

PROGRAM NOTES

by Phillip Huscher

Joseph Haydn

Born March 31, 1732, Rohrau, Lower Austria.

Died May 31, 1809, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 101 in D Major (The Clock)

Haydn began this symphony in Vienna in 1793, completed it in London in February of 1794, and led the first performance on March 3 of that year. The score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, with timpani and strings. Performance time is approximately twenty-seven minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first subscription concert performances of Haydn's Symphony no. 101 were given at Orchestra Hall on January 28 and 29, 1937, with Hans Lange conducting.

London knew Haydn's music as early as 1765, when some of his string quartets were advertised under the name Haydri. By the time he visited England for the first time in 1791, not only had the printers got his name right, but the public knew him as the greatest of composers. That visit, which introduced six brilliant new symphonies (the first half of the set we now call the *London Symphonies*), was a great—though not unexpected—success. The concerts were the talk of London, and Haydn, who had spent the last thirty years in private practice, writing to satisfy the demands of the Esterházy family, now enjoyed great public acclaim. A second visit was inevitable.

Eighteen months separate Haydn's two London sojourns. Back in Vienna, where, like so many important composers in history, he was treated with indifference, he began to write the symphonies with which he would reconquer London, perhaps even surpassing his first success. Few external events in his life had stimulated him like the stay in London. He was full of fresh, new ideas. And he now knew that the audience there was as sophisticated as any in the world.

Haydn returned to London on February 4, 1794, with his full-time copyist, Johann Elssler; abundant baggage; the completed score of Symphony no. 99; and parts of nos. 100 and 101. A composer who travels with his personal copyist obviously plans to write a lot of music and oversee its performance. Symphony no. 99 was played just five days after he arrived; Haydn quickly set to work preparing the other two. No. 101 was ready first and performed on March 3; Symphony no. 100 was given at Hanover Square on March 31, Haydn's sixty-second birthday. For this visit, the orchestra at Haydn's disposal included clarinets, and all but one of his last six symphonies take advantage of this new richness of sound.

Symphony no. 101 was popular from the start. At the premiere, both the first and second movements had to be repeated. The *Oracle* commented that "the connoisseurs admit [it] to be his best work." Haydn had already spoken about his desire to write for the crowd as well as the connoisseur, and few works satisfy both audiences so fully without making concessions to the other. Haydn begins in D minor, as he would in his final symphony composed only a year later, with a weighty slow introduction. Here the effect is very somber—lacking clarinets, brass, and timpani—and the effect mysterious. The presto marking and 6/8 time signature of the body of this movement are what one expects from a finale, but Haydn makes it work brilliantly upfront. (Besides, he has plenty of new ideas for the real finale.)

It's the Andante, with its ticking accompaniment, that gave the symphony its nickname, although Haydn's clock—with its tick-tock pattern skipping back and forth over two octaves at one point, and split incongruously between high flute and barking bassoon at another—is one of a kind. Even when the movement suddenly switches to loud and dramatic music, the clock keeps running.

Haydn's minuet is unusually long (the longest he ever wrote, in fact) and filled with wonderful touches, like the timpani solo midway through. The trio is village band music, duplicated whole, right down to the missed cues, late entrances, and wrong notes.

The finale is nonstop brilliance—it has often been called the greatest last movement of Haydn's very long career. He moves with confidence and ease from high drama to homespun simplicity, and from folk song to a magnificent double fugue. Haydn ends, for the last time in his symphonic career, with a familiar signal: a quick pause followed by three firm chords.

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

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