

PART I

Haydn in context

1 Haydn's career and the idea of the multiple audience

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For whom did Haydn write? This simple question, easily enough answered by such obvious recipients as his patrons or the public or particular performers, masks a series of more complex questions about Haydn's career as well as about his muse. How did he balance his own desires with those of his patrons and public? How did he respond to the abilities of the performers, whether soloists, orchestral musicians, or students, for whom he composed? How did he seek to communicate with different audiences, and were his communicative strategies and modes of persuasion always successful? While these questions might be asked of any composer, especially those in the later eighteenth century who had to adapt to an evolving menu of career opportunities, they have special pertinence for Haydn, whose career and works reveal, as well as revel in, the idea of the multiple audience that emerged in this period. This essay will explore the ways in which the shape of Haydn's career, his sometimes inexplicably defensive tone in letters and memoirs, and his musical self-assessments stem from this new source of inspiration. It is perhaps not a coincidence that Haydn, unlike C. P. E. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, left no record of disparaging remarks about the public.

Audiences

Let us consider the various shades of meaning associated with the term "audience." Conventionally understood are, in order from local to global, the people who attend a performance; a "readership," in the sense of a book finding its audience; or a group of adherents, a broad following. These virtual dictionary definitions ought to be broadened, given the developing social context, to include those for whom the composer writes: the musicians who will play the music, the patrons and employers who will commission and support it, the publishers who must find it saleable, and the critics who respond publicly and in print. We cannot consider patron, performer, and publisher as transparent windows or mere facilitators between the composer and the wider audience because they materially affected the creation of the works and the works themselves. When Haydn wrote to Artaria in 1789 that

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he was sending a piano trio that he had “made quite new and, according to your taste, with variations,” he may or may not have meant “because that’s what people want to play and hear” but certainly Artaria thought so.¹ In the same letter, Haydn sought to interest him in a new Capriccio for piano a year after Artaria’s publication of his much older Capriccio in G major (Hob. XVII: 1): “In a most playful hour I composed a quite new Capriccio for the piano, which on account of its taste, singularity, and special elaboration is sure to meet with approval from connoisseurs and non-connoisseurs alike.”² Haydn’s clear-eyed assessment of the appeal of this work, the Fantasia in C (Hob. XVII: 4), reflects the widespread concern on the part of composers and publishers for reaching both sides of the celebrated “binaries” of eighteenth-century cultural forms and musical life—connoisseurs and amateurs, virtuosos and dilettantes—while at the same time considering an entirely different division of his audience, the “present” audience—the known quantity of the local court or city—and the “imagined” audience of a larger musical public that he needed publishers to reach. While it is always difficult to determine what is a sales ploy and what a genuine aesthetic stance, Haydn’s interest in the means of reaching the audience remained very high throughout his life.

In 1796, Johann Ritter von Schönfeld’s remarkable *Yearbook of Music in Vienna and Prague* gave an invaluable series of listings of performers, composers, patrons, music-lovers, and a host of other categories of people creating musical life toward the end of the eighteenth century.³ One of the surprising features for the modern reader is that the terms “connoisseurs” and “amateurs” (*Kenner und Liebhaber*) do not make an appearance as a pair.⁴ Instead, we read lists, in some cases copiously annotated, of patrons, called “special friends, protectors, and connoisseurs” (*Kenner*); performers and composers, called “virtuosos and amateurs” (*dilettantes*); sponsors of amateur concerts; music-lovers (*Liebhaber*) with big manuscript collections; performers in the imperial Kapelle, as well as performers in courtly house-orchestras, wind-bands, and the national and suburban theaters; composers; conductors who lead from the violin; publishers and music-sellers; and instrument- and organ-makers. It is also surprising to note how infrequently composers used the terms “Liebhaber” and “Dilettante” for “amateur” or “music-lover” in their understanding of the musical public, outside of C. P. E. Bach’s big collections of piano music for “Kenner und Liebhaber” published between 1779 and 1785. Mozart famously wrote of “connoisseurs and non-connoisseurs”; his father described the “musical and unmusical public,” in which there are “a hundred ignoramuses to every ten true connoisseurs”; J. K. F. Triest used the terms “connoisseurs and half-connoisseurs.”⁵ And connoisseurs themselves ranged from patrons like Baron van Swieten to other composers; Haydn’s biographer Griesinger notes

that Haydn as a young man was heard as an accompanist “at Prince von Hildburghausen’s [the patron of Dittersdorf], in the presence of Gluck, Wagenseil, and other renowned masters, and the applause of such connoisseurs served as a special encouragement to him.”⁶ Thus, the term “connoisseur” had several meanings – socially powerful patron, composer, judge – rather than merely designating someone who had studied or who had developed taste.

