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HAYDN, ARTARIA AND THE SEVEN LAST WORDS

or

HOW THE CONCERT SPIRITUEL WAS CHEATED IN 1787

...Pecunia non olet...

THIEMO WIND

In the summer of 1787, the Viennese music publisher Artaria & Co. advertised an orchestral composition by Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) which would soon enjoy great popularity and help the composer to establish his international reputation: *Musica Instrumentale Sopra le sette ultime Parole del nostro Redentore in Croce* (*The Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross*). The piece consisted of – according to Haydn¹ – ‘purely instrumental music divided into 7 Sonatas, each Sonata lasting 7 or 8 minutes, together with an opening Introduction and concluding with a Terremoto, or Earthquake’.² Haydn considered this composition, creating ‘the most profound impression even on the most inexperienced listener’,³ as one of his best. Apart from the orchestral version Artaria also published an arrangement for string quartet by the composer, as well as an anonymous but authorized version for harpsichord or fortepiano.

At the end of the century, the composer finally turned *The Seven Last Words* into an oratorio. In the preface to the edition of 1801 Haydn explained how it had all happened.⁴ About fifteen years earlier he had received a commission to compose instrumental music on the seven last words of Christ from a canon of the Spanish town Cadiz. The work was devised for a liturgical service during Lent in the grotto Santa Cueva (and not, as Haydn stated, in the cathedral), built underground as part of the Parish of Rosario. Until now it was generally

1 All English translations of original sources were taken from H.C. Robbins LANDON, ed., *The Collected Correspondence and London Notebooks of Joseph Haydn* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1959), hereafter CCLN. Original texts in Dénes BARTHA, ed., *Joseph Haydn, Gesammelte Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, unter Benützung der Quellensammlung von H.C. Robbins Landon* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1965), hereafter BARTHA.

2 Letter to the London publisher William Forster of 8 April 1787; CCLN, 59-60. BARTHA (No. 81), 162: ‘bestehend in blosser Instrumental Music, abgetheilt in 7 Sonaten, wovon jede Sonate 7 bis 8 Minuten dauert, nebst einer vorhergehenden Introduction, zu lezt ein Terremoto, oder Erdbeben.’

3 CCLN, 59-60. BARTHA (No. 81), 162: ‘... dergestalten ausgedruckt, daß es den unerfahrensten den tiefsten Eindruck in Seiner Seel Erwecket.’

4 English translation in H.C. Robbins LANDON, *Haydn at Eszterháza 1766-1790 = Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, Vol. 2 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 616, hereafter HCWE.

believed that Haydn received the commission in 1785 or 1786. New evidence, which will be disclosed elsewhere, suggests that this happened considerably earlier, and that the work was ready in its original form as early as 1784.⁵

Whatever the case, during the first months of 1787 the preparations for the editions of the three instrumental versions were well advanced and it was planned to present the work before the Holy Week, for which it was obviously composed. This changed abruptly when a rather mysterious letter arrived from the Concert Spirituel, the renowned concert organisation in Paris. This letter, which obviously contained a request, gave cause for some correspondence between Artaria and the composer. Unfortunately, only two letters, both written by Haydn, have survived.

Until now, Haydn scholars have been satisfied with the rather trivial explanation that the Concert Spirituel wished to publish the music or to perform it from manuscript parts.⁶ The present article will show that it was not so simple as all that.

Haydn's first letter to Artaria

Haydn wrote his first letter concerning the affair on 27 February 1787, from the court of Eszterháza:⁷

(...) But now, my dear friend, as to the letter for [CCLN: 'from'] Paris that you sent me, I must frankly tell you that after due consideration, I cannot agree to it, for the following reasons: first, because by so doing I would terribly offend the gentlemen from

⁵ See my forthcoming article, "Verschiedene große Passions-Symphonien, von Haydn komponiert" - Eine Rotterdamer Aufführung der Sieben letzten Worte im Jahre 1784?", which will be published later this year in the *Tijdschrift van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis*.

⁶ CCLN, 58 (note 1); HCWE, 689 (note 3); BARTHA, 160 (note 1).

