Joseph Haydn Biographical Sketch

Joseph Haydn was born in 1732 in the small Austrian town of Rohrau, north of the Neusiedlersee. At the age of eight this son of a wheelwright traveled to Vienna to enter the famous St. Stephen's Choir School. This trip was the first step in a journey that would fashion Haydn into the most famous composer of his day, and the father of much of the music still enjoyed today.

Haydn’s success as a composer and performer in and around Vienna in the 1750s gave rise to his appointment as a court composer to the influential Hungarian family Esterházy in 1761. He was responsible for providing music for all types of occasions at the Esterházy palaces in Vienna, Eisenstadt, and at Eszterháza what is now Fertőd in Hungary. The growing publishing industry in Vienna, Paris, and London contributed to the rapid promulgation of his fame. By the 1780s Haydn’s music could be heard in most major cities in Europe and North America, including Paris, London, Philadelphia and Boston. The popular appeal of his orchestral music in London prompted the composer to take two celebrated trips there in the 1790s. As the 18th century drew to a close, Joseph Haydn had become the most famous and influential composer in Europe.

Haydn’s music reflects the tastes of his patrons, but also of the emerging middle-class audiences of the 18th century. His works exemplify the Enlightenment artistic ideal of balancing structural clarity with emotional content. They would become models for 19th century composers, beginning with Beethoven.

Below is a chronological outline of some of the important events and people in Haydn’s life, as well as a partial list of compositions. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but rather a referential overview.

I. Key

Biographical items

Symphonies (Hob. I). Note: titles in parentheses are nicknames not attributed to Haydn.

String Quartets (Hob. III)

Concertos (Hob. VII & XVIII)

Keyboard Trios (Hob. XV)

Keyboard Sonatas (Hob. XVI)
Dramatic Works, including Oratorios (Hob. XX/2, XXI) and Operas (Hob. XXVIII & XXIX)

Masses (Hob. XXII) and other Liturgical Works (Hob. XXIII)

II. The Young Haydn 1732-1758

1732 31 March: Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) born in Rohrau, Lower Austria, to Mathias Haydn (1699-1763), a wheelwright, and Anna Maria Koller (1707-1754), a cook at the Harrach castle. Joseph was the second of five Haydn children to survive beyond infancy.

1737 Haydn receives his first formal general and music education from Johann Mathias Franck, his father's cousin, living in Hainburg. 14 September: Brother Johann Michael Haydn (1737-1806) baptized. Michael Haydn would become a famous composer in Salzburg.

1739 Georg Reutter (the Younger, 1708-1772), Kapellmeister at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, was in the Hainburg region in search of boys to sing at the cathedral, and recruits Haydn. Haydn moves to Vienna to sing treble in the cathedral choir, and begins study at the St. Stephen's Choir School.


1745 Younger brother Johann Michael joins Haydn at the St. Stephen's Choir School.

1749 Haydn’s voice breaks and he is dismissed from the Choir School. He remains in Vienna working as an independent performer, teacher, and composer. His earliest compositions come from about this time (1747?), and his playing engagements put him in contact with various musicians, aristocrats, and Catholic orders, including the Barmherzige Brüder.

First Masses (Hob. XXII: 1 & 3)

1750 Haydn moves into the garret room at the Michaelerhaus, adjacent to St. Michael's Church, and near the Habsburg Imperial Palace. Other tenants in the Michaelerhaus include court poet and librettist Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782) and soprano/composer Marianna von Martines (1744-1812). Haydn was hired to give Martines voice and harpsichord lessons.

1751 Der krumme Teufel (Singspiel; Hob. XXIXb:1a). Haydn's first opera, on the farcical libretto by comic actor-singer Joseph Felix von Kurz-Bernardon (1717-1784).
1753 Haydn becomes valet and accompanist for composer Nicola Porpora (1686-1768), best known for his Neapolitan operas and as a fine teacher. Haydn's apprenticeship with Porpora probably had a profound impact on Haydn's development as a composer of vocal music, in particular the setting of the Italian language. Metastasio introduced the two.

*Keyboard Sonata in C (Hob. XVI:1) probably composed.*

1756 *Salve regina (Hob. XXIIIb:1)*

1757 Haydn makes the acquaintance of **Carl Joseph Weber Fürnberg** (c1720-1767), an official in the Lower Austrian government who had a country residence in Weinzierl. Count Fürnberg engaged Haydn to compose chamber music for this residence, including some string trios and his first string quartets.

