

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN'S "HARMONIEMESSE"

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With the death of Prince Nicolaus I of Esterházy in 1790, Franz Joseph Haydn was relieved of his duties as Kapellmeister after nearly thirty years of service. By this point in his career, he was a well-respected musician and highly esteemed man. With a desire to devote himself entirely to his music on a freelance basis, he moved from Eisenstadt to Vienna. In January of 1791, Haydn arrived in England for his first of two lengthy visits, which brought him great acclaim, especially for his twelve “London Symphonies.” One of these symphonies, *The Oxford*, got its nickname when Haydn conducted it at the ceremony in which Oxford University awarded him an honorary doctorate. The Esterházy orchestra resumed service in 1795 under Prince Nicolaus II and Haydn was again appointed its Kapellmeister. During his second tenure however, he was only required to be present in Eisenstadt in the summer and autumn months.

Prince Nicolaus II’s primary artistic interests were said to have been in painting, not music. Thus, the only compositions he required from Haydn were masses. In 1799 Haydn wrote, “My present young Prince issued a moderate command four years ago that in my old age I must compose a new mass once a year.” Haydn made no specific mention of when these masses were to be presented each year, but it is widely accepted that the prince ordered them as part of the nameday celebrations for his wife, Maria Josepha Hermenegilde Esterházy de Galantha. Between 1796 and 1802, Haydn composed six of these masses. In succession, they were the *Heiligmesse*, the *Paukenmesse*, the *Nelsonmesse*, the *Theresienmesse*, the *Schöpfungsmesse*, and the *Harmoniemesse*.

The first of these masses was *Missa Sancti Bernardi*, nicknamed *Heiligmesse*. Although it was first performed on Princess Marie’s nameday, Haydn composed this mass in honor of the Feast of Saint Bernard of Offida, a seventeenth century Capuchin monk who was beatified in 1795. The Capuchins celebrated Saint Bernard’s feast day on September 11, which in 1796

happened to fall on the same date as the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary, which was also Princess Marie's name day. The second of these masses was *Missa in tempore belli* (*Mass in the Time of War*), which was given the nickname *Paukenmesse* (kettle drum mass) for its extravagant use of timpani. The *Paukenmesse* was first performed in December 1796 at the ordination of a priest and again on September 29, 1797, but a new mass by another composer was performed on Marie's nameday that year. *Missa in angustiis* (*Mass in Troubled Times*) was nicknamed the *Nelsonmesse* (*Nelson Mass*) and due to unknown circumstances was first performed two weeks after Marie's nameday.

Haydn did not give names to his final three masses, titling them simply *Missa*. Each of them has since acquired a nickname, but this gave no clue as to the occasion for which they were written. Little is known about a timeline regarding the composition or first performance of the *Theresienmesse*, but it is assumed that it premiered on Princess Marie's nameday in 1799. The Austrian empress, Marie Therese, was particularly fond of Haydn's music and acquired a copy of this mass for her personal library, thus Haydn's association with the empress in this case generated speculation that the mass had been composed for her. Both the *Schöpfungsmesse* (*Creation Mass*) and the *Harmoniemesse* (*Wind-band Mass*) premiered on Princess Marie's nameday in 1801 and 1802 respectively. The *Schöpfungsmesse* was nicknamed such since Haydn recycled music from his oratorio *Die Schöpfung* (*The Creation*) for the Gloria. The *Harmoniemesse* received its nickname because of the prominence of wind instruments in the score.

Missa Solemnis in B-flat, Hob. XXII: 14, *Harmoniemesse*, was the last of Haydn's "High Masses" and was also his last major work. He began working on this Mass in April of 1802 in Vienna. In written correspondence with Prince Nicolaus II on June 14, 1802, Haydn stated that

he was “laboring wearily on the new mass,” implying that he was growing older and that he found the required concentration too strenuous. He and the prince had come to the conclusion that he needed an Assistant Kapellmeister. In August, Haydn moved to Eisenstadt and completed the work just in time for its first performance on Wednesday, September 8, the celebration of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and, as previously mentioned, the celebration of the nameday of Princess Esterházy.

