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The life of Haydn

Presenting a fresh picture of the life and work of Joseph Haydn, this is the first biography of the composer to appear in over twenty-five years. In his lifetime Haydn achieved a degree of fame that easily surpassed that of Mozart and Beethoven. Later his historical significance was more restricted, regarded exclusively as the composer who first recognized the potential of the symphony and the quartet. However, Haydn had also composed operas, oratorios and church music with similar enthusiasm and self-regard. Too easily pigeonholed as a Viennese composer, he interacted consistently with the musical life of Vienna only during the earliest and latest periods of his life; London was at least as important in fashioning the composer's fame and legacy. To counter the genial view of the composer, this biography probes the darker side of Haydn's personality, his commercial opportunism and double dealing, his penny pinching and his troubled marriage.

David Wyn Jones is Professor of Music and Head of School at Cardiff University and has written extensively on music and musical life in the Classical Period. He is the author of *The Symphony in Beethoven's Vienna* (2006), *The Life of Beethoven* (1998), *Beethoven: The Pastoral Symphony* (1996) and is the editor of *Music in Eighteenth-Century Austria* (1996), all published by Cambridge University Press. His *Companion to Haydn* (2002) was awarded the C. B. Oldman Prize by IAML UK. He has contributed to several programmes on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4.

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P R E F A C E

‘Haydn was far from wanting to keep his life a secret; he responded with good humour to everything that I asked him about it.’ These are the words of Haydn’s first biographer, Georg August Griesinger, written a day before the final instalment of his biography appeared in the leading music journal of the day, the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, in August 1809, a mere three months after the composer’s death. The author had known Haydn for ten years, shared the outlook of musical Europe that he was the greatest living composer and noticed that he not only enjoyed this status but also willingly promoted it. Alongside the pride there was a simplicity that captivated those who had met him and which informed a musical expression that was particularly distinctive and certain in its vision.

While Griesinger celebrated Haydn’s universality the composer still held the title of Kapellmeister to the Esterházy family, a post he had occupied for nearly fifty years. From composing music for a single prince to addressing the whole of Europe constituted a musical life of unparalleled interest, made even more intriguing in that the local audience was never forgotten as Haydn discovered the larger one. Being a dutiful Kapellmeister and a free artist at the same time was something that was to trouble the Romantic era. It is only one of several creative paradoxes that characterized the composer’s life and fascinate the biographer.

Haydn was recognized as the first composer to revel in the intellectual challenges of the string quartet and the symphony, yet he had spent much of his time at the Esterházy court composing and directing opera; even towards the end of his life, when the notion of a Classical School founded on the common achievement of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven in instrumental music was slowly emerging, Haydn said that he wished he had devoted more time to

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vocal music. That Classical School was centred on Vienna, where all three had worked, but for much of his life Haydn's interaction with that city was either fitful or troublesome. He did not become a true Viennese until after his two visits to London, a city that had regarded him as one of their own, the 'Shakespeare of music', and which, in a matter of a few years in the 1780s and 1790s, had determined the composer's legacy as a master of instrumental music.

Posterity has always been reluctant to probe sympathetically another tension in Haydn's life: that a creative figure who so obviously, and intently, embraced Enlightenment values in his music – enquiry, reason, optimism and sensibility – should also be a devout, practising Catholic of the most traditional, unquestioning kind. As someone who headed his autograph scores 'In Nomine Domini' and concluded them with 'Laus Deo' Haydn has always been allowed his religious belief because it conveniently fuelled a simplistic view of his personality. This is unfortunate. Mid-eighteenth-century Austrian Catholicism shaped not only Haydn's formative years as a musician but aspects of his character that are better regarded as formidable than naïve, in particular an indivisible loyalty to state and church that enabled the composer to become a national icon in the Napoleonic period.

Two hundred years have passed since Haydn's death and Griesinger's biography, and the modern author has much more material to investigate, scrutinize and evaluate than Griesinger ever had, a good deal of it uncovered in the last thirty years or so. It was a long life, seventy-seven years, one of the longest of any major composer. If this biography captures some of the underplayed complexities and contradictions of that life, then it will be an appropriate tribute in this anniversary year: a man of the eighteenth century who speaks with a richly variegated voice to the twenty-first century.

It is a pleasure to record my thanks to many individuals who have assisted in the preparation of this biography, from providing

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