

Haydn, Symphony No.8 "Le Soir"

"Whenever His Princely Highness commands, the vice-Kapellmeister is obligated to compose such works of music as His Highness may demand; further not to communicate [such] new compositions to anyone, still less allow them to be copied [for others], but to reserve them entirely and exclusively for His Highness; most of all to compose nothing for any other person without prior knowledge and gracious consent."

Under the terms of the apparently onerous contract quoted above, one of the most fruitful experiments in the history of Western music was begun. When Joseph Haydn was hired as "Vice-Kapellmeister" by the court of the music-loving Prince Esterhazy, it created a sort of laboratory for the creation of the Classical Symphony. Haydn was presented with a virtuoso orchestra at his beck and call, and commanded to produce symphonic works at a high rate of speed. It afforded him what was then an unprecedented luxury for a musician: A sort of 'lab orchestra' with which to try out any combinations of instruments, movements, melodic ideas that passed through his fertile mind, then to get instant feedback on what worked and what didn't. The result was arguably the greatest symphonic oeuvre in history, taking into account the sheer number (well over 100 published symphonies – as compared to Mozart's 41, or Beethoven's 9) and quality of the work.

The Esterhazy orchestra, though brilliant, was a small one, normally comprising 13 to 15 players (of whom many performed on more than one instrument): a few strings and a few winds – a group in fact, somewhat smaller than the HPO ensemble you are hearing tonight. Haydn led from the violin; no keyboard continuo was employed except in the theatre. Beginning in the 1770s, the ensemble was gradually enlarged, owing primarily to the increasing importance of the court opera; at its height in the 1780s it counted 24 virtuoso members. This situation is reflected in many difficult and exposed passages in Haydn's symphonies, particularly the early ones.

Indeed, symphonies nos.6–8, *Le matin*, *Le midi* and *Le soir* (1761) – among his first compositions in his new position; apparently the 'times of day' topic was suggested by the prince – were expressly calculated to show off the new ensemble, both as a whole and in terms of the individual players, all of whom receive solos. But Haydn was also demonstrating his own prowess: although the topics were traditional, the works have no precedent, either generally or in his own output.

The orchestration used in Symphony No. 8 is very similar to the style of the Baroque period, where a small group of solo instruments was set against a larger ensemble. In Symphony No. 8, the small group consists of a solo cello and two solo violins and the large ensemble contains the entire mixed ensemble. *Le Soir* has the usual number of four movements for a classical symphony: *Allegro – Andante – Minuet and Trio – Presto*. The first movement is partly based around a song from one of Gluck's operas, called "*Je n'aimais pas le tabac beaucoup* (I didn't like tobacco much)". An interesting feature of the final movement, subtitled *La tempesta* (the storm); you will hear the strings playing a variety of figures to suggest falling rain, lightning and thunder, and swirling winds. It is quite remarkable that Haydn could achieve these sorts of effects with such a tiny orchestra, where later composers would use 100 or more players to chase after the same dramatic effects.

Mozart, "Eine kleine Nachtmusik"

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was an astonishingly fluent and prolific composer. He managed in his 35 years of life to complete well over 600 works, large and small, and left uncatalogued pieces and sketches totaling a few hundred more. He wrote quartets and symphonies for connoisseurs, sonatas for students, concertos for his friends, and for his own brilliant performing career; operas were for glory and wealth. Like everyone, Mozart also had to put bread on the table and pay the rent (and pay his

gambling debts!); and so he was also a composer of what we would now call 'popular music', although the barriers between styles were far less distinct in the 18th century than they are today. He wrote a large number of serenades, cassations, divertimentos, and a variety of other incidental pieces, often written on commission (though sometimes on 'spec'); light music, often intended as nothing more than background for state dinners, parties and the like. One could even say that this was the time of the highest-quality 'Muzak' ever created.

The famous "*Eine kleine Nachtmusik*" Serenade for strings is one of these incidental pieces, an easy, happy 4-movement diversion with no great ambition other than pleasing the ear of an audience of noble laymen. And yet, for all the simplicity of its ambitions, it is, as with all of Mozart's 'hack work', impeccably crafted, full of infectious tunes and great good humour. Indeed, one could make the argument that the opening of the first movement is the best-known Mozart tune of the present day; indeed that when a large number of people think of "classical music" this is the melody that runs through their heads. The serenade was completed in Vienna on 10 August 1787, around the time Mozart was working on the second act of *Don Giovanni*; the specifics of its genesis are lost, but it was probably a commission – the place and date of the first performance were also never committed to record.