⁷ CCLN, 57-58. BARTHA (No. 79), 159-60: 'Nun aber, bester freund! was den Brief nach Paris, so Sie mir zuschückten, betrifft, muß ich Ihnen aufrichtig gestehen, daß ich nach reifer überlegung, solchen aus folgenden ursachen nicht unterschreiben kan, Erstens, weil ich dadurch die herrn v. Cadix, welche doch die grund ursache dieser Sonaten sind, und mich darum bezahlten, sehr beleydige, zweytens würden die herrn franzosen dadurch noch mehr beleydigt, wan ich mir ein werck bezahlen liesse, was in 3 wochen öffentlich in stich erscheint, von welch.[em] werck Sie, bester freund, ganz sicher den vortheilhaftesten Nutzen ziehen werden, um So viel mehr, da solches sowohl in ganzen, als auch in quartetten kan abgesetzt werden. Noch etwas.

gestern erhielt ich von Herrn v. Jacoby, Königl. Preuss. Resident ein schreiben worunter folgendes ware,

WAS HAT ES MIT DEN STÜCKEN VON IHRER COMPOSITION FÜR EINE BEWENDNÜß, WELCHE HERR ARTARIA NACH BERLIN AN DEN KÖNIG ZU ÜBERSENDEN VORHABENS IST? ICH MÖCHTE DARÜBER GERNE DEROSELBEN AUFSCHLUSS HABEN, UND BITTE DARUM ERGEBENST:

Ich hofte ja nicht, daß Sie etwa diese Sonaten weder als quartetten, noch mit allen stimmen Sr Maj. dediciren werden. weil es wider alle Raison wäre, sondern ich glaube, daß es die neuen quartetten angehen werde, welches ich belobe, So Sie es willens sind.'

Cadiz, who after all are responsible for my having written the Sonatas, and who paid me for them; secondly, the French gentlemen would be even more offended if I accepted payment for a work which was to be published in three weeks, from which work you, my good friend, certainly stand to derive the greatest possible profit, the more so since it can be sold as a whole as well as in quartet form.

Another thing: yesterday I received a letter from Herr von Jacoby, Royal Prussian Minister, in which he wrote the following: WHAT ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF SOME PIECES OF YOURS WHICH HERR ARTARIA INTENDS TO SEND TO THE KING AT BERLIN? I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE AN EXPLANATION FROM YOURSELF, AND THEREFORE BEG YOU TO GIVE ME ONE.

I hope that you do not perhaps intend to dedicate these Sonatas [i.e., *The Seven Last Words*] to His Majesty, either as quartets or for full band, because that would be contrary to all common sense; but I believe that you must mean the new Quartets, which I highly approve of, if this is what you intend to do (...).

What Haydn had received from Artaria, was certainly *not* the request from Paris (as Dénes Bartha⁸ and H.C. Robbins Landon believe), but Artaria's reply. Haydn unambiguously wrote about 'den brief *nach* Paris' – the letter *to* Paris. Landon's translation is wrong at this point.

As will be shown later, Haydn partly misunderstood the contents of Artaria's letter. This makes clear that the publisher had received the letter from Paris, and why Haydn was not fully aware of its nature. Artaria could probably not act without Haydn's approval, because the composer's letter reveals that the Parisians had also offered money to him. Thus, Artaria submitted his answer and probably asked Haydn to affix his sign it.⁹ Haydn refused. What did the Parisians want, and why did Haydn not agree?

The suggestion that the Concert Spirituel might have intended a *publication*, is not so strange in itself. Six years earlier, on 27 May 1781, Haydn had written to Artaria that Monsieur Le Gros of the Concert Spirituel was so fond of his *Stabat Mater* (1767), that he had asked permission to publish it.¹⁰ But in the case of *The Seven Last Words* the situation must have been different, for an obvious reason: Haydn could not offend the gentlemen from Cadiz with a French publication. He was free to publish the music without mentioning who had commissioned it on the title page, as Artaria's edition (to be published in

⁸ BARTHA, 160, Note 1.

⁹ H.C. Robbins LANDON (CCLN) translated the German verb 'unterschreiben' into 'to agree' (see above). The word, however, can also mean 'to sign'. In the present context it is more likely that this was meant. See also note 17.

¹⁰ BARTHA (No. 33). 96.

the following weeks) shows. And only one month after writing this letter he offered the work to the London publisher William Forster without any restriction or reference to a commission.¹¹

An extra payment as such was not the problem either, despite Haydn's remark that the gentlemen from Cadiz had paid him already. When offering the work to Forster, he wrote: 'I leave it to your judgement to send me what you think I deserve for it.'¹² After being put off by Forster with five guineas he wrote on 20 September 1787: '(...) but you must see yourself that for music such as that of *The Seven Words* I deserve more; you could give me at least another five guineas more.'¹³

The Concert Spirituel was a concert organisation, not a publishing house, and it is clear that the Parisians had a *performance* in mind, for which they offered payment. This willingness to pay is strange because the Artaria edition was about to be published, as Haydn pointed out in his letter. Hence the French could easily have the disposal of it without paying the composer. It is easy to understand Haydn's fear that the French would feel offended. But why would a performance offend the gentlemen from Cadiz?

