Carrara: *Mater* for String Orchestra

Cristian Carrara was born in Pordenone, Italy. After his early training he graduated from the Conservatory of Udine. He writes mainly symphonic and chamber music, but also works for musical theater and television. His music has been heard in concert and recital halls worldwide and he has collaborated with renowned Italian and international musicians to create new works. He serves as artistic consultant to the superintendent at Teatro Lirico di Trieste and he is Chairman of the Culture Committee of the Regione Lazio.

Christian Carrara has provided this description of *Mater*:

"Mater" was commissioned in 2009. My wife was expecting our first daughter Catherine, so I decided to write a piece dedicated to motherhood, the expectation of a life that comes to light. "Mater" describes the slow development of a creature in the belly of the mother. At the same time, it tells of the patience of those who have been waiting for nine months and feel a face growing inside for which they do not know the features. It describes the mysterious bond between mother and child, a bond unique and miraculous. The writing of "Mater" has thus accompanied the expectation of our first daughter.

The first performance of "Mater" was scheduled for April 12, 2009, on Easter Sunday. By an extraordinary coincidence I could not be present at the first performance of this work. On 12 April 2009 my daughter Catherine was born and, therefore, that day, I had more important things to do than go to a concert!

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Rodrigo: *Concierto de Aranjuez*

Every artist responds to injustice, war and violence in a different way. Beethoven violently slashed his pen through his dedication to Napoléon Bonaparte on the title page of his “Eroica” Symphony when Bonaparte declared himself Emperor. Dmitri Shostakovich depicted the mechanized terror of the Nazi invasion of his country with a pompously vulgar and repetitive march in his “Leningrad” Symphony. Pablo Picasso responded to the senseless bombing of innocent civilians by Franco’s forces (aided by the Italian Air Force and the German Luftwaffe) in his native Spain by painting the stark and moving “Guernica.” Other musicians react to the cruelty and inhumanity of the world by creating their own oasis from violent conflict and asking us to join them in it. Such is the case with Joaquín Rodrigo’s *Concierto de Aranjuez*, written during the Spanish Civil War and on the cusp of the Second World War.

Rodrigo had been studying in Paris and had taught in France and Germany when his scholarship was cut off at the start of the Spanish Civil War. With the victory of Franco’s forces in 1939, Rodrigo and his wife
returned to Spain. While in Paris, Rodrigo had written a number of works which had yet to be performed. One of these was the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, dedicated to the Spanish guitarist Regino Sainz de la Maza, the soloist for the premiere in Barcelona in 1940. One of the critics present at the first performance recognized the importance of Rodrigo’s work to Spanish music:

“...it is impossible to find another Spanish work with such exciting picturesque qualities and formal perfection. For the first time in the history of our music, the picturesque and the classical are fused, reciprocally mitigating and enlivening each other.”

The concerto takes its inspiration from the 16th-century Palacio Real de Aranjuez, the summer palace of the Bourbon monarchy, and specifically the palace’s spectacular gardens. The concerto is not overtly pictorial, but rather attempts to evoke the moods of the gardens – the textures, sounds and smells. Rodrigo recognized this when he wrote:

“...in its notes one may fancy seeing the ghost of Goya, held in thrall by melancholia. Its music seems to revive the essence of an 18th century court where the aristocratic blended with the popular element, and one could say that in its themes there lingers on the fragrance of magnolias, the singing of birds, and the gushing of fountains, although any more specific description is absent. It is a synthesis of the classical and the popular in point of form and sentiment, dreams hidden beneath the foliage of the park surrounding the baroque palace, and only wants to be as nimble as a butterfly and as controlled as a verónica (a maneuver a bullfighter performs with his cape).”

At the time of the premiere, Spain was adjusting to the new Franco regime. Artists of all kinds, including composers, had to create works that at least appeared to celebrate the victory of the new government. The Franco regime may have taken *Concierto de Aranjuez* as a compliment, as though Rodrigo were comparing the Spanish Nationalists to the noble leaders of the Golden Age. Others may have seen it as a less flattering comparison – Rodrigo underlining the oppression of the new dictatorship by contrasting it with a far more prosperous and civilized era of Spanish history.

Speculation about the origin and meaning of the *Adagio* began shortly after the premiere. Rodrigo himself said nothing about this ravishingly beautiful but sorrowful movement. Many thought it was a lament for the victims of the 1937 bombing of Guernica. Rodrigo’s wife, Victoria, stated in her autobiography that this movement depicted both the joy of the newly married couple’s honeymoon and the unbearable anguish of the miscarriage of their first child. Yet in one of his letters, Rodrigo mentions that the whole of the last two movements came to him in his Paris studio in November 1938, a full six months before the miscarriage.

The work is in three movements. Spanish dance is present from the opening bars, with the soloist introducing an ostinato of strummed guitar chords alternating between a feeling of two beats and three beats. This rhythmic figure pervades the entire movement, evoking the spirit of *flamenco* throughout. While Rodrigo never directly quotes Spanish folk music, it inspires both his melody and harmony.
Adagio also opens with strummed guitar chords, over which the English horn floats a lament full of both yearning and regret. The soloist elaborates on this melody and engages in dialogue with other instruments in the orchestra, leading to the guitar cadenza at the heart of the movement. The intensity of the cadenza builds to a passionate climax, followed by the full orchestra responding in equal ardor with a fully scored version of the opening melody. Its grief spent, the movement slowly ebbs into gentle harmonics in both the strings and the guitar. The third movement returns to the lively dancing of the opening movement, again alternating between duple and triple meters. The textures are light, with echoes of Baroque dances pervading the entire movement, dispelling the sorrowful shades of the Adagio. While the solo guitar’s virtuosity is on full display, the work finishes quietly, as though the dancers and musicians have decided to gracefully conclude the festivities.

