Franz Joseph Haydn's Late Masses: An Examination of the Symphonic Mass Form

by Eric A. Johnson

Portrait in oils by Isador Nuegrass of Hayden holding *The Creation.*

The last six masses of Haydn, written between 1796 and 1802, stand as a body of work which has spawned much discourse regarding their place in history. For much of the nineteenth century, these masses were denounced (except within Austria) as trivializing the religious content of the mass by being too worldly, using secular forms and orchestration to set the text for the mass. More recently these six masses have received new evaluations and have been hailed, by some, as the zenith of the Viennese Mass for their fusion of the symphonic form and mass text. As is usual, the truth lies somewhere in between these extremes and these works defy easy compartmentalization. Charles Rosen offers qualified praise for the Late Masses when he states that they are "full of admirable details and contain much writing of great power. They remain, however, uncomfortable compromises."[1] In an effort to understand these Masses questions of history, construction and intention must be addressed:

> How does the label "symphonic mass" apply to these masses?
> What did Haydn use of the musical vernacular of his time to solve compositional challenges set for himself?
> What did Haydn use to create continuity in the large-scale structure of the cyclic mass?

The answers to these questions uncover the heart of Haydn's compositional design. Haydn's genius is not found in the formal similarities with the symphony, but in the small details, which reveal how Haydn moves the listener from one tonal event to another. This was accomplished through the rhetorical gestures, textual and musical, that Haydn developed and manipulated to create and foil the listener's expectations. These gestures, in turn, grew from individual events to unifying themes that bring entire movements and masses together. Even the traditional naming of Haydn's masses acknowledges the influence of these inventions, *Die Kleine Orgelmesse,* or the *Paukenmesse* owe their moniker to musical gestures that Haydn employed.

An oft-quoted phrase used in describing these masses is the term symphonic mass. The exact meaning of this term varies slightly depending upon who is using it. Martin Chusid has received much notoriety for his thesis, which proposes that each mass consists of three vocal symphonies. Part of this theory is constructed upon the performance practice inherent in the liturgical celebration of the mass: the Kyrie and Gloria are performed sequentially, the Credo is separated on either side by various elements of the service such as the Epistle, etc. and, finally, that the Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei are performed in sequence. These three divisions of the ordinary of the Mass, Chusid opines, are used by Haydn to create three independent vocal symphonies. Table 1 demonstrates Chusid's application of this theory to the *Schöpfungsmesse* of 1801.

As one can see, movements are delineated within the mass by text divisions, key, and tempo relationships. As a general structure the movements follow the outline of a symphony, tonal centers are closely related, with tertial and subdominant shifts common, and the tempos also parallel symphonic pro-

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gressions from fast to slow and back to fast. However, when one ventures below the surface of this theory consistent formal analogies between Haydn's symphonies and his late masses are difficult to identify. In his article, *Some Observations On Liturgy, Text And Structure In Haydn's Late Masses,*[2] Chusid does not really offer any conclusive statements about the structure of individual movements beyond their key and tempo relationships. In fact, most of his arguments contain numerous qualifiers, which mitigate his basic premise. He states, that the textual subdivisions of the mass "*suggest* the appropriateness of analogy with the instrumental symphony"[3], and that Haydn "*tends* to use forms that *resemble* his instrumental structures."[4] Chusid's concluding statements argue that "by the *symphony-like* grouping of major subdivisions, I believe [Haydn] has minimized the effect of [liturgical interruptions of the mass setting] in an eminently logical and musical manner."[5] One must be careful not to read too much into Chusid's arguments. He did not argue that below the individual movement level these "symphonic masses" correlate directly to the symphonic form. Rather, merely that larger tonal and tempo relationships do exist in these masses and that these correspond to symphonic movements, providing an analogous unity to the subsections of the mass.

