services bound the community together, uniting body and soul in the Catholic liturgy. Although its musical provision was negligible, a reflection of Count Harrach's lack of interest, some of Joseph's earliest musical experiences would have occurred in the church, though nothing was vouchsafed to the composer's first biographers, Griesinger and Dies.

Joseph's mother is an elusive, unknown figure remembered, as befits a cook, for her neatness, industry and order, qualities she instilled in her children. More is known about the father, suggesting that his contented life was marked by a degree of ambition and pride, initially for himself and then for his children. Griesinger and Dies both pointed out that as a young man he had travelled 'as was customary for his trade', probably a reference to the long formal apprenticeship as a wheelwright, from apprentice (*Lehrling*), through journeyman (*Geselle*), to fully qualified craftsman. Certainly Joseph Haydn remembered his father recounting the time he had spent in Frankfurt where he learnt to strum the harp. Although Mathias never learnt to read music, singing songs to the accompaniment of the harp was a favourite pastime in the household. His own sense of self-worth was further enhanced in 1741 when, like his father-in-law before him, he

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1. Birthplace of Joseph Haydn, Rohrau (Vienna, c.1820).

assumed the duties of district magistrate, which necessitated occasional visits to Vienna. None of his sons was to enter the family trade: Michael like Joseph became a court composer, working most of his life in Salzburg, and Johann was given a post as a tenor in the Esterházy court by his elder brother.

One occasional visitor to the Haydn household was Johann Mathias Franck (1708–83) from Hainburg. Married to a stepsister of Mathias Haydn he typically combined the duties of a head teacher of the only school in the town with those of choir director and sexton in the local church. During one visit to Rohrau he was treated to the customary homely singing by the Haydn family and noticed that Joseph was rhythmically accompanying himself on an imaginary violin, using a piece of wood as a bow; all this was to be fancifully captured in an early nineteenth-century depiction of Haydn's birth place (Figure 1). The general alertness and musicality of the five-year-old impressed Franck

who suggested that he should be educated at his school in Hainburg. This was a more structured education than was available in Rohrau and the two hopeful parents may even, at this very early stage, have foreseen a career that was akin to that of Franck, teacher, musician, serving the church, or a mixture. In 1737 or 1738 Haydn moved to Hainburg to begin his formal education.

The town of Hainburg was a much more lively place than Rohrau, with plenty to feed the imagination of a young boy. Perched on a cliff on the south bank of the Danube it was a fortress town strategically placed between the Habsburg capital of Vienna and the Hungarian capital of Pressburg (Bratislava). Over the centuries it had been the scene of several bloody battles, as the name of the steep street from the church down to the river gruesomely suggests: Blutgasse. The last siege of the Turks had taken place in 1683, leaving a scarring folk memory; for some, like Haydn's grandmother (Mathias's mother), it was a living memory. The main street was the busy thoroughfare from Vienna to Pressburg and goods from as far as Constantinople were regularly carried through the town. The town gates were closed every night and Haydn's grandmother lived close to the Vienna gate. Down on the broad and swift Danube, Haydn would have seen the flat-bottomed boats that plied goods locally (the unregulated nature of the river downstream prevented it from being a major trading waterway until the nineteenth century). The winter of 1739–40 was one of the most severe in the century and the river was frozen solid from November to March.

Haydn lived as a paying lodger with Franck and his wife in the schoolhouse. One of his first, and lasting, impressions was the unkempt surroundings compared with home: 'It pained me to note that uncleanness was the rule and, although I took great pride in my small person, I still could not prevent occasional spots on my clothing about which I was sensitive and ashamed.'<sup>2</sup> Although education in Austria at the time (that is before the reforms of Maria Theresia in the 1770s and Joseph II in the 1780s) was entirely haphazard and unregulated it did have the common characteristic of being tied to the

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Catholic church. In Hainburg approximately seventy to eighty children attended the school, arriving at seven in the morning; they went to mass at ten before going home for lunch; at midday they returned to school where they stayed until three. Reading and writing was entirely based on religious matter, the Bible, the Catechism and the writing of Thomas à Kempis; arithmetic was perfunctory. Music was taught mainly after school hours and its immediate purpose was to serve the liturgy of the church, again organized and delivered by Franck. The church was larger than the one in Rohrau, richly decorated (especially the altar) and with paintings of the Fourteen Stations of the Cross on the walls. From the gallery at the back of the church the enveloping sound of music during the services of the Catholic liturgy would have been a major formative influence on the young Haydn, uniting music and religion. The central service of the mass was divided into two broad types. On most Sundays the musical forces of the choir of schoolboys and adults was accompanied by a basic ensemble of violins and organ; much more exciting, on important feast days the mass was accompanied by strings, trumpets and timpani, forces that drew on the wider musical resources of the town.