In a revealing snapshot, when Haydn offered his Op. 33 string quartets by subscription to selected “gentlemen amateurs, connoisseurs, and patrons of music,” as he put it to Lavater in Switzerland, he differentiated this method from that of “dedicating his works directly to the public,” by which he meant publishing them with Artaria, advice he received from van Swieten.⁷ This terminology echoes that of Kirnberger and Sulzer in the article on chamber music in Sulzer’s *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*: “Because chamber music is for connoisseurs and amateurs, a piece can be more learned and more artfully composed than if it were intended for public use, where everything must be simpler and more cantabile so that everyone may grasp it.”⁸ The “public” comprised many different audiences, and “connoisseurs and amateurs” by no means covered all the alternatives.

Haydn seems to have been acutely sensitive to the principal rhetorical claim of a piece of music: that it must communicate persuasively with an audience through the medium of performance. In eighteenth-century terms, filtered through Haydn’s own words, this claim might be rendered: that it instruct, please, and move the passions in the manner appropriate to occasion and venue so that what originated in his own spirit and sensibility would remain in the listener’s heart.⁹ The role and sound of the performers loomed very large to him, and one must take him at his word when he seemed to describe the best part of his job with Esterházy as the ability to try out things, to see “what would make an impression.”¹⁰ One senses that he wrote performers’ music as well as listeners’ music, from the witty trade-offs in the first string quartet (Op. 1 no. 1, in B♭, in which players almost physically engage with each other) to the expressive details in the Sonata in E♭ for Marianne von Genzinger (Hob. XVI: 49, which he described to her as “very full of meaning”) to the soul-irradiating sonorities of the oratorio version of the *Seven Last Words* (especially in the new introduction to Part II). Because he composed at the keyboard, his invention was always linked to sound, and it was both a natural concomitant and a canny career move to ensure that his players enjoyed the works that showed them off to best advantage. With the first symphonic trilogy for Prince Paul Anton Esterházy, nos. 6–8, Haydn hit on the happy idea of quasi-programmatic concertante writing in the tradition of the Vivaldi *Four Seasons* – a score in his patron’s library as of 1740 – winning the prince’s approbation and the musicians’ loyalty.¹¹ The

local success of this style is revealed in the numerous concertante movements in symphonies from the 1760s and 1770s, and the penetration of such related devices as cadenzas, breakaway figurations, and quasi-ritornellos in string quartets and keyboard music (and even the baryton trios). To the end of his career he would feature soloists in sometimes surprising ways and work for sonorous effects to mold an ensemble.

In what follows, I consider first the shape of Haydn's career through the lens of the "success narrative" in which it is usually cast, paying close attention to its problematic undertones that reveal Haydn's changing fortunes and the sources of his unusual mix of confidence and defensiveness. Then, I evaluate several key documents – the most defensive ones – as evidence of Haydn's conceptions of the different strands of his audience. What will emerge are new views of his relationship with performers, of his attitudes towards connoisseurs and critics, and of his enduring desire to be widely understood.