By placing Haydn's Late Masses within a historical context of the cyclic mass, rather than in direct lineage from the symphony, his works can be seen as existing on a continuum of development. The traditions and performance practices of the Viennese and Salzburg church music have been scrutinized by extensive research and many articles have articulated the unique elements of the mass form in this region. It is important to remember that Haydn was a product of that tradition and that many of the Salzburg and Viennese traditions are also present in Haydn's Masses. In particular, certain characteristics identified by Bruce MacIntyre necessitate articulation concerning this question of symphonic form. In his article *Viennese Common Practice in the Early Masses of Joseph Haydn,* MacIntyre summarized his survey of over 500 masses composed between 1741-1783. In his research MacIntyre discovered many commonalties between settings. Of significance to this topic are: use of pastoral music, solo vocal quartets alternating with chorus, and slow choral movements preceding fast choral movements.[6] Regarding the use of pastoral music MacIntyre writes, "the pastoral mass as a special sub-genre was a favorite of Austrian composers in the Advent season."[7] Thus, the appearance of pastoral and dance-like movements in Haydn's late masses, such as the Benedictus of the *Schöpfungsmesse,* are not a product of the trio and dance movements of symphonies but rather this Austrian mass heritage. Regarding the use of solo quartets and slow choral introductions MacIntyre directly refutes Chusid's claim that these are symphonic derivations by stating, "Anyone acquainted with the mid-eighteenth-century Masses in Vienna will realize immediately that both of these attributes had long been part of the common practice in Mass writing."[8] Indeed, the masses of Michael Haydn and his contemporaries are full of passages in which the solo quartet alternates with the chorus.

The use of slow choral introductions was also a common practice at this time, as demonstrated by MacIntyre through his survey. One need look no farther than Mozart to find proof of this. The Crucifixus found in Mozart's K. 66 (1769) is a rather astonishing movement, which pre-dates Haydn's Late Masses by twenty-seven years. This setting shows Mozart's proclivity to compose from a formal rather than a textual perspective. The movement was composed in C minor and functions as an *adagio* introduction to the Et resurrexit. The opening statement of the crucifixus is a homophonic choral articulation of a C-minor chord followed

by a Four-measure phrase finishing the text "etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato." Mozart then repeats the opening C-minor articulation. This time, however, he changes the voicing of the chord so that all voices are singing in a higher register, thereby increasing the dramatic tension of the music. The following phrase is now extended to nine measures with a deceptive cadence in m.131 and a final cadence on G major. The final G-major cadence functions as the dominant for the following Et Resurrexit in C major. The harmonic progression for this movement then becomes merely a shift (albeit dramatic) from tonic to dominant. Thus, in this movement one finds the text being subjected to formal considerations, becoming a slow introduction to what follows.

The Kyrie of Haydn's *Paukenmesse,* an example of Haydn's slow choral introductions, is similar to Mozart in general harmonic movement from C to G. In Haydn, the parallel-minor sonority is also used but not found until the last measures of the movement. Instead, Haydn moves first from the tonic to a cadence on the subdominant F m. 5. Already, in the first measures, Haydn is playing with the listener's expectations by interrupting the basic progression of I-V. This expectation is not realized until 5 measures later with the cadence on G major for the C-major *Allegro Moderato* that is to follow. Like Mozart, in a very compact space (fifteen measures for Mozart and ten for Haydn) dramatic tension and anticipation are created by harmonic shifts and manipulations in a slow choral introduction. Both movements are very effective musical experiences, but to point to Haydn's use of this as innovative or uniquely symphonic is erroneous.

Thus, by putting to rest the notion that these late masses are simply the Ordinary texts poured into the mold of the symphony, the issue of formal analysis and identification becomes problematic. One must be cautious not to fall into the trap of many nineteenth-century theorists, who passed judgment based on aesthetics and ideals that did not exist at the time of creation. When speaking of the *sonata* form, for example, one must not become anachronistic. Leonard Ratner in an essay entitled "Theories of Form" from *Haydn Studies: Proceedings of the International Haydn Conference,* (ed. Larsen 1981), identified significant parameters that one should maintain when using formal analysis, "Form can be viewed as a plan or a process ... for analysis emphasis is placed upon plan ... for composition, process."[9] Composers during Haydn's time were not beginning with the *sonata*-form mold and inserting music to fill it up. Rather they were posing musical challenges for themselves to solve. What did guide composers was a sense of progression from one musical event to another. The primary force used to create this movement was harmony. "The shape of a composition was seen as a trajectory moving to and from keys."[10] Beyond this basic harmonic progression any attempt to place strict formal equations upon music of the Classical era will prove fruitless. Rosen argues that "an articulate movement to the dominant (or the subdominant) is all that is required harmonically of a sonata exposition: how it is done is completely free, or rather bound only by the nature and material of each individual work."[11]

With movement to and from keys being the goal of a work, how a composer achieved this transition became the tools of composition. Again, Ratner continues, "eighteenth-century instructions for compositions were concerned principally with rhetorical parameters, processes by which coherence could be established and eloquency achieved."[12] The connective tissues of the movement, how one passed from theme "a" to "b" (if there was a "b") became the driving force for formal structure. To that end the melody, or theme, of a movement was the means of achieving said goals. Within the melody the "essential element was the figure, a short characteristic pattern ... with clearly defined harmonic identity and a sharply chiseled rhythmic profile."[13] It is at this level of understanding, that one begins to understand the compositional perspective of Haydn and to solve the enigmas of the late masses.

