



REVIEW: BOOK

The Haydn Economy: Music, Aesthetics, and Commerce in the Late Eighteenth Century

Nicholas Mathew

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In 1779 Haydn reached an agreement with his employer, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, that allowed him to sell his music without princely restrictions. What followed brought fame, fortune and questions. Already in Haydn's lifetime, apostles of the new discipline of aesthetics objected to his apparent concessions to entertainment; preferring their art autonomous and disinterested, they especially disliked the literal conjuring-up of nature in *The Creation* and *The Seasons*. A century and more later, the normally pro-Haydn Donald Francis Tovey dubbed another attention-grabber, the surprise in the 'Surprise' Symphony, 'the most unimportant feature in all Haydn's mature works' (quoted on page 82). As Nicholas Mathew shows, the composer and his fans would have been, well, surprised. Late eighteenth-century consumers had a lot of goods and attractions to choose from, and they were as concerned with sociability as with artistic autonomy. Grabbing their attention was the first step towards creating shared experiences of surprise, natural wonders and everything else Haydn aimed to express. If this led to high market value, it did not diminish aesthetic value; aesthetics and economics had not yet coalesced into separate fields, and pieces of music could be both material and immaterial, commodities circulating sentiment through a global system of commerce.

Immaterial virtues such as formal ingenuity, harmonic inventiveness and expressive wit have dominated Haydn scholarship for so long that it takes a concerted effort to recall just how material his music can be. To this end, Mathew brings eighteenth-century commerce right onto the page, eschewing traditional musical examples in favour of facsimiles. Unedited, a little hard to read and sometimes askew, the images also draw on the practical sources typical of the period: the 'Surprise' Symphony is represented by a contemporary keyboard reduction, Symphony No. 59 by a second-violin part. This is a Haydn of ready-to-play fragments, not the idealized wholes of a critical edition. The accompanying narrative shows the sheet music circulating from author to manufacturer to owner, joining all the other saleable objects linking peoples, places and things in the emerging consumer economy of Europe and its colonies. Though he invokes modern actor-network theory, Mathew notes that the era itself knew perfectly well what was going on: its literary objects included 'it-narratives', stories told from the perspective of pens or pieces of clothing as they wended their way through the system (90). Together with its contents, sheet music followed the same routes, a reminder that what would be theorized after 1800 as musical 'works' – exhibits in an imaginary museum, in Lydia Goehr's influential study – were solid commodities first. Keyboard songs, especially, became 'quintessential modern consumer items', frequently staging the same cycles of identification, desire and gratification that underpinned the market economy (90–101).

A kind of market logic reaches into the substance of Haydn's music as well. In the 1780s and 1790s, 'surprises' became a reliable, repeatable strategy for engaging attention, and something similar can be said for the 'stock' musical gestures that have occupied much recent scholarship. Mathew focuses on the generic harmonic-contrapuntal progressions or 'partimenti' excavated by Robert Gjerdingen and others from period sources, as well as the rhythmic, melodic and textural 'topics' first catalogued by Leonard Ratner. Both function like interchangeable parts, easily adapted to realize that paradoxical telos of consumer capitalism, the new product that appears comfortingly familiar. One could add other practices, such as standardized ornaments or the formal-rhetorical habits also described in eighteenth-century composition pedagogy (such as statement, elaboration and expansion). Stock gestures draw the circle of sociability tighter, aiding circulation, comprehension and – not least – productivity.

For, of course, someone had to make all this music, and labour is no less central to 'the Haydn economy' than any other. The composer's own experience took different forms. His Esterházy appointment, which he never relinquished, was not 'work' in the sense of wage labour or even his entrepreneurial efforts after 1779; in Mathew's words, it was 'service – a principle of zealously performed loyalty that would continue as long as the hierarchical social relations that it helped to sustain' (125). Haydn wrote quantities of music not to build a catalogue so much as to uphold court culture and an ideal of what he called *Fleiß*: 'industry', in the archaic sense of 'industriousness'. Writing for market, by contrast, was work in the more familiar sense, and he writes of its rigours in some of his late-career letters (128–129).

