Haydn's First Mass: A Practical Introduction to His Style

by Nina Gilbert

A choir with moderate sight-reading ability can learn Joseph Haydn's *Missa brevis in F* (Hob. XXII:1) in about two hours of rehearsal. The result will be an attractive ten-minute piece for presentation in concert or church, but the choir will find its small investment of time repaid as well in the form of increased understanding of Classical music, with particular emphasis on Haydn and Vienna. The performing forces comprise two soprano soloists, SATB choir, and two violins and continuo, the so-called Viennese church trio.

Haydn composed the *Missa brevis in F* in 1749, probably his last year as a choirboy at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. He may have written the two solo parts for himself and his twelve-year-old brother Michael. Joseph's decade at St. Stephen's had been intensely musical. Living with the *Kapellmeister* (Georg Reutter the younger) and five other choirboys, Franz Joseph studied Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725) and Mattheson's *Der volkommene Capellmeister* (1739). His concentrated exposure to late-Baroque Viennese tradition included music by Fux, Caldara, the older and younger Reutters, Palotta, Tuma, and others.

One of these traditions represented in Haydn's first Mass is that of the *Missa brevis.* Twenty-five years after Haydn's *Missa brevis in F,* W. A. Mozart virtually defined the term in his famous letter to Padre Martini of September 4, 1776: "Our church music is very different from that of Italy, since a Mass with the whole Kyrie, the Gloria, Credo, the Epistle sonata, the Offertory or motet, the Sanctus, and the Agnus Dei must not last longer than three-quarters of an hour. . . . So you see that a special study is required for this composition."[1]

Part of this special study was the compression of the most text-laden sections of the Mass—the Gloria and the Credo. Haydn started this compression from the beginning of the Gloria text with the intonation, "Gloria in excelsis Deo." Composers since the seventeenth century had set these opening words polyphonically instead of leaving them to be chanted by a celebrant. Credo intonations, on the other hand, were not widely absorbed into polyphonic settings until the eighteenth century. Haydn reverted to chanted intonations in both of his short Masses (*Missa brevis in F* and *Missa brevis St. Joannis de Deo* (1778), in which latter case he set the Credo intonation polyphonically but left the Gloria to the celebrant) and in the *Grosse Orgel-Messe* (1766).

Gregorian chant today is sung quickly and evenly. But chant books published throughout Europe from 1582 through at least 1801 show proportional notation: semi-breves (◇), breves (□), and longs (┓), which had been introduced into Gregorian chant by Palestrina's student Giovanni Guidetti in his *Directorium chori* (Rome, 1582). J. J. Fux's rhythmic setting of a Gloria chant intonation with concertizing instruments in his *Missa gratiarum actionis* (1716) confirms the currency of such rhythmized chant in Vienna in the early eighteenth century. Original and modern notation for two intonations from a Missal published in Saxony in 1801 are shown as Ex. 1.

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Missa in angustiis by Joseph Haydn

by Lawrence Schenbeck

I: The Music

In the almost 200 years since its initial performance in Eisenstadt, Austria, the *Missa in angustiis* has become one of Joseph Haydn's most popular choral-orchestral works.[1] In many ways it epitomizes the Viennese Classical Mass, yet its unique alternation of stark drama and expressive depth gives it a fervor that its companions in this repertory cannot match. Among the factors accounting for its wide acceptance we must include the choral writing, which is not always easy but is never inaccessible and which can provide a workable challenge for many church, college, and community choirs. The work's relatively light instrumental scoring, especially in its most authentic version of strings, organ, three trumpets, and timpani, must also be attractive to expense-conscious concert planners. Here is a circumstance in which the most economical presentation also offers the best (i.e., most characteristic) sound-portrait of the piece!

Haydn was not responsible for the many nicknames that became attached to the Mass, "Lord Nelson," "Imperial," and "Coronation" among them. His own designation, *Missa in angustiis* (literally, "in time of the 'narrow' "), seems ambiguous; it may mean "Mass in time of fear," or it may simply imply that the Mass was composed in a short time. The work was completed in a scant fifty-three days at a point in history when the Napoleonic wars were a source of daily concern for many Europeans.[2] In any case, the piece demonstrates a compelling unity of feeling from the first staccato violin strokes on a descending d minor triad to the final, abrupt shout of "pacem" in D major.