Haydn's career through the looking-glass

Haydn's life story as a rags-to-riches success is easily summarized. Plucked from humble origins, first by a schoolmaster relation and then by the Kapellmeister of St. Stephen's Cathedral, Haydn continued to make auspicious contacts seemingly by accident once on his own in Vienna, while teaching young students. High-spirited street serenading led him to Joseph Kurz, popular theater's "Bernardon," for whose broad style of comic acting and improvisation he provided music. Living in the same building as one of the most famous men in Vienna – imperial court poet Pietro Metastasio – and giving music lessons to Metastasio's pupil Marianne von Martínez, he was quickly introduced to Italian opera composer Nicola Porpora, accompanying his singing lessons. Through these connections he was recommended to his first two noble patrons: for Baron von Fürnberg's summer parties he wrote string quartets and for Count Morzin he undertook directorial duties and wrote symphonies, until another fortuitous introduction led him to the Esterházy princes at the precise moment that Morzin was forced by financial exigency to dissolve his orchestra. Hired in 1761 with a contract regulating his behavior, dress, and responsibilities, Haydn was so successful in pleasing his patrons, first Paul Anton and from 1762 on Nicolaus Esterházy, as well as their musicians, singers, and theatrical troupes, and in acquiring fame abroad, that he was able to negotiate a new contract in 1779 giving him the rights to his own works. Thus he was able to get in on the ground floor with the new Viennese publishing house of Artaria, and to respond to commissions from as far away as Cadíz, Naples, Paris, and London. After

the death of Nicolaus in 1790, Haydn spent several years in London and Vienna, enjoying the period of his greatest renown and financial success, and writing the works that would have the greatest continuing impact after his death.

Were we to recast this narrative in terms of the nodal points of sensitivity that underlay Haydn's self-concept and that found their way into several of Haydn's strikingly defensive statements, we might annotate it like this:

Plucked from humble origins, *which forever kept him out of the ranks of the well-connected and made him more than a little sensitive to the courtly birth of composers like Hofmann and Dittersdorf*, first by a schoolmaster relation *who taught him but beat him* and then by the Kapellmeister of St. Stephen's Cathedral, *who gave him scant attention when he tried to compose and beat him when he played practical jokes*, Haydn continued to make auspicious contacts seemingly by accident once on his own in Vienna, while teaching young students, *in a "wretched existence" which embittered him by leaving him little time to study*. High-spirited street serenading led him to Joseph Kurz, popular theater's "Bernardon," for whose broad style of comic acting and improvisation he provided music. Living in the same building as one of the most famous men in Vienna – imperial court poet Pietro Metastasio – and giving music lessons to Metastasio's pupil Marianne von Martínez, he was quickly introduced to Italian opera composer Nicola Porpora, accompanying his singing lessons *and learning the true fundamentals of composition though being beaten and verbally abused*. Through these connections he was recommended to his first two noble patrons: for Baron von Fürnberg's summer parties he wrote string quartets and for Count Morzin he undertook directorial duties and wrote symphonies, until another fortuitous introduction led him to the Esterházy princes at the precise moment that Count Morzin was forced by financial exigency to dissolve his orchestra. *He seems to have been early aware that his reputation would depend on players who sounded good and who enjoyed their work*. Hired in 1761 with a contract regulating his behavior, dress, and responsibilities, *Haydn suffered the nasty meddling of his immediate superior, Kapellmeister Gregor Joseph Werner, and in consequence had to give proof of his diligence to Prince Nicolaus Esterházy*. *Isolated in the country for most of each year, suffering attacks in the north German press, nonetheless Haydn was so successful in pleasing his patrons, first Paul Anton and from 1762 on Nicolaus Esterházy, as well as their musicians, singers, and theatrical troupes, and in acquiring fame abroad, that he was able to negotiate a new contract in 1779 giving him the rights to his own works, though that same year he was outraged by his treatment by the Viennese Tonkünstler-Sozietät over the demand for new works*. Thus he was able to get in on the ground floor with the new Viennese publishing house

of Artaria, whose first three publications responded to or occasioned problems and embarrassments for Haydn,¹² and to respond to commissions from as far away as Cadiz, Naples, Paris, and London. *The patronage he had praised in his 1776 autobiographical sketch and the originality-producing isolation he praised to Griesinger eventually gave way to feelings of melancholy, loneliness, and involuntary servitude.* After the death of Nicolaus in 1790, he spent several years in London and Vienna, *the latter finally recognizing his achievements, enjoying the period of his greatest renown and financial success, even though his Orpheus opera was not produced in London,* and writing the works that would have the greatest continuing impact after his death. *For the last half-decade of his life he was unable to compose at all, his strength and acuity having begun to weaken already about 1800; instead of composing he produced anecdotes and narratives for his biographers, the sober Griesinger, the artist Dies, and the more fanciful Carpani.*

Despite Haydn's fame and public successes, then, he was often conscious that he could not please everyone. In his concern to "make an impression," he needed to win over performers and listeners, publishers and purchasers, connoisseurs and critics. Most of all, he needed to make sure that his work sounded good.

