

■ *Nantwich Choral Society* ■

MOZART
MASS IN C MINOR

HAYDN
NELSON MASS



SATURDAY 18th NOVEMBER
1995

The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 7.30pm.

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

NANTWICH SINFONIA
(Leader: David Routledge)

Fiona Motherway ~ *Soprano*
Elizabeth Davidson ~ *Soprano*
Marjorie Seddon ~ *Contralto*
Paul Phoenix ~ *Tenor*
David Campbell ~ *Bass*

Andrew Mildinhall ~ *Organ*

Conducted by
Stephen Buckman

NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF MUSIC SOCIETIES



"NELSON" MASS

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Haydn's D minor Mass of 1798 is the third of the six great Masses he wrote towards the end of his life to celebrate the name-day of the Princess Marie Esterhazy. This fell on 8 September with a special service incorporating the new Mass on the following Sunday. These were difficult and dangerous times, however, and the apparently invincible French army, under the command of Napoleon, had been steadily marching through Europe, sweeping aside all opposition until only England remained beyond its control. In May 1798, then, Napoleon turned his sights on Egypt, hoping to cut the life-line of England's Mediterranean trade, but instead, at the beginning of August, he got his first taste of defeat when Lord Nelson and the English navy wiped out the French fleet harboured at Aboukir in the historic Battle of the Nile.

Two years earlier, when Napoleon was advancing into Austria, Haydn had called the first of his Masses for the Princess a *Missa in tempore belli* ("Mass in time of war") and startled people with the menacing drum tattoos and fanfares which interrupt the Agnus Dei. Now, he again used trumpets and drums with unprecedented effect to create the threatening atmosphere which pervades the Kyrie and Benedictus of this new Mass. Now it so happened that the first performance of the Mass took place just as the news of Nelson's victory at Aboukir finally reached Vienna, and as people inevitably associated the music with the event it immediately became known as the "Nelson" Mass. (Two years later, when Lord Nelson actually visited Prince Esterhazy in his palace at Eisenstadt, it was of course the "Nelson" Mass that was performed in his honour.)

Haydn himself referred to the Mass as his *Missa in angustis*, an unusual appellation which is probably best translated as "Mass in straitened times". Although, with the benefit of hindsight, commentators have often taken this to mean something like "Mass in time of fear", it could just as easily refer to the straitened conditions of the Esterhazy court orchestra which at this time was reduced to a minimum, without any woodwind players. Necessity being the mother of invention, however, Haydn used the available forces of three trumpets, timpani, organ and strings, plus a group of singers that obviously included an exceptional soprano soloist, to create one of his most dramatic and involving scores.

This drama is evident right from the beginning of the **KYRIE**, with its uncompromising insistence on the tonic note 'D', hammered out in unison by the trumpets and timpani and reiterated by the strings' staccato crochets, then outlining the powerful octave drop on each word of the choir's first, shattering entry: 'Kyrie, Kyrie eleison' (Lord, Lord have mercy*). A moment of respite is provided by a move to the relative major at the words 'Christe eleison', for which the principal soprano is given a floridly decorative melody, but Haydn soon begins to increase the tension again through the following fugato section until, pushed on by the trumpets and drums, the choir take up their initial cry of 'Kyrie' once more. This time, though, they are joined by the soprano soloist, whose coloratura now takes her soaring up to a climactic top B flat in an unforgettably spine-tingling moment.

With the **GLORIA**, Haydn returns to that more genial style familiar from *The Creation* (first performed earlier in 1798) and sets the whole of the first half of the text in one continuous movement alternating between soloists and chorus. As always with Haydn there are some strikingly original features, like the soprano's pre-echo of the choir's first entry that starts the movement, or the unexpected *sforzando* accents at 'Laudamus te'. The middle of the Gloria, beginning 'Qui tollis', is an expressive solo-written for Haydn's favourite bass in the opera at Esterhazy - with decorative figuration from the first violins and organ. The drama here is in the supplicatory interjections of the chorus, whether in hushed chant-like octaves or in anguished chromatic harmony. To round off the Gloria, Haydn returns to the music with which it began, inserting a fugue at the words 'in gloria Dei Patris, amen' before concluding with a development of the sustained music that earlier accompanied the words 'et in terra pax' for the final 'amens'.

The **CREDO** (in three movements like the Gloria) also begins unusually with a strict canon at the fifth between sopranos and tenors on the one hand and altos and basses on the other, shadowed by upper and lower strings respectively. The slow middle section begins with another expressive solo - this time for the soprano - but soon the choir takes over in a richly harmonized extension of the melody. At 'Crucifixus', the music shifts into G minor and Haydn recalls the darkness of the Kyrie with the use of stark octaves and the menacing return of that rhythmically repeated 'D' from the trumpets and timpani. The movement ends, however, back in G minor, with a tranquil *pianissimo*. All the more surprising, then, is the agitated B minor opening of the 'Et resurrexit' - normally one of the brightest moments in the mass. Towards the end of the movement, too, Haydn thwarts our expectations by *not* ending with a fugue at 'et vitam venturi seculi'. Instead he gives these words to the soprano soloist with another piece of florid coloratura on 'amen'. The choir then takes up the first part of her melody but makes a grand perorational coda out of its final 'amen'.