As with the other late Masses, symphonic form and style predominate. By adding vocal forces in ecclesiastical style, Haydn expanded the highly developed format of his "London" symphonies—perhaps in the only way he saw remaining. One scholar has even proposed an analysis of these works as sets of "vocal symphonies" in which the *Nelsonmesse* would be viewed as three connected works: the Kyrie-Gloria (four movements, *Allegro* in d—*Allegro* in D—*Adagio* in B-flat—*Allegro* in D), the Credo (three movements, *Allegro* in D—*Largo* in G—*Allegro in D), and the Sanctus-Benedictus-Agnus Dei (three movements, Adagio/Allegro* in D—*Allegretto/Allegro* in d/D—*Adagio/Vivace* in G/D).[3] An integral part of the composer's symphonic orientation, and what makes it so effective in the Masses, is a cheerfully tolerant eclecticism that unhesitatingly seats fugues in the same pew as theatrical arias. To certain pious Victorian critics, such incongruities of style provided a major obstacle to acceptance of these works in spite of their compositional brilliance and melodic appeal. Happily, our own age seems to be more capable of appreciating both Haydn's musical achievement and his sincerity as a creator of devotional art.

What are the specific musical events that set apart the *Missa*

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Missa in angustiis by Joseph Haydn

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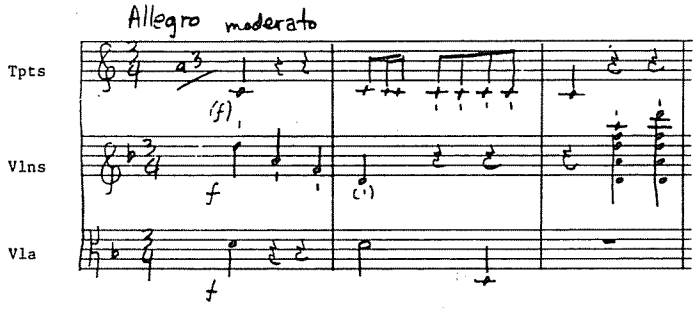
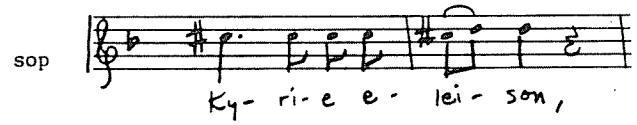
in angustiis? From the very beginning, an intense mood is generated as the composer, eliminating the customary *adagio* introduction,[4] dives immediately into the trumpet calls and bold octave-leaping motives that dominate the first movement (Ex. 1). This is one of Haydn's most tightly constructed adaptations of sonata-allegro form, and the strong motivic concen-

Ex. 1: Kyrie, mm. 1-3, partial score.

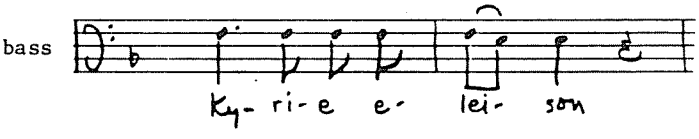


tration within it provides much of the movement's power. One example will have to suffice: a short figure that first serves as transitional/cadential material in the chorus (Ex. 2) reappears later in inversion (Ex. 3) to fuel an entire development section in stirring imitative fashion, virtually on its own. The other

Ex. 2: Kyrie, mm 22-23.