Haydn, naturally, received singing lessons that resulted in a voice that was noted for its musicality and confidence rather than its power and beauty. Violin and harpsichord lessons also turned him into a capable instrumentalist. More idiosyncratically, Haydn became a competent timpani player, the initial circumstances of which he fondly recalled in old age. Catholic services routinely spilled out into the streets of the town, for the Corpus Christi services, the election of the town councillors and the annual commemoration of the defeat of the Turks. Soon after his arrival in Hainburg another annual ceremony took place, Rogation, the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday that preceded Ascension Day, characterized by public processions accompanied by the chanting of the Litany of Saints. Franck, as usual, was in charge of the music. His timpani player, however, had recently died. He turned to his new young lodger, taught him the basics of drumming and left him to practise. Haydn approached the task with

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enthusiasm, placing a breadbasket on an armchair as a substitute drum but failed to notice the residue of flour that covered the chair after the drumming. Franck was impressed with the boy's enterprise and facility, and ignored the flour. One problem remained. Haydn was too small to carry the drum and would not be able to reach it even if it was carried by an obliging adult. In the event it was carried by a particularly obliging hunchback, causing a good deal of merriment. Curiosity about timpani and timpani playing remained with Haydn throughout his life, his writing for the instrument revealing an individuality that is not apparent in the music of his contemporaries, including Mozart.

In 1739 Georg Reutter visited Hainburg, staying with his cousin the local priest. Reutter had just become Kapellmeister of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna and was looking for new choirboys. The priest recommended Haydn for an audition, during which the boy was asked whether he could sing a trill. He replied that not even Franck could do that. Bribed with some cherries – these allow the story to be placed in the early summer of 1739 – Haydn was taught to trill. Reutter was impressed but recommended that he should consolidate his technique through assiduous singing of scales, to develop accuracy of pitch and flexibility. Neither Franck nor, consequently, Haydn was familiar with the common Italian system of solfeggio (*ut, re, mi* etc.) but, once more, with determination and resourcefulness the young boy invented a system of his own using German pitch names, *c, d, e* etc. On a return visit the following year Reutter checked on Haydn's progress, declared himself happy and arranged for the boy to move to Vienna.

The two or three years that Haydn spent in Hainburg had transformed his personality from a lively boy from the countryside who could sing a little to an inquisitive, increasingly competent musician, one for whom music, education and even recreation were bound with the rich and regular patterns of the liturgical year. Haydn seems to have kept in touch with the Franck family, even after Mathias died in 1783; he owned a portrait of the schoolmaster which he left in his will together with 100 gulden to Franck's daughter and her husband. He

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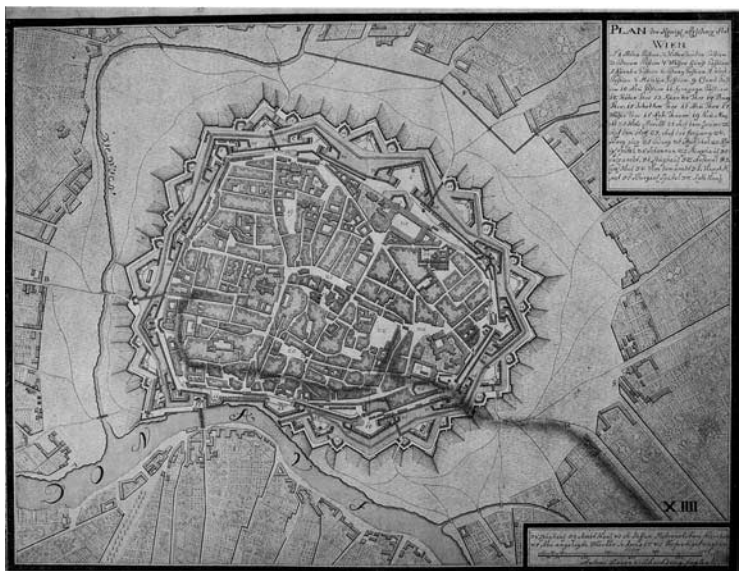
told Griesinger: 'I shall owe it to that man, even in my grave, that he taught me so many things, although in the process I received more thrashings than food.'<sup>3</sup>