*Der neue krumme Teufel (Singspiel; Hob. XXIXb:1b)*


III. Haydn The Court Composer 1758-1769

1758 Haydn receives his first full-time appointment as Kapellmeister (until 1761) to the Morzin family—most likely Count Franz Ferdinand Maximilian von Morzin (1693-1763)—in Vienna during the winter and Unter-Lukawitz (Dolní Lukavice) during the summer.

*Symphony No. 1 in D (Hob. I:1) probably composed.*

*Keyboard Sonatas, Hob. XVI:7-10 probably composed.*

1760s

1760 26 November: Haydn marries Maria Anna Aloysia Apollonia Keller (1729-1800) at St. Stephen's. Haydn had apparently fallen in love with her younger sister Therese some years earlier, but Therese was destined to become a nun, and entered a convent in 1755.

*Symphonies (Hob. I): 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 15, 18, 20, 25, 27, 32, 33.*

1761 Due to financial difficulties, the Morzin family is forced to disband its cappella. Count Morzin recommends Haydn to Prince Paul Anton Esterházy (1711-1762), of one of the wealthiest and most influential Hungarian families in the Habsburg Empire, whose main residence is in the town of Eisenstadt, roughly 40 miles south of Vienna, near the Neusiedlersee.
March: Haydn begins working for the Esterházys in their winter palace in Vienna. Haydn would remain in the service of the Esterházy family (with some brief pauses) the rest of his life.

1 May: Haydn signs a formal contract assigning him as Vice-Kapellmeister in the Esterházy court. He was to assist long-time Kapellmeister Gregor Joseph
**Werner** (1693-1766); Werner would be responsible for church music, and Haydn for all other music requirements. Haydn quickly became acquainted with the court’s talented lead violinist **Luigi Tomasini** (1741-1808).

**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 6 'Le Matin', 7 'Le Midi', 8 'Le Soir'.
**String Quartets, Op. 2 (Hob. III:7, 8, 10, 12)** probably composed.
**Violin Concerto in G (Hob. VIIa:4)** probably composed.

1762  18 March: Prince Paul Anton dies; succeeded by his brother Prince **Nicolaus I “The Magnificent”** (1714-1790). Nicolaus I was an avid musician, with a particular interest in playing the baryton. Between 1765 and 1778 Haydn would compose nearly 150 works for this unusual instrument. Nicolaus I began renovating his château at Sütőr, south of the Neusiedlersee, turning it into an opulent palace, which he would rename “Eszterháza” in 1766. Nicolaus I and his court would spend most of each year at Eszterháza from 1766 through the 1780s.

**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 9, possibly 14, 17, 19.
**Horn Concerto in D (Hob. VIIId:3).**  
**Acide (festa teatrale; Hob. XXVIII:1)**

1763  **Symphonies (Hob. I):** 12, 13, 40, possibly 16, 36.
**Violin Concertos in C (Hob. VIIa:1) and A (Hob. VIIa:3)** probably composed.
**Cello Concerto in C (Hob. VIIib:1)** probably composed.
**Te Deum in C (Hob. XXIIIc:1).**

1764  Copyist **Joseph Elßler, Sr.** (d. 1782) employed at Esterházy court, and also works as private copyist for Haydn.
**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 21, 22 (‘Philosopher’), 23, 24, possibly 72.

1765  Haydn, with the help of Joseph Elßler, Sr., begins to assemble his *Entwurf-Katalog*, a thematic catalogue that he continues to update through the late 1770s. Kapellmeister Werner issues letter complaining that Haydn was not fulfilling his duties properly. Haydn is reprimanded by Prince Nicolaus I.
**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 28, 29, 30 (‘Alleluia’), 31 (‘Hornsignal’), 39, possibly 34.
**Keyboard Sonatas, Hob. XVI:3-4** probably composed.

1766  3 March: Kapellmeister Werner dies. Haydn is made Kapellmeister, now in charge of entire musical life of the Esterházy court. Prince Nicolaus I renames Sütőr **Eszterháza**, which now becomes his main residence.
Haydn buys a house in Eisenstadt. 
Keyboard Concerto in F (Hob. XVIII:3) probably composed. 
Missa Cellensis in honorem BVM ('Cäcilienmesse'; Hob. XXII:5). 
La canterina (intermezzo in musica; Hob. XXVIII:2).

Haydn's walk to Schloß Esterházy: Haydn's Eisenstadt home is on the right (blue façade with the Austrian flag), and the roof of the palace is visible up and to the left.
1767  
**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 35, possibly 38, 58, 59 ('Feuer').
**Stabat mater** (Hob. XXbis).
**Keyboard Sonata, Hob. XVI:19**

1768  
Main opera house opens at Eszterháza. For the next fifteen years, Haydn dedicates much of his creative work towards producing operas for the new opera house. This includes writing original operas, and obtaining materials for and preparing operas of other composers.