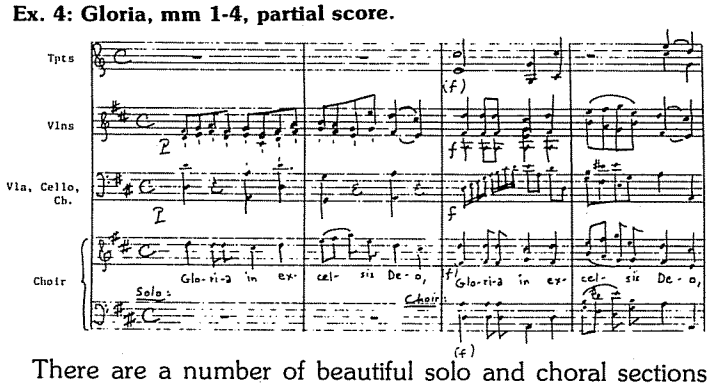
Ex. 3: Kyrie, mm 54-55.



outstanding feature of this opening movement is the soprano solo. Appearing shortly before the modulation to the second tonal area (F major, coinciding with the "Christe" text portion), it provides a typically florid, graceful contrast in the new key, supported by an SATB solo quartet. If this were the extent of the soprano's contribution, it could scarcely be distinguished from the lyric or coloratura solos in a dozen other Classic Masses, including most of Haydn's. But there is more—the soprano reenters at the moment of the recapitulation, a dramatic return to the d-minor fanfares. Her *passaggi*, which rapidly ascend over the full ensemble to b flat^2, a^2, and c^2, take up on a steely bravura that galvanizes the emotional claim in the music; it is an unforgettable moment! Haydn must have possessed an extraordinary soloist in order to have called here for such a combination of flexibility and power.

The following Gloria, all release, all joy in its transport to the relative major key, presents a stunning contrast to the Kyrie, with its menace and tense minor tonality. In the Gloria, one also observes more readily the typical Haydn choral-orchestral style of the late Masses. Against a background of rapid passagework or repeated short notes in the strings, with the winds (in this case, the organ) filling in the harmonies, soloists and choir alternately declaim the text in the basic tempo of the movement (here quarter- and eighth-note values in common time) (Ex. 4). It is a marvelous formula, combining in equal degrees propulsive energy, rich but intelligible sound, and vocal-instrumental virtuosity. Once again, the soprano soloist is featured, although this time the other members of the quartet are given greater opportunities for participation.

Ex. 4: Gloria, mm 1-4, partial score.



There are a number of beautiful solo and choral sections that follow; allowing for considerations of space, they must be summarized briefly. The Quoniam ends with an energetic fugue on "in gloria Dei Patris" that caused Haydn to be compared favorably to Handel and Durante (!) when the music first appeared in print.[5] Another "learned" but buoyant movement is the Credo, written as a canon at the fourth and at one measure between ST and AB, accompanied by ornate, rapid strings and by trumpets in true *clarino* range. Not a trace of academic stiffness impedes the onward march of this music! The Sanctus, which will be discussed below, and the Qui tollis demonstrate two very different uses of the choir. The latter movement, a bass solo of immense dignity (demanding, at one point, a well-sustained and projected low G), employs the choir in a murmuring, chant-like accompaniment ("miserere nobis") that eventually rises to a climactic *forte*-level entreaty. Haydn also used chant style to set the lengthy concluding portions of the Credo text ("Et in Spiritum Sanctum," etc.).

Although the intent is different, the technique is equally effective there.

In discussing the remarkable unity of feeling achieved by the composer, two more movements must be mentioned. First, there is the Et incarnatus est, a sumptuously beautiful "manger scene" in the Austrian tradition. The music of its opening soprano solo is echoed in the choral section that follows, leading to a striking Crucifixus in which the ominous trumpet calls of the Kyrie return. Since the movement is in G major, this is managed by a shift of tonality to g minor, into which the fanfares are driven as a dominant pedal. The reference is unmistakable and chillingly appropriate. A similar occurrence, of even greater impact, forms the high point of the Benedictus, an uneasy *Allegretto* in d minor which is central to the second "vocal symphony" of the Mass. This climax may well be the emotional center of the entire work. After an exposition and development which combine many structural features of the Kyrie and Gloria—again with soprano solo leading, choir echoing, and solo quartet providing contrast of color—the recapitulation breaks off sharply and, in the words of Robbins Landon,

