

## HAYDN'S 'NELSON MASS' REVISITED

His Honour Judge Denis Orde MA (Oxon)

The uncertainty surrounding the date or dates, if any, when Haydn's '*Nelson Mass*' (Novello 3) was performed, suggested in the article 'Haydn's Nelson Messe' (TND Vol. 13 Part 2 pp114-5) is understandable, since there is of course no ship's log to be consulted. Moreover, unlike another 'Lap of Honour' by the *Tria Juncta in Uno* (Note 1) to Oxford and the West Country two years later (see 'An Oxford Blip in Nelson's Lap of Honour' by Denis Orde in *The Nelson Dispatch* Vol. 11, Part 4, pp211-214), Nelson's visit to Vienna in 1800 had been wholly unplanned and therefore largely unreported. Attempting to navigate the course of events during the Vienna visit is therefore largely dependent upon the accuracy or otherwise of comment made afterwards in those few letters and diaries, written by persons there present, which have survived.

This was a difficulty I encountered when writing a biography of Admiral Lord Collingwood more than ten years ago now. The result in one chapter was a resumé of this expedition which was far too light in its detail, although I did there express my own view that it was 'more than possible' that Haydn's Mass was performed in the presence of Nelson during that visit (Note 2).

The Admiralty, through the now almost neurotic Rear-Admiral Lord Keith, newly appointed commander of the Mediterranean Fleet, had granted Nelson leave to return home. His original intention had been to return by sea from Naples direct to England for well-earned rest, recuperation and no doubt adulation; then he learned that his friend Queen Maria Carolina, the Queen of Naples, sister of Marie Antoinette, mother of the Empress of Austria and grandmother of Marie-Louise, who was later to marry Napoleon Bonaparte, had arranged a visit to Vienna to see her paternal Austrian Imperial family at the Schönbrunn Palace, in the hope of garnering support for her resistance to Napoleon. It was important to travel before the armistice with France ran out on 12 July. With memory of her sister's execution, the Queen feared capture by the French, which she rated more probable if she travelled by sea, and so she insisted on covering most of the journey overland. Although the capture of Nelson would have been a greater prize for the French, responding to her pleas he agreed to go with her to afford what little protection he could. He took with him a sickly Sir William Hamilton and a now secretly pregnant Lady Emma, who were also returning to England, with Mrs Cadogan, Emma's mother. The beautiful Lady Hamilton dwarfed the diminutive and gaunt, one-armed Nelson with her height and generous proportions, and even with her theatrical flamboyance, she too had no wish to travel by sea.

After a sea crossing from Palermo to Livorno, an overland journey to Ancona and another sea journey across the Adriatic Sea they arrived in Trieste, then in Austria, on 1 August, sick and exhausted. After a fortnight or so of rest, they set out on 10 August with the Queen's entourage of eighty persons, two days

ahead of Nelson. They were careful to avoid the outposts of French soldiers as they went, and the journey from there to Vienna was long, tedious and hazardous. But Nelson's fame had gone before him and he was greeted at all points on the journey, as he had been in Trieste, as the hero of the Nile and the first commander to defeat Napoleon in battle. The Queen was already installed at the Palace when Nelson and his party arrived in Vienna in the last of the carriages, on 18 August. Worn out from the journey, he and the Hamiltons booked into the Villar family's Inn in the Graben (old moat) which lay between St Stephen's Cathedral and the Imperial Palace, where he was feted and surrounded by enthusiastic crowds whenever and wherever he ventured forth. There his friend Sir Gilbert Elliott, by then Lord Minto and at that time Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary at the Court of Vienna, took the party under his wing.

Copies of an engraving of Daniel Orme's portrait of Nelson went on general sale, the composer Johann Wanhal's composition of a piano sonata with the title '*The Great Sea-battle of Aboukir*' was in evidence, and a Nelson fashion in clothing was hurried out. One of the best portraits of Nelson in civilian clothes was painted by the famous Heinrich Füger who had painted Queen Maria Carolina's portrait several times, and a life mask was sculpted by the much less famous Franz Thaller, from which copies were produced. Banquets were held in his honour, an audience with the Emperor followed, and crowds would gather outside restaurants and pay good money to watch the one-armed Nelson being fed by Lady Emma. During all this, visits were made to a small house near to the Hungarian Esterhazy Court at Eisenstadt (then in Hungary), where the great composer Joseph Haydn lived for part of the year, and to which he had only recently returned after his triumphant second tour of London.