The *Applausus* letter: Haydn and performers

In 1768, Haydn was already full Kapellmeister to Prince Nicolaus Esterházy, yet when commissioned by the abbey of Zwettl in Lower Austria to write a celebratory cantata, called an *Applausus*, for the fiftieth anniversary of the abbot's taking his vows, he wrote a deeply self-conscious letter giving details of performance practice, declamation, and rehearsal time. His conclusion is worth quoting:

Finally I ask everyone, and especially the musicians, to apply the greatest possible diligence in order to advance my reputation (*Ehre*) as well as their own; if I have perhaps not guessed their taste, I am not to be blamed for it, for I know neither the persons nor the place, and in truth the fact that these were concealed from me made my work very difficult. For the rest, I hope that this *Applausus* will please the poet, the most worthy musicians, and the honorable reverend *Auditorio*.¹³

What Haydn overtly recognizes here is, to paraphrase the old Vidal Sassoon advertisement, if they don't look good, he doesn't look good. Thus the real reason to ingratiate himself with musicians and to write for their strengths is not only to reap the benefits of a happy group of employees

but to make his music shine, burnished by the virtuosi at his command: in a good performance, everyone's reputation improves. When a piece is to be heard one time only, the quality of preparation and of the performance itself become crucial. If the audience's experience of the piece lives or dies by the players, then the composer must communicate with the players first, so that their experience as the first audience will guide the rest. Griesinger reported that "through long practice, [Haydn] had learned in general how musicians must be handled and thus succeeded by much modesty, by appropriate praise and careful indulgence of artistic pride so to win over Gallini's orchestra that his compositions were always well performed."¹⁴ Presumably this technique of personnel management had been learned with the Esterházy.

The letter also reveals the extent to which Haydn's self-concept in 1768 is still entirely local, and, perhaps surprisingly, on that basis insecure. To this time, Haydn had always been on the scene to flatter, cajole, and guide musically. Indeed, this letter makes us look anew at the evidence of Haydn's relationships with his musicians in the Esterházy establishment. Although Haydn's works started appearing in print during the 1760s (e.g., the two sets of early quartets published by La Chevardière in Paris in 1764), he was far from imagining his works as destined or even appropriate for venues far removed from his own. Haydn had also come to take for granted a level of skill in orchestral and vocal performance. In *Applausus*, the concertante style of quite a few of his early Esterházy symphonies (as well as of the concertos themselves) is evident in solo turns for organ (no. IVb) and violin (no. VIIb), as well as cadenzas for boy sopranos (nos. IIIb and VIb), tenor (nos. IVb and VIIb), and bass (no. Vb).¹⁵ Moreover, the "Sturm und Drang" style of his contemporaneous Symphony no. 49 in F minor (as well as other works not written in 1768) appears in the wide leaps, frenzied tremolos, syncopations, fast walking bass, and minor mode of the bass aria no. Vb.¹⁶ The tiny organ concerto of no. IVb features a vocal as well as a separate organ cadenza, while the violin and tenor in no. VIIb join for the final cadenza (after the tenor had a solo cadenza in the first A section). *Applausus* contains no fugal movement even in the final chorus but fully three pieces in festive C major trumpet-and-drum style (nos. I, III, VIII). Haydn may well have wondered about local taste because these styles were so fully embodied in his productions of the 1760s that he wondered if they would "travel," in the same way that he later said his operas wouldn't travel well outside of the specific personnel and theater at Eszterháza. Yet by the end of his life, Haydn expressed satisfaction that his works were known in remote places because his goal was to be considered a "not unworthy priest of this sacred art by every nation where my works are known."¹⁷