> the music plunges into B flat for what must be called the boldest and most powerful music in the whole of Haydn. The trumpets hammer out a fanfare on unison d[1] and the chorus also sings its text on the note d, its message interrupted by the "clash of arms and the horrid sublimity" that is war.[6]

II. Performing Editions

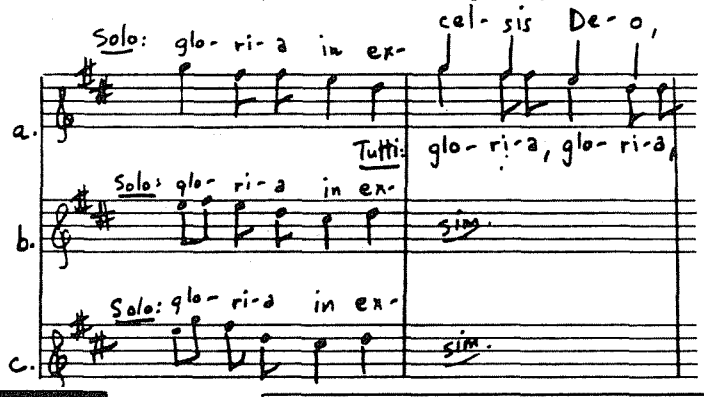
A letter from Haydn dated July 5, 1799, is revealing:

> Dearest Friend!
>
> I sent you the Mass with today's mail coach. The costs for copying it were 11 f. 65 xr. and the carrying charges 1 f. 34 xr. If you should ever have a similar wish in the future, you have only to command your servant,
>
> Joseph Haydn[7]

The request that prompted Haydn's letter was one of many the composer was pleased to fill, provided he knew the musician well enough to feel assured of an adequate performance. What modern conductor wouldn't wish for such simple means of obtaining accurate score and parts! Every edition now on the market presents certain problems; these are detailed briefly below, along with suggestions for performers.

First, there are the original manuscripts to consider. In the case of the *Missa in angustiis,* not only is there an autograph score, but there are several sets of parts that can be traced to Haydn and his assistant, Johann Elssler. In short, plenty of source material exists on which to base a critical edition. Problems have come about for two main reasons: (1) well after the first performance, Haydn made certain changes in the autograph that were not reflected in the sets of parts he sent out, and an additional discrepancy between the autograph and the authentic parts seems to indicate the opposite procedure; (2) many modern performing editions, including one so-called *Urtext,* are based upon none of the authentic materials but, rather, on the 1803 Breitkopf & Härtel

Ex. 5: Gloria, mm. 5-6 (Solo and Choral Sopranos).



edition, which differs from the autograph in many important details.

By far the simpler issue is that of the conflicts between the autograph score and the authentic parts. In two instances in the solo vocal lines, the composer lowered the parts, evidently to accommodate the talents of particular singers. In the Gloria, m. 5 and analogous places, the solo soprano originally had the strong, effective line shown in Ex. 5a. Haydn later erased this and wrote in something interpreted variously as in Ex. 5b (Landon, 1963; see below) or as in Ex. 5c (Thomas, 1965; see below).[8] Likewise the solo tenor line was lowered in the Gloria in mm. 18 ff. and 23 ff. Since it is difficult to consider these patches to be musical improvements and since the composer was content to send out sets of parts that did not contain them, there is no compelling reason for modern conductors to adopt them. The other discrepancy can be similarly handled. In the climactic section of the Benedictus discussed earlier, the autograph score shows the timpani supporting, with single strokes, the string chords that punctuate the music. The parts, however, have timpani doubling the trumpets, a change that the composer might have dictated orally (mm. 122 ff.; the Bärenreiter miniature score shows both versions on p. 112). Conductors should choose the version most in line with their own understanding of style and the demands of acoustics and ensemble balance.