It is not known for sure what concerts were given during Nelson's stay in Vienna, still less which pieces were performed, for no programme survives which could have identified all this; but Haydn had resumed by then his old position of Kapellmeister to the opulent and magnificent Esterhazy family at Eisenstadt with new patrons in Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy II and his wife consort Princess Maria Hermenegild. Although heavily engrossed in the composition of his most loved and famous work, *The Creation*, in those years, he had earlier composed six uplifting masses to be performed in church to commemorate Princess Maria's name days, and the third of these, the *Missa in Angustiis* (Mass for Times of Distress) had been written in August of 1798 and performed on 23 September of that year. A Mass in D Minor and Major, it had been so described by Haydn because at that time it had seemed to all that the French invader was at the door and everywhere triumphant. However, before the work was completed and certainly before it was performed, that anxiety had abated somewhat with the news that Nelson had brought the French fleet to battle at Aboukir Bay and destroyed them. The probability is that the chorus of exultation at the end of the *Benedictus* was composed in a mood of euphoria generated by the news of that victory. Contrapuntally, the Mass is regarded as outstanding.



During Nelson's visit in 1800 Haydn had found in Lady Hamilton a musical devotee and they became great friends. It was on 6 September that Nelson and the Hamiltons visited Prince Esterhazy at Eisenstadt, some 40 miles from Vienna, and four concerts were staged in the Palace there between 6 - 9 September, two of them directed by Haydn himself. Indeed, at Emma's request, Haydn set lines to music and composed an aria based on part of an ode on the Battle of the Nile which Cornelia Knight (who was in Nelson's party) had written shortly after the battle, and which Nelson had had published, and Haydn then accompanied Emma when she sang it, perhaps when back in Vienna. But the venue for most of his masses was the Bergkirche (hill church) in Eisenstadt which now contains the Haydn mausoleum, and so, if the Nelson Mass was played, the venue would have been that church.

Although it is not known for sure what music was in fact performed for Nelson in those concerts, I tend to favour the opinion of Sue Morris at p 115 of the *Nelson Dispatch* that performance of the 'Nelson Mass' probably did take place. And I so wrote in the book *In The Shadow of Nelson*, notwithstanding that, before that work was published, there landed on my desk Otto Erich Deutsch's book to which the *Dispatch* refers, sent by a judicial colleague (Note 3) who had it in his library since his wife is a close relative of the Deutsch family. In that work, after careful review of the evidence then available, Deutsch did express some doubt as to the naming of the work as the 'Nelson Mass' and expressed no view as to whether it was performed in the presence of Nelson other than to write that it was 'possible'.

The author of the Haydn biography in the celebrated J M Dent series did assert that it was indeed performed during that visit, but the author of the Haydn entry in *Grove* used the phrase 'it is said to have been performed during Nelson's visit', and the later *New Grove* inserts a question mark as to when it was performed and whether that was in Eisenstadt at all. (Note 4)

But the fact that much music was played by Haydn for Nelson and Emma over those days, and that this particular Mass did contain that chorus of exultation which had probably been inspired by Nelson's victory at the Nile, and which could have persuaded Haydn that it would be appropriate to play this particular Mass when Nelson was present, does favour the opinion I offered that it is 'more than possible' that it was so performed. Of course the fact too that it became known as the 'Nelson Mass' probably suggests that those alive at the time who spoke of it thus, did so because they had heard that it had been performed during that visit to Vienna.

It should however be noted that although Haydn did describe the Mass in his Catalogue Sketch, the description he gave it was '*Missa in Angustiis*'. It was not given any other title when composed and it only became known as the 'Nelson Mass' in about the year 1805 when so described in Germany and Austria. In 1811

one French publisher gave it the title *L'Impériale* by which it is now also known in France and England.

Although therefore the '*Nelson Mass*' was not composed for Nelson personally, or indeed, to commemorate any of his battles, and although it did not become known as the '*Nelson Mass*' until several years after the visit to Vienna, and despite the fact that there remains uncertainty as to whether it was performed in the presence of Nelson during that visit, it would seem 'more than possible' that it was, and certain it is that Nelson was received by the population of Vienna during that visit with warmth and appreciation.

Nelson and the Hamiltons then left the City on 24 or 25 September for Dresden and points north before sailing from Hamburg for Yarmouth, which they reached on 6 November.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Lady Emma often used this motto of the Order of the Bath in letters to Nelson's wife, and Nelson later referred to the Hamiltons and himself as the real Trio - see *The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson* IV 63

<sup>2</sup> *In The Shadow of Nelson* by Denis Orde (2008) pp 148-9.

<sup>3</sup> Rt. Hon. Lord Justice Schiemann

<sup>4</sup> *Haydn* (J.M.Dent) pp100, 130.; *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* Fourth Ed. Vol. 2 p. 578; *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (reprinted 2002) vol. 11 p.187. And see.189 where it is stated that 'Haydn probably composed the *Te Deum* for the Empress in 1800 and apparently first given in September in Eisenfeld perhaps in conjunction with the visit there of Lord Nelson whence the nickname '*Nelson Mass*' for the *Messe in Angustiis*. See also at p.205 the catalogue entry '*Missa (Nelson Messe; Imperial Mass; Coronation Mass)* perf.? Eisenfeldt? 23 September 1798.

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(1997 - REPRINTED IN *PAPERBACK* 2014)  
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