

## MUSIC

## Papa Haydn

By Ralph de Toledano

THE MEDIA in all its forms was crowded with highly laudatory comment on the 250th anniversary of the birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, hailing him as the greatest composer of his time, if not of all time—a self-taught genius who was performing and composing at age five. This *wunderkind* status is the basis for much of the justified adulation that surrounds him—and little credit is given to this father, Leopold, who was the greatest press agent in musical history.

This is not to downsize Mozart, though one wonders whether there was some out-of-time extrasensory link between what has been called “a lively-minded intellectual lightweight” and the music of the spheres. Past the early compositions, there is, in addition, a sameness to his work which Donald Tovey, the great musicologist, detected. “Mozart’s whole musical language is, and remains throughout,” Tovey noted, “the language of comic opera”—*opera buffa*. That “theatricality” was noted by Virgil Thomson and perhaps by Toscanini, who treated most Mozart scores as if they were “Heigh-Ho Silver.”

In opera, Mozart stands foremost, particularly when he is wedded to the librettos of Lorenzo da Ponte. “Don Giovanni”—its lyricism, its brilliance, its dark passages, its perfection—is unmatched as an opera, *buffa* or *seria*, and the same is nearly true of “*Così fan tutte*” and “*Le Nozze di Figaro*.” Who, having been exposed to “*Giovanni*,” ever forgets “*La ci darem la mano*” or “*Dalla sua pace*”? When I was on long marches, the troops and I picked up our sagging spirits and restored our leg muscles with “*Non più andrai*.” In contrast, Mozart’s Masses and liturgical pieces were conditioned by a Freemasonry bereft of religious emotion and written as ordered.

Even his arioso “*Et incarnatus est*”—one of the purest and most beautiful passages in church music—gives the “*Great Mass in C Minor*” no incandescence.

We are repeatedly told that Mozart was self-taught in composition, hardly accurate when one considers the influence of his father. In his early years, Mozart had no formal academic training, but he did study under Haydn—as did Beethoven—and he would later say, “It was from Haydn that I first learned the true way to compose quartets.” The *ars musica* of what we call “classicism” had all been handed to him by Haydn, who in 1761, when Mozart was five, had composed 30 symphonies and a whole library of scores in other forms.

An old edition of *Groves* tells us “Haydn’s position in the history of music is of the first importance. When we consider the poor position in which he found certain important forms of music, and, on the other hand, the vast fields which he opened to his successors, it is impossible to overstate his creative powers.” Even in his lifetime, Papa Haydn was recognized as the “father of the symphony” and the “father of instrumental music”—and (again *Groves*), “There is scarcely a form throughout the whole range of music in which he did not make his influence felt.”

His *oeuvre* was marked by inexhaustible invention, lucidity, depth, perfect finish, spontaneity. His later symphonies—and not only those he wrote in his triumphal periods in London—completely overshadowed those of his predecessors and contemporaries. Those symphonies, as well as his major work, are each a world unto themselves and not the rubber-stamp output of other famous composers. Virgil Thomson, always slightly cool to Haydn, still characterized his work as “a goldmine of melody and instrumentation . . . giving weight to what might be merely graceful.”

With the advent of the LP and the CD, and with the record companies looking for music other than that of the old and worn catalog, Haydn slowly came into his own both in the record catalogues and in symphony halls, though for far

too long as an also-ran to Mozart. In the 1950s, the Haydn Society issued a beautifully performed series of his Masses. “At the thought of God, my heart leaps,” this deeply religious man once said—and so it was with Haydn’s church music, which until then lived for the most part in the unheard scores studied by musicologists.

The six Masses he wrote after the triumphs of his visit to London and the other capitals of Europe are in a sense the key to Haydn’s genius. Certainly no liturgical writer since Tomas Luis de Victoria reached up to God so earnestly and beautifully in the creation of the Mass as Haydn—and none since then has challenged him. (These Masses can be heard in a very fine recording for Phillips by John Eliot Gardner and the Monteverdi Choir.) For the “*Heiligmesse*,” the “*Nelsonmesse*,” the “*Theresienmesse*,” and the others are the measures of his contrapuntal mastery, religious depth, his sense of the dimensions of the Mass, and his deep Catholic faith. They echo the paean of the Sanctus: *pleni sunt coeli et terra Gloria tua*—“Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.”