A comparable diversity of work manifests itself in his musical 'works', the term itself referring to the 'affective labour' they represent. In a virtuosic reading of the finale of Symphony No. 98, Mathew connects the leaps between contrasting topics, the endless play with repetition and closure, and the disassembling and reassembling of the main gigue tune to the 'zany aesthetic' theorized by Sianne Ngai (129–132). Rooted in the clowning servant roles of *commedia dell'arte*, zaniness seeks to hold (or distract) the attention at all costs and requires untold effort. Any number of late eighteenth-century instrumental pieces could serve as illustrations, but Symphony No. 98 goes so far as to highlight the individual effort behind the antics, giving solos first to Haydn's business partner in London, the violinist Johann Salomon, then to the composer himself, running the performance from the keyboard. Both are faithfully reproduced in the source used for the accompanying musical examples, Salomon's quintet arrangement of the symphony, where Haydn's solo bears a footnote memorializing his appearance as a player. At this point, 'the work was not yet fully detachable from the musical worker' (133). A few years later, *The Creation* shifts attention towards the composer's authorial labour, especially the opening blast of light, the biggest surprise of all, which spawned inevitable comparisons between Haydn's work in the oratorio and God's in the Book of Genesis. *The Seasons* follows with an actual chorus honouring *Fleiß* – understood, as in eighteenth-century British economic theory, as the industriousness that transforms nature's bounties into civilization. Favourably depicted throughout the oratorio, whose seasons are as much agricultural as climatic, *Fleiß* gets the full Handelian treatment of acclamations and counterpoint in the chorus, elevating the glue that holds the capitalist enterprise together. 'The audible industriousness of Haydn's fugue', concludes Mathew, 'provided a musical analog for that ubiquitous yet sublime principle that brought unity to multiplicity – work' (151).

With its works about work and its scraps of music paper tempting consumers with recombinations of stock parts, *The Haydn Economy* turns a familiar stretch of European music history inside out. Haydn entering the market has long been seen as a court musician shedding the ancien régime to pursue an innovative popular style. While acknowledging the composer's agency, Mathew shows how thoroughly his achievements were shaped by other forces at play: money, trade, commercial law, social practice and the logistics of publishing and performing. Amidst these consumerist surroundings the late music acquires unexpected associations, and it becomes something other than the tidy rows of symphonies (and oratorios, quartets and so forth) occupying latter-day book- and

record-shelves. Although Haydn lived long enough to see the first efforts at complete editions, for much of his career music remained contingent, fragmented, dynamic – a mass of objects caught up in the unpredictable swirls of commerce.

Mathew's account is dizzying, utterly convincing and not a little sobering. Following the money does more than batter already bruised assumptions, however bracing it is to recognize continuities between aesthetics and economics: 'a deterritorialized market existence is more or less the same thing as vaunted aesthetic autonomy' (52). Still, *The Haydn Economy* also highlights the ethical catastrophe of deterritorialized markets, engines of a rapidly expanding colonial network enforced by racist, Eurocentric violence. It was no metaphor when an English enthusiast declared, in a poem celebrating Haydn's revitalization of British music, 'Our Arts and Industry in times of need / Can proud and distant empires clothe and feed' (22); and conversely, it was imperial commerce that fed the composer's appetite for coffee and chocolate, imports from the New World plantations (25). Under such conditions, musical sociability did not necessarily mean inclusive community-building. Sharing sentiment could equally well substitute for recognizing difference or granting empowerment. The artful slaves' laments for keyboard and voice that circulated in Haydn's milieu, or the innumerable pieces referring to Scottish, Gypsy and other marginalized peoples and places, offer only the clearest examples of music serving an exculpatory 'project of feeling for and with colonized others' (54). A style built of stock gestures and designed for frictionless circulation always risked superficiality, its level surface flattening the complex, often inequitable relationships between its conveniently interchangeable parts.

As Mathew is at pains to show, a similar risk haunts the very method that underpins his stunningly revisionist history. The actor-network ideal of objects, people and places all having agency can obscure the ways in which hierarchies still govern their interactions. Not coincidentally, fully developed enumerations of networks – 'Latour litanies' – bear more than a passing resemblance to the descriptions of commerce penned by Adam Smith and others, in which vast webs of small-scale activity produce wondrous goods and events (148, 153–154). No one would seriously claim that market economies bestow agency equally: musical or otherwise, they have winners and losers by definition, and in the eighteenth century their rewards were distributed differentially and with respect to hereditary as well as market-based privilege. 'To unravel masterwork into network', Mathew further notes, is to elevate *Fleiß* to a universal value: 'everyone and everything must be active, must have an impact, if they are to be worthy of acknowledgment' (154). Concentrated near the end of the book, this reflexive critique recalls a surprise-filled Haydn coda, at once confirming the argument and opening up unexpected consequences. Recovering the material, the relational and the global in Haydn poses a long-overdue challenge to a more traditional historiography segregating text from context, author from onlooker, centre from periphery. But no one should assume it answers all the questions about power and agency confronting the writing of Western music history today. 'It seems to me more important', Mathew remarks in his final sentence, 'to ask what new hierarchies are replacing the old, and who gets to choose what they are' (169).

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