

Korynne Bolt
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Program Notes

Haydn, Symphony No. 93 in D Major

Of Franz Joseph Haydn's 108 completed symphonies, this no. 93 was the first of a dozen to bear the nickname "London" symphonies. As the world experienced significant political changes leading up to 1791, this year also signalled a turning point in Haydn's career. The French Revolution, still underway, entered into a turbulent constitutional monarchy that failed to establish stability; the American government was still young; and Haydn effectively terminated a longstanding post at the Esterhazy court, which had supported him for many years. In its place, Haydn accepted a commission from the enterprising German violinist Johann Peter Salomon. His symphonies were to be premiered in London, and Haydn made his initial journey to England, arriving auspiciously on New Years' Day 1791. Completed within a few months of arrival, this D Major Symphony in four movements displays Haydn's characteristic style and wit.

The first movement opens with a striking, somewhat ominous unison D throughout the entire orchestra. Without any other notes for reference, the powerful note could introduce a variety of moods; not until the violins enter with a soft, sweet melody do we realize that the music is happily centered in a major key. Still, the music starts in the strings and immediately stops again, twice, before wandering into a darker sound, leaving the listener uncertain what kind of piece to expect. Finally, after the entire orchestra pauses warily, the music gets going more definitely, moving faster and steadily. The strings begin the theme, and then dialogue with the wind section, trading off. With dance-like rhythms, any hint of the dark or ominous is completely replaced by joyful, carefree sounds for the majority of the movement. In the middle, there is one fairly short section where the same upbeat sounds and quick pace are developed in a slightly more worried mood. But this does not last long before returning to the triumphant ending.

Haydn begins the second movement in an unusual way: with four solo strings. Known for his innovations in composing string quartets, Haydn uses that experience here to open the movement in a very intimate way. It sets the tone of the movement as more of a chamber piece than a large symphonic work, and the rest of the movement plays on this distinction between small, string-based sections and bigger, angrier sections using the brass. These unexpectedly loud contrasting sections recall the opening of the first movement, meaning there is a dark undertone running throughout the whole symphony despite its appearance of jollity. Haydn excels at writing witty, even humorous twists of phrase (listen for the unexpected bassoon solo near the end of this movement), but it would be a mistake to ignore the deeper, more introspective aspects of his music.

As a prime example of these contrasting tendencies in Haydn's writing, the third movement of this symphony begins with a very lighthearted minuet dance section. This section is repeated, and you will hear just a hint of unrest in the middle each time. But the Trio, the other main section, begins with a noticeable call to attention, a unison variation on the D at the very beginning of the symphony. This time

it sounds even more militaristic and menacing. It ushers in a contrasting tune played by the strings, here a melancholy one. After indulging this more pessimistic turn of events, Haydn returns to the original first section of the minuet, ending once again in a place of security.

The Finale begins unassumingly with strings only, once again. After a short time, the rest of the orchestra enters, and the music begins to sound more intense and negative. But then the winds decide to echo the tune the violins began with, and all is well. In the middle, a lot of fast note patterns are repeated over and over again. At one point, there is a beautiful oboe and bassoon duet while the rest of the instruments are either silent or playing very quietly. This showcases Haydn's penchant for writing melodies that are memorable and poignant in their simplicity. About $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way through this movement, Haydn inserts one of his characteristic musical jokes: the music has become somewhat turbulent, though still quiet. And Haydn pauses the entire orchestra, halting the flow of the music. One single cello plays a short figure, then another silence, then repeats it. This type of reducing the huge ensemble to one soloist is unusual and effective; while the audience is stunned and listening closely to hear the solo, suddenly the entire orchestra returns with the most emphatic and certain version of the unison D that opened the symphony. After this, the music can return to the charming melody that ran through most of this fourth movement. This time, the wind instruments join in seamlessly, without argument. Although Haydn could continue unhampered into the triumphal ending his audience would expect, he insists on adding a few more surprises in the form of the entire orchestra pausing a few times in a row, then re-entering in a dark minor key. From then on, the music wanders a bit unexpectedly before all the instruments find each other at the final ending.