Admire, if you will in this 250th anniversary of his birth, the boyish and vagrant graces of Mozart, his ebullient genius. Haydn called him the greatest composer of all time, but he virtually had the same praise for Handel. Beethoven had sought Haydn’s advice and instruction and remarked, on seeing a picture of Haydn’s birthplace, “To think that so great a man should have been born in a common peasant’s cottage.” Honored and loved by all Europe, the reigning monarch of its music, he would say quietly of himself, “I know that God has bestowed a talent upon me, and I thank him for it. I think I have done my duty, and been of use in my generation by my works. Let others do the same.” Few celebrated the 250th anniversary of Haydn’s birth, but what will the world of music say in 2032, his 300th birthday? ■

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# Russian Bear Baiting



Failure has done nothing to moderate the insane ambitions of U.S. policymakers. Not content with the bloody fiasco in Iraq, the intensification of the

war in Afghanistan, a soaring budget deficit, and the electoral triumphs of the anti-American populist Left throughout South America, American policymakers have decided to open up a number of new battlefronts. First, they threaten to overthrow the clerical regime in Tehran. As if that weren't enough, they have now decided to pick a fight with Russia. Yes, Russia, the biggest country in the world and one that possesses thousands of nuclear warheads. Hubris like this has not been seen since Adolf Hitler.

A little while ago, Vice President Cheney went to Vilnius, Lithuania—a country that recently was an integral part of the Soviet Union—and accused Russia of undermining “the territorial integrity of a neighbor” and interfering with “democratic movements.” Cheney was belligerent, undiplomatic, and almost looking for trouble. But he was not bellicose enough for the Democratic Party leadership. A few days after Cheney's speech, an open letter was delivered to the White House, signed by Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, Joe “Your words are my words” Biden, and Carl Levin, the ranking Democratic member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The open letter urged President Bush to use the power of his office to dissuade Russia from selling the Iranians air defense missile systems. Those are of no threat to the United States, or indeed anyone else—unless Uncle Sam or Israel plans to attack Iran.

Amidst the hysteria over Russia's alleged threats against its neighbors, Washington of course ignores its own threatening moves toward Russia.

Having made promises to Gorbachev at the time of German reunification that NATO would not seek to take advantage of the fall of the Warsaw Pact and expand eastwards, the West, led by Uncle Sam, promptly threw these pledges into the wastebasket. In fact, the United States has surrounded Russia by inducting Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary into NATO. Washington is also actively urging NATO membership for Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. We are building military bases on Russia's borders and even threatening to station our ballistic missile defense system in former Warsaw Pact territory. When the Russians, in response to the increasingly belligerent anti-Russian leadership in Ukraine, said that in the future they would ask the Ukrainians to pay market prices for its gas imports, Western leaders shrieked as if Stalin were sending the Red Army into Finland.

What is going on here? Who in hell is this gang that can't shoot straight to tell others how to conduct themselves? Even a state with less reason to fear aggression than Russia (invaded twice in the 20th century, innumerable times before that) would regard such acts as hostile. And it gets worse. In 2004, the United States granted political asylum to Ilyas Akhmadov, former foreign minister of the self-styled Chechen republic and a close friend and ally of Shamil Besayev, head of Chechnya's deadliest jihadist movement and the man who masterminded the horrifying terrorist attack on the school in Beslan. As if that were not enough, Akhmadov was put on the U.S.

government payroll as the recipient of a research grant from the neocon National Endowment for Democracy. (Quite a double standard. Palestinians are terrorists, but Chechens are freedom fighters.)

Russia's democratic institutions have always been weak and fragile. In fact, they were nonexistent before 1991. What is Putin supposed to do? Force the Russian people to forget 700 years of Russian tyranny and turn into democrats overnight? Puffed up with their own importance, busybody fools like Madeleine Albright, Joe Biden, Richard Holbrooke, William Kristol, and Martin Peretz, among others, signed a ludicrous letter warning the West about Putin's dictatorial tendencies. (This following the Beslan slaughter of innocent Russian children.) A Washington outfit called the American Committee for Peace in the Caucasus is comprised of such individuals as Kristol, Elliot Abrams, Richard Perle, Frank Gaffney, James Woolsey, and Norman Podhoretz—all hawks where the Middle East is concerned but doves on Chechnya. The real purpose of the group is to justify Chechen terrorism, demonize Russia, and to seek to involve NATO in the Caucasus. These are the very same people who promised us a cakewalk in Iraq and are doing their best to get us to bomb Iran in order to make Israel safe. Just try and imagine the following: how would these “peace in the Caucasus” types respond if we were to substitute Palestinian for Chechen and Israel for Russia?

Russia is an ancient country with a great history behind it. The people who have got us into the Iraqi mess should try to keep their mouths shut for a while. As we do not permit anyone to tell us what to do—far from it—perhaps it's time to practice what we preach and mind our own business for a change. ■