It is a sad fact that we can never hear the music of earlier generations as they themselves would have heard it. This has nothing to do with 'authentic performance', but rather with 'authentic listening': try as we might we can never 'un-hear' all that extra music we have heard (in the case of the *Nelson* Mass, almost exactly two

hundred years of music separate its first audience from the one hearing it tonight) and so we miss out on that "shock of the now" which delighted, puzzled or outraged those earlier generations. The *Nelson* Mass is full of innovations. Some, like the opening of the Kyrie are still self-evident, but now pass our jaded ears unnoticed. When the first bars of the **SANCTUS** first stole over the ears of that first audience, gradually filling the chapel at Eisenstadt with sound and then just as gradually dying away again, there must have been a gasp of delight. Nobody had heard such a sound before: a long-held crescendo by the voices and strings, at the high-point of which there is single staccato note for trumpets and timpani ornamented by a quick broken chord from the organ, *forte*. So that we can really appreciate the magic and novelty of what he has done, Haydn lets us hear it again before moving on to the main substance of the movement, in which solemnity and mystery give way to joyful praise.

For the **BENEDICTUS**, Haydn returns to the D minor of the Kyrie, trumpets and drums again adding their threateningly martial tones. This part of the mass, particularly in Viennese settings of the period, was often given to the soprano soloist as a decorative and tender aria, so although the mood of this movement's long introduction may have come as something of a surprise, Haydn makes as if to satisfy convention when the soprano does indeed begin to sing. Her sudden noisy interruption by the choir however, should warn us that Haydn has no intention of providing us with the merely conventional; but there is no indication yet of the vehemence with which the movement will end. Once again the rhythmic unison "D's" return, now, as in the Kyrie, pounded out by the full chorus and all three trumpets as well as timpani, but now louder than ever and overtly militaristic. Is this an image of the war which Napoleon's armies had brought, or did Haydn have in mind that war which the Book of Revelations tells us will happen when "Christ comes to his rightful rule"? After such a dramatic outburst it must be said that the straightforward repeat of the "Osanna" (always a tricky point in the mass) does sound rather incongruous.

The tone of the **AGNUS DEI**, however, is entirely appropriate. Against the luminous background of a symphonic slow movement the vocal soloists offer up a heartfelt prayer for God's mercy and peace. Haydn's unshakeable confidence in God "as a being infinitely great and infinitely good" inspires a final "Dona nobis pacem" of unclouded ebullience, towards the end of which the trumpets' rhythmic "D's" make a final appearance, now tellingly transformed into bright-sounding octaves that seems to emphasise their victorious arrival in the key of D major.

~ INTERVAL ~

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791): Mass in C minor, K.427

Why Mozart should have set about writing a mass on such a grand scale as the unfinished "Great" C minor Mass remains something of a mystery. Even as it stands it requires a greater number of performers and lasts much longer than any of his other Masses. Had he ever completed it, it would have ended up as big as Bach's B minor Mass.

It's possible that, like Bach, he originally intended only the Kyrie and Gloria for liturgical use - common practice in the 18th Century for music in the so-called "Neapolitan" style (in which florid operatic solos rubbed shoulders with more serious "old style" choruses) - the rest of the mass being sung to plainchant. Then possibly, again like Bach and influenced by his recent introduction to the music of Bach and Handel by the Baron von Swieten, Mozart decided to set the rest of the Ordinary of the Mass as a sort of compendium of the various styles used in contemporary church music - a showcase for his genius.

We know from a letter to his father that by the New Year of 1783, Mozart felt that he had to complete the Mass (which by now, in addition to the Kyrie and Gloria, included music for the first two sections of the Credo) to fulfil a "moral obligation". Whether this was connected with his marriage to Constanze Weber the previous August (of which his father disapproved) or perhaps with the couple's expectation of their first child (born the following June) we can't say, but it seems certain that the beautiful soprano solos were intended for his wife to sing. In any case she was the principal soloist when the Mass was eventually performed on 26 October 1783 at the end of the couple's first, repeatedly delayed, visit to Wolfgang's family in Salzburg. While he was there Mozart had added a Sanctus and Benedictus to the parts he had brought with him from Vienna, but he didn't have time to finish off the Credo and the music he had already written for it was left uncopied, unperformed and forgotten.

