

Haydn: Symphony No. 31 in D Major (*Horn Signal*)

Although Franz Joseph Haydn didn't invent the symphony, he has long been known as its "father"—an appellation bestowed at least in part because of his intense approach to the genre. While we may think of Haydn as having creative control over his symphonies, for much of his career he was at the mercy of his patrons at Esterházy—both in terms of the types of music he composed, and the instrumental resources at his disposal. Written for four horns, Haydn's Symphony No. 31 in D Major (*Horn Signal*) provides a good illustration.

While the traditional Classical period orchestra employed a pair of French horns, in the fall of 1763 Haydn's orchestra at the court of Esterházy acquired two additional horns, opening up new sonic avenues for the composer. Haydn took full advantage of the expanded resources at his disposal, writing for four horns until two of his players died suddenly in 1764, forcing him to return to the traditional pair temporarily. When replacements were hired in 1765, the Symphony No. 31 *alla posta* (literally "with the horn signal") was the result.

Not surprisingly, the horns come out in force from the very beginning of the symphony, their distinctive call dominating the first movement. Haydn revels in the talent of his Esterházy musicians in the ensuing Adagio, which features a passionate yet restrained dialogue between solo violin and cello against a backdrop of pizzicato strings and horns. After the elegant Minuet, the final movement is a brilliant theme and variations that gave every player in Haydn's orchestra a chance to shine. In a particularly inspired move, Haydn concludes the symphony with a reprise of the "horn signal" from the opening of the work, simultaneously creating a sense of unity and closure.

Handel: Concerto a due cori in F Major, HWV 334 (*Judas Maccabaeus*)

George Frideric Handel seems to have invented the *concerto a due cori*—a work for two "choirs" of woodwinds and brass (oboes, bassoons, and horns) and strings—to make

his oratorio performances more attractive. Composing for groups of musicians was hardly a new concept; the idea of split groups, or “cori spezzati,” dates from the Renaissance, and in the Baroque era Vivaldi composed five concertos “in due cori.” Apart from their basic use of antiphony, however, Handel’s three concertos a due cori are wholly his own. While all three consist mostly of melodic material drawn from his choral music, they are unique in the way Handel extends his choral approach to instrumental music—avoiding traditional Baroque form and focusing instead on fully exploring the textural and timbral possibilities of the two “choirs.”

The third of Handel’s concerti a due cori, HWV 334 was composed for a 1747 production of his oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus*. While Handel refers to quite a few of his own works in the first two concertos, most of the Concerto a due cori in F Major was actually original material. Handel borrows from only two other works in the concerto; however, far from simply filling in gaps, the preexisting music informs his compositional choices throughout, particularly with regard to the French horn. In the first movement, a French overture shot through with dotted rhythms, Handel reworks his “Fitzwilliam Overture” for two clarinets and horn (HWV 424). The concluding Allegro, complete with difficult and distinctive horn writing, is derived from a hunting aria in Handel’s opera *Partenope* (1730). Handel subsequently brings the horns into nearly every movement of the F Major Concerto (for example, the call-and-response Allegro ma non troppo), making the final movement sound like an inevitable conclusion rather than an afterthought.

Handel: Concerto grosso in D Major, op. 6, no. 5, HWV 323

Of all the orchestral works Handel composed, the Op. 6 collection of “Grand Concertos” is perhaps the best known today. Written in the span of about a month during the fall of 1739, the set emerged during a relatively unproductive period for the composer. From the start, Handel seemed to be striving for something special. According to Donald Burrows, Handel wrote the concertos with a fervor he usually reserved for operas and oratorios, setting aside a full month for the works’ composition. Burrows concludes,

“This conscious production of masterpieces—for indeed the concertos are one of the peaks in Baroque instrumental music—suggests that Handel’s motives in composing his own ‘Op. 6’ included an intention to match Arcangelo Corelli’s famous Op. 6 Concerti Grosso with works of equal quality.” Corelli’s concertos were a good role model. Upon their publication in 1714, the older composer’s works had elicited a rapturous response in England: historian Roger North even went so far as to dub them the “bread of life.” Handel’s publisher, John Walsh, was quick to recognize the commercial value of Handel’s own Op. 6 collection, and placed an advertisement in the *London Daily Post* directing those who wished to purchase the works either directly to Handel “at his home in Brook’s-street” or to Walsh himself. Approximately 100 subscriptions were received, both from members of the aristocracy and from professional musicians and music societies.