The Bergkirche, the church which hosted all six of Haydn’s late masses and the first performance of the *Harmoniemesse*, is located in Eisenstadt, the capital of the state of Burgenland in Austria. Its architecture is somewhat unconventional and was built in two sections. The main part, the church proper, is approximately square. The interior adheres to the Austrian Baroque styles of architecture and design and features a dome ceiling bearing a late eighteenth century fresco by Johann Wolfgang Baumgartner. The side chapel holds a large marble sarcophagus, the final resting place of Franz Joseph Haydn. The church still houses the original organ, built in the eighteenth century by the Viennese organ builder, Gottfried Malleck. In recent years, the instrument has been restored to its original state, just as it was when the *Harmoniemesse* premiered, though the original console is no longer in use and can be found in the nearby Haydn Museum.

Count Louis Starhemberg, the Austrian Ambassador to Great Britain, kept a detailed diary, which provided a concise timeline for the events of the Princess’ nameday festivities and of the first performance of the *Harmoniemesse*. According to his account, Count Starhemberg and his guests arrived in Eisenstadt on Tuesday evening and were taken by stagecoach to the Bergkirche on Wednesday morning for the Mass. Count Starhemberg noted that Haydn conducted the Mass himself. Following the performance, a lavish dinner was served at the palace

where background music was provided, most likely by the court Harmonie. After dinner, a toast was proposed to the princess accompanied by trumpet fanfares. Further toasts were offered, including one to Count Starhemberg and one to Haydn. After dinner, a large ball was held, consisting mainly of waltzes. Following a rather large supper, the ball resumed and continued until two in the morning. On Thursday, palace guests were woken by the sound of French horns, signaling a hunt to take place. That afternoon, Haydn conducted a final concert, including movements from the *Harmoniemesse* and, after dinner, Count Starhemberg departed for Vienna. This would prove to be the last of many occasions throughout Haydn's illustrious career in which Haydn's music was featured in celebrations at the Esterházy court.

The score calls for a large ensemble of musicians, including four solo vocalists, chorus, and a full orchestra. The wind section features flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns in B-flat, and two trumpets in B-flat. The mass also calls for timpani, strings, and organ. As was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the organ part was written in basso continuo. It should be noted that the general composition style does not place the importance of the orchestra over that of the choir, or vice versa. It is not a symphony with a chorus, nor a motet with orchestral accompaniment.

As Haydn's last major work, it is a fitting culmination of his distinguished career. It demonstrates all musical elements for which he is recognized—his unrestrained energy, magnificent melodies, knowledge and understanding of the new symphonic sound and structure, and musical sensitivity. As with all six of Haydn's late masses, the *Harmoniemesse* combines the pomp and splendor of the early Austrian baroque, representing the composer's youth, with the grandiose symphonic style of his later years. The work has a splendor that is matched only by the architecture of the Austrian Baroque churches, such as the one that housed its first performance.

The Mass is divided into six parts—the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, and the Agnus Dei. It is especially noteworthy for presenting the liturgical text without abridgements and in the correct sequence. This is not evident in all of Haydn's masses, but we know Haydn took special care with the composition of this mass with the early start date, the aforementioned correspondence with the prince, and evidence of rewriting during the rehearsal process.

The tone of this mass is set in the first few measures of the Kyrie, which opens in the key of B-flat major at 3/4 time. As opposed to the harsh, aggressive opening of the *Nelsonmesse* or the *Paukenmesse*, it begins with an extensive *poco adagio* movement. The prevalent temperament of this movement is of an introspective and contemplative nature and begins with somewhat of a dialogue between a deep, fortissimo full orchestra and a soft, mystical string and wind response. The tutti chorus seems to interrupt this dialogue with an extravagant “Kyrie eleison,” after which the orchestra recedes to cue the bass soloist, who enters with a deep “Kyrie,” seemingly pleading for mercy. The score of this movement seems to run the gamut of possible emotions one could muster to ask for God's mercy. After the soloist and quartet exchange dialogue, the choir lightly reenters, repeating the “Kyrie eleison” motif established at the beginning, but sharply interrupts itself with the “Christe eleison” response. The quartet and choir exchange responses to each other throughout the movement, but some of the most beautiful passages are when the quartet itself splits between the soprano and alto versus the tenor and bass, alternating in lengthy, melismatic phrases, largely stacked in intervals of a third. This movement finishes with a triumphal tutti choir mellowing out into a repeating “eleison,” cueing the soprano soloist's introduction to the Gloria.

