

March 2017

Calvin R. Stapert. *Playing Before the Lord: The Life and Work of Joseph Haydn*. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014. ISBN 978-0-8028-6852-7.

Rena Roussin
University of Virginia

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Recommended Citation

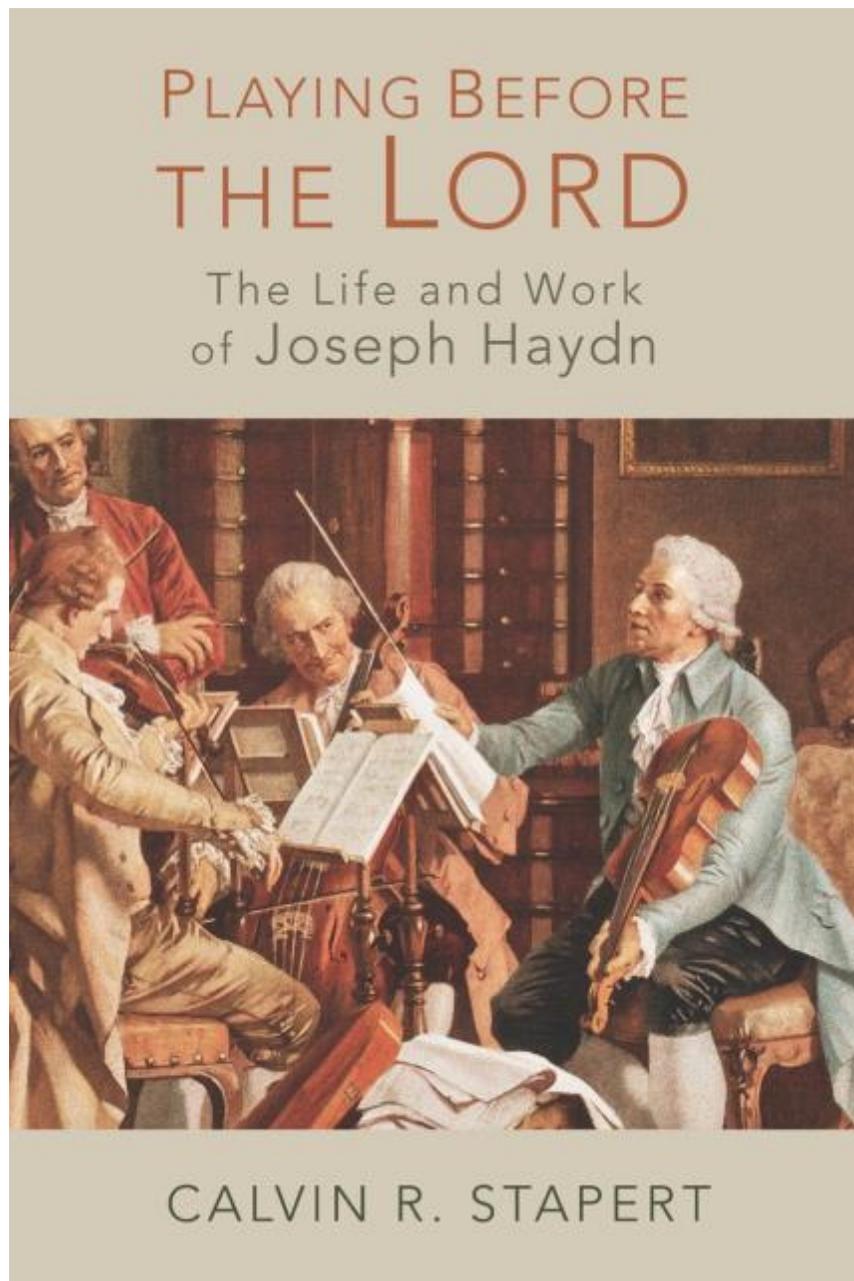
Roussin, Rena (2017) "Calvin R. Stapert. *Playing Before the Lord: The Life and Work of Joseph Haydn*. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014. ISBN 978-0-8028-6852-7.," *HAYDN*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://remix.berklee.edu/haydn-journal/vol7/iss1/4>

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Book Review: Calvin R. Stapert. *Playing Before the Lord: The Life and Work of Joseph Haydn.* Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014. ISBN 978-0-8028-6852-7.