With that single performance of his C minor Mass, albeit incomplete, Mozart must have considered his obligation discharged because he never went back to the work except to turn the Kyrie and Gloria into a hastily arranged cantata a couple of years later. As a setting of the mass the music wasn't heard again until this century, when musicologists, using varying degrees of detective work and musicianship, have succeeded in bringing all the music Mozart wrote for it back together again.

KYRIE

The anxiously pulsating introduction of the Kyrie leaves us in no doubt that this is not just going to be one of

those charming little masses whose sole purpose is to decorate the Sunday morning service. Unlike even his own earlier Masses, the Mass in C minor burns with the passion of Mozart's newly found faith. Only a few days after his marriage to Constanze (and so shortly before he began composing the Mass) he had written "...For a considerable time before we were married we had always attended mass and gone to confession and taken communion together; and I found that I never prayed so fervently or confessed and took communion so devoutly as by her side; and she felt the same. In short, we are made for each other, and God who orders all things and consequently has ordained this also, will not forsake us". That prayerful fervour is certainly evident in the choral outer sections of the Kyrie, while the tone of the soprano's angelic "Christe eleison" (Actually based on a vocal exercise Mozart had written for Constanze) could aptly be described as devout.

GLORIA

Fervour and devotion are again contrasted in the first movement of the Gloria, which begins with a joyful shout but becomes more reflective at the words "et in terra pax". The **Laudamus te** is a bravura aria full of leaps and runs and trills over a range of two octaves that was obviously intended as a vehicle for Constanze's vocal agility, in contrast to the lyrical beauty of tone required for her "Christe eleison". (In these more egalitarian days the "Laudamus te" is normally assigned to the second soprano soloist, but tonight we will have the chance to hear it, as it should be, sung by the *prima donna*).

Fervour and devotion return with the five-part choral **Gratias**, whose jagged rhythms and declamatory style are clearly derived from Mozart's studies of the Baroque masters. The *Domine Deus* also adopts a rather old-fashioned idiom, but more Italian than German - reminiscent of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* - with the two sopranos set in opposition, vying with each other for vocal honours. At the heart of the Gloria stands the **Qui Tollis**, a technical *tour de force* which shows how thoroughly Mozart had absorbed the characteristics of the Baroque. It is a massive double chorus over a chromatically descending bass which successfully combines the monumentality of Handel's great choruses with the flexibility of Bach's harmonic language. The trio **Quoniam** returns to the Neapolitan style of the "Domine Deus", but its minor key gives the music's syncopation and florid quaver passages a seriousness not usually associated with this style of writing. The fugue at **Cum sancto spiritu** (introduced in typically Baroque fashion by a brief but expansive prelude reiterating the name **Jesu Christe**), is as thoroughly worked out as any teacher of counterpoint could wish, but Mozart makes it sound anything but academic, turning it instead into a jubilant re-affirmation of the fervour with which the Gloria began.

CREDO

When Mozart realised that his Mass would have to be performed without the Credo (whether for liturgical or practical reasons), he left the sketches he had already made in Vienna exactly as they stood. This meant that although the two sections of the Credo he had been working on were complete in their musical substance, some of the orchestration was still missing. In the **Credo in unum Deum** this amounts only to details, but in the **Et incarnatus est** most of the spaces for the string parts were left blank. When these blanks are filled in, however, we can hear something very close to what Mozart had in mind, namely an exciting chorus driven by a persistent hunting-style rhythm and an elaborately decorative aria for soprano with concertante

flute, oboe and bassoon parts. This last piece must be the apotheosis of that traditional Italian shepherd's Christmas music so popular in 18th century compositions, of which the *Pifa* ("pastoral symphony") in Handel's *Messiah* is probably the best known example. Mozart must surely have regretted never hearing Constanze sing this in Salzburg.

SANCTUS & BENEDICTUS

The choral parts of the **Sanctus** and **Osanna** have also had to undergo a measure of reconstruction from the first printed edition (Mozart's manuscript for them now being lost) which, for lack of space on the page reduced them to five and four parts respectively rather than Mozart's original eight-part double chorus. As with the end of the Gloria, Mozart prefaces the "Osanna's" busy counterpoint with the spacious grandeur of the Sanctus, characterised by the sonorous return of the trumpets, trombones and timpani.

The **Benedictus** completes the sequences of movements for soloists which, from the coloratura of "Laudamus te" (remembering that the "Et incarnatus" falls outside Mozart's original plan), have become increasingly serious and contrapuntal with the addition of each successive voice; the second soprano in "Domine Deus", the tenor in "Quoniam" and now, finally, the bass. By relating the Benedictus rhythmically and melodically to the "Osanna", Mozart effects the transition into the reprise of the "Osanna" quite seamlessly, ingeniously avoiding that jarring gear-change which (as we have already noticed this evening) usually mars this point in the Mass. With this reprise Mozart's great C minor Mass comes to a sudden but satisfying jubilant conclusion.

Colin Bromelov