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Conference Report: Reassessing Haydn's Sacred Music, 12–14 June 2023, Eisenstadt, Austria

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Conference Report: Reassessing Haydn's Sacred Music, 12–14 June 2023, Eisenstadt, Austria

By Robert B. Wrigley

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The 30th anniversary of the International Joseph Haydn Foundation in Eisenstadt was marked this summer by a conference on "Reassessing Haydn's Sacred Music," cosponsored by the Foundation and the Haydn Society of North America. The conference, organized by Walter Reicher and Michael E. Ruhling, took place 12–14 June 2023 at the Haydn Museum in Eisenstadt. It featured speakers from more than half a dozen countries discussing various aspects of Haydn's sacred vocal music, including historical, political, and liturgical contexts, compositional and religious influences upon Haydn, reception, and stylistic characteristics of specific sacred works. Given the fact that there remains a wide lack of understanding of how Haydn's music would have functioned in the religious service of his own time, it is of particular note that many papers focused on the liturgical practices in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Austria.

The conference opened with a keynote address by Otto Biba (Independent Scholar), "Joseph Haydn's Kirchenmusik: Gattungsspezifische Voraussetzungen und Normen, Regularien und Traditionen." Examining the context of a conference on "Reassessing Haydn's Sacred Music," Biba stressed the need to have a clear delineation of the current state of knowledge in order that we can fruitfully ask, as he put it, "Was ist 'neu?' Was ist 'Reassessing?'" For Biba, the principal problem with the state of research around Haydn's sacred music is a lack of awareness of the context and purpose for which it was originally written, and that consequently regaining a knowledge of the norms, traditions, and restrictions on church music in the eighteenth century must be the primary goal of current scholarship. Biba highlighted at least two paths which this investigation may pursue: first, a better understanding of the social place of church music in the eighteenth century would help clarify the extramusical constraints upon Haydn's sacred compositions, and second, a fuller knowledge of the church music of Haydn's contemporaries would promote a better recognition of which stylistic characteristics of Haydn's sacred music are

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generic and which are individual. Both of these threads were prominent in many of the papers to follow.

Following Biba's keynote address, the first paper panel of the conference broadly explored the musical culture of the eighteenth century in a large sense and its role in Haydn's sacred music. Jakob Johannes Koch (German Conference of Bishops) contributed a two-part study of the musical and liturgical cultures of the Austrian Empire. In the first part, Koch stressed the continuing presence of the orchestra in Austrian church music in the eighteenth century, notwithstanding Pope Benedict XIV's 1749 encyclical *Annus qui*, which inveighed against secular and especially operatic music in the Church. Koch then delved more into the liturgy, noting that the nature of the liturgy as "insider's game," fully understood only by the priesthood, became a point of contention for thinkers of the Catholic Enlightenment in the latter half of the century, who sought an "edification through understanding." Michael E. Ruhling (Rochester Institute of Technology) then explored the impact of the Catholic Enlightenment on the stylistic construction of Haydn's music, arguing that the Masses display the ideal of a rationally disciplined sensuousness. Ruhling noted that theologians like Ludovico Muratori stressed two complementary aspects of the sensuous side of Christian doctrine and practice: first, Christ was an incarnation who sensuously experienced the world in the same way as humanity, and second, humans in turn experienced Christ sensuously through the Eucharist. In Ruhling's view, the sensuous moments in Haydn's Masses instantiate this idea, and are thus best compared not to slow movements of symphonies, as they have been in several previous studies, but rather to sentimental moments in opera and oratorio.

The afternoon panel explored the ways in which several Baroque composers may have influenced Haydn. Ryuichi Higuchi (Meiji Gakuin University) focused on the influence of Bach on Haydn, as suggested by a manuscript copy of the B-minor Mass in the Esterházy Music Archive apparently purchased by Haydn from Johann Traeg. Recent research indicates that this copy was brought back from Berlin by Gottfried van Swieten, Haydn's librettist for his two late oratorios; therefore, Haydn may have had access to the copy during the time period in which he was composing his last six Masses. Though direct influence of Bach's music on Haydn's Masses cannot be definitively proven on documentary grounds, Higuchi pointed out how the frequent use of chromaticism in the fugues of Haydn's last six Masses suggests the impact of Bach's music, especially the fugue theme from Bach's Kyrie. James S. MacKay (Loyola University New

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Orleans) looked to Johann Joseph Fux and Georg Reutter, whose voices were dominant in the Viennese church music scene of Haydn's youth. MacKay demonstrated that Haydn's settings of particular texts in his *Missa Brevis* in F (H. XXII:1) and *Missa Cellensis* (H. XXII: 5) are stylistically parallel to settings of the same text passages in Fux and Reutter, suggesting that they were indeed decisive influences upon Haydn's own style. The panel closed with Janet Page reading a paper by Dexter Edge (*Mozart: New Documents*) on Haydn's *Stabat Mater*, which emphasized the importance of Marian devotion both to the Hapsburg Empire and to Haydn himself. Indeed, his *Stabat Mater* setting proved decisive in establishing Haydn's reputation abroad, both in Northern Germany and in France. Edge particularly noted its reception at the Concert Spirituel in Paris, in which it fared well despite deliberate juxtaposition against the famous and popular setting by Pergolesi.

