

MATANGI QUARTET

VII LW OP.51

JOSEPH HAYDN

matangi

VIOLINI : MARIA-PAULA MAJOR
VIOLIN II : DANIEL TORRICO MENACHO
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What could be a bigger challenge than giving musical expression and shape to “Die sieben letzten Worte”, the seven last sentences that Jesus spoke on the cross: giving feeling and articulation to the most charged text in the world, but without the words? Haydn did this more than successfully in 1787 with these seven string quartets.

The narrative character of these seven sonatas for string quartet really makes its mark on the listener. The slow tempi of the dramatic opening and each of the seven parts that follow, and indeed the sheer length of the piece all bring us into an almost trance-like state: an hour of adagios with many contrasts of atmosphere and feeling, and then suddenly the bombastic and shocking earthquake (Terremoto) of the final two minutes.

This is a trial of stamina for four musicians who have to give form to a rollercoaster of intense feelings that range from despair and pain to forgiveness and hope, resignation and death.

Of all of the versions that exist of this piece, that for string quartet has become the most well-known and popular, possibly because the intimacy of this form best coincides with something like four people united in prayer.

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DIE SIEBEN LETZTEN WORTE UNSERES ERLÖSERS AM KREUZE

The last words of Christ as handed down by the evangelists Luke, John and Matthew, inspired Haydn to create an orchestral piece that he later arranged for string quartet, and on the basis of which he subsequently wrote an oratorio and even gave permission for a piano arrangement.

The instrumental versions of 'Die sieben letzten Worte' consist of an impressive, dramatically tense introduction (*maestoso ed adagio*), seven so-called 'sonatas' (seven beautiful movements, each of around ten minutes in length and known as *adagios*, but which in fact are three *largos*, two *graves*, a *lento* and an *adagio*) closing with a 'Terremoto', a final earthquake. Each of the parts is based on sonata form (with exposition, development and recapitulation) and each is preceded by the relevant words of Christ (in Latin). The "earthquake" at the end, a *presto e tutta la forza* in C minor, certainly makes a great impression in the orchestral version, with trumpets and timpani creating a thunderous *fortissimo* conclusion.

Haydn succeeds superbly in fulfilling his mission to portray the last hours of Christ with purely instrumental means.

There can be little doubt that the work's swift rise in popularity in its day was due to its accessibility as a constantly evolving narrative in music. As early as 1788 a reviewer in the *Musikalische Zeitung* commented that anyone with merely an ounce of feeling should be

able to understand what the composer was trying to express almost note by note. There is sufficient contrast within the constraints of a series of purely slow movements. The simplest means are used in all of the movements, and although they are homophonic in nature they still have great expressive depth.

The piece has a clearly innovative and weighty character, and declamatory melodic lines provide highly effective representations of Christ's words. Haydn can be forgiven for the very programmatic nature of the final depiction of the earthquake as a conclusion.

1- THE "MAESTOSO ED ADAGIO"

introduction is an emotional overture in the key of D minor, a key suitable for a requiem.

2- PATER, DIMITTE ILLIS; QUIA NESCIUNT, QUID FACIUNT

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lucas 23:34)

Those who crucified Jesus were not aware of the full extent of their actions as they did not recognise Him as the Messiah. However, their ignorance of Divine truth did not mean that they deserved forgiveness, and Christ's prayer in the midst of their mockery is an expression of the infinite compassion of Divine grace.

3- HODIE MECUM ERIS IN PARADISO

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Lucas 23:43)

With this statement, one of the criminals on the cross is assured that he will find heavenly glory after his death with Jesus. This promise was made because, in his last hour of life, the criminal expressed faith in Jesus and acknowledged Him for who He was.

4- MULIER, ECCE FILIUS TUUS – ECCE MATER TUA

“Woman, here is your son” - “Here is your mother.” (John 19:26-27)

When Jesus saw His mother standing at the cross with the apostle John, whom He loved very much, He placed the care of His mother into John's hands. From that moment John took her into his house. Jesus, the Son who is always full of compassion, ensures that His earthly mother is cared for after His death.

5- DEUS MEUS, DEUS MEUS, UTQUID DERELIQUISTI ME?

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

Here Jesus expresses his feelings of utter abandonment. It is a quote from Psalm 22.

6- SITIO

“I am thirsty” (John 19:28)

Here Jesus fulfils the Messianic prophecy from Psalm 69:21: “No, they mix poison through my food and quench my thirst with vinegar.” By saying that He was thirsty, He caused the Roman guards to give him sour wine, which was customary at a crucifixion.

7- CONSUMMATUM EST!

“It is finished!” (John 19:30)

These words of Jesus meant that His suffering had ended and that the task that His Father had given Him was fulfilled. That task involved preaching the Gospel, performing signs, and delivering salvation for His people.

8- IN MANUS TUAS, DOMINE, COMMENDO SPIRITUM MEUM

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Lucas 23:46)

Here Jesus places His existence in the hands of the Eternal Father. With a quote taken from Psalm 31, He indicates that this is the moment of death.

9- “TERREMOTO”

REFERS TO THE EARTHQUAKE MENTIONED IN MATTHEW 27:51.

After eight slow adagios this part comes as a shock to the listener and takes them into a world of overlapping notes, arpeggios and tremolos.

MATANGI

Daniel, Maria-Paula, Karsten and Arno have been close for years as friends and sharing their love of quartet playing. In the last twenty years, since they were students together, they have been a part of each other's lives as musicians and seen each other marry and have children. They have played hundreds of concerts worldwide, from Russia to Tunisia and from China to New York. Often, they play as a quartet, and other times they share the stage with performers from home and abroad, many of them renowned. They have performed at prestigious festivals in the Netherlands and further afield.

“The strength of Matangi is in the strength of the group. We are four independent artistic souls of which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts”, according to Daniel.

“I would describe us as unruly and untamed. We don't colour inside the musical lines!”, is what Maria-Paula writes.

“We play a wide range of kinds and styles of music, all of which demand their own interpretation and presentation. For us, that's both the challenge and the inspiration.”
(Karsten)

Arno says “The audience knows they can always expect surprises with us. We're not afraid to try out new ideas; Matangi offers endless possibilities!”

They like taking risks, in their programme selections and even more in their playing. The keyword is trust. Knowing that your fellow musicians will be alert, will be there for you and then take you by surprise with something even more beautiful.

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de Doelen



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