The autobiography: an *apologia pro vita sua* for elite readers and connoisseurs

In 1776, Haydn was asked to contribute an autobiographical sketch for inclusion in *Das gelehrte Oesterreich*. He responded in a letter endlessly pored over by scholars, for it is the only account entirely in the composer's own words;¹⁸ together with the interviews conducted by biographers Dies and Griesinger (and possibly Carpani) late in his life, it is the only source for his early years. Its emphases and peculiarities of construction derive from its rhetorical organization,¹⁹ and it is likely that the striking amount of space given to his musical education (the *narratio*, or statement of facts), including the early recognition of his talent, derive from the volume's focus on "learned" achievements. (Of his fifteen years in Esterházy service, he states only that he is "Capellmeister of His Highness, the Prince, in whose service I hope to live and die.") The theme of the "making of a composer" would in any case have been of considerable interest at the time, but the focus stresses his gifts, recognized in unpromising circumstances by more knowledgeable masters, and, more important, the necessity for study to bring them to fruition. Indeed, he still sounds bitter about the necessity to "teach the young" in order to "eke out a wretched existence," noting that "many geniuses are ruined by having to earn their daily bread, because they have no time to study." As Leon Botstein has pointed out, the narrative about his early years appeared to follow certain well-worn tropes about the early lives of artists found in sources from Greek antiquity through the Renaissance, following the "narrative formulas" identified by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz in their fascinating study *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist*.²⁰ These formulas might be summarized as follows: a youth born to pastoral surroundings (an identity as shepherd is not infrequently invented) shows evidence of musical talent already in childhood; this talent is recognized in a chance encounter with a connoisseur who takes the youth's training in hand; the youth rises on the social ladder to achieve great fame. Persistent motifs, including the emphasis on childhood, genius expressing itself early, and the heroic artist triumphing over obstacles, became part of the age-old "legend of the artist." Vasari's celebrated biography of Giotto, in which the shepherd boy noticed by Cimabue in a chance encounter acquires the latter as teacher and mentor, thereafter rising to fame, draws on these older myths while furnishing a model to future generations; Thomas Tolley even wonders if perhaps Baron van Swieten suggested this storyline to Haydn.²¹ Haydn's stress on the amount of study involved adds an Enlightenment aspect of self-made moral education, and also appears to suggest that education and patronage does not extend far enough to talented youths.

While Haydn recounted a valuable artistic “lineage” lifting him from folk-harp to Reutter to Porpora to his present eminence, his outsider status remained on display and apparently rankled. One senses that this lies behind his insulting comments to Artaria in 1781 about Leopold Hofmann’s recently published *Lieder*, described as “street songs, wherein neither ideas, expression nor, much less, melody appear”; Haydn wrote that “just because this braggart thinks that he alone has ascended the heights of Mount Parnassus, and tries to disgrace me with a certain high society, I have composed these very three *Lieder* just to show this would-be high society the difference.”²² A. Peter Brown points out that Hofmann’s insider status at court, together with the greater opportunities he was offered from youth on and his earlier established status, may have aroused Haydn’s ire.²³ But for all Haydn’s supposed comfort-level with people of his own rank and his satisfaction with his remote location (at least before the later 1780s), he felt consistently slighted by the Viennese establishments, including the court and the *Tonkünstler-Sozietät*. Thus, Haydn sometimes intended his compositions to prove something to at least one segment of his audience, as to the unnamed personage of this letter.

The other lengthy segment of the autobiography concerns Haydn’s ill-treatment at the hands of the north German critics (the *confutatio*, refutation of his enemies’ arguments), and here Haydn’s responses are instructive:

In the chamber style [referring to all instrumental music not destined for theater or church] I have been fortunate enough to please almost all nations except the Berliners; this is shown by the public newspapers and letters addressed to me. I only wonder that the Berlin gentlemen, who are otherwise so reasonable, preserve no middle ground [*Medium*] in their criticism of my music, for in one weekly paper they praise me to the skies, whilst in another they dash me sixty fathoms deep into the earth, and this without explaining why; I know very well why: because they are incapable of performing some of my works, and are too conceited to take the trouble to understand them properly, and for other reasons which, with God’s help, I will answer in good time. Herr Capellmeister von Dittersdorf, in Silesia, wrote to me recently and asked me to defend myself against their hard words, but I answered that one swallow doesn’t make the summer; and that perhaps one of these days some unprejudiced person would stop their tongues, as happened to them once before when they accused me of monotony. Despite this, they try very hard to get all my works, as Herr Baron von Sviten [sic], the Imperial and Royal Ambassador at Berlin, told me only last winter, when he was in Vienna: but enough of this.²⁴