- **Lo speziale (dramma giocoso; Hob. XXVIII:3)** composed for the inaugural performance in the new opera house.
- **'Applausus' cantata** (Hob. XXIVa:6) composed for Cistercian prelates in Zwettl. Because Haydn would not be leading the performance in Zwettl, he wrote his so-called Applausus Letter to the Cistercians describing how the work should be performed. This letter has become an important document for studying 18th century performance practices.

**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 49 ('La passione'), possibly 26 'Lamentazione', 41, 48 ('Maria Theresa').
**Missa in honorem BVM ('Grosse Orgelsolomesse'; Hob. XXII:5)** probably composed.
**Non nobis Domine** (Hob. XXIII:1) probably composed.

1769  
**Keyboard Concerto in G (Hob. XVIII:4)** probably composed.
**Le pescatrici (dramma giocoso; Hob. XXVIII:4)**

IV. 1770s

1770  
Haydn is very ill during this year. While the nature of the illness is unclear, some have speculated exhaustion led to an extended illness.
**String Quartets, Op. 9 (Hob. III:19-24).**

1771  
**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 42, possibly 43 ('Mercury'), 44 ('Trauer').
**String Quartets, Op. 17 (Hob. III:25-30).**
'Salve Regina in g minor (Hob. XXIII:2)

1772  
**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 45 ('Farewell'), 46, 47, possibly 51, 52, 65.
'Sun' **String Quartets, Op. 20 (Hob. III:31-36).**
**Missa Sancti Nicolai in G (Hob. XXII:6).**

1773  
**Philemon und Baucis (marionette opera; Hob. XXIXa:1)** opens the new marionette opera theatre at Eszterháza.
Empress **Maria Theresa** visits Eszterháza for three days, attending performances of Philemon und Baucis and **L'infedeltà delusa (burletta per musica; Hob. XXVIII:5).**

**Symphonies (Hob. I):** 50, possibly 64 'Tempora mutantur'.
**Keyboard Sonatas (Hob. XVI):** 21-26, dedicated to Prince Nicolaus I.
1774 Vienna Tonkünstler-Societät commissions Haydn for an oratorio for their annual Lenten concert.

Viennese publisher Kurzböck publishes Keyboard sonatas Hob. XVI:21-26 (1773). This is the first authorized publication of Haydn's music.

Symphonies (Hob. I): 54, 55 ('Schoolmaster'), 56, 57, 60 'Il distrauto'.

1774-75 Keyboard Sonatas (Hob. XVI): 27-32.

1775 2 & 4 April: Il ritorno di Tobia (oratorio; Hob. XXI:1) performed at Tonkünstler-Societät Lenten concert, led by Haydn.

Symphonies (Hob. I): possibly 68.

Missa brevis Sancti Joannis de Deo in B-flat ('Kleine Orgelsolomesse'; Hob. XXII:7).

L'incontro improvviso (dramma giocoso; Hob. XXVIII:6).

1776 Prince Nicolaus I reorganizes Eszterháza theatre season, which includes stage plays, operas and marionette operas. A permanent opera company is established. Gluck's Orfeo ed Euridice and Piccini's La buona figliuola performed. Between 1776 and 1790 90 different operas are produced. Haydn's focus on opera at this time contributes to reducing his symphonic output—only 9 symphonies completed 1776-81. Haydn writes a short autobiographical sketch, addressed to "Mademoiselle Leonore." This was apparently intended for inclusion in an Austrian encyclopedia Das gelehrte Oesterreich (1776-78), assembled by Ignaz de Luca. This letter is Haydn's only autobiographical writing.

Symphonies (Hob. I): 61, possibly 66, 67, 69 ('Laudon').

Die Feuersbrunst (German/marionette opera; Hob. XXIXb:A).

1777 Il mondo della luna (dramma giocoso; Hob. XXVIII:7).

1778 Due in part to the amount of time the court retinue spends in Eszterháza (nearly 10 months of the year), Haydn sells his Eisenstadt house.

Symphonies (Hob. I): possibly 53 ('Imperial'), 63 'La Roxelane'.

La vera costanza (dramma giocoso; Hob. XXVIII:8).

1779 1 January: new contract with Esterházys signed, lifting prohibitions on selling his music. Haydn establishes publishing relationship with Artaria. During the 1780s, Artaria develops a distribution arrangement with the London firm Longman & Broderip, leading to the dissemination of much of Haydn's music in London.

Luigia Polzelli (1750-1831), with whom Haydn would have a lengthy affair, joins the Esterházy cappella as a soprano.