The second day commenced with a panel on the continuing use of Haydn's music in Eisenstadt in the early nineteenth century. Mikhail Kuchersky (Folkwang University of the Arts) recounted the still unknown history of the *Kapellknabeninstitut* established at Eisenstadt in 1804 under Johann Nepomuk Fuchs, as related in documents available at the Hungarian National Library in Budapest and the Esterházy archives at Forchtenstein Castle (now available online). This Institute, which closed in 1811 for budgetary reasons, made considerable use of many of Haydn's sacred vocal compositions in instructing its charges. James Armstrong (College of William and Mary), in turn, examined Johann Bader's 1810 catalogue of music performed for Esterházy services, which featured the use of three of Haydn's late Masses for the Forty Hours' Devotion during Pentecost. The connection of this practice to times of war suggests to Armstrong that not just the *Paukenmesse* but also the *Nelsonmesse* constitute *Missae in tempore belli* written in part with this special liturgical service in mind.

Marko Motnik (Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts) opened the afternoon panel with an exploration of the use of Haydn's church music by the Philharmonic Society of Laibach (today Ljubljana, Slovenia). Although liturgical music was not central to the repertoire of the society, its library contains a copy of the *Paukenmesse* in Johann Elssler's hand, obtained by members of the Society in 1800 when they visited Haydn in Vienna to confer upon him an honorary membership. Molly Cryderman-Weber (First Presbyterian Church, Stockbridge, MI) catalogued the enormous extent to which Haydn's melodies have spread in the American hymn

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repertoire (no fewer than sixty-five tunes attributable to Haydn appear in American hymnals) and traced the historical processes through which this happened. For instance, the tune of the "Kaiserlied" (generally referred to in hymnals as "Austria" or "Austrian Hymn") began its life as a hymn in an English collection of 1802. Lowell Mason, among others in the early nineteenth century, seized on Haydn's music as a commendable model of music for congregational singing. Janet Page (University of Memphis) explored settings of the *Mater Dolorum*, a German text glossing the Latin *Stabat Mater*, which was set both by Georg Reutter, the *Kapellmeister* at St. Stephen's when Haydn was a student at the school there and by Gregor Werner, Haydn's predecessor in service with the Esterházy. Page suggests that these settings had an influence on Haydn's own setting of the *Stabat Mater*, as well as on his *Seven Last Words*.

The second day concluded with a concert in the Chapel of the Barmherzigen Brüder, featuring students and faculty from the Joseph Haydn Conservatory (now the Joseph Haydn Privathochschule) in Eisenstadt. In addition to several of Haydn's instrumental pieces, the concert included movements from some of the sacred vocal works discussed at the conference, including the *Stabat Mater*, the *Missa Brevis* in F, and the *Kleine Orgelmesse*, the last of which may have been first performed at that very chapel; this was particularly special as the organ obligato in the Benedictus allowed us to hear an instrument Haydn himself would have played. A welcoming address by Frater Daniel Katzenschläger emphasized the degree to which Haydn's sacred music continues to have an impact on religious life in Eisenstadt.

The third day of the conference began with a panel concerning stylistic analysis of Haydn's sacred music. Balázs Mikusi (RISM, Central Editorial Office) contextualized Haydn's use of canonic writing in the *Nelsonmesse* and *Heiligmesse* in light of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theoretical writings about canon, arguing that the use of canonic technique achieved specific aesthetic effects. While the two-part canon at the fifth that opens the Credo of the *Nelsonmesse* suggests the eternal nature of God, the three-part canon in the *Heiligmesse* depicts the process of Christ's incarnation, as the third voice enters on "et homo factus est." Clive McClelland (University of Leeds) argued that the conventional style topics of *ombra* and *tempesta* in eighteenth-century opera proved an expressive resource in Haydn's religious music to evoke the presence of the supernatural. Salient moments come not only in the religiously themed oratorios, but also in liturgical music proper: in addition to being common in "crucifixus" sections, *ombra* marks the "Benedictus" of the *Nelsonmesse* with particular

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vehemence. James Webster (Cornell University) ended the panel by dealing with the “two personalities” of both Haydn and his music, the earnest and the humorous. Contrary to the opinion, prevalent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that Haydn’s Masses contained music improper to the celebration of the liturgy, Webster defended the suitability of Haydn’s Masses for the liturgy as it was conceived in eighteenth-century Austria: the “Dona nobis pacem” of the *Nelsonmesse*, for example, can be read as “quietly dancing through the gates of heaven.”

The conference concluded with a roundtable discussion among all the panelists. Its central theme was the continuing richness of the field and the possibility and need for further research. Webster, echoing Biba’s opening keynote, stressed the degree to which musicologists have been at a considerable disadvantage when dealing with liturgical music, necessitating the development of new approaches. Webster and Ruhling stressed in particular that the continuity of liturgical practice through the century further complicates or even refutes the already problematic notion of a stylistic break between Baroque and Classical at midcentury that is so prominent in conventional histories. Biba reiterated the necessity of a much deeper knowledge of Haydn’s contemporaries and their common practices in order to clarify which aspects of Haydn’s music are conventional and which are individual. A number of cordial disagreements and open questions also animated the discussion; these concerned the recognizability and intensity of *ombra* topics, the frequency of organ solos in *Salve Regina* settings, the exact nature and musical influence of the Catholic Enlightenment, and the doctrinal and historical meanings of the Benedictus text.

In addition to the intellectual stimulation provided by the papers, the conference was emotionally stimulating, not least due to its location in Eisenstadt, in a building right next door to the house in which Haydn lived and worked for decades of his life. With any luck, this will launch a new resurgence of Haydn research, for if the conference proved anything, it is that we still have much to learn about this body of music. Papers from the conference will be published in forthcoming editions of the *Eisenstädter Haydn-Berichte* and *HAYDN: The Online Journal of the Haydn Society of North America*.

Note: This report also appears in the 2023 issue of *Journal of the Haydn Society of Great Britain*.