

Franz Joseph Haydn biography

(adapted and edited from Encyclopedia Britannica by S.L.)

Haydn ((born March 31, 1732, Rohrau, [Austria](#)—died May 31, 1809, [Vienna](#)), was an Austrian composer and among the most important figures in the development of the Classical style in [music](#) during the 18th century. He helped establish the forms and styles for the string [quartet](#) and the [symphony](#).

EARLY YEARS: His father was a wheelwright, his mother, before her marriage, a cook for the lords of the village. Haydn early revealed unusual musical gifts, and a cousin who was a school principal and choirmaster in the nearby city of Hainburg offered to take him into his home and train him. Haydn, not yet six years old, left home, never to return to the parental cottage except for rare brief visits. The young Haydn sang in the church choir, learned to play various instruments, and obtained a good basic knowledge of music. But his life changed decisively when he was eight years old. The musical director of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna had observed the boy on a visit to Hainburg and invited him to serve as chorister at the Austrian capital's most important church. Haydn's parents accepted the offer, and thus in 1740 Haydn moved to Vienna. He stayed at the choir school for nine years, acquiring an enormous practical knowledge of music by constant performances but, to his disappointment, receiving little instruction in music theory. He had to work hard to fulfill his obligations as a chorister, and when his voice changed, he was expelled from both the cathedral choir and the choir school.

With no money and few possessions, Haydn at 17 found refuge for a while in the garret of a fellow musician and supported himself "miserably" with odd musical jobs. He meanwhile undertook an arduous course of self-instruction through the study of musical works—notably those of [Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach](#)—and of leading manuals of musical theory. A fortunate chance brought him to the attention of the Italian composer and singing teacher [Nicola Porpora](#), who accepted him as accompanist for voice lessons and corrected Haydn's compositions. He was eventually introduced to the music-loving Austrian nobleman Karl Joseph von Fürnberg, in whose home he played [chamber music](#). For the instrumentalists there he wrote his first string quartets. Through the recommendation of Fürnberg, in 1758 Haydn was engaged as musical director and chamber composer for the Bohemian count Ferdinand Maximilian von Morzin. Haydn was put in charge of an [orchestra](#) of about 16 musicians, and for this ensemble he wrote his first symphony as well as numerous divertimenti for wind band or for wind instruments and strings. These early musical compositions were still conventional in character, yet a certain freshness of melodic invention and sparkle marked them as the work of a future master.

ESTERHÁZY PATRONAGE : Haydn was invited to enter the service of Prince Pál Antal [Esterházy](#). His employment by the Esterházy family proved decisive for his career, and he remained in their service until his death.

The Esterházys were one of the wealthiest and most-influential families of the Austrian empire and boasted a distinguished record of supporting music. Prince Pál Antal had a well-appointed orchestra performing regularly in his castle at [Eisenstadt](#), a small town some 30 miles from Vienna. Because his aged music director was ailing, the prince appointed the relatively unknown Haydn to be assistant conductor in 1761. While the music director oversaw [church music](#), Haydn conducted the orchestra and coached the singers in almost daily rehearsals, composed most of the music required, and served as chief of the musical personnel.

From his first symphonies written for the Esterházy, Haydn amply displayed his characteristic good humour and wit, as well as the dependable freshness of his musical ideas, although full maturity would come much later. In his youth and early career, Haydn experimented with the prevailing stylistic trends. He was familiar with the pompous and complex idiom of the preceding Baroque period; he then adopted the light, gay, and elegant musical style that was popular at the time in Austria; and he was subsequently influenced by the strongly emotional and expressive style preferred by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and other north German composers. He eventually achieved his own distinctive musical identity by using some elements from all three of these styles simultaneously.

In 1766 Haydn became musical director at the Esterházy court. He raised the quality and increased the size of the prince's musical ensembles by appointing many choice instrumentalists and singers. His ambitious plans were supported by Prince Miklós, who, on the death of his brother in 1762, had become head of the Esterházy family. He was able to appreciate Haydn's musical contributions and created an atmosphere conducive to the development and maturing of Haydn's art. In addition to composing operas for the court, Haydn composed symphonies, string quartets, and other chamber music. The prince was a passionate performer on the [baryton](#), and Haydn provided for his patron more than 150 compositions featuring this now-obsolete cello-like instrument.