18 November: fire destroys Eszterháza opera house. Many opera scores and other materials also destroyed.

Symphonies (Hob. I): 70, possibly 71.

L'isola disabitata (azione teatrale; Hob. XXVIII:9).
Die bestraftes Rachbegieride (German/marionette opera; Hob. XXIXb:3).

V. The “Public” Haydn 1780s-1809

1780s


1781 Haydn establishes publishing contract in London with Forster. La fedeltà premiata (dramma pastorale giocoso; Hob. XXVIII:10) opens rebuilt opera house at Eszterháza. String Quartets, Op. 33 (Hob. III:37-42), incl. no. 2 ('Joke'), and no. 3 ('Bird'). Symphonies (Hob. I): 73 'La Chasse'.


1783 Future Nicolaus II marries Princess Marie Josepha Hermenegild von Liechtenstein (1768-1845). It is possibly this year that Haydn begins friendship with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). Keyboard Sonata, Hob. XVI:43 published (composed 1775?). Cello Concerto in D (Hob. VIIb:2). Armida (dramma eroico; Hob. XXVIII:12).


1785-6     Symphonies (Hob. I): 'Paris' Symphonies 82 ('L'Ours'), 83 ('La Poule'), 84, 85 ('La Reine'), 86, 87.

1786     Seven Last Words of Our Savior on the Cross (orchestral version; Hob. XX:1) completed (fp. 1787).

1787     Johann Elßler (1769-1843), son of Joseph Elßler, Sr., begins working as Haydn's copyist and factotum.
     'Prussian' String Quartets, Op. 50 (Hob. III:44-49), incl. no. 6 ('Frog').
     Symphonies (Hob. I): 'Tost' Symphonies 88, 89.
     Seven Last Words of Our Savior on the Cross (quartet version; Hob. XX:3).

1788     Haydn purchases a Schanz fortepiano.
     Symphonies (Hob. I): 'd'Ogny' Symphonies 90, 91.

1789     Haydn befriends aristocrat Maria Anna von Genzinger (1750-1793), with whom he would correspond until her death.
     Symphonies (Hob. I): 92 ('Oxford')
     Piano Sonatas, Hob. XVI:48-49; no. 49 dedicated to Maria Anna von Genzinger.
     Piano Trios, Hob. XV:11-14.

1790s

1790     28 September: Nicolaus I dies. Prince Anton Esterházy (1738-1794) assumes throne. Prince Anton disbands cappella, retaining only Haydn, Tomasini and a harmonie ensemble. Given his diminished duties, Haydn is able to travel and compose much more freely.
     'Tost' String Quartets, Op. 64 (Hob. III: 63-68), incl. no. 5 ('Lark').
     Piano Trios, Hob. XV: 15-17 (flute instead of vln).
     December: violinist and impresario Johann Peter Salomon (1745-1815) meets Haydn in Vienna. 8 December he dispatches a letter to London newspapers announcing that Haydn will accompany him to London. On the way to London Haydn and Salomon stop in Salomon’s hometown of Bonn, and Haydn meets Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827).

1791     1 January: Haydn arrives at Dover.
     2 January: Haydn arrives in London.
     June: Haydn attends Handel Commemoration concert at Westminster Abbey.
     8 July: Haydn awarded honorary Doctor of Music by Oxford University. Symphony No. 92 ('Oxford') is performed as part of the festivities. Soon after arriving in London, Haydn becomes acquainted with the Prince of Wales (future King George IV) and the Duke of York, both proponents of
“new” music. Haydn would attend many salons hosted by the royal families, including one on 10 April 1795, two days after the wedding of the Prince of Wales to Princess Caroline of Brunswick.

L’anima del filosofo (dramma per musica; Hob. XXVIII:13). Not performed during Haydn’s lifetime.

1791-2 Symphonies (Hob. I): 'London' Symphonies 93, 94 ('Surprise', 'mit dem Paukenschlag'), 95, 96 ('Miracle'), 97, 98.
Sinfonia Concertante (Hob. I:105).