Haydn divided the Gloria movement into three smaller sections—the “Gloria,” the “Gratias,” and the “Quoniam.” It begins with a light, *vivace assai* tempo and somewhat bouncy

“Gloria in excelsis Deo” from the strings and solo soprano, again in B-flat major, but this time in common time. The soprano line is echoed and amplified by the tutti chorus. Maintaining the B-flat major key signature, the orchestra and choir modulates to F minor for “Et in terra pax hominibus.” A series of modulations occur over the course of a canon on “bonae voluntatis,” ending in G minor. The orchestra takes control for a phrase, before the choir comes in with an antiphonal “Laudamus te,” again bringing it together for “benedicimus te.” The sub-section segues into an *allegretto* “Gratias agimus tibi, in E-flat major and in 3/8 time. The Alto soloist enters after a short introduction of strings, clarinet, flute, and carries the melody until it is picked up by the soprano soloist. The tenor and bass soloists respond with “Domine Deus, Agnus Dei” in a short, polyphonic phrase, picked up by the orchestra signaling the entrance of the choir with a building “Qui tollis peccata mundi” starting with the basses, adding the altos and finally the sopranos and tenors together. The choir essentially finishes the sub-section with polyphonic passages alternating with harmonic phrases, with the exception of a short interruption by the quartet singing “Suscipe.” The “Gratias” segues into the final sub-section of the Gloria, the “Quoniam,” which begins with the full orchestra and tenor section cueing the rest of the choir in “Quoniam tu solus sanctus.” This pattern of the tenors bringing the choir in continues until the “Cum Sancto Spiritu.” This sub-movement modulates back to the key of B-flat major and to common time. The choir brings back the alternating polyphonic and homophonic texture in the “Amen,” and just as it sounds as if the movement is coming to a close, the quartet reenters with stunning melismatic duets, with harmony in thirds, similar to the Kyrie. Haydn’s love of surprises makes an appearance with a sudden tutti orchestral and choral entrance with the final “Amen,” closing out the Gloria movement of the mass.

This score is quite demanding on the choir as they are expected to sing the “Amen” of the Gloria at full force only to transition directly into a *vivace* Credo at tutti choir in forte, without any sort of introduction. The Credo keeps the key and time signature of the “Quoniam” section of the Gloria, allowing for a quick transition between the two movements. The Credo is divided into four sub-sections, making it the longest movement of the *Harmoniemesse*. It begins with “Credo in unum Deum,” and segues into the “Et incarnatus est,” followed by the “Et resurrexit,” and finally, the “Et vitam venturi.” The first section of the Credo is largely homophonic, forcefully declaring, “Credo in unum Deum” (I believe in one God). There is a brief orchestral interlude before proceeding to the “Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum” (And I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ), a largely polyphonic section. The choir carries the text until the tenor and bass soloists pick up with “Qui propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis” (Who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven). The tutti choir echoes these words before the orchestral segue into the soft, *adagio* “Et incarnatus” in a 3/4 time E-flat major. This sub-movement is predominately carried by the soprano soloist with responses from the alto, tenor, and bass soloists in singing “Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine: Et homo factus est” (And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man). The choir comes in for a brief eight measures with “Crucifixus etiam pro nobis: sub Pontio Pilato passus” (Crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate),” bringing the soprano soloist and the quartet back in for the remainder of this sub-movement. “Et resurrexit” begins the third sub-movement of the Credo with a strong, hurried *vivace* in B-flat major and in common time. This homophonic sub-section yields to a few short echoes of the soprano and alto voices by the tenors and basses, but the voices remain entirely with the choir. The final sub-movement of the Credo comes in immediately after the final fermata of the “Et resurrexit” with a *vivace*, 3/4-time

“Et vitam venturi saeculi, Amen” in B-flat major. Being a continuation of the sentence started at the end of the previous sub-section, there should not be a break between these two sections at all. This section employs a second soprano soloist and tenor to join the quartet, allowing the two sopranos to harmonize the “Amen” over the Alto soloist’s “Et vitam venturi saeculi.” The two tenor soloists and the bass soloist repeat this pattern. Meaning “[I await the resurrection of the dead] and the life of the world to come. Amen.,” this sub-movement takes on the personality of a joyous waltz, putting a cheerful period on the end of the Credo movement.

