

Nantwich Choral Society

HAYDN *HARMONIEMESSE*

BEETHOVEN *MASS IN C*



SATURDAY 19TH JUNE 1993
The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 7.30 p.m.

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

NANTWICH SINFONIA
Leader: David Routledge

Catrin Ley, soprano

Georgina West, contralto

Paul Phoenix, tenor

Martin Bussey, bass

conducted by
Stephen Buckman



HAYDN (1732 – 1809), Mass in B flat ("Harmoniemesse")

BEETHOVEN (1770 – 1827), Mass in C, Op 86

When Prince Nicolaus II Esterházy inherited his title in 1795, he also inherited as his court-composer the most famous musician of his day, Franz-Josef Haydn. Ironically the new Prince had little interest in music, but this suited Haydn who was by then in his sixties and, after more than thirty years' service with the Esterházy family, probably glad of this well-earned semi-retirement. Other than administrative work, the only official duty Haydn now had was to compose one new mass annually for the name-day of the Prince's wife, Princess Maria-Hermenegild. The masses were performed on the Sunday nearest 8th September (the Feast of Our Lady) in the little church near the family's castle at Eisenstadt, in the Austrian mountains. Haydn was very fond of the Princess, and between 1796 and 1802 he composed his six last and greatest masses; one a year except for 1800, when he was hard at work on **The Creation**.

The size of the Prince's orchestra was never the same two years running, so Haydn had to write for whatever forces were available with the result that each of the six masses is scored differently. At one extreme is the **Nelson Mass** of 1798, scored just for strings, organ, timpani and three trumpets (even the trumpeters had to be brought in from Vienna), and at the other is the **Harmoniemesse**, Haydn's last setting of the mass, written in 1802, by which time the Prince had augmented the basic strings, organ and timpani by the addition of a flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns and two (regular) trumpets. Haydn's full and prominent use of these instruments earned the work its German nickname, which means "Wind-band Mass".

Haydn did not write any more large-scale compositions after the **Harmoniemesse**, and from 1804 his former pupil and new assistant at Eisenstadt, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, began to provide masses for the Princess's name-day; but in 1807, the honour went to another of Haydn's old pupils, Ludwig van Beethoven.

It must be said that Beethoven's **Mass in C** did not get off to a good start in life: a less than adequate performance and Prince Nicolaus' dismissive attitude to the work (sycophantically shared by Hummel, who was supposed to be Beethoven's friend) left the composer seething, and in later years the **Mass in C** has always been overshadowed by the monumental **Missa Solemnis** of 1823. Beethoven himself, however, was always justifiably proud of his first mass-setting and we should remember that he had already composed four symphonies and four piano concertos, as well as the opera **Fidelio**, all of which stood him in good stead when he came to write the **Mass in C**.

In the Eighteenth Century, grand settings of the mass had usually been in the so-called "cantata-style", consisting of a large number of fairly short contrasted arias and choruses (like Mozart's C minor or Bach's B minor masses), but Haydn, for his late masses, took the older format of the *missa brevis* (in which each section of the liturgy was composed as a single movement), and expanded it — drawing on his vast experience as a composer of symphonies and opera to keep the long stretches of music thus produced within a dramatic and well-controlled structure. This "symphonic" style became the new standard for the Nineteenth Century, and Beethoven's mass for the Eisenstadt chapel, not surprisingly, follows Haydn's model very closely.

Like the **Harmoniemesse**, the **Kyrie** of the **Mass in C** is a slow movement; but whereas Haydn begins with an impressive orchestral introduction, Beethoven takes a much more intimate approach, with unaccompanied basses ushering in the rest of the choir. At the start of the **Gloria**, on the other hand, it is Beethoven who goes for the grand gesture, while Haydn's temperament inclined him towards a lighter mood and he begins with a jolly little tune, sung first by the solo soprano. The structure of both movements is, however, basically the same: two brisk, predominantly choral sections framing a slower central section with a greater emphasis on the soloists.

The **Credo** (the longest part of the mass) follows the same three-part structure as the **Gloria**, but the mood is more serious, as befits the text. The central slow section, referring to the Incarnation and Crucifixion, seems to be the heart of the mass for both composers, who give it their most intense and moving musical expression.

The opening of the **Sanctus** is in both works a moment of reverential awe rather than a shout of praise, with Beethoven's never rising above a whisper, but the rest of the movement is contrastingly loud and vigorous. The **Benedictus** was traditionally the musical highlight of Viennese masses in Haydn's day, often turning into a rather indulgent and operatic set-piece, but Haydn's new dynamic concept of the mass had no room for such vanity and in the **Harmoniemesse** this movement is an unsettling, nervous-sounding chorus marked *Molto allegro* which relaxes a little only when the soloists come in. Beethoven takes a more conventional approach, but the static quality of his simple motet-style **Benedictus** means that the sudden return to the "Osannas" from the **Sanctus** makes even more of a jolt than it does in the Haydn.

The fervent pleas for mercy in the first section of the **Agnus Dei** — a prayer for peace — drew a heartfelt response from both composers, for during the time Haydn was writing his last masses most of Europe was trying to defend itself from the advancing armies of Revolutionary France and when Beethoven came to write the **Mass in C** Vienna was actually under French occupation. Their different circumstances are reflected in the two composers' differing response to the second part of the **Agnus Dei** (at the words "grant us peace"), for whereas Haydn, announcing it with a martial fanfare and continuing with cheerful confidence, concludes in a burst of noisy optimism, Beethoven is altogether more ambivalent and muted, ending his mass quietly with a musical reference to the opening of the **Kyrie** and an unspoken "Lord have mercy".

(Notes by Colin Bromelow)

**THERE WILL BE AN INTERVAL
BETWEEN THE TWO WORKS IN TONIGHTS CONCERT**