by Rena Roussin

University of Victoria



I. Overview

Haydn's contemporary and current audiences have consistently encompassed both the musical *Kenner* and *Liebhaber*. His awareness of, and ability to, successfully compose for both groups at once remains a central feature of how his career and compositional language are explained in musicological discourse, the music history classroom, and to the concert-attending public. Yet this multi-audience success achieved by Haydn in his music has yet to see its parallel in Haydn research and biographical studies. While a rich tradition of life and works scholarship directed towards the musical *Kenner* exists in Haydn literature, chief among them H. C. Robbins Landon's magisterial *Chronicle and Works*, few biographies explicitly target today's *Liebhaber*.¹ Calvin R. Stapert's *Playing Before the Lord: The Life and Work of Joseph Haydn* is a notable exception to this rule. Written explicitly for general rather than specialist readers (the first English-language Haydn biography to do so since Butterworth's 1998 *Illustrated Lives of the Great Composers*), Stapert's monograph provides a comprehensive and engaging overview of Haydn's life and music.² While it contains considerable biographical discussion, *Playing Before the Lord's* central purpose is to introduce the reader to Haydn's "huge and diverse output" (xi) across musical styles and genres, a goal which requires honing in on central features rather than providing an exhaustive examination. Stapert's "bird's-eye view" focuses on giving many brief descriptions of music from all of Haydn's main areas of compositional activity, rather than exhaustive discussions of only a few well-known compositions. Stapert readily acknowledges the selectivity of his musical discussion through an indelible metaphor, noting that "as a listener's guide . . . this book is like a trail guide. Such a guide might give a hiker a general overview of the terrain. . . . And just as the trail guide, incomplete though it is, can open a hiker's eyes to more of what

¹ H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, vol. 1-5 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976-1980).

² Neil Butterworth, *Haydn. The Illustrated Lives of the Great Composers* (London: Music Sales Publishing Group, 1998). Additional resources available to general readers include H. C. Robbins Landon's and David Wyn Jones's *Haydn: His Life and Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) and László Somfai, comp., *Joseph Haydn: His Life in Contemporary Pictures*, trans. Mari Kuttna and Károly Ravasz (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

there is to see along the trail, so too this book . . . can alert a listener's ears to what there is to hear in Haydn's music" (xi). To alert the ears of as many listeners as possible, Stapert draws on both technical and affective analysis, keeping jargon to a minimum and providing a glossary (pages 263-267) for those readers who may lack background in musical terminology.

The book's chapters are organized chronologically, with chapter titles that indicate both timeline and topic, and epigraphs that describe each chapter's main themes. Stapert gives a particularly strong (if succinct) discussion of Haydn's childhood, musical beginnings, and early adulthood (Chapters 1-3). The author expertly weaves historical and cultural elements into his narrative of Haydn's life, focusing not only on biographical details, but also on the institutions and cultures that formed Haydn's personal and musical foundations. For example, Stapert's account of Haydn's time as a choirboy at St. Stephen's (9-16) incorporates discussion of Vienna's political and social climate, and how liturgical and musical cultures at St. Stephen's impacted Haydn's musical training and language.

From Chapters 4 through 18, musical discussion takes center stage, often replacing biographical events and timeline as the organizational basis of each chapter. Musical focus occasionally occurs at the expense of biography, particularly in the coverage of Haydn's mid-career (Chapters 8-14), which is decidedly more concerned with "works" than "life," and thus is rich in musical examples and details. This feature will reward the reader with a broad understanding or review of the characteristics of Haydn's musical output across multiple genres. However, it will also be of disappointment to those who picked up Stapert's book with the goal of knowing more about Haydn's life throughout all of its stages. While a clearer balance of the two would have been beneficial, the vigor and beauty of Stapert's handling of Haydn's oeuvre cannot be denied.

Strong description and analysis of works from all genres appear, but Stapert clearly has a soft spot for Haydn's sacred vocal music. His discussion of the composer's *Stabat mater* is a highlight, and forms the most extensive musical discussion in the book,

totaling seven pages and including the only "Listener's Guide" (76-79) in *Playing Before the Lord*. It is perhaps the best musical example to serve as a token of the whole, for it restores the composition which was, as Stapert reminds us, "Haydn's most frequently performed and widely disseminated work during his lifetime" (74) to its proper place. Like the rest of Stapert's book, the *Stabat mater* discussion reminds us that the "father of the symphony" composed much of his music in other genres, and it is this other music that brought him the most fame during his own lifetime.