Musical and textual figures used by Haydn often functioned at many levels

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in his masses. They may, for example, surprise the listener, signal an impending structural shift, or serve as transitional material. Often these rhetorical gestures become the unifying elements in a movement that allow the mass text and classical concept of form to be joined successfully. An example of this can be found in the Et Resurrexit of the *Nelson Mass.* Haydn sets the word "et" in the first measure as a unison half note ("*et motto*"). This is rather striking for the lack of harmony between the voices, the emphasis that is placed upon an unimportant word, and the establishment of B minor, and unusual key for the traditionally joyful text et resurrexit. Here is a fine example of how Haydn creates a problem for himself that is resolved in the following measures (see table 2 below). The "*et motto*" returns numerous times within this movement and at each appearance, it assumes a different role. At times this recurrence propels the listener into the next line of text, as in m13-14 and m. 63. At other times the "*et motto*" stands as a point of arrival, such as in m. 28 and 76. Throughout the movement Haydn expands the meaning and significance of the "*et motto*" through repetition and redefinition of it's function. Finally in m. 76 Haydn provides the listener with what was expected in m.1, the unequivocal establishment of D major, again using the "*et motto.*"

With this example the surprise gesture of m. 1 evolves into the skeleton upon which the movement hangs. The recurrence of the single word "*et* " provides unity for the movement while its different harmonic functions urge the listener along. One is tempted to speculate about the theological implications of this repetition: was this a joyful re-articulation of "et " celebrating the many facets of the Christian creed or a humorous poke at the length of text required to be set within the Credo, etc.?

Another common, choral compositional device that Haydn uses to surprise the audience and articulate to formal structure was the choral unison. This device appears throughout all of his masses and serves to underscore Haydn's ability to resolve the rather restrictive forms of the mass texts with his vision of a formal structure. The appearances of unison choral phrases in the *Paukenmesse* indicate the variety of uses that this rhetorical gesture may have (see table 3). At times, the choral unisons such as the one on "*suscipe,*" function as a dramatic element to heighten the meaning of the text. In other locations, their role is much more subordinate to the harmonic activity at the moment, as seen in the pedal point at "confiteor." The most numerous instances are reserved for strong cadential passages. Through the unison choral passages Haydn maintains the integrity of the mass text while employing a compositional device that serves the dramatic and formal requirements of the music.

Haydn was equally masterful at employing musical gestures to facilitate the transition from one musical idea to another. This can be demonstrated through

the examination of an eighth-note motive found in the violin I of the Gloria, *Nelson Mass.* Beginning in m. 15 the violins initiate a simple, eighth-note, triadic pattern, alternately outlining the tonic and dominant (D and A). The orchestration has been reduced to string and continuo only to accompany the solo quartet. The grouping of the four eighthnote motive is 1+3 with the first eighthnote receiving a *staccato* mark and the other three slurred together. As the soloists continue, the violins maintain this basic articulation with little interruption until m. 31. In this measure the articulation changes to a *sfz* over the first of these last three notes of the four-note grouping, coinciding with an harmonic shift to E minor. The *sfz* establishes a syncopation and driving energy that is quickly picked up by the choir at the text "*laudamus te benedicimus te.*" The combination of tonal displacement from the original key of D and the driving syncopated rhythms of the strings and now chorus create an intensity that is finally resolved in m. 39 with a cadence in the dominant. Four measures later this motive functions as a cadential extension to reinforce the shift to the dominant. The arppeggiated violin motive also returns in m. 60 and at that point it is the transitional seam between two soloists. Once the tonic is recapitulated in m. 77 the *sfz* articulation does not return, instead one finds the gentle triadic undulations that parallel measures 15-18. Haydn takes the simple motive and develops it into the driving force through modulations and into the text. From small building blocks such as this Haydn is able to construct the larger forms of the mass.

