

HILTON HEAD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
PROGRAM NOTES: FEBRUARY 22, 2021 ORCHESTRA SERIES CONCERT

Franz Joseph Haydn spent his early career as a freelance musician, teaching music, busking on the streets, and composing for a variety of occasions and nobleman. It was not until 1761 that he landed his first significant employment, becoming Vice-Kapellmeister for the prominent Esterházy family. By 1766, he was elevated to full Kapellmeister under Prince Nikolaus and eventually spent 30 years under the family patronage, composing, conducting the orchestra, and playing chamber music for and with his patrons. Needless to say, it was a tremendous opportunity for Haydn!

Symphony No. 59 was likely composed in the late 1760s and is scored for two oboes, two horns, and bassoon. The title of “Fire” (Feuer in German) most likely comes from the fact that the symphony was used as incidental music for the play *Die Feuersbrunst* by Gustav Grossmann, performed at the Esterházy palace. The symphony follows what would become the standard movement order in the Classical Era: a fast movement, a slow movement, a minuet and trio, and finally another fast movement.

The opening Presto has an energetic tune found in the inner strings while the first violins provide effervescence on a single pitch. Soon, however, the music winds down to a soft rocking motion as the movement closes. The Andante focuses on the strings playing in elegant fashion, the winds not entering until the second half. The Minuet opens with the same sequence of pitches as the Andante while the Trio offers a melancholy contrast in a minor key. The final Allegro features a marvelous horn call decorated with the oboes which reappears triumphantly at the end.

Haydn composed the *Cello Concerto in C Major*, his first, early in his career (sometime during 1761-65) for his old friend Joseph Weigel, principal cello of the orchestra at the Esterházy court. Unfortunately, the score was lost in the shuffle of time and all anybody knew of it was from the brief entry in the personal catalog Haydn kept of all of his pieces. It was not until 1961 that the concerto came to light when musicologist Oldřich Pulkert discovered a set of parts in the Prague National Museum. The first modern performance occurred on May 19, 1962, with Milos Sádlo as soloist and Charles Mackerras conducting the Czech Radio Symphony.

The structure of the concerto is what you might expect from the earliest stages of the Classical style: it has elements of both the older ritornello form, where a primary theme alternates with solo passages, and the newly emerging sonata-allegro form, with its strong harmonic structure. Even the instrumentation, strings plus two oboes and two horns, reflects the transitional nature of this work. The last movement, allegro molto, is an exciting ride filled with lightning-fast scales and bouncing string-crossings.

The last work on tonight’s program, *Symphony No. 44*, “Tragic” or “Mourning,” was completed in 1772. It is firmly in Haydn’s “Sturm und Drang” phase: the music features a minor key, wide leaps in pitch, strange melodic contours, sudden dynamic changes and, in general, is agitated.

The opening of the first movement is a striking theme in unison, followed by a spritely second theme. The Minuet and Trio of this symphony falls on the second movement and is characterized by a canon in the Minuet and flowing, descending passages in the Trio. The slow movement charms the audience with its sweet, beguiling melody in the muted violins. Legend has it that Haydn once asked for this movement to be played at his funeral, thus the notion of "Mourning." The last movement features unison writing again, this time with an aggressive tune that jumps all over the place.

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