The only plausible explanation is that the Parisians did not just want to perform it, they wanted to have the *première*, as if they had commissioned it. Only that would offend the gentlemen from Cadiz! (No evidence exists that the Concert Spirituel claimed to be mentioned as the dedicatee on Artaria's title pages. Haydn only refers to this in a different context, as the quotation above shows: a dedication to the King at Berlin would be 'contrary to all common sense').

Understandably, Haydn was not willing to put his honour into question by the request for the *première* of *The Seven Last Words*. The gentlemen from Paris had obviously heard the rumour of a new composition without being aware of the original commission from Cadiz. Haydn could never agree to a first performance, since he knew that the work had already been premiered in Cadiz.¹⁴

The wish of the Concert Spirituel was quite understandable, since Haydn's instrumental passion music was just what this organisation needed. Its concerts took place on those days of the year when religious feasts precluded the

¹¹ See note 2.

¹² Letter of 28 June 1787. CCLN, 65. BARTHA (No. 90), 171: 'les sept dernieres paroles, que Jesus Crist pronomer sur la Croi. pour les quelles je laisse a votre disposition, de m'envoyer, ce que vous jugerez que j'ai merite.'

¹³ CCLN, 70. BARTHA (No. 97), 178: 'Je vous fais savoir, que j'ai recû de Mons: le general Jerningham cinq guiné, mais vous verrez vous même, que pour une tele Musique comme les Septs paroles, j'ai plus merité, vous pourrez bien encore me donnéz au moins cinq guiné.'

¹⁴ Several musicologists have suggested that the first performance in Cadiz was given during the Holy Week of 1787. This, however, is most unlikely, as it implies that the composition had already been played in public before the commissioners could perform it themselves. If the 'gentlemen from Cadiz' were so nonchalant, Haydn would never be scared to offend them. Hence, the *première* in Cadiz must have taken place in 1786 at the latest.

performance of operas and other dramatic spectacles. During the Holy Week – for which *The Seven Last Words* were meant – concerts were given every day.¹⁵ Motives of rivalry may also have played a part. Haydn's music was in fashion, especially in Paris. He had recently finished a set of six symphonies (the so-called 'Paris' symphonies) for the Loge de la Olympique, the second most important concert organisation in the French capital after the Concert Spirituel.

Haydn's second letter to Artaria

Haydn had good reasons to refuse. On the other hand Artaria had a profitable deal in mind and persisted in changing the composer's mind. The assumption that Artaria intended to publish *The Seven Last Words* within three weeks, was a misunderstanding by the composer and reason for Artaria to explain the whole matter to him in more detail (this letter has not survived either). Haydn replied on 7 March from Eszterháza:¹⁶

Dearest friend!

I have no objections to any of the negotiations you propose to undertake because of the Sonatas [i.e. *The Seven Last Words*], but motives of policy prevent my agreeing to the letter from the *Concert Spirituel*.¹⁷ If you wish to make an offer in your name, I shall be quite satisfied. I approve of your holding back the engraving, and quite see the substantial and advantageous profits you will thereby gain. I am sincerely delighted for your sake, for I know that you will not be stingy with me on other occasions (...).

This is Haydn being very diplomatic. He still does not agree, dissociates himself from the matter, but nevertheless gives Artaria all freedom to settle the negotiations in his own name. This second letter makes unambiguously clear that the Frenchmen had asked to hold back the engravings in order to be

¹⁵ Concerning the Concert Spirituel and its programmes, see Constant PIERRE, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel 1725-1790* (Paris: Heugel, 1975).

¹⁶ CCLN, 58-59. BARTHA (No. 80), 161: 'Liebster Freund! Über alle Ihre Handlungen, so Sie wegen denen Sonaten willens sind, hab ich nichts entgegen, nur kan ich aus Politischen absichten den brief an das Concert Spirituel nicht unterschreiben, wollen Sie aber diesen antrag auf Ihren Nahmen machen, bin ich es ganz zufrieden. Belobe die zurückhaltung des stiches, sehe aber darauß ganz wohl den vortheilhaftten beträchtlichen Nutzen. ich vergönne Ihnen denselben von Hertzen, weil ich weis, daß Sie auch in anderen fällen gegen mich nicht werden geitzig seyn (...).'