The end of Stapert's monograph matches the beginning by providing strong treatment of Haydn's London trips and final years in Vienna (Chapters 15-20), carefully balancing biographical and musical details. Haydn's social and musical experiences throughout the two London trips is especially well covered. A particularly charming discussion of Symphony No. 94 ("Surprise") makes use of a hypothetical musical sketch of the main theme cross-compared to Haydn's actual composition (Examples 16-1&2, pages 202-03) to demonstrate formal innovations, at last letting the musical *Liebhaber* in on the secret of the symphony's other surprises. The context and music of the late oratorios are also given rich if uneven discussion (as is always the case when it comes to *The Seasons*) and form Stapert's final central musical examples. An appendix also outlines the text and scriptural basis for *The Creation* (259-62). Stapert's conclusion is particularly moving in its summary of Haydn's contemporary fame, his slip into lesser appreciation as the nineteenth century progressed, and his "resurgence" (254) in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Stapert concludes with a veritable love letter to Haydn's music, stressing the necessity and worth of its continued performance, as well as its ongoing importance and relevance to our current world.

There is much to praise in this book, not the least of which is Stapert's efforts to make his work accessible to a large and principally non-musicological audience. Accessibility is possibly *Playing Before the Lord's* dominant feature. While the volume contains no original research, it is a heroic amalgamation of pre-existing Haydn biographical literature. Stapert draws chiefly from Landon's *Chronicle and Works*, Gotwals's compilation of the contemporary Dies and Griesinger biographies, and to a lesser extent,

Geiringer's and Jones's life and works studies. These numerous biographical studies are woven together to create a concise but thorough narrative of Haydn's life, music, and the socio-cultural contexts in which the composer and his compositions lived.³ Stapert's clear and enjoyable prose enriches the book, and assists in making decades of Haydn scholarship available to a larger public. Ample resources are also used to help readers target areas of interest: both a general index and an index of works are included, and Stapert's generous use of headings in each chapter clarifies the topics and works discussed at a glance. Prefatory illustrations, including portraits of Haydn, Salomon, and Prince Nicolaus I Esterházy, a drawing of Haydn's birthplace in Rohrau, and a scale model of the Eszterháza opera theater, give readers new to Haydn's world a visual orientation to its characters and settings (xv-xxii).

II. Perceived Weaknesses

In spite of Stapert's considerable achievements, *Playing Before the Lord* is not without its faults. While the expectations and strictures of academic discourse need not weigh down a work ultimately intended for a public rather than scholarly audience, there are moments when tighter language and style would have enriched the book. Stapert's writing is free of typos and grammar errors, but the occasional word is missing (e.g. 166: "*The Seven Last Words* is an expression of faith over against the liberalism of the time"; 229: "According Dies he took this route") and language is at times antiquated ("ladies" appears in place of "women" on 142 and 156). His language use also occasionally detracts from or interrupts the main point of his prose. Integration of idiomatic expressions as whole sentences, for example, breaks the flow of Stapert's own thoughts or discussion of Haydn's music ("But 'no man is an island'" on 21, or "As an old proverb says, 'The forest would be a very quiet place if only the nightingale sang'" on 123 — a doubly ironic use, as Stapert uses this idiom in arguing for the musical quality and

³ Gotwals, Vernon, trans., *Haydn: Two Contemporary Portraits*, translations of G. A. Griesinger, *Biographische Notizen über Joseph Haydn*, and A.C. Dies, *Biographische Nachrichten von Joseph Haydn* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Karl Geiringer, *Haydn: A Creative Life in Music*, 3rd rev. and enlarged ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); David Wyn Jones, *The Life of Haydn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

worth of Haydn's operas). Similarly, gratuitous use of exclamation points adds comic effect to moments never meant to be humorous; citing a more glaring example, he uses them to convey extreme enthusiasm for *The Creation's* "Then let our voices ring," by noting that "Indeed they do! Adam and Eve, the angel choir, and all creation join in singing what Tovey called the greatest movement that Haydn ever wrote!" (240).

