

Hermann Scherchen Born: June 21, 1891 – Berlin, Germany Died: June 12, 1966 – Florence, Italy

The eminent German conductor, Hermann Scherchen, was mainly self taught in music. He learned to play the viola and was a violist from 1907 to 1910 in the Berlin Blüthner Orchestra and on a temporary basis at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. He met Arnold Schoenberg and made his debut with A. Schoenberg's Pierrot lunaire in 1912.

In 1914 Hermann Scherchen became conductor of the Riga Symphony Orchestra. He was interned in Russia during the First World War. In 1918 he returned to Berlin and founded the New Music Society and a string quartet that bore his name. One year later he created Melos, a journal devoted to contemporary music. In 1920 he was reader at the Berlin Music College. He took over the Leipzig Concert Association Orchestra in 1921 and succeeded Wilhelm Furtwängler as conductor of the Frankfurt Museum concerts. From 1923 (until 1947) he worked regularly with the Winterthur Orchestra and was director of the Winterthur Collegium Musicum for a time. In 1923 he was a founder member of the International Society for Contemporary Music, on whose behalf he also appeared as conductor. In 1928 he moved to Königsberg where he was chief musical director (until 1931) and principal conductor (until 1933) of the Eastern Radio Symphony Orchestra. In 1933 he left Germany and worked as guest conductor in various countries. He created orchestras and journals in Brussels, Vienna and Switzerland, all with the name Ars Viva or Musica Viva and all devoted to contemporary music. From 1944 to 1950 he was conductor of the Zurich Radio Orchestra, which was renamed Beromünster Radio while he was working there. After the Second World War he gave classes at the Venice Biennale and in Darmstadt. In 1950 he founded the Ars Viva publishing house in Zurich, publishing forgotten or unknown works by classical and contemporary composers. He was also interested in electro-acoustic music and with the support of UNESCO founded a sound studio in 1954 in Gravesano (Switzerland). From 1959 to 1960 he was conductor of the North-West German Philharmonia, his last permanent post. Scherchen is certainly one of the most important figures in the world of music in the twentieth century. He unearthed new talents but without neglecting old traditions. Even today, his interpretations of Mozart and the Romantics are unequalled. Scherchen was one of the few conductors who conducted without a baton.



Franz Joseph Haydn

The Seven Last Words of Christ

Hermann Scherchen
Vienna State Opera Orchestra
Günther Theuring, chorus master
Vienna Academy Chamber Choir



Joseph Haydn (1732 - 1809)

The Seven Last Words of our Savior on the Cross

In 1785 or '86 Haydn, a devout Catholic, received a commission from the cathedral in Cádiz. He was asked to provide descriptive orchestral interludes between the spoken parts of the service in the great Spanish Baroque church during Holy Week, presumably on Good Friday. In 1787, the year in which it was first performed, he transcribed the work for string quartet to give it wider currency, and eventually, in 1795-96, he made a choral version which was published in 1801. In the preface to that score, Haydn wrote:

“Some fifteen years ago I was requested by a canon of Cádiz to compose instrumental music on the seven last words of Our Savior on the Cross. It was customary at the Cathedral of Cádiz to produce an oratorio every year during Lent, the effect of the performance being not a little enhanced by the following circumstances. The walls, windows, and pillars of the church were hung with black cloth, and only one large lamp hanging from the center of the roof broke the solemn darkness. At midday, the doors were closed and the ceremony began. After a short service the bishop ascended the pulpit, pronounced the first of the seven words (or sentences) and delivered a discourse thereon. This ended, he left the pulpit and fell to his knees before the altar. The interval was filled by music. The bishop then in like manner pronounced the second word, then the third, and so on, the orchestra following on the conclusion of each discourse. My composition was subject to these conditions, and it was no easy task to compose seven adagios lasting ten minutes each, and to succeed one another without fatiguing the listeners.”

This masterpiece was conceived in a spirit of profound religious conviction. Despite its length and emotional urgency, it is a model of simplicity and sophistication. Above all, Haydn wanted it to be accessible to everybody, regardless of

one's musical or religious background. He wrote: “Each sonata, or movement, is expressed by purely instrumental music in such a way that even the most uninitiated listener will be moved to the very depths of his soul.”

In the hands of a mere four string players, this music cannot achieve the volume and tonal diversity of a symphony orchestra or choir. Nevertheless in the four-voice setting, with only one instrument on a part, it is imbued with a heightened intimacy which larger ensembles cannot possibly match. This music's emotional and psychological impact is best conveyed through the most subtle variations of timbre, voicing, rhythm, and tempo - techniques ideally suited to a string quartet. Therefore this simplest of all versions may indeed be the most affecting. No less compelling than its more grandiose cousins, it is inherently more personal.

Haydn considered this to be one of his greatest works. But to hear the music by itself, however powerfully it stands alone, is to experience it in only part of its glory. Reunited with the words that served as its inspiration, it takes on a spiritual dimension rarely found in even the most profound compositions. Though its message is decidedly Christian, it transcends the focus of any particular faith. This is music which cuts across religious and social lines and speaks sincerely, eloquently, and passionately to everyone, via the common denominator that exists in the soul of all humanity.

The diverse versions of “The Seven Words” have each had their lobby amongst Haydn scholars who have long-debated the merits of the original orchestral score versus the vocal arrangement, the string quartet and the piano arrangement. Today the string quartet - first performed in Vienna on St Cecilia's Day 1787 - is the version heard most often. It is also interesting to notice that the work was already being performed in America in 1793.

Franz Joseph Haydn

- 1 Introduzione I: Maestoso ed Adagio 4:53
 - 2 Vater, vergib ihnen (Father, forgive them) 6:37
 - 3 Furwahr, ich sag es dir (Verily I say unto you) 5:57
 - 4 Frau, hier siehe deinen Sohn (Woman, behold your son) 6:29
 - 5 Mein Gott, mein Gott (My God, my God) 6:58
 - 6 Introduzione II: Largo e Cantabile 7:17
 - 7 Ach, mich durstet (I Thirst) 4:10
 - 8 Es ist vollbracht (It is finished) 4:30
 - 9 Vater, in deine Hande (Father, into your hands) 9:14
- Total Play Time: 56 minutes, 5 seconds

Hermann Scherchen

Vienna State Opera Orchestra
Günther Theuring, chorus master
Vienna Academy Chamber Choir

Virginia Babikian and Ina Dressel, sopranos; Eunice Alberts, contralto; John Van Kesteren, tenor
Otto Wiener, bass. Günther Theuring, chorus master. Vienna Academy Chamber Choir

Transferred from 15ips 2-track tape Recorded by Westminster 1958
Engineer – Adolf Enz, Raymond Füglistaler Producer – Dr. Kurt List

The Seven Last Words of Christ