Haydn’s objection to their inconsistency, wondering at their extremes with no “Medium,” sounds strikingly like the celebrated letter Mozart wrote to his father on 28 December 1782, in which he claims that the “mean, the

genuine in all things, is known and valued no longer” because only extremes reign: “to receive approval, one must write something so easy to understand that a coachman can sing it right back to you, or so incomprehensible that it pleases precisely because no rational person can understand it.”²⁵ In attributing the critics’ animus to their inability to perform his works properly and their unwillingness to take the time to learn them, Haydn might have been covertly relying on van Swieten’s information on the quality of performances in Berlin, while crediting the diplomat with a less incendiary item. (Swieten was ambassador in Berlin from 1770 to 1777, returning to Vienna for a vacation every winter except in 1776, and this reference to a meeting during the winter of 1775 is the earliest datable account of their contact.²⁶) But he might also have been drawing on his own strong sense that he couldn’t trust performers he did not himself train. Some of these critiques were after all contemporaneous with *Applausus*. The question of difficulty in performance, although hard to credit when it came to counterpoint and octave doublings, might be right on the money with respect to the “inappropriate” mixtures of comic and serious elements.²⁷

Haydn’s assessment of his works in performance, that is, his works as experienced by an audience, made him acutely sensitive to the opportunities for misunderstanding. If the picture I have painted elsewhere of Haydn’s theatrical style is correct, namely that his profound daily involvement with theater of all kinds at Eszterháza over a period of years affected his musical style and intensified his natural tendencies toward the gesture and the seriocomic mixture, then, as with stage works themselves, his symphonic music could be understood only *as performance*, and thus without proper performance no understanding was possible. We can see the roots of this approach in his first reported interaction with Joseph Kurz, famous for his role as the comic character Bernardon in the popular Viennese theater, when Kurz asked him to accompany his gestures of swimming: to his evident delight, Haydn, perhaps not much older than twenty-one, “fell into six-eight time.”²⁸ The correlation between physical and musical gesture is strikingly evident in Haydn’s music, and may be the source of comments like Hiller’s: “in springs Hans Wurst, right into the middle of things.”²⁹

The Auenbrugger letter: Haydn, critics, and “virtuosos and dilettantes”

From the beginning of Haydn’s correspondence with Artaria over the publication of the six sonatas dedicated to the Auenbrugger sisters, he was concerned with their reception. On February 8, 1780, he indicated that he hoped to gain honor with the “discerning world,” and that he had many critics who were motivated by jealousy.³⁰ In the very next letter he takes steps to

head off such criticism because two of the sonatas share a theme. This letter has never been examined from the perspective of Haydn's communication with the multiple audience:

Among other things, I consider it necessary, in order to forestall the criticisms of any would-be wits [*Witzlinge*], to print on the reverse side of the title page the following sentence, here underlined:

Avertissement

Among these 6 Sonatas there are two single movements in which the same idea [Idee] occurs through several bars: the author has done this intentionally because of the difference in realization [Ausführung]. For naturally I could have chosen a hundred other ideas instead of this one; but so that the whole opus will not be exposed to blame on account of this one intentional detail (which the critics and especially my enemies might take the wrong way), I think this avertissement or something like it must be appended, otherwise the sale might be hindered thereby. I submit the point in question to the judicious opinion of the two Misses v. Auenbrugger, whose hands I respectfully kiss.³¹