The numerous problems connected with the Breitkopf & Härtel edition of 1803 are more significant, especially since so many modern editions are derived from it. Complications at Breitkopf began when the publishers, who were planning to bring out all of Haydn's Masses, received this directive in a letter from their agent, G. A. Griesinger:

> Haydn told me that in the Mass you wrote about he put the wind instruments in the organ part, because at that time Prince Esterhazy had dismissed the wind players. But he advises you to put everything that is obbligato in the organ part into the wind instruments and to print it that way.[9]

Breitkopf & Härtel duly commissioned a wind arrangement of the organ obbligato. The Leipzig editor responsible for the arrangement may have been August Eberhard Mueller, later the cantor of St. Thomas's Church, but this cannot be firmly established.[10] Breitkopf's wind arrangement appears to be based on parts made earlier by Johann Fuchs, Haydn's colleague and successor at Eisenstadt. The published wind parts do not improve on Fuchs's efforts but, instead, omit his clarinets and horns, which had added some darker, Austrian shades to the orchestral timbres. Breitkopf's editor also rewrote the trumpet parts, which necessitated changes for the timpani as well. Many *clarino* passages were removed or lowered in pitch, and the third trumpet, originally used by Haydn only to double the other trumpets' fanfares in the Kyrie and Benedictus, was given additional material in the low register. Apparently this was intended to keep the player busy, since virtually none of it is audible in performance—or worth hearing![11]

More insidious are the dozens of changes in text placement, articulations, and dynamics that clutter the Breitkopf score and

news briefs . . .

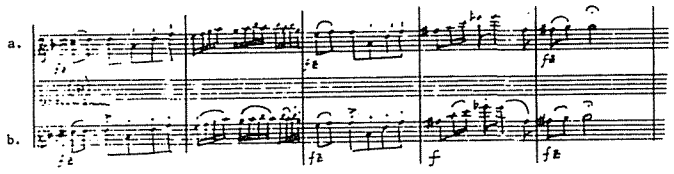
Conductors of Women's Choruses Have you tried . . . ?

The internationally-acclaimed San Francisco Girls Chorus made musical history recently when they presented an historical reconstruction of Henry Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas.* Originally composed in 1689 for presentation by the girls at Josias Priest's boarding school for young gentlewomen in Chelsea, England, *Dido and Aeneas* is Purcell's only opera. It is performed by professional opera companies throughout the world, but it has seldom been sung by a group of youg girls similar in age to those of the original cast.

For the original production, headmaster Josias Priest, a prominent dancing master, assigned the roles to his students, set the dances, and hosted an orchestra that some believe included Purcell himself at the harpsichord. Reconstruction of the music, of dance notations of the late seventeenth century, of period costumes, and of historically authentic stage settings should attract the attention of many directors of choral music, dance, and theatre.

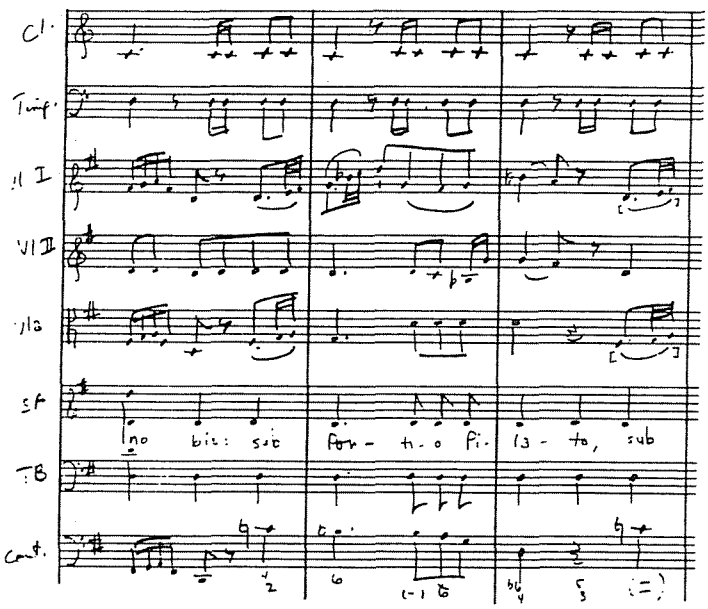
those descended from it. Sometimes the added markings merely render obvious what is implied by the context of the piece, such as *staccatos* for the violins' quarter notes in the Kyrie, mm. 33-35. In Weismann's edition for Peters (see below), an effort has also been made to ensure expressive wind playing by adding markings congruent with those in the string parts (*cf.* Kyrie, mm. 22-27, 43-46, in the Peters and critical editions). For the conductor lacking time or experience in editing for performance, the Peters edition may be useful in this regard. However, along with the other older publications, it contains distortions of the composer's intent. Compare, for example, the first violins' line as found in the autograph score (Ex. 6a) and as it appears in Weismann (Ex. 6b). In the latter, the extra slurs and dots reveal the editor's fussy notion of "Classic style," or perhaps of an easier way to play the passage, but they conceal Haydn's forceful simplicity. Regardless of whether the performer eventually chooses to rework certain articulations, is it not better to begin with what the composer wrote? When every page of an edition is filled with alterations, even that basic step is impossible.

