

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809): Te Deum, Hob. XXIIIc, No.2 (1802)

Although published in the same year as his *Harmoniemesse*, Haydn composed his second setting of this liturgical hymn of praise two or three years earlier, following the *Theresienmesse* of 1799 and whilst he was also working on *The Seasons*. The first setting had been composed in the early 1760's, probably as part of the liturgical celebrations marking Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy's inauguration as Lord of Eisenstein in May, 1762, after the death of his older brother, Prince Paul Anton, though it was also performed at the wedding service of Count Anton Esterhazy in January, 1763. The second setting was requested, almost four decades later, by Prince Nicolaus's wife, the Empress Marie Therese at an eventful and difficult time for Haydn: his wife had died in March 1800 but his status as an international celebrity after his two successful visits to London in 1791 and 1794, meant that he was invited to meet Admiral Horatio Nelson and Lady Hamilton, who were visiting Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy in September of that year, and for whom he conducted, on September 8, the first performance of his *Missa in angustiis* of 1798 – since known as the 'Nelson' mass. This was at the name-day concert for Princess Marie Therese and thus the most appropriate of occasions on which to premiere the new setting of the *Te Deum* .

The contrast between the two settings is among the clearest evidence to invalidate Aldous Huxley's facile contention that Haydn "continued, as an old man, to write the sort of thing he had written 20, 30 and 40 years before". Whilst clearly already a mature work, the first setting is tied to what were still the conventions for composition and performance of rococo court music at the time, its exuberantly embroidered elaborations qualified by rather formal counterpoint, particularly in the fugal passages. The later setting, however, is much more expansive, exhibiting the relaxed confidence characteristic of Haydn's late style and is justifiably considered the most important of his shorter works of church music. Scored for a large orchestra, including three trumpets and, in one of the later (1829) published source scores, as many trombones, it sweeps from the outset, in an exultant C major, with eight opening bars of orchestral ritornello marked *allegro con spirito*, into an energetic grandeur sustained as background to the emphatic entry of the chorus intoning *con moto* the ancient Gregorian chant of *Te Deum laudamus*. This is elaborated into a continuing litany of praise by inspired changes of dynamic and, occasionally, of tempo, together with brief interpellations of string-dominated orchestral passages – at this tempo, a relief for the chorus. A sudden change occurs, prefaced by a deeply sonorous C minor orchestral chord, to a brief *adagio* which marks the centre of the work, both musically and liturgically, on *Te ergo quaesumus* – stating the core resurrectionist belief that Christ will come again to judge those He has redeemed with his precious blood. The spirited *tempo primo* is then resumed for the final section, alternating praise with pleas for mercy. Haydn moves towards the climax of the work with a vigorous Handelian double fugue on the last verse: *In te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in aeternum*, concluding it with a series of extraordinary chromatic syncopations on *non confundar* to indicate the plaintiffs' terror at the threat of damnation, before resuming the measured harmony of an assertive C major finale.