¹⁷ Here again, the word 'unterschreiben' can mean either 'to sign' or 'to agree' (cf. note 9). In the present context, the first translation is right: Haydn did agree, as the opening words of the letter show. But he could not sign the letter for political reasons and gave Artaria the freedom to make an offer in his name.

able to give the first performance (a good reason to approach the publisher directly instead of through the composer). The Concert Spirituel was willing to pay considerable compensation which was big enough to supply Artaria with 'substantial and advantageous profits'. Artaria jumped at the chance.

Here starts an unsavoury chapter in the whole affair. Artaria agreed to the French request, but did not hesitate to sell manuscript copies – a normal practice as such – of *The Seven Last Words*. Haydn possibly referred to this when writing about 'the negotiations you propose to undertake because of the Sonatas'. By means of this commercial loophole Artaria played a dubious part. Perhaps it was not against the agreement in a strict sense to hold back the engravings, but the publisher could be sure that this behaviour was in flat contradiction with the French intentions.

A letter in which Artaria recommended the new composition to the Elector of Trier has survived (he asked eight ducats for one manuscript set).¹⁸ It is dated 21 February 1787. This was only six days before Haydn's first answer to Artaria, about the time when Artaria must have received the request from Paris. Whether the French letter had already arrived or not, doesn't alter the fact that Artaria's rendered himself guilty of swindling the French. If the letter had arrived, he had sold the manuscripts with malice thoughts; if the letter had not yet arrived he could by no means grant a first performance.

Four of the hand-written copies from Artaria's publishing house are extant, three in Germany and one in Italy.¹⁹ Two of them – the copies in Harburg and Regensburg – were used for performances in the year 1787. Two other performances are documented. On 26 March *The Seven Last Words* were played at the Palais Auersperg in Vienna.²⁰ Four days later another performance, which was reviewed by Christian Gottlob Neefe in Cramer's *Magazin der Musik*,²¹ took place in Bonn.

The deal

It is beyond doubt that the transaction with the Concert Spirituel was effectuated. Evidence is threefold. In the first place Artaria postponed the publication, which was – as has been said before – initially scheduled within three weeks after 27 February. As late as 23 June, Haydn returned proofs of all

¹⁸ For a translation of the French text, see HCWE, 690 (note 3). The original text appears in Hubert UNVERRICHT's critical commentary to the edition of *Die Sieben letzten Worte des Erlösers am Kreuze* in the *Joseph Haydn Werke* (München-Duisburg: Henle, 1963), 23.

¹⁹ See UNVERRICHT, 12-14 (Sources Be, C, D and E): Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek; Harburg, Fürstl. Oettingen-Wallersteinsche Bibliothek; Modena, Biblioteca Estense; Regensburg, Fürstliche Thurn und Taxissche Hofbibliothek.

²⁰ HCWE, 690.

²¹ p. 1385.

three versions to Artaria.²² The publication was finally announced in the *Wiener Zeitung* of 7 July.

A second indication is found in the letter to the London publisher William Forster in which Haydn offered his composition for publication.²³ This letter was written on 8 April: Easter Sunday! This was exactly the date on which the French embargo must have ended, since the Paris 'world première' could after all not take place later than Easter.

Finally, there is a letter dated 26 April in which the composer thanks Artaria for 'the unexpected 12 ducats – a proof of your friendship, mine, and your efforts on my behalf'.²⁴ What reason could there have been for Artaria to send twelve ducats unexpectedly, except to share in profits from France? Possibly this gesture resulted directly from Haydn's flattering remark in the second letter to Artaria, 'that you will not be stingy with me on other occasions'.

Twelve ducats was a considerable amount of money, two ducats more than what Haydn usually received from his publishers for one piano sonata.²⁵ The price paid by the gentlemen from Paris must have been many times more than this, because Artaria was forgoing a considerable part of his income. First he had to miss the first peak season for a work which due to its subject was chiefly suitable for programmes in the weeks during lent until Easter. Secondly, he had good reason to fear other editions – legal or pirated – by the time the next high season began in the Spring of 1788.²⁶

The 'world première' at the Concert Spirituel

Although all 1787 concert programmes of the Concert Spirituel were advertised in the *Journal de Paris* and other newspapers, the identification of the supposed 'world première' of *The Seven Last Words* is not as easy as one might expect. As has already been mentioned, Haydn's music was prominent in the concert life of Paris at the time. On practically all of the eight days preceding Easter at least one composition by the composer was programmed:²⁷

²² CCLN, 65. BARTHA (No. 89), 171: 'Übersende die Correctur der 7 worth in allen 3 gattungen.'

²³ See note 2.

²⁴ CCLN, 61. BARTHA (No. 83), 164: 'Danke unendlich für die unverhofften 12 Ducaten, ein Zeichen Ihrer Freundschaft, meiner, und Ihrer Bemühung (...).'

