December 2014 Program Note

Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis ("Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.") This most Baroque of Biblical texts conjures up images of a swirling multitude of angels announcing the nativity of Jesus. The *chiaroscuro* of the radiant heavenly host against the night sky contrasts with the peaceful innocence of dumbstruck shepherds below on earth. Similarly, in Baroque art and music, ceilings soaring "in the highest" with apotheoses of saints and classical gods contrast with the pastoral conceit of an imaginary Arcadia of rustic flock-tenders.

Although in the Scriptures they only appear at the Apocalypse to signal the Last Judgment, trumpet-playing angels are essential to the musical iconography of Christmas. Moravian trumpeter, Pavel Josef Vejavanovský (c.1633-1693), introduces his *Sonata natalis* with a pair of trumpets, placing a well-known (even then) Vespers antiphon-turned carol, *Resonet in laudibus* (known in German as *Joseph lieber, Joseph mein),* in a gilded Baroque frame. He spent most of his career in Kroměříž (now in the Czech Republic), exchanging musical influences with the great violinist Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber, his colleague in the employ of the prince-archbishop of Olomouc. A virtuoso music copyist as well as trumpeter, he also copied some 1,300 items from the Imperial Library in Vienna for his patron.

The brief *Sonata natalis*, one of over a hundred compositions listed in Vejavanovský's personal inventory, begins with a grand homophonic (chordal) introduction between six-part strings and two trumpets. The trumpets then introduce the carol tune alone, trading antiphonal phrases with the strings in the manner of Venetian polychoral music. The meditative Adagio which follows departs from the carol tune (for a brief *et in terra pax* moment) with an expressive violin solo over sustained string harmonies à la Biber.

The delicate simplicity of a Christmas lullaby composed by Prince Paul I Esterházy (1635-1713), the first prince in a lineage that continues to this day, belies its aristocratic origin. *Cur fles, Jesu* from his collection *Harmonia caelestis* (1711) is a bittersweet strophic song to the infant Jesus with an introductory "sonata" and brief interludes for two violins and continuo, similar in style to the "little sacred concertos" of Heinrich Schütz. The vocal line is naive and tuneful, possibly derived from one of the Hungarian or German folk melodies found elsewhere in the collection. As the Virgin bids the Christ-child not to cry but sleep (despite premonitions of his eventual death) the violins alternately rock in repeated triplets. It's hard to envision this poet-harpsichordist-composer leading regiments against the Turks at the siege of Vienna some thirty years earlier.

By the time Haydn wrote *Ave Regina Coelorum* (1771), he was Kapellmeister for the grandson of Prince Paul I, Prince Nikolaus I Esterházy (1714-1790), and had earned an international reputation despite living at their estate in rural Hungary. There he was responsible for conducting the orchestra and composing symphonies, operas, string quartets, and church music both large and small. Tonight's work is among the latter, a setting of one of the four hymns to

the Virgin Mary known as "Marian antiphons," sung since the thirteenth century in the monastic services known collectively as the Divine Office.

Haydn's setting is a gracious, elegant work in three sections. Although the string introduction (*ritornello*) seems to prepare for an *aria di bravura*, the vocal line delivers an *aria di cantabile*--more lyrical than pyrotechnical. The fluid coloraturas are discreetly supported by the three-part strings (no violas), who either double the voice or provide harmonic foundation. There's a surprising resolution to what we expect to be the final vocal flourish (*cadenza*); Haydn brings back the ritornello in *minor*, forcing the form into overtime and a second cadenza before the proper resolution in major. The choral section (*Gaude virgo*) is written in simple hymnbook (homophonic) style. Staggered entries superficially suggest a fugue at "*super omnes*," but it is sleight-of-hand; the parts simply pile up in blocks of harmony, not as interwoven contrapuntal lines. The third section is a gentle leave-taking of the Virgin, with continuous staccato rising figures in the strings over a pulsating bass suggesting her ascent to heaven while the soloist and choir pray for her intercession.

While most of Vivaldi's fifty or so sacred works were written for the all-female Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, commissions elsewhere allowed for works with tenor and bass parts not available to him there. Though the specific origins of tonight's *Dixit Dominus* are unknown, its score somehow arrived at the Saxon court in Dresden in the 1750s, where it languished incognito until discovered by a stylistically savvy Australian musicologist in 2005. Copied in the hand of a Venetian copyist notorious for forgeries, the title page reads "Dixit a 4/Con Strumenti/Del Sig. Baldassar Galuppi...1745." By the 1750s the dead Vivaldi was stylistically out-of-date compared to the popular Venetian Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785), *maestro di coro* at St. Mark's Basilica and composer of comic operas. Though at the time Galuppi enjoyed an international career in London, St. Petersburg, and Vienna (where to this day Vivaldi lies in an unmarked grave) both composers had faded into obscurity by the nineteenth century. The Vivaldi revival in the first half of the twentieth century launched his rise to superstardom, but Galuppi, not so much.

That a work of Vivaldi could pass as one by Galuppi can be attributed to its *galant* style, in which genteel balanced phrases, tuneful melodies, and simpler harmonic progressions rejected the contrapuntal complexity and extravagant virtuosity of the Baroque. *Dixit Dominus* is a setting of Psalm 110, the opening psalm of the liturgy for Vespers. Vivaldi separates the psalm verses into separate movements of contrasting tempi, styles, textures, with the alternation of solos and choruses found in oratorios and concerted masses of the period.

The work is a sampler plate of stylistic variety. It opens with the majesty of descending block chords in dotted rhythms (long-short, long-short) over a vigorously rising bass. The recurrence of this passage in the final movement is a musical pun commonly found in the period: *sicut erat in principio* ("as it was in the beginning"). The interplay of unison first and second violins in canon creates an aural equivalent to the "coextensive space" in Baroque art; the ear hears the same notes imitating one another from different locations within the orchestra. Vivaldi uses this device again in the duet for two tenors (no. 4) and two sopranos (no. 9). An anomalous

dramatic entrance of the tenor soloist in the midst of an allegro aria (no. 6) betrays its operatic origins: Vivaldi recycled the aria from his own opera *La fida ninfa* (1732), further