

Symphony No. 98 in B-flat major, Hob. I:98

Joseph Haydn

Joseph Haydn's tenure of nearly three decades heading the music staff of the Esterházy Court ended shortly after the death of Prince Nikolaus Esterházy on September 28, 1790. His successor did not care for music, so he promptly fired the court orchestra and opera company, and granted Europe's most admired composer a pension of 1,000 florins a year. Although he kept Haydn on staff as his official music director, he made it clear that no particular duties — or even attendance — would be required.

For the first time in decades Haydn was free to explore. He turned down an immediate job offer from another prince and briefly considered the idea of accepting a position with the King of Naples. On learning of the changes at the Esterházy court, the German-born violinist Johann Peter Salomon, then working as a concert impresario in England, arrived unannounced, presumably introducing himself with words along the lines of, "I am Salomon of London and I have come to fetch you. Tomorrow we will arrange an *accord*."

An *accord* was reached. Following his first voyage aboard a ship, Haydn arrived in London on January 1, 1791. "My arrival caused a great sensation throughout the whole city," he wrote to a friend, "and I went the rounds of all the newspapers for three successive days. Everybody wants to know me." After the initial flurry, he embarked on a schedule of music-making and social appearances that included dinners with the royal family and acceptance of an honorary doctorate from Oxford University. Haydn returned home in the summer of 1792, having enjoyed his time in England so much that he happily accepted a second invitation to go back in 1794.

For each of these two residencies in England, Haydn wrote a group of six symphonies

(his Nos. 93 through 104), which ever since have been dubbed the *London* or *Salomon* Symphonies. The works exhibit enormous diversity, but the set as a whole, grander in scope and orchestration than anything he had previously written, represents the apex of his symphonic achievement.

Symphony No. 98 was the final entry from Haydn's first London visit. Though marginally less famous than the nicknamed *London* symphonies (such as the *Surprise*, *Military*, *Clock*, or *Drum Roll*), it takes a back seat to none. Despite its major key, the work is touched by a degree of poignancy. One hears it right at the opening, with the exploration of a theme built from the B-flat-minor triad — a key so obscure that 18th-century audiences rarely encountered it apart from passages of fleeting modulations. The *Allegro* that emerges from that introduction turns out to be based on the major-key equivalent of the same theme, an uncommon example of unifying sections that normally stood

IN SHORT

Born: almost certainly March 31, 1732 — he was baptized on April 1 — in Rohrau, Lower Austria

Died: May 31, 1809, in Vienna, Austria

Work composed: 1792

World premiere: March 2, 1792, at the Hanover-Square Concert Rooms in London, with the composer leading from the keyboard

New York Philharmonic premiere: December 31, 1931, Hans Lange, conductor

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: October 28, 2000, Colin Davis, conductor

Estimated duration: ca. 29 minutes

discretely apart at that time. At the work's premiere, the first movement was repeated, as was the *Finale* — or, as Haydn wrote in his notebook, exercising his newly acquired English, “The new Symphony in B-flat was given, and the first and last Allegros encort.”

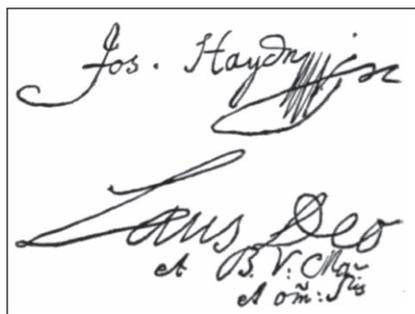
The profoundly moving *Adagio cantabile* has evoked much comment in that it includes references to the slow movement of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony. This is no coincidence. Haydn began composing this symphony only a few weeks after learning of Mozart's passing. “For some time I was beside myself about his death,” he wrote in January 1792 to Michael Puchberg, one of his and Mozart's friends back in Vienna, “and could not believe that Providence would so soon claim the life of such an indispensable man.”

Deep thoughts are banished from what remains of the symphony: a vigorous *Minuet* with a charming, pastoral *Trio*, and a frisky *Finale*. Haydn gives free rein to his beloved musical jokes in this conclusion — unexpected silences (including one, at the end of the exposition, into which many a premature applauder has stumbled), stuttering repetitions, unpredictable turns of direction and character, momentary solo incursions from the concertmaster (Salomon, at the premiere), and more opportunities to end than one would expect a composer could ignore and get away with.

Instrumentation: flute, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, fortepiano, and strings.

A Musical Signature

In the original score of the *Finale* of Haydn's Symphony No. 98, an 11-measure section featuring the keyboard instrument, is marked “Haydn solo.” One would be quite correct to consider this moment, located practically at the end of the piece, as the aural equivalent of a painter's signature in the corner of a canvas. The English composer Samuel Wesley, who attended the premiere, later reported in his memoirs about Haydn's role in the concert:



His Performance on the Piano Forte, although not such as to stamp him a first rate artist upon that Instrument, was indisputably neat and distinct. In the *Finale* of one of his Symphonies is a Passage of attractive Brilliancy, which he has given to the Piano Forte, and which the Writer of this Memoir remembers him to have executed with the utmost Accuracy and Precision.

Haydn's actual signature, attached to the end of one of his manuscripts