Ex. 6: Kyrie, mm. 23-27 (Vln. I)



There are more crucial transgressions in the Breitkopf-based editions, and a few of these must be discussed in order to show the range of error. The "Crucifixus" passage in the Et incarnatus est, in which the menacing trumpet figures form the Kyrie return, was discussed above (see Ex. 7). Haydn marked this passage *forte,* changing to *piano* only as the texture changes in m. 119; here the ATB soloists continue by emphasizing another portion of the text, "pro nobis." Breitkopf *et al.* inserted a *piano* marking in all parts beginning in m. 114, beat 3. The effect is completely altered; the trumpets' menace is muted, and much of the contrast with the succeeding solo-trio section is lost; worst of all, the expressive thrust of the music underlining "sub Pontio Pilato" has been denied. In-

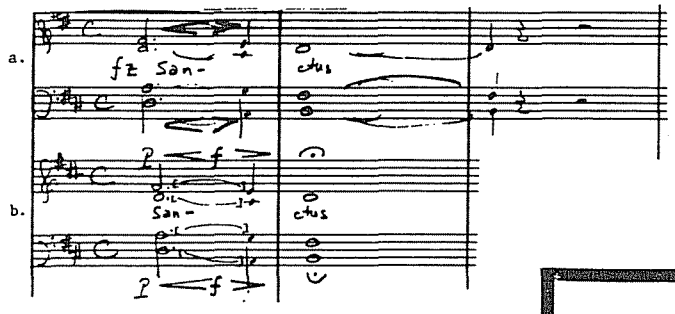
Ex. 7: Et incarnatus est, mm 114-116.



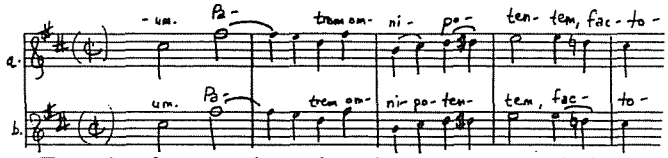
stead of experiencing the oppressive force of Christ's persecutor, the listener is asked by the Breitkopf editor to focus, perhaps, on a gently suffering Savior. Did practical considerations prompt this gutting? The voices are admittedly low in their ranges, making projection more difficult; it might be easier to obtain a decent choral-orchestral balance if the instruments were to play softly. A more creative, honest approach to the passage would lie in asking the choir for a bright, *marcato, forte* sound, while toning down the orchestra as little as necessary, especially the trumpets. Then Haydn's expressive intent would surface, in line with his original dynamic indications.

Another fine example of Haydn's choral genius in the *Missa in angustiis,* blunted by the Breitkopf edition, is the opening of the Sanctus (Ex. 8a, repeated in mm. 3-4 at the IV-V^7/ii-ii level). The crescendo in choir and strings is capped by a surprising single clap of sound from tumpets, timpani, and organ on the third quarter-note pulse, communicating the text's mystery in a manner both subtle and shocking. In the 1803 publication, a *forzando* was added at the beginning of mm. 1 and 3 (Ex. 8b). Fans of modern movie "thrillers" may find this an attractive special effect; to others it will seem superfluous at best. Regrettably, it appears in every modern edition save the two recent critical offerings.

