

2022 Evaluations Advanced Biography

Franz Joseph Haydn

1732-1809

Franz Joseph Haydn was born in Austria in a small village called Rohrau. Haydn's father was a wheelwright (someone who makes wheels). Haydn's father was a passionate folk musician who taught himself to play the harp. The family frequently sang together with their friends. By the time young Haydn was 5, he could sing all of his father's favorite folk songs. Until Haydn was 6, his musical background consisted of folk songs and peasant dances which had an influence on his later compositions.

When Haydn was 6 years old, a relative, Johann Mathias Franck, came to visit; he was an organist and ran a school. He was very impressed with young Haydn's musical talent and took him to his school to study music. He moved ten miles away from his parents and never again lived at his parent's home. While at school he learned many instruments and became a very good singer. Two years later, Haydn was chosen to become a member of a choir at the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna. While there, he studied harpsichord, violin, and voice. He sang with the choir until his voice changed at the age of 18. He was rumored to be a trouble-maker; some say he was thrown out of the choir because he cut off the long braided hair of an unknowing choir student in front of him.

In 1750, at the age of 18, Haydn found himself with very little money. He tried to support himself by teaching music and doing odd jobs. Throughout these hard times, he continued to try to teach himself composition. In 1759, at the age of 27, he finally found work when he met an Austrian nobleman who hired him to direct an orchestra for a small salary. During this period Haydn wrote his first symphony and many quartets. His compositions were very popular with his audiences.

In 1761, he entered service with the Esterhazys, one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Hungary. Haydn's jobs were to compose music, lead performances, take care of instruments, and supervise and teach other hired musicians. For nearly 30 years, most of Haydn's music was composed for performances in the palaces of the Esterhazys. He was very busy leading two concerts and two operas weekly as well as daily chamber music performances. In the 1770s and 1780s, Haydn's fame spread and he composed many commissioned works for people throughout Europe.

In 1781, Haydn met Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and became his teacher. They both thought highly of each other. Haydn once said of Mozart, "friends often flatter me about my talent, but (Mozart) was far above me." Many of Mozart's pieces were influenced by Haydn.

In 1790, Haydn left the Esterhazys to work for himself. He moved to Vienna and met a concert promoter, Johann Peter Salomon, who sent Haydn to London to perform and compose music. The people of England loved Haydn and wanted him to stay. After two years he left London, England and met Ludwig van Beethoven on his return trip to Vienna. He was very impressed by Beethoven and offered to teach him. Beethoven became Haydn's student from 1792 until 1794. You can hear Haydn's influence in many of Beethoven's works.

In 1794, he returned to London and found he was still successful. In 1798, he returned to Vienna. Here he composed six masses and two oratorios, *The Creation* (1798) and *The Seasons* (1801), which were so popular that orchestras and choruses were formed just to perform these pieces. He remained in Vienna until he died in 1809 at age 77.

It is difficult to know exactly how many pieces Haydn wrote throughout his long life. Many pieces not written by Haydn were falsely attributed to him to increase their retail value. The list of his authenticated copies includes 108 symphonies, 68 string quartets, many orchestral and chamber works, 47 piano sonatas, vocal pieces, and 26 operas. Many of Haydn's symphonies and string quartets now have nicknames that weren't given by Haydn.

Franz Joseph Haydn was one of the most important composers of the Classical period; some scholars believe that Haydn invented the string quartet form. He was also considered a pioneer in the development of the symphony. He was fondly nicknamed the "Father of the Symphony" and the "Father of the String Quartet".