Handel never directly imitates Corelli, but the two collections bear a number of superficial similarities: not only do they share the same opus number and use the same scoring, a *concertino* (solo group) of two violins and cello, plus four-part *ripieno* (ensemble) strings and continuo, but both composers also created the works as a coherent set. Nonetheless, the drama and intensity of focus the concertos exude is purely Handelian. The fifth in the collection, the D Major concerto borrows loosely from existing compositions, as do many of the Op. 6 concertos—as Burrows puts it, “because the music fitted his schemes and not because his inspiration was flagging.” Thematic material in the opening two movements and the last is derived from the *Ode for St. Cecilia’s Day*, HWV 76, a piece that was often coupled in the 1740s and 50s with *L’Allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato* (which Music of the Baroque will perform in March). The concluding Menuet is a particular favorite among Handel devotees, praised for its forward-looking musical architecture and tuneful melody.

Haydn: Symphony No. 98 in B-flat Major

Haydn spent most of his career in the employ of the Esterházy, concerned predominantly with producing music to suit the needs of the court. When his longtime

employer Nicolaus the Magnificent died in 1790, however, Haydn was temporarily free to pursue other opportunities—as Giorgio Pestelli puts it, he “broke away from the *ancien régime* like a falling ripe fruit.” Several eager patrons offered him work, but it was the German violinist Johann Peter Salomon, a London impresario, who finally convinced the composer to make his long-promised trip to England. For the 1791 season—the first in which Salomon offered a public concert series—Haydn was promised £300 for an opera, £300 for six symphonies, and additional money for publication rights and other compositions. As his contemporary biographer Albert Christoph Dies reported, some of Haydn’s associates, including his close friend Mozart, were concerned about the composer making the trip at the advanced age of nearly 59.

“If it pleases my prince,” said Haydn, “I’ll go with you to London.” Prince Anton granted permission for the journey at once, but it was not all right as far as Haydn’s friends were concerned, the ones who had so often before tried to persuade him to leave Vienna. They reminded him of his age (sixty years) [sic], of the discomforts of a long journey, and of many other things to shake his resolve. But in vain! Mozart especially took great pains to say “Papa!” as he usually called him, “you have had no training for the great world, and you speak too few languages.” “Oh!” replied Haydn, “my language is understood all over the world.”

Judging from his overwhelmingly positive reception, Haydn’s language was certainly understood in London. He wrote to a friend, “Everyone wants to know me. I had to dine out six times up to now, and if I wanted, I could dine out every day; but first I must consider my health, and second my work.”

Haydn’s last twelve symphonies—including No. 98—were written for Salomon’s public concerts in London (although by 1795, Wilhelm Cramer had supplanted Salomon as the director of the series he had founded). Comparing these “London” symphonies to Haydn’s earlier works, Pestelli describes them as painted with an “artist’s brush” rather than with an “engraver’s tool”—works with Haydn’s unique stamp writ large. At the same time, the Symphony No. 98—composed in early 1792—coincides with a relatively personal event in Haydn’s life: the news, finally arriving from Vienna, of Mozart’s death.

The premature passing of his friend deeply touched Haydn—and as Donald Tovey first pointed out in the 1930s, Symphony No. 98 seems to hold an homage to Haydn’s compatriot. This is particularly apparent in the Adagio movement, which bears an audible similarity to the slow movement of Mozart’s *Jupiter* Symphony. Noting both structural and melodic similarities between the two works, Tovey concludes, “The contrast between the two masters is thus seen even where Haydn is most touchingly docile towards his spiritual son, who has left him alone in the world of earthly music with only the awkward and stubborn young Beethoven to fill the void.”