Ex. 8: Sanctus, mm 1-3 (Choir and Strings).

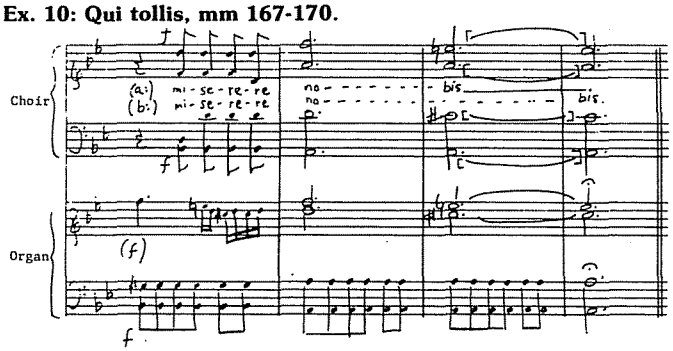


Ex. 9: Credo, mm 11-15 (Sopranos).



Two brief examples of awkward text underlay in the Breitkopf edition must conclude this part of the discussion. Consider Ex. 9, in which 9a shows mm. 11-15 of the Credo as Haydn wrote it, and 9b shows the same passage as first published. The former honors both the music's basic pulse and the Latin accents: the latter does neither. And finally Ex. 10 is given, showing the last measures of the Qui tollis. Not only is 10b not Haydn, but it also makes good ensemble diction difficult by fighting the natural cadential rhythm of the piece. Unfortunately, these are not isolated instances of errors or ill-considered interpretations of the text setting.

Ex. 10: Qui tollis, mm 167-170.



Listed below are the performing editions available today:

1. Breitkopf & Härtel, 1803. A. E. Mueller (7), ed. Strings, 3 trumpets, timpani, organ continuo. Wind parts 1/2/0/2 based on Fuchs. No organ obbligato; altered brass and timpani parts; heavily edited string parts; numerous errors and alterations throughout. Modern (but unrevised) editions available from B. & H., Wiesbaden. 0—CHB—714 (vocal parts) and B. & H., Leipzig (rental).

2. Novello, n.d. Based on (1) above. 07.0161.00 (vocal score); performance material on rental.
3. G. Schrimer, n.d. Based on (1) above. Ed. 309 (vocal score); performance material on rental.
4. C. F. Peters, 1931. Wilhelm Weismann, ed. Based on (1) above. 4372 (score); 4351 (vocal score); performance material for sale.
5. Kalmus, n.d. Reprint of (4), based on (1) above. L390 (score); 6241 (vocal score); performance material for sale.
6. Eulenberg/Schott, 1963. H. C. Robbins Landon, ed. Strings, 3 trumpets, timpani, organ obbligato. No wind parts. Based on autograph score and authentic parts. Eulenberg 995 (miniature score); Schott 10808 (vocal score); Schott performance material on rental.
7. Henle/Bärenreiter, 1965. Guenter Thomas, ed. Strings, 3 trumpets, timpani, organ obbligato. Wind parts by Fuchs 1/2/2/1, included as option. Based on autograph score and authentic parts. G. Henle *Joseph Haydn Werke* Ser. XXIII, Vol. 3 (score); Bärenreiter TP 98 (miniature score); BA 4660a (vocal score); BA 4660 (performance material).

It should be obvious at this point that anyone wishing to present the *Nelsonmesse* in a way that honors Haydn's intentions will rely on either the Landon or Thomas editions. The other publications do have one useful feature—they preserve the original solo vocal parts, minus the composer's later changes in the autograph. Both Landon and Thomas felt constrained to publish the score in its final version.

Thomas also includes Johann Fuchs's wind parts, which might be reckoned more authentic than those of Breitkopf *et al.*, since their proximity to Haydn is better established. However, even these parts, especially the horns, present a few awkward moments in performance and may require modification. Those who need to replace the organ obbligato with winds will find Thomas useful in spite of this minor problem.