The traditionally used name of the work comes from the entry Mozart made for it in his personal catalog, which begins, "Eine kleine Nacht-Musik." It is unlikely that this was a specific title that Mozart gave the piece, rather just a way to note that he had written a little serenade, presumably to be performed at an evening function. Amazingly enough for what is now such an iconic work, it was not published until 1827, almost 40 years after Mozart's death. Originally composed in five movements, only four have survived to the present: the original second movement, a minuet, is lost. The absence is effectively camouflaged, however, by the remaining movement scheme (sonata-form *Allegro*, ternary *Romance*, *Minuet* and *Trio*, and a fast *Rondo*), which matches that of a typical Mozartean string quartet or symphony.

Schoenberg, *Transfigured Night*

Transfigured Night is a Late-Romantic work for string ensemble, a rich, tonal study in expressionism by the dreaded Arnold Schoenberg. It is widely agreed to be his earliest instrumental masterpiece, and continues to surprise and seduce audiences with its sensuousness and air of moonlit mystery. Given the severity and often unresolved dissonance of his later 'atonal' and twelve-tone music, it is perhaps no surprise that this is now Schoenberg's most frequently performed creation; although Schoenberg reminds us, "It shall not be forgotten that this work, at its first performance in Vienna, was hissed and caused riots and fist fights."

This piece is a programmatic work: the melodies, textures, harmonies and dramatic shape all derive from an external source, in this case a poem by Schoenberg's contemporary and friend Richard Dehmel. His poem, inscribed at the head of the score, falls broadly into six parts: 1) A man and woman who have recently met are taking a moonlit walk in the 'bare, cold woods'; 2) She tells him, with great sadness, that she's pregnant by another man, but wishes she'd met him first; 3) She stumbles along in despair, not quite knowing where to look after this confession; 4) The man, at first neutral, comes to say that her radiant condition makes him feel warm and childlike himself; 5) He forgives her, they embrace. 6) They walk on through the night. The text to these final sections is particularly beautiful:

*"Do not let the child you have conceived
be a burden on your soul.
Look, how brightly the universe shines!
Splendour falls on everything around,*

*you are voyaging with me on a cold sea,
but there is the glow of an inner warmth
from you in me, from me in you.*

*That warmth will transfigure the stranger's child,
and you bear it me, begot by me.
You have transfused me with splendour,
you have made a child of me."
He puts an arm about her strong hips.
Their breath embraces in the air.
Two people walk on through the high, bright night.*

All of these scenes, events and moods have direct referents within the score; but even without knowing the 'road map' intimately, the cold mystery, the intimacy, and the 'transfiguration' at the ending are all manifestly clear in every bar of this wonderful music. It is worth knowing, moreover, that this rather precise program does not correspond exactly with the composer's own explanation of the music. It may well be that our best approach to hearing this work is to heed the composer's later advice to recognize that "it offers the possibility to be appreciated as 'pure' music." He even went so far as to advise that we "forget the poem" and enjoy the portrayal of nature (woods at night) and human feeling (from confession to acceptance, loneliness to love) at the heart of his effort in this work.

There is an interesting footnote to the history of *Transfigured Night*. At the end of 1939 an American publisher approached Schoenberg about publishing a new edition. Schoenberg agreed, provided it was an improved version, and for a full string orchestra; this is the version we are performing tonight. Schoenberg also took the opportunity to change all of the expression indications from German to English. This obviously had practical implications for an American edition, but it was a symbolic gesture of 'transfiguration' for the man as well. By that time, he had emigrated to the USA, escaping Berlin in 1933 – as an Austrian Jew, a modernist and an intellectual, the dreadful handwriting was on the wall there for him, and he was one of the fortunate few with the foresight to read it clearly, and the means and connections to get away. Although he had decidedly mixed feelings about American culture and music, he lived out his last years in relative comfort in Los Angeles, teaching, conducting and composing, as his failing health permitted, until his death in 1951.