1792 Haydn meets physician John Hunter (1728-1793) and his wife Anne Hunter (née Home, 1742-1821), who was an accomplished poet and hostess of a popular salon which she discontinued following her husbands death in 1793. Haydn set several of Anne Hunter’s poems to music in his two sets of English Canzonetatas (Hob. XXVIa:25-36).July: Haydn returns to Vienna.
The Storm (cantata; Hob. XXIVa:8)

1793 Haydn purchases house in Gumpendorf, a suburb of Vienna.
'Apponyi' String Quartets, Op. 71/74 (Hob. III:69-74)

1793-4 Piano Trios, Hob. XV:18-20, 32

1794 January: Haydn returns to London.
Haydn establishes publishing relationships with both Longman & Broderip and Corri & Dussek in London.
“London” Trios for 2fl, vcl (Hob. IV:1-4)

1794-5 Symphonies (Hob. I): 'London' Symphonies 99, 100 ('Military'), 101 ('Clock'), 102, 103 ('Drumroll'), 104 ('London').
“London” Piano Sonatas, Hob. XVI:50-52 (publ. 1798); dedicated to London pianist Therese Jansen (1770-1843).

1795 Haydn meets several members of the English royal family, including King George III.
Haydn acquires a Longman & Broderip grand piano, possibly as a gift from the firm.
10 April: Haydn attends celebration of the wedding (8 April) of the Prince of Wales to Princess Caroline of Brunswick. King George III and Queen Charlotte (Mecklenburg-Strelitz) suggest that Haydn remain in London, even offering Haydn the use of the royal apartments for the summer. Haydn declined.
4 May: concert given for Haydn’s benefit. A reviewer from the Morning Chronicle wrote the next day: “A Gentleman, eminent for his musical knowledge,
taste, and sound criticism, declared this to be his opinion, that for fifty years to come Musical Composers would be little better than imitators of Haydn, and do little more than pour water on his leaves. We hope the prophecy may prove false, but probability seems to confirm the prediction.”

15 August: Haydn leaves London for last time.
Berenice, che fai? (cantata; Hob. XXIVa:10).

1796 Haydn begins relationship with Baron Gottfried van Swieten (1733-1803), Imperial Librarian and leader of the Vienna Gesellschaft der Associirten.

Breitkopf & Härtel becomes Haydn’s principal publisher. Seven Last Words of Our Savior on the Cross (oratorio version; Hob. XX:2).
- Trumpet Concerto in E-flat (Hob. VIIe:1).
- Piano Trios, Hob. XV:27-30; dedicated to Therese Jansen.
- Missa in tempore belli in C ('Paukenmesse'; Hob. XXII:9).
- Missa Sancti Bernardi d’Offida in B-flat ('Heiligmesse'; Hob. XXII:10).

1796-8 The Creation (Die Schöpfung, oratorio; Hob. XXI:2).

1797 Haydn is made a lifetime member of the Vienna Tonkünstler Societät.
- 'Erdödy' String Quartets, Op. 76 (Hob. III:75-80), incl. no. 2 ('Fifths'), no. 3 ('Emperor'), and no. 4 ('Sunrise').

1798 The Creation receives its first private performance at the Schwarzenberg palace.
- Missa in angustiis in D minor ('Nelsonmesse', 'Imperial mass', 'Coronation mass'; Hob. XXII:11).

1799 19 March: first public performance of The Creation at the Burgtheater.
October: George Thomson (1757-1851) first contacts Haydn about setting British and Scottish folk songs.

Haydn is first visited by biographer Georg August Griesinger (1769-1845), an agent of Breitkopf & Härtel, as the publishing firm begins its Oeuvres complètes de Joseph Haydn. Griesinger publishes Biographische Notizen über Joseph Haydn in 1810.

- Missa in B-flat ('Theresienmesse'; Hob. XXII:12).
- 'Marie Therese' Te Deum in C (Hob. XXIIIc.).
Bergkirche, Eisenstadt

1800s

1799-1801  The Seasons (Die Jahreszeiten, oratorio; Hob. XXI:3).

1800  20 March: Haydn’s wife Maria Anna dies.

1801  24 April: first private performance of The Seasons at the Schwarzenberg palace.
       19 May: first public performance of The Seasons at the Redoutensaal.

       Missa in B-flat ('Schöpfungmesse'; Hob. XXII:13)

1802  Michael Haydn offered position of Esterházy court composer; turns it down.

       Missa in B-flat ('Harmoniemesse'; Hob. XXII:14); last major composition.

1805  Albert Christoph Dies (1755-1822) begins his interviews (until 1808) with Haydn for his Biographische Nachrichten von Joseph Haydn, which is published in 1810.

1806  27 March: Haydn makes last public appearance at a performance of The Creation at the old university in Vienna, under the direction of Antonio Salieri (1750-1825).
       Michael Haydn dies in Salzburg.
1807 Prince Nicolaus II commissions Beethoven for a Mass (Mass in C, f.p. in Bergkirche).

1809 Napoleon lays siege to Vienna; guards posted outside Haydn's Gumpendorf house to protect him and his property.

31 May: Haydn dies.

**VI. Bibliography**