²⁵ See for instance the letter of 11 January 1790 to Artaria about pianoforte sonatas, 'each, as usual, for 10 ducats'. CCLN, 94. BARTHA (No. 137), 223: '(...) und jede wie gewöhnlich per 10 Ducaten zu haben sind (...).' Also a letter of 5 April 1789 to the publisher Breitkopf: 'I am sending you the new pianoforte Sonata (...) I have received the 10 # [ducats] in good order'. CCLN, 83. BARTHA (No. 119), 203: 'Übersende durch Herrn Traeg die neue Clavier Sonaten [: Sonate C-Dur, Hob. XVI: 48] (...) die 10 # hab ich richtig erhalten.'

²⁶ These editions came. In 1788 two other editions (Sieber and Forster) were available.

²⁷ PIERRE, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel*, 334-35 (Nos. 1197-1204).

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| 30 March: | Grande symphonie |
| 1 April: | Symphonie... cors, hautbois obligés |
| 2 April: | - |
| 3 April: | - |
| 4 April: | Symphonie; <i>Stabat Mater</i> |
| 5 April: | Symphonie... hautbois & cors obligés |
| 6 April: | Symphonie |
| 7 April: | <i>Stabat Mater</i> (fragments) |

None of the advertisements mentions *The Seven Last Words* by name. Needless to say, the *Stabat Mater* was a different work. The symphonies of 1 and 5 April can be disregarded, since they were announced as being with obbligato horns and oboes, whereas *The Seven Last Words* require many more wind instruments (two flutes, two oboes, two bassoons, four horns and two trumpets). The three remaining compositions were simply described as symphonies (4 and 6 April) and 'Grande symphonie' (30 March). Needless to say, it is highly unlikely that the Concert Spirituel paid a considerable sum to premiere a new and impressive work by the most distinguished composer of the time and consequently left it unperformed.

There can be no doubt that if any of these three works alluded to Haydn's instrumental passion music it would be the 'Grande symphonie' of 30 March. The term 'Grande symphonie' might seem to be a misnomer, but it should not be forgotten that the work was so unique, that nobody at the time knew how to classify it. Advertising the piece with its descriptive title would suggest a vocal work. In the minds of Haydn's contemporaries, this orchestral composition with its multiple movements could be compared at best with a symphony. It was classified as such more than once, as can be seen in several work catalogues.²⁸ The original manuscript which Haydn sent to William Forster was entitled anonymously as: 'La Paßione. / Symphony. / Haydn.'²⁹ Two years later the Concert Spirituel announced the performance of a 'Symphonie tirée des Sept paroles du Christ'.³⁰

The special character of the composition could not have been better emphasized than by the addition of the word 'grande', a qualification most uncommon in the advertisements of the Concert Spirituel. Here it was no exaggeration: both for its scoring and its length (more than an hour!) it really was a 'grand symphony'.³¹

²⁸ See UNVERRICHT, 7.

²⁹ Preserved in the British Library, London. See UNVERRICHT, 7-10 (Source A).

³⁰ PIERRE, *Histoire du Concert Spirituel*, 342 (no. 1258): concert of 17 April 1789. The work was announced here under its real title, indicating that it had become well-known in the meantime (Sieber had published the music the year before).

³¹ See also William Forster's title page: The PASSION of our SAVIOUR [...] for a Grand Orchestra.

One strange fact is that the piece was not among the 'nouveauautés intéressantes dans les Concerts de la semaine dernière' which were reviewed in the *Journal de Paris* of Easter Sunday (8 April). The piece might be expected to have attracted the reviewer's attention as a true 'nouveauauté'. On the other hand, this is no reason to doubt that the 'Grand symphonie' was the same piece as *The Seven Last Words*, because symphonies performed at the Concert Spirituel were seldom reviewed, as Constant Pierre has noted.³²

Conclusion

Undoubtedly the gentlemen of the Concert Spirituel firmly believed that they were giving the world première of Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross* on 30 March 1787. However, on the same evening a performance was given in Bonn, and the work had been played four days earlier in Vienna. In other words: the French were shamelessly cheated by Artaria. Their promised première was certainly not such thing. They thought that they were receiving special treatment, but were in fact nothing more than one of many customers. Yet there was one remarkable difference: whereas ordinary customers paid only eight ducats for their manuscript parts, the French paid so much that twelve ducats could serve as a gratuity for the composer. And Haydn himself? He received his money and did not concern himself with the rest.

³² PIERRE, 190: 'Pour les symphonies, les journaux donnent rarement une appréciation'.