During the 1760s Haydn began to solidify and deepen his style and his fame began to spread throughout Europe. His new technique of working with small motifs to tighten the fabric of the [sonata form](#) turned the first movement of the sonata, quartet, and symphony into a little musical drama. In the period from 1768 to 1774, his music took on a deeper hue; the intellectualization that had steadily increased throughout the 1760s at last found its natural outlet in the mid-1780s. Aristocratic patrons in south Germany, Italy, and the Austrian empire assiduously collected his music, and their libraries would eventually become important sources for copies of his work. The music written then, from the *Stabat Mater* (1767) to the large-scale *Missa Sancti Nicolai* (1772), would be sufficient to place him among the chief composers of the era. The many operas he wrote during these years did much to enhance his own reputation and that of the Esterházy court. Among his other important works from this period are the string quartets of Opus 20, the Piano Sonata in C Minor, and the symphonies in minor keys, especially the so-called *Trauersymphonie* in E Minor, No. 44 ("Mourning Symphony," so named because its slow movement, which was a particular favourite of the composer, was performed at a memorial service for Haydn) and the "Farewell" Symphony, No. 45.

The following decade and a half did even more to enhance Haydn's fame. His operatic output continued strong until 1785, notwithstanding the destruction of the Esterházy opera house by fire in 1779. Increasingly, however, his audience lay outside his employer's court. In 1775 he composed his first large-scale oratorio, *Il ritorno di Tobia*, for the Musicians' Society in Vienna; for unknown reasons, relations between Haydn and the Viennese musicians cooled considerably a few years later. By the early 1780s, though, things seemed much improved, and the Viennese firm Artaria published his six Opus 33 quartets. These important works quickly set a new standard for the genre, putting many of his competitors in this increasingly lucrative market out of business. In mid-decade as well came a

commission from Paris to compose a set of symphonies, and Haydn's resulting "Paris" symphonies are a landmark of the genre. It was also about this time that he received the commission to compose the Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross; for the incorrigibly cheerful Haydn, writing seven successive dour movements was a particularly difficult undertaking, but the effort resulted in one of his most-admired works. Haydn served Prince Miklós for nearly 30 years. He frequently visited Vienna in the prince's retinue, and on these visits a close friendship developed between himself and [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart](#). The two composers felt inspired by each other's work. Mozart declared that he had learned from Haydn how to write quartets and dedicated a superb set of six such works to his "beloved friend." Haydn's music, too, shows the impact of his young friend. The mature composer was by no means set in his ways; he was flexible and receptive to new ideas.

Haydn's professional success was not matched in his personal life. His marriage to Maria Anna Keller in 1760 produced neither a pleasant, peaceful home nor any children. Haydn's wife did not understand music and showed no interest in her husband's work. Her disdain went to the extremes of using his manuscripts for pastry pan linings or curl papers. Haydn was not insensitive to the attractions of other women, and for years he carried on a love affair with Luigia Polzelli, a young Italian mezzo-soprano in the prince's service.

ENGLISH PERIOD When Prince Miklós died in 1790, he was succeeded by his son, Prince Antal, who did not care for music and dismissed most of the court musicians. Haydn was retained, however, and continued to receive his salary. No duties were required of him, enabling Haydn to do whatever he pleased. After such a long time at the Esterházy court, the composer was eager to try a different way of life. At this point a violinist and concert manager, Johann Peter Salomon, arrived from England and commissioned from Haydn 6 new symphonies and 20 smaller compositions to be conducted by the composer himself in a series of orchestral concerts in London sponsored by Salomon. Haydn gladly accepted this offer, and the two men set off for London in December 1790.

On New Year's Day 1791, Haydn arrived in England, and the following 18 months proved extremely rewarding. The many novel impressions, the meeting with eminent musicians, and the admiration bestowed on him had a powerful impact on his creative work. He was feted, lionized, and treated as a genius; [Charles Burney](#) published a poem in his honour. The 12 symphonies he wrote on his first and second visits to London represent the climax of his orchestral output. Their virtuosity of instrumentation, masterly treatment of musical forms, and freely flowing melodic inspiration—not to mention their deft wit—endeared the works to British audiences. Their popularity is reflected in the various nicknames bestowed on them—e.g., The Surprise (No. 94), Military (No. 100), The Clock (No. 101), and Drumroll (No. 103). The London visits injected a new force in Haydn's music, but, side by side with a greatly increased nervous tension, his works began to take on an emotional depth often characteristic of the music of an aging composer.

