

Musical Treasure Chest #56

Sitting above the fireplace of my living room at Ma'alwyck is a lovely copy of the 1791 painting of Franz Josef Haydn by English artist Thomas Hardy. Haydn, looks distinguished, but also very approachable and friendly. In his hands is a music score. This painting dates from Haydn's first visit to England, a very successful visit, where Haydn was treated like royalty. His London concerts were immensely popular, and he was the guest of the wealthiest and most elite of English society. I adore this painting, and Haydn's warm gaze presides over many a practice session, rehearsal and lesson.

Haydn has always occupied a very special place in my musical soul, which responds not only to his music but to the man as well. Haydn was a wonderful man, and his moniker "Papa" Haydn, while perhaps a bit simplistic, does rather capture the spirit of the composer. Haydn came from peasant stock and while immensely gifted, his talents did not present in a brilliant Mozart prodigal child way, but in a long simmering pot of skill, unceasing hard work, and incredible persistence. His personality, according to his colleagues and friends, was kind, a bit self-effacing, generous and loyal. From his humble beginnings he toiled to establish himself a successful musician, and this he did probably beyond his wildest dreams. By the time he visited London he was one of the most respected and popular musicians in Europe.

There are so many pieces I would love to share with you and some of my favorite Haydn works I already have, such as his op 33 string quartets and the f minor Andante and variations for piano. Through my work as a player for choral society orchestras, I have gotten to know well many of his masses and the oratorio *The Creation*, all masterpieces. Haydn's profound Christian faith made the marriage of the Catholic texts and stories with his music pieces of profound inspiration. The only area of Haydn's output that I consider not quite on the level of the rest of music is his operatic attempts. Somehow the genuine fervor with which he responded to the sacred texts did not carry over quite into his operas, there is a certain banality that I find no where else in his music. Loving opera as I do, I was

always a trifle disappointed that Haydn's operas did not quite live up to my expectations.

In 1984, while I was still working at WMHT-FM, I had a chance to attend a recital given at Proctor's Theater by Jessye Norman. The program was really outstanding, with lots of varied repertory, some familiar and some not. For me the highlight of the evening was a performance of a **Haydn cantata titled *Arianna a Naxos***. It was stunning and captivating and not like any of the other secular vocal music of Haydn I had heard. I had to work my overnight air shift after the concert, and I went into the record library and grabbed a few recordings of the work to listen to them with different singers. I discovered that there was not only the piano and voice version that maestra Norman had performed, but also one for voice and orchestra.

So I share with you in the MTC this amazing cantata, which Haydn probably wrote in the late 1780s. It wasn't published until 1790 in Vienna, and then a London edition came out in 1791 while Haydn was visiting and in conjunction with a performance of the cantata. We have the following description of the concert (London, February 1791 with the soprano castrato Gasparo Pacchierotti and Haydn accompanying on the harpsichord) and reaction to *Arianna*.

"The Musical World is at this moment enraptured with a Composition which Haydn has brought forth, and which has produced effects bordering on all that Poets used to seign of ancient lyre. Nothing is talked of—nothing sought after but Haydn's Cantata—or, as it is called in the Italian School—his Scena... It abounds with such a variety of dramatic modulations—and is so exquisitely captivating in its larmoyant passages, that it touched and dissolved the audience. They speak of it with rapturous recollection, and Haydn's Cantata will accordingly be the musical *desideratum* for the winter."

I think you will also be enraptured by this charming piece. The orchestral version, though period, is apparently not a setting by Haydn but is rather by Sigismond Neukomm. I have given you both the orchestral version and then the original voice/keyboard one.

Recording 1 Arleen Auger, Handel and Haydn Christopher Hogwood

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrtrZVoCAJk>

Jessye Norman and Geoffrey Parsons (1987)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7k4rnly2Ec>