Haydn: Symphony No. 101 in D major, “Clock”

Joseph Haydn’s 30-year career with the Esterházy family proved to be a fruitful relationship for both musician and monarch. It is true that Haydn was treated as a servant – his contract specified that he and his musicians “appear in white stockings and white shirt, with either pigtail or tiewig, and thoroughly powered” – but his patrons, Prince Paul von Esterházy and his successor Prince Nikolaus, provided Haydn with all the resources he could want in order to make the Esterházy musical establishment one of the most renowned in all of Europe. Since Haydn had only one fairly liberal patron to please, without the need to entertain a fickle public, he could experiment to his heart’s content. In so doing, he forged the modern forms of both the symphony and string quartet. Haydn wrote of his time at Esterházy: “I was cut off from the world. There was no one to confuse or torment me, and I was forced to become original.”

When Prince Nikolaus died in September 1790, Haydn’s sheltered creative life came to an end. Nikolaus’s successor, Prince Anton, severely cut the musical staff at his court. Most of the musicians were given six weeks’ severance pay, and Haydn was given a pension, with almost no demands on him for new compositions. With over 90 symphonies to his credit along with numerous other works in all genres, no one could blame Haydn for contemplating a quiet (if austere) retirement at the age of 58.

Fortunately for Haydn and the history of music, fate had other plans. Haydn’s dull domesticity was shattered by the appearance of one Johann Peter Salomon, a violinist, composer and conductor who had made a very successful career as a concert impresario in London. Salomon made the journey from London to Vienna to entice Haydn to return with him to write music, give concerts – and make obscene piles of money. According to Haydn’s first biographer, Albert Christoph Dies, Salomon’s first words to Haydn were “I am Salomon of London and I have come to fetch you; tomorrow we will establish an agreement.” While Haydn was initially skeptical and slightly apprehensive of undertaking such a long journey at his age, the lure both of a new audience and much-needed financial security proved irresistible. With the contractual promise of 5000 Austrian gulden (roughly $65,000 in today’s currency) in hand, Haydn landed in Britain on New Year’s Day, 1791 after a two-week journey across Europe.

Salomon was as good as his word. Within days of setting foot in England, Haydn wrote “My arrival caused a sensation throughout the city and I went the round of all the newspapers for three successive
days. It appears that everybody wants to know me.” His concerts were considered the most important events of the society season, playing to sold-out houses on almost every occasion. The musicologist and critic Charles Burney attended Haydn’s first concert in London and reported the sensation it caused:

“Haydn himself presided at the piano-forte; and the sight of that renowned composer so electrified the audience, as to excite an attention and a pleasure superior to any that had ever been caused by instrumental music in England.”

He was awarded an honorary doctorate from Oxford, and was a frequent guest and performer for the Royal Family.

Haydn’s two seasons in London (1791 – 92) proved so artistically and financially successful that Salomon arranged a second London trip for 1794 – 95. For both of these sojourns, Haydn’s contract called for him to produce six new symphonies to be given their initial performances in London. These twelve works (numbered as Symphonies 93 – 104) have been collectively dubbed the “London” Symphonies, and you may occasionally see them called the “Salomon” Symphonies. Thanks to Salomon’s connections in London’s music world, Haydn had the best players of the time, and wrote accordingly. While today we are accustomed to performance practice with an orchestra of perhaps 30 musicians, we know from contemporary accounts that performing these pieces with large groups of players was also common practice. In one instance, Haydn heard one of his symphonies performed by an orchestra of over 300 musicians.

The Symphony No. 101 in D major was part of Haydn’s second visit to London, though, as with many of the pieces premiered in London, at least portions may have been written beforehand. It was first performed in the Hannover Square Rooms (one of London’s premiere concert venues at the time) on March 3, 1794 with a handpicked orchestra of 60 players led by Salomon from the concertmaster’s chair. As with most of the premieres of the “London” Symphonies, both audience and critics were rapturous in their praise. In its review of the concert, the Morning Chronicle gushed more like a teenybopper at a Beatles’ concert than a distinguished metropolitan newspaper:

As usual the most delicious part of the entertainment was a new grand Overture [i.e., symphony] by HAYDN; the inexhaustible, the wonderful, the sublime HAYDN! The first two movements were encored; and the character that pervaded the whole composition was heartfelt joy. Every new Overture he writes, we fear, till it is heard, he can only repeat himself; and we are every time mistaken.

Like most of the “London” Symphonies, the work opens with slow introduction. Rather than assert the key of D major, Haydn begins in D minor, with most of the introduction played pianissimo throughout. For the sprightly 6/8 Presto which follows, Haydn sets himself a special challenge: instead of presenting a dramatic first theme and a more lyrical second melody for contrast, Haydn uses virtually the same music for both themes – what’s known as a monothematic exposition. With less “raw material” to work with, Haydn shows off his compositional virtuosity in getting the most musical mileage out of it,
modifying and reshaping it at every appearance. The *Andante* second movement is the source of the symphony’s nickname, and the gentle ticking in strings and bassoon that opens the movement changes color but remains throughout. The third movement *Minuet* is Haydn’s musical wit at its cheekiest – the trio section portrays a hapless village band, full of “wrong” entrances. The bustling finale is full of high spirits and contrapuntal hijinks, from its witty main theme to a double fugue in the middle, and it concludes with jubilant fanfares from the full orchestra, led by trumpets and timpani.