Haydn suddenly understood that what was intended as a publication for domestic music-making would be noticed by critics, by connoisseurs who understood rhetorical terminology like the “idea” and the “realization,” and by his “enemies” – who are these: the unfriendly Berlin critics? rival composers like Hofmann? Haydn's sensitivity to this issue may have been inspired by Christian Gottlob Neefe's essay on musical repetition, published in the inaugural year (1776) of the journal *Deutsches Museum*, or by the trend which it reports, namely, that “it is customary for critics of musical compositions in newspapers, journals, societies, and audiences that they reproach composers [for their] repetition.”³² Neefe divides repetition into two rhetorical categories strikingly similar to those used by Haydn in the “Avertissement”: invention (*Erfindung*) and realization (*Ausführung*). For the first, Neefe observes that composers may repeat either their own ideas or someone else's, and that if they repeat their own they are either “poor in invention” and thus “open to censure,” or “deficient in memory.” Only when it “arises from the necessity of working hard and fast” is it “an error that deserves [our] indulgence.” Thus Haydn sought to head off the critics by making the claim that his “repetition,” far from being an error, had an appropriate aim.³³

In fact, the themes to which Haydn refers, the movements they generate, and the sonatas of which they are a part, nos. 36 in C♯ minor and 39 in G of the set dedicated to the Auenbrugger sisters (Hob. XVI: 35–39, 20), differ from each other on several levels, as would have been appropriate for sonatas intended to realize the differences in skill between the two ladies, and, by extension, the larger audience of more and less talented players. First, the form of each movement is somewhat different: each has variations

of that theme alternating with episodes, but in the second movement of no. 36 the episodes are both in parallel minor, with the second a variation of the first, resulting in an ABABA form. In the first movement of no. 39, not only are the two episodes in different keys – first parallel, then relative minors, an unusual combination – but the second is unrelated to the first, resulting in an ABACA form.³⁴ (Common to both movements, however, is the four-measure theme refrain that appears before each variation of A, and the second episode landing on the dominant, without a repeat.) And in no. 39/i the B section (mm. 17ff) is an expressive variation of the A theme, while the C section (mm. 53ff) is a “characteristic” episode. No. 39/i has a more dynamic profile, with sharply pointed dotted rhythms and a higher melodic arch; its mode of execution might be described as quasi-brilliant, as befits a first movement. No. 36/ii is more “rounded,” leading to a more graceful yet playful mode of performance, appropriate to a middle movement marked “Scherzando.” It contrasts with the moody C♯ minor opening movement. Finally, no. 39/i is more difficult to play, a result perhaps of the unequal talents of the sisters to whom the sonatas were dedicated; contemporary reports reveal that Katharina played better than her younger sister Marianna.³⁵

It appears that Haydn, not wanting to execute any missteps with his new publisher and new public, gave them three easier (35, 36, 37) and three more difficult (38, 39, 20) sonatas, in a rational, even didactic, key order (C, c♯, D, Eb, G, c). His letter, long taken as a rationalization for a memory lapse, suggests instead that the set is carefully constructed, exploring different musical topics and shapes in every sonata and finding good reasons to include the earlier C minor sonata (Hob. XVI: 20, the autograph fragment of which is dated 1771) as an expressive conclusion. With his primary focus on the “discerning world,” Haydn revealed an interest in dilettantes and students while giving an intellectual basis for the set to connoisseurs and critics.

The “French swill” letter: Haydn, the general public, and posterity

In 1801, Haydn wrote to August Eberhard Müller, the Leipzig Kapellmeister who was making the piano reduction of *The Seasons*, that a particular passage had to be corrected in order to leave out a bit of word-painting. He added rather gratuitously: “NB! This whole passage, with its imitation of a frog, did not flow easily from my pen; I was forced to write down this French swill [*französischen Quark*]. With the whole orchestra this miserable idea disappears rather soon, but it cannot remain in the piano