Stapert's writing also takes occasional theological turns. Given the religious mandate of Eerdmans Publishing Company, Stapert's prior publications on sacred music, and his position as emeritus professor at Calvin College, this aspect should not come as a surprise. Stapert notes of Op. 50, for example, that "only God can truly create — if that means to bring something into existence out of nothing. But in this movement and hundreds more, Haydn creates something out of next to nothing" (151). Overt theological readings of Haydn's non-sacred music also occur: Stapert makes theological connections between Psalm 90 and Symphony No. 101 ("Clock") in how both mark the passage of one's time on earth (218). These theological leanings are at times a distraction, and may perturb those readers drawn to Haydn's music for its beauty rather than the finer points of Haydn's (and often Stapert's own) theology.

Reducing scholarly apparatus in this volume makes sense, but only to a point. Stapert provides footnotes or in-text attribution for direct quotes, but does not consistently provide his sources for facts outside the realm of common knowledge, or provide the original source of quotations drawn from secondary scholarship. This does not get in the way of successfully communicating information about Haydn's life and music, but it is disheartening that Stapert does not provide his readers with ready access to further information. While a glance at Stapert's "Works Cited" gives a strong overview of classic and current Haydn scholarship to readers who might want to deepen their knowledge, additional footnotes or a "Suggestions for Further Reading" would surely simplify the task.

There are also rare instances in which Stapert seems to put words in Haydn's mouth, as he does most saliently on page 101, when he quotes extensively from Benjamin Britten's

sentiments surrounding the importance of creating music that is emotionally and intellectually available to a wide audience.⁴ Stapert notes that Haydn "would have said" the same thing alongside Britten, and "expects" that Haydn "would have substantially agreed with" the later composer's remarks. That may be true, but why not let Haydn speak for himself, through any of his numerous quotes on musical aesthetics? Furthermore, it is impossible to be "sure" that Haydn would be "pleased to find" (233) the text of John Newton's "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" accompanying the second movement of Op. 76, no. 3.

The reader might wish for a more nuanced, less apologetic portrait of Haydn's relationships with women: his love of Therese Keller and marriage to Maria Anna is covered in a scant three paragraphs (28-29, 33). While it is true that "the story we get of [the Haydns'] marriage is far too skimpy for us to understand the real situation" (33), it is not so skimpy a story that it can be swept under the rug and reduced to an aside. Haydn's relationship with Luigia Polzelli is covered in less than two sentences (33: "at least one affair is well-attested"; 206: Polzelli "had been Haydn's mistress for a time during the '80s"). Similarly, Haydn's "friendship" with Rebecca Schroeter merits only two paragraphs of discussion, and Haydn's known comment to Dies that he likely would have married Schroeter had he been single "hardly sheds more light on the nature of their relationship" (191). Yet Haydn's statement does indicate something more than friendship. In the twenty-first century, it is perhaps time to admit that Haydn did not, in fact, always remain a choirboy.

III. Conclusion

Despite my criticisms and wish for a stronger biographical undercurrent, Stapert's book is ultimately a triumph in terms of public outreach and awareness of Haydn's work. A particular delight of Stapert's monograph is its exploration of components of Haydn's music that have traditionally been marginalized in public awareness and scholarly

⁴ Stapert's quotations of Britten are drawn from *On Receiving the First Aspen Award* (London: Faber Music in association with Faber and Faber, 1978), 10-11.

discourse alike. It seems a small sacrifice to give up biographical details in order to make room for a chapter each on Haydn's baryton trios and operas, and sections on both his Lieder and songs. An abundance of unexplored musical riches awaits readers of all stripes in these pages. Like Haydn's music, Stapert's book will surely prove enjoyable and illuminating to varied audiences. It could easily serve as a helpful introduction to Haydn's life and work for the music lover or amateur, as a music history pedagogy tool for studio, high school, and university-based music instructors, and as a useful and concise refresher for Haydn scholars. Ultimately, in its insistence on highlighting the rich diversity of Haydn's musical oeuvre, *Playing Before the Lord* serves as a valuable reminder that there will always be more to hear, appreciate, and understand about Haydn's work, world, and life.

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