

A Peasant in the Palace

A talk on the famous composer

Haydn, broadcast from 2YA

by Karl Atkinson

SOON after Haydn composed his first symphony and thus struck the second keynote of his originality he had the good fortune to attract the attention of a man whose family has since become intimately associated with musical genius in Germany; this was old Prince Esterhazy.

"What! You don't mean to say that little blackamoor" (alluding to Haydn's brown complexion and small stature) "composed that symphony?"

"Surely, Prince!" replied the director, Friedburg, beckoning to Haydn, who advanced toward the orchestra.

"Little Moor," says the old gentleman, "you shall enter my service. I am Prince Esterhazy. What's your name?"

"Haydn."

"Ah! I've heard of you. Get along and dress yourself like a Cappelmeister. Clap on a new coat, and mind your wig is curled. You're too short; you shall have red heels; but they shall be high, that your stature may correspond with your merit."

Thus, the one who had been born a peasant passed into the palace, where he lived and worked for thirty years.

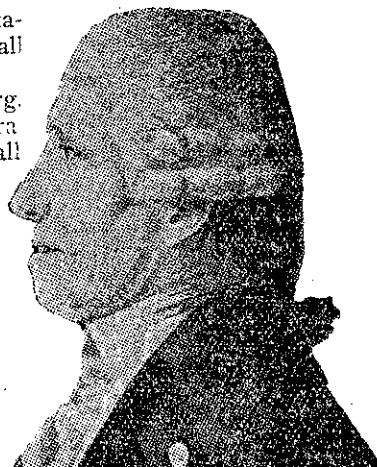
Everything we know about Haydn proves him to have been as simple and appealing as the music which he bequeathed to posterity. Children were invariably fond of him. Many women loved him, and he used to congratulate himself that it must have been something deeper than beauty they saw in him, for beautiful he certainly was not. Even his clothes, since he never troubled to keep pace with the fashions, were comically out of date. Still, though careless of fashion, he was always dapper. His one mistake in life was his wife. In her he caught a veritable Tartar, who nagged without ceasing and cut up his MSS. for curl-papers.

Haydn, with his daily time-table of long hours and methodical ways, gives a complete lie to the prevalent notion that genius is anything but an infinite capacity for taking pains. The astonishing thing is that, with it all, his genius rarely failed him. In fact he never seemed to wait on genius: it was *his* apparently to command when he would. And more—almost every one of his compositions, even among the least-known ones, contains something that catches the breath with pleasure.

Among all composers, one of the most essentially happy was surely Haydn; he seemed somehow able, whatever the set-backs of life, to draw humour from a secret well of happiness. He had a generous patron; he was happy and easy in his work, and wherever he went he was genuinely welcomed by friends and appreciators galore, living to relish life to the full for 77 years.

The second of what was to be a family of twelve children was born to Mathias and Maria Anna Haydn at Rohrau, a tiny village in Lower Austria, just 200 years ago, on the evening of March 31, 1732. The child was a boy, whose father was a wheelwright in poor circumstances. From his parents Haydn inherited little beyond the love of music, which was to shape his whole life's future, and a polypus in the nose, bequeathed him by his mother, that was a source of considerable trouble to him later. The father had a fine tenor voice, and his mother sang well, too; both belonged to the village choir.

The father played the harp by ear, and the family sang, not infrequently being reinforced by the neighbours. When a little boy Haydn made himself a little violin, which instrument a relative volunteered to teach him; and this, together with a position as chorister, put him well on the high road to a musical career.



Joseph Haydn, 1732-1809.

"Haydn . . . was the first man who achieved a glorification of the natural music which exists in the heart of the people, by carrying its essence and its most healthy and vigorous qualities into the province of high art."

One thing led to another, and ultimately at the early age of nine his lovely voice secured for him a post in an important choir in Vienna.

The sweet young voice of marvellous soprano quality filled all the town with delight. After about nine years at St. Stephens's, Haydn's voice showed signs of breaking, and the ungrateful choirmaster, Reutter, had no further use for him, and took ready advantage of a boyish prank of cutting off the tail of another chorister's wig to turn him out into the streets penniless.

From this desperate plight Haydn was ultimately rescued by one Spangler, a chorister at another church, who provided a corner of his garret where at least he could sleep under shelter. Despite a rough time in his youth and fitting from one precarious position to another, the industry and talent of little Joseph found reward in the long run. His education was very hardly bought, and as a self-taught genius he stands for all time as an inspiration and example to future generations of struggling students.

A slender income was eked out by an occasional engagement playing at dances, a few pupils, and ultimately a job as accompanist to the singing teacher, Porpora, who, for all his irascible temper, put Haydn into the way of picking up a good deal of assorted musical knowledge of the art of composition. He met many musicians and theatrical artists and wrote some music for a stage farce.

The next step up the ladder of fame was an appointment as kapellmeister or musical director to Count Ferdinand Morzin. On the strength of this post and a fair number of pupils, Haydn made what proved to be the most disastrous decision of his whole life. He was really deeply in love with the younger daughter of a wig-maker named Keller. As this young lady decided to take the veil, Haydn, for some reason or another, allowed himself to be persuaded to marry the elder daughter, with whom he was not at all in love.

In the words of Ernest Newman, Mrs. Haydn was a thorn in his flesh to the end of her days—an avaricious, ill-tempered, bigoted termagant, who had no sympathy with either him or his music, and never lost an opportunity of plaguing him during their 40 years of married life.

WHEN financial difficulties compelled Count Morzin to retrench and disband his musical organisation and Haydn found himself once again among the unemployed, he had the exceptional good fortune to be engaged by Prince Paul Anton Esterhazy as second kapellmeister.

The senior musician's duties became more and more nominal as time went on, and he died five years following Haydn's appointment. Our genial composer was well treated, and for 30 years he returned this kindness by turning out for his princely employers an almost incredible number of works of all kinds, including operas.

We can well believe Sir Hubert Parry's contention that Haydn's prominent position in the history of music is enhanced by his being the first great representative composer of modern secular music. The Esterhazy appointment made this possible. Till the beginning of modern instrumental music, all the highest achievements in the art were closely connected either by style or descent with church music; and the greatest composers rested their fame (Continued on page 31.)