score.”³⁶ The indiscreet Müller showed the passage to J. G. K. Spazier, who had just founded the journal *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*; Spazier's attack on van Swieten's text created a nasty brouhaha between Haydn and van Swieten. Both Griesinger and Dies reported Haydn's complaints about the text and about van Swieten wanting him to use Grétry as a model.³⁷ The curious features of this incident require some comment, because comparable tone-painting appeared in *The Creation*, a work Haydn seemed rather to admire. Possibly he had already received advance word of critical response to *The Seasons* and would have been pursuing damage control. It is also not out of the question that he was tired of taking suggestions from van Swieten, whose fingerprints are all over *The Seven Last Words* as well as *The Creation*; and van Swieten for his part, two years before his death, took such suggestions as his right. However, what ought to be noted is the placement of the pictorialism in a set-piece rather than in an accompanied recitative. The larger rhythm of the numbers in Parts I and II of *The Creation* creates two-unit or three-unit segments: the laconic words of Genesis are set in simple recitative, moving to more vivid descriptive language, with texts based partly on *Paradise Lost*, in accompanied recitative (the pre-eminent site of word-painting), and then to aria or to the occasional ensemble of soloists enumerating and elaborating the “facts of creation.”³⁸ Choruses of praise, sometimes together with the angelic soloists, round out each “day” of creation. In *The Seasons*, on the other hand, the accompanied recitatives are fewer and farther between, and the set-pieces themselves contain description or action, like the sunrise or successful hunting of a bird. The return to normal after the huge summer storm, itself vividly “painted,” occasions cows, quail, crickets, and the frog to be heard – oddly, the frog seems the least intrusive of all! – and Haydn may have objected to the closing Trio and Chorus (no. 18) usurping the role of recitative in this respect while it enacts the most quotidian conclusion in the oratorio. (Even the “tipsy” chorus that concludes Autumn is a tour-de-force of counterpoint despite its text deplored by Haydn.)

The most interesting detail about this controversy is the way it intersects with the question of musical meaning, as different kinds of audiences might understand it. Haydn once again seems to be threading his way between broad appeal and critical detractors (even while poisoning the well), aware that he was reaching the widest audience of his life with the sensationally popular oratorios. Both biographers queried Haydn about the “subject-matter” of his music: what was he trying to express?³⁹ Haydn told Dies that he “seldom” had a specific topic in mind (or at least as specific as the “coquette” or “prude” with which Dies taxed him), preferring to let his “more purely musical fantasy” prevail; to Griesinger he answered that he had often tried to portray “moral characters” in his symphonies; and to both

he recounted the Adagio of an old symphony that featured God arguing with an unrepentant sinner.⁴⁰ The widespread sense in Haydn's lifetime that his instrumental music was "about" something reveals how fully characterized and persuasive was his musical rhetoric. Significant in the exchange with Griesinger is that Haydn might have been able to say more about the issue had the biographer showed him score after score, "and that proved irksome to the aged man." One can only conclude that Griesinger *did* try to go through scores with him, and either nothing rang a bell or – a more likely possibility? – Haydn refused to come clean. Why would he risk identifying a background narrative or image or concept or set of characters that might expose him to the same ridicule as the "French swill"? What we may also have here is the discrepancy between a kind of "poetic idea" in a Beethovenian sense – "I have always an image in mind, and work up to it" – which is part of the compositional process, and the meaning that the composer wants the listener to grasp.⁴¹

But Griesinger had not in fact asked him about instrumental music in particular (only Dies had), merely about his "compositions," so perhaps it isn't surprising that in the two paragraphs after this exchange he goes on to describe the way he illustrated text in the late masses: the Agnus Dei of the *Mass in Time of War* set with timpani "as though one heard the enemy coming already in the distance" followed by all the voices and instruments breaking in pathetically for the text "Dona nobis pacem"; and then a more esoteric example of meaning in the *Schöpfungsmesse*:

it occurred to him in the [Gloria] that weak mortals sinned mostly against moderation and chastity. So he set the words *qui tollis peccata mundi* to the flirtatious melody of the words in *The Creation*, "The dew-dropping morn, o how she quickens all!" But in order that this profane thought should not be too conspicuous, he let the *Miserere* sound in full chorus immediately thereafter.⁴²

Thus, even though Griesinger wove a narrative version of several or many conversations, one must conclude from his presentation that Haydn continued to answer his question about musical meaning, "what he tried to express through musical language," with both obvious and more subtle text-related details in his late masses, details that might be either irrelevant or unrecoverable within the fabric of his instrumental works. As he spoke to his posterity through his biographers, Haydn must certainly have realized that his trademark instrumental qualities of intelligible topical discourse, formal idiosyncrasy, and brilliantly deployed gesture, appreciated on as many levels as there were levels of skill, knowledge, judgment, and taste in his multiple audiences, needed no road maps.