In June 1792 Haydn left London for Germany. On his journey he stopped at [Bonn](#), where the 22-year-old [Ludwig van Beethoven](#) was introduced to him, and it was arranged that the tempestuous young composer should move to Vienna to receive Haydn's instruction. In a letter of 1793 to Beethoven's patron, the elector of Cologne, Haydn stated that "Beethoven will one day be considered one of Europe's greatest composers, and I shall be proud to be called his teacher."

Haydn's curiously cool reception on his return to Vienna in 1792 may have strengthened his decision to make a second journey to England in January 1794. The principal compositions of his second visit to

London were the second set of London (or Salomon) symphonies (Nos. 99–104) and the six Apponyi quartets (Nos. 54–59). While in London, Haydn reached even greater heights of inspiration, particularly in the last three symphonies he wrote (Nos. 102–104), of which the Symphony No. 102 in B-flat Major is one of the greatest of all symphonies. The British public no longer regarded him as a sensation but as an old and well-loved friend. King [George III](#) earnestly invited him to stay in England, but Haydn—for reasons that have never been made clear—preferred to return to his native Austria to serve the new head of the Esterházy family, Prince Miklós II.

THE LATE ESTERHÁZY AND VIENNESE PERIOD

While in London in 1791, Haydn had been deeply moved by the performance of [George Frideric Handel's](#) masterly [oratorios](#). After settling in Vienna and resuming his duties for Prince Esterházy, he started work on the oratorio [The Creation](#), the text of which had been translated into German by Baron Gottfried van Swieten. The work was planned and executed to enable performances in either German or English; it is believed to be the first musical work published with text underlay in two languages. The libretto was based on the epic poem [Paradise Lost](#) by [John Milton](#) and on the Genesis book of the Bible. Composing the oratorio proved a truly congenial task, and the years devoted to it were among the happiest in Haydn's life. The Creation was first publicly performed in 1798 and earned enormous popularity subsequently. Haydn was thus encouraged to produce another [oratorio](#), which absorbed him until 1801. An extended poem, [The Seasons](#), by [James Thomson](#), was chosen as the basis for the (much shorter) libretto, again adapted and translated by van Swieten so as to enable performance in either German or English. The libretto allowed Haydn to compose delightful musical analogues of events in nature, and as a result the oratorio achieved much success, both at the Austrian court and in public performances.

Haydn's late creative output included six [masses](#) written for his patron Miklós II. Those are among the most-significant masses of the 18th century, pillars of symphonic strength and grandeur, ranging from the brightness of the Missa in tempore belli (1796) to the terse drama of the Nelson Mass in D minor (1798). Here the symphonic principles brought to perfection in the London symphonies are brilliantly combined with older contrapuntal forms. Solo voices are blended with vocal quartet and choir, and there is a constant juxtaposition of the available forces. He also continued to compose magnificent string quartets, notably the six Erdödy quartets known as Opus 76. In 1797 Haydn gave to the Austrian nation the stirring [song](#) “Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser” (“God Save Emperor Francis”). The song was so beloved that Haydn decided to use it as a theme for variations in one of his finest string quartets, the [Emperor Quartet](#) (Opus 76, No. 3). In these works he brought the art of the quartet to a new pinnacle that was not to be equaled until the quartets of Beethoven in his maturity.

“The Seasons broke my back,” Haydn is reported to have said; and indeed, apart from the last two masses of 1801 and 1802, he undertook no more large-scale works. During the last years of his life, he

was apparently incapable of further work. In 1809 Napoleon's forces besieged Vienna and in May entered the city. Haydn refused to leave his house and take refuge in the inner city. Napoleon placed a guard of honour outside Haydn's house, and the enfeebled composer was much touched by the visit of a French hussars' officer who sang an aria from The Creation. On May 31 Haydn died peacefully, and he was buried two days later.

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Haydn was a true representative of the [Enlightenment](#). His optimistic approach to life; his striving for a balance between intellect and emotion; his sense of moderation, leading to the avoidance of strongly discordant moods; all these found superb expression in his music and were appreciated by his contemporaries. Music lovers also found irresistible the nobility and deceptive simplicity of his idiom, sparked by delightful outbreaks of humour. The gaiety and naturalness of Haydn's music held less appeal to the Romantic era of the 19th century, however, when dark, complex moods and ambivalent emotions were being explored in music; although many of his symphonies and quartets were performed with some frequency well past 1850, by the end of the century they had all but slipped from the repertory. But in the 20th century there was a reevaluation of Haydn's work, and his outstanding thematic elaborations, his dependably engaging wit, the originality of his [modulations](#), and the artistry and superb craftsmanship of his [orchestration](#) were again appreciated in full measure.