Haydn's Late Masses are not works that are the result of his trying to fit the mass into the symphonic form. These late masses are, instead, the resultant hybrid of the heritage of the Austrian/ Viennese Mass traditions and Haydn's own solutions to creating unity over large-scale structures, as personified in his late symphonies. The key relationships found in the "vocal symphonies" can be explained as Haydn using the vernacular of his time to create form and unity. In that harmonic relations and progressions operated at the fundamental level of composition for the Classical composer, it is only logical that one would use tonal relationships to create continuity over a large structure such as the mass. Haydn is using the tools available to him to solve musical challenges. The resultant formal structures of these masses resemble symphonic forms and individual movements can be analyzed as various permutations of *sonata, rondo,* etc. However, the important distinction to be made is that the form of the movements resulted from the development of the rhetorical gestures employed by Haydn, not the other way around. This goes to the heart of the matter for a conductor. It is in the identification of Haydn's rhetorical gestures and devices that the music can be brought to life.

—CJ—

Table -1

Vocal Symphony, no. 1

Movement	Text	Tempo &	# of Bars	Meter	Keys
I	Kyrie	Adagio	28	$\frac{3}{4}$	B♭ major › F major
		Allegro Mod.	111	$\frac{6}{8}$	B♭ major
II.	Gloria	Allegro	160		B♭ major
III.	Miserere	Adagio	63	$\frac{3}{4}$	E♭ major
IV.	Quoniam	Molto Vivace-Presto	119	C	B♭ major

Vocal Symphony, no. 2

Movement	Text	Tempo &	# of Bars	Meter	Keys
I.	Credo	Vivace	59	C	B♭ major
II.	Et incarnatus	Adagio	41	$\frac{3}{4}$	G maj.- G min. V
III. minor	Et resurr exit	Allegro	78	C	B♭ major › B♭
IV.	Et vitam Più	Allegro	45	C	B♭ major

Vocal Symphony, no. 3

Movement	Text	Tempo &	# of Bars	Meter	Keys
I minor F minor › B♭	Sanctus	Adagio Pleni Allegro	18	$\frac{4}{4}$ 29	B♭ major, F $\frac{4}{4}$
II	Benedictus	Allegretto	123	$\frac{6}{8}$	E♭
III	Agnus Dei	Adagio	47	$\frac{3}{4}$	G major › V
IV	Dona Nobis	Allegro Mod.	123	*Alla Breve*	B♭

Measure	Harmony	Function
1	unison B	Opening statement of movement
13	G	Transitional move to "a" for
14	$g\sharp^{o7}$	*et motruos*
28	unison B♭	Denotes new section, arrival with cadence on B♭
47	unison C	Establishes C pedal to be continued by chorus in following 5 measures.
63	unison A	Continuation of a dominant pedal tone
76	unison D	Joins soloist on final cadence to establish D major tonality for the conclusion of work

Table 3, Appearances of the "*et* motto"

Movement	Text	Measures	Function
Gloria	Suscipe	163-169	Exclamations of supplication from chorus after Bass solo, octave leaps
Credo	confiteor	161-166	Pedal point
	et expecto	171-176	Emphatic cadential material
	Amen	306-311	Final cadence of Credo
Sanctus	in excelsis	36-38	Final cadence
Benedictus	In nomine..	67-72	Signals recapitulation

Table 4 - Appearances of unison choral passages in *Paukenmesse*

Crucifixus Mozart, K. 66				
m.119	123/4	127	131	133
cm	G cm	G	Aug 6	G
i	V i	V	VI	V

Kyrie, Haydn Paukenmesse				
m1	2	5	**9**	**10**
C	C	F	c minor	G
I	I	IV	i	V

END NOTES

[1] Charles Rosen. *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven.* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 369.

[2] Martin Chusid. *Some Observations on Liturgy, Text, and Structure in Haydn's Late Masses,* Studies in eighteenth-century music; a tribute to Karl Geiringer on his seventieth birthday. Edited by H. C. Robbins Landon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) Pp. 125-135.

[3] Ibid., 127

[4] Ibid., 130

[5] Ibid., 131

[6] Bruce MacIntyre. *Viennese Common Practice In The Early Masses of Joseph Haydn,* International Joseph Haydn Congress Ed. Eva Badura-Skoda. (München: G. Henle, c1986), 489.

[7] Ibid., 487

[8] Ibid., 489

[9] Leonard Ratner. *Theories of Form,* Haydn studies: proceedings of the International HaydnConference, Washington, D.C., 1975. Ed. Larsen, Serwer, and Webster (New York and London: Norton, 1981), 347.

[10] Ibid., 348

[11] Charles Rosen. *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven.* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 69.

[12] Leonard Ratner. *Theories of Form,* Haydn studies: proceedings of the International HaydnConference, Washington, D.C., 1975. Ed. Larsen, Serwer, and Webster (New York and London: Norton, 1981), 348.

[13] Ibid., 348