Vienna in 1740 was the most important city in German-speaking Europe, the administrative capital of the Austrian Monarchy, that is the territories over which the Habsburg family exerted direct rule, and, as a largely separate governmental process, the capital also of the Holy Roman Empire, an agglomeration of independent kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, counties and even single cities that lay across central, German-speaking Europe. The complexity of the differentiated degrees of power was reflected in the formulation 'kaiserlich-königlich' ('imperial-royal'). It was also inherently unstable and was about to be put to the test. In the same year as Haydn arrived in Vienna, Maria Theresa, aged only twenty-three, succeeded her father, Karl VI, as Habsburg leader, the first woman ruler of the Habsburg dominions. Karl had spent the previous quarter of a century or so trying to ensure that the rest of Europe would accept a female ruler, but within weeks Frederick the Great of Prussia exploited the inevitable uncertainty and announced his intention of annexing Silesia, part of the Monarchy. The War of the Austrian Succession erupted at the end of 1740 and lasted eight years, followed a decade later by the Seven Years' War (1756–63).

As an eight-year-old choirboy newly arrived in the imperial-royal city Joseph Haydn would have been only dimly aware of this wider political unrest, but his entire existence, including much of the musical repertoire that he was required to perform, was a projection of characteristics deeply ingrained in the psyche of the Habsburg capital. As European politics became more agitated Vienna continually reasserted its identity as a seat of power.

For nearly 500 years it had been a heavily fortified city and this marked its personality as well as its topography (see Figure 2; north is towards the bottom of the map). The walls had four gates that opened out to the wider world and shut it out at night, the Kärntnertor to the south, the Schottentor to the west, the Rotenturmtor to the north, and the Stubentor to the east, four entrances that governed a similar





2. Map of Vienna, 1741.

division of the inner city into four quarters. To the north the Danube canal formed a convenient protection while in all other directions there was a wide area of open land, the Glacis. In contrast to the inner city, which was very compact, the suburbs beyond the Danube and the Glacis were more generously laid out and continually expanding. In 1740 the inner city and the suburbs between them contained a population of c.170,000.

Much of the inner city had been transformed in the earlier decades of the century by a spontaneous and self-confident building programme that defined its appearance for ever. Part of it was initiated by the imperial court, such as the imperial quarters themselves (the Hofburg), the court library and the Spanish Riding School. In a display of competitive loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty aristocrats built palaces close to the Hofburg, including many whose names were to figure prominently in the history of music, the Dietrichstein, Esterházy, Liechtenstein, Lobkowitz and Schwarzenberg families. Charles Burney,

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the English musician who visited Vienna in 1772 to gather material for his history of music, left a vivid picture of the compact nature of the city as well as its still modern splendour.<sup>4</sup>

The streets are rendered doubly dark and dirty by their narrowness, and by the extreme height of the houses; but, as these are chiefly of white stone and in a uniform, elegant style of architecture, in which the Italian taste prevails, as in music, there is something grand and magnificent in their appearance, which is very striking; and even many of those houses with shops on the ground-floor, seem like palaces above. Indeed the whole town and its suburbs, appear, at first, glance, to be composed of palaces, rather than of common habitations.

Alongside the palaces Burney would have noticed the large number of religious buildings in the inner city, churches, monasteries, convents, nunneries and, if he had access, private chapels, many modernized or newly built. As leading proponents of the Counter-Reformation the Habsburg family had managed, in a very compelling and majestic manner, to bind the eternal truths of the Catholic faith with the power of the dynasty. When the Turks were repelled in 1683 this was not only a triumph of Habsburg secular might but of the Christian religion over the infidel. Almost in the centre of the city stood the cathedral of St Stephen's, the focus of Haydn's life for the next five years, its spire the highest in the city and acting as a watchtower, both emblematically and practically, for the inner city and the outer suburbs. It was one of the few churches that escaped modernization in the eighteenth century. Indeed in comparison with the sumptuous interiors of the Peterskirche, Schottenkirche and other Baroque churches, the interior of St Stephen's was thought rather gloomy by many commentators, including Burney: 'The church is a dark, dirty, and dismal old Gothic building, though richly ornamented; in it are hung all the trophies of war, taken from the Turks and other enemies of the house of Austria, for more than a century past, which gives it very much the appearance of an old wardrobe.'<sup>5</sup>