The shortest movement of the *Harmoniemesse* is the Sanctus. It comes in with a soft, *adagio* choir and orchestra in B-flat major and 3/4-time. As the invitatory sentences of the Sanctus employ “the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven” to sing this hymn, it is easy to visualize clouds and a “heavenly host” singing this together. The light temperament of this movement is interrupted with an Allegro, triumphal “Osanna in excelsis” section which includes a brief response by the soprano, alto, and bass soloists.

The penultimate movement of the mass is the Benedictus, which begins with a lengthy, *molto allegro* orchestral introduction in F-major and common time. Echoing the music of the orchestra, the choir enters with a bouncy, yet soft “Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini” (Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord). This phrase crescendos as if to portray the excitement surrounding the triumphal entry of Christ in Jerusalem. The quartet returns twice between three choral sections with the same text as the choir. This motif is interrupted with an abrupt change to an Allegro 3/4-time “Osanna in excelsis,” using the same rhythm as was used for this text in the Sanctus.

The sixth and final movement of the *Harmoniemesse* is the Agnus Dei. This movement is divided into two parts—the opening “Agnus Dei” and the “Dona nobis pacem.” It begins at an

adagio tempo with a short introduction of pizzicato strings and oboes in G major and a 3/4 time signature and makes a direct reference to the *adagio cantabile* (second) movement of Haydn's ninety-eighth symphony. The quartet follows suit with a soft "Agnus Dei." About halfway through this sub-movement, the key begins to modulate to G minor. The instrumentation here remains pretty sparse compared to the rest of the mass, employing only strings and a few light reeds. In stark contrast, the "Dona nobis pacem" begins with sudden change to fortissimo trumpets and timpani, as if announcing the entry of a monarch. This section returns to the key of B-flat major and is in an *allegro con spirito* cut time. This final section employs every instrument in the orchestra, highlighting each section in what takes on the sense of a "curtain call" for each musician. The quartet takes the lead for a short phrase before returning the text to the tutti choir for an extravagant end to Haydn's masterpiece.

In more than two centuries since the premier of the *Harmoniemesse*, it has been recorded and performed by countless orchestras and choirs under the baton of many of the world's most renowned conductors such as Karl Böhm, John Eliot Gardiner, and Leonard Bernstein. Some of the more recent recordings have been done by the London Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Westminster Choir, and the Monteverdi Choir. While each recording offers spectacular elements in their own right, one inconsistency among all of them is the choice between the use of Austro-Germanic pronunciation of the Latin text versus the Ecumenical or Italian pronunciation commonly used in the Roman Catholic Church. It is impossible to state that every choral piece written by a German or Austrian composer was pronounced in this Austro-German variant, therefore we cannot assume that Haydn opted for one over the other in any of his masses or other Latin choral works. However, since the Vatican did not attempt to standardize Ecumenical Latin pronunciation throughout the Roman Catholic

Church until the late nineteenth century, it is probable that Haydn may have expected the Austro-Germanic pronunciation to be used in the performance of this mass. In either case, the choice now seems to fall under the category of “artistic license” for each individual conductor. J. Owen Burdick opted for the Germanic pronunciation in his 2008 Naxos recording while Bernstein seemed to gravitate toward the more common liturgical Latin in his many recordings of Haydn’s masses.

Live performances of the *Harmoniemesse* are typically reserved for cathedrals, larger churches, and concert halls due to the space requirements of such a large orchestra and the choir necessary to offset it. Most performances of this work are performed in the context of a concert as opposed to a mass, however some performances in worship do appear every now and then. One such recent performance was in 2009 at St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican City. This performance was actually used for the Mass of the Solemnity of Pentecost and coincided with the two hundredth anniversary of Haydn’s death.

Franz Joseph Haydn died peacefully at home on May 31, 1809 at seventy-seven years old. A memorial service was held in the Schottenkirche (Scots Church) on June 15, at which Mozart’s *Requiem* was performed. His remains were interred at the Hundsturm cemetery until 1820 when Prince Nikolaus had them moved to Eisenstadt. As his last major work, premiering just seven years prior to his death, the *Harmoniemesse* perfectly encompasses the virtuosity, beauty, and extravagance evident throughout Haydn’s catalog.

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