

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
Symphony No. 88 in G major

Haydn is a composer generally categorized as belonging to the 'Classical' era, because it is convenient to have a comparison point that links his music to that of his exact contemporaries Mozart and Beethoven. However, Haydn gets short shrift in the dinner party conversations that compare him to Mozart and Beethoven and don't go any further. Similarly, the old Victorian penchant for comparing Bach to Handel is equally unqualified unless one is prepared to go deeper. Haydn was a genius in his own way. There was a refined palette from which Mozart derives his style, and a dramatic force coupled with 'whimsy' from which Beethoven derives his. Haydn lived long for his time. His life 1732 to 1809 completely encompassed Mozart's life and was long enough to connect the Baroque period to Early Romanticism. We must therefore concede that there would naturally be different styles and periods in his many works. His prolific 104 symphonies as they are numbered can chart this style quite clearly.

His early period is obvious, but uncannily full of personal style. The symphonies numbered in the 40's represent a concurrence with the great German expressionism of '*sturm und drang*', forceful experimentation, an attempt to discover emotion and feeling. This artistic period, in thought, philosophy, writing and poetry is well documented and for Haydn manifested itself in the discovery of remoter keys. Symphonies had not explored F# major or minor as their main keys. Thanks to Haydn, that possibility was now a part of the musical language. There is also a rebalance which then delivers a marvelous period marked by symphonies from No. 68 to No. 92 of which No. 88 is a part. There is great craftsmanship, perhaps as great as Mozart. There is also a necessary relaxation in style since Haydn has nothing more to prove, already fêted in high society and revered by musicians and audiences alike. Symphony No. 92 the famous 'Oxford' Symphony was written for the occasion of his honorary doctorate at the university. Symphonies 93-104 are the great 'London' symphonies in which the collaboration with the great violinist, conductor and impresario Johann Peter Saloman made Haydn as familiar in London as he had been in Vienna.

In many ways Haydn was the first international superstar creating a buzz in Vienna, Paris and London. Haydn's personal position with the public represents the first generation of such musical superstars. Paganini was a contemporary and Liszt the inevitable culmination. This adulation takes on another dimension when one considers the private lessons Haydn gave to both Mozart and Beethoven – who whether they benefitted directly or not, knelt at his feet in his own lifetime. Then there is the real Haydn, a mischievous prankster with a glint in his eye that reminds us all to be human. Symphony No. 88 is the embodiment of this style, and more personally for me, was the first symphony I ever conducted in concert.