Up to this point little mention has been made of the organ part. Its substitution for the customary woodwinds and horns was a hardship that Haydn's genius transformed into an essential ingredient of the piece. Many instances can be cited of the organ's inimitable contribution, from the unyielding snarl of its sustained chords in the opening bars of the Kyrie to its pithy obbligato phrases in the Qui tollis. It may be significant that Haydn did not choose to rewrite this part for winds in his own late performances of the Mass, when wind players were again available. On the other hand, Johann Fuchs's parts may have served adequately for just such a purpose.

Conductors desiring a successful performance of the *Nelsonmesse* will need to secure professionally skilled soprano and bass soloists (the alto and tenor can be recruited, in a pinch, from the choir) and a small but expert body of instrumentalists. The Esterhazy orchestra never numbered more than twenty to twenty-five players, and the choirs available to Haydn were correspondingly chamber-sized.[12] A performance with larger forces can also be effective, but only if clarity, balance, and precision are strictly maintained. Haydn's own enthusiasm for large-scale renditions is well documented; he was deeply impressed by the massive Handel concerts he witnessed at Westminster Abbey.[13] One must balance this view by remembering that in Austria, Haydn was not composing for such events and was forcibly reminded of his own limited circumstances in 1798 by Prince Nikolaus's dismissal of the wind players in the court band.

Whether festival-sized or intimate, a performance today of the *Missa in angustiis* can hardly fail to have an impact on the audience. How fortunate we are, living in an era of unlimited "hype" and instant superstars lacking the most basic skills, to have works like this, undertaken in devotion and utter humility, which move and excite us through their maker's genuine mastery of the craft. How important it is that we continue to bring such works to the public through performances that will radiate the integrity and depth of feeling that the composer brought to his task so many years ago.

Notes

[1]H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, IV (London, 1977), 327. On the basis of an entry in the diary of J. C. Rosenbaum, Landon places the performance at the larger Stadtpfarrkirch on September 23, 1798, not at the Bergkirch, which was the site of the performance of the other late Masses.

[2]*Ibid.*, 325-328. Herein are descriptions of Haydn's activities at this time and Admiral Nelson's exploits in Egypt, with which this Mass has long been associated.

[3]Martin Chusid, "Some observations on liturgy, text and structure in Haydn's late masses," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Music*, H. C. Robbins Landon and Roger E. Chapman, eds. (New York and London, 1970), 132.

[4]See, for examples, the twelve-bar introduction to the *Missa Sancti Bernardi* of 1796, the solemn *Largo* which begins the *Missa in tempore belli*, also 1796, or virtually any first movement of the "London" symphonies.

[5]J. F. Rochlitz, Review of Masses "No. 2 and 3," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, VI (Oct. 5, 1803), 8-10. Trans. in Landon, *op. cit.*, 443-444.

[6]Landon, 442.

[7]H. C. Robbins Landon, ed., *The Collected Correspondence and London Notebooks of Joseph Haydn* (London, 1959), 157. See also the letter of June 14, 1802 (205), which colors the subject a bit differently.

[8]Landon's interpretation squares best with the presumption that a lower tessitura was the primary consideration for the changes. Thomas's version follows the harmony more closely and, perhaps, provides a slightly more interesting melody.

[9]Edward Olleson, "Georg August Griesinger's Correspondence with Breitkopf and Härtel," *Haydn Yearbook*, III (1965), 40.

[10]Hermann von Hase, *Joseph Haydn und Breitkopf & Härtel* (Leipzig, 1909), 37. Carl Maria Brand, *Die Messen von Joseph Haydn* (Wuerzburg, 1941), 311ff.

[11]Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, IV, 430.

[12]Jens Peter Larsen, "Haydn, (Franz) Joseph," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 20 vols. (London, 1980), VIII, 333. See C. F. Pohl, Joseph Haydn*, III (Leipzig, 1927), 104ff. for a description of the very small orchestra gathered for the church music at Eisenstadt in the late 1790s.

[13]*Ibid.*, 343. See also Landon, 251, quoting the Swedish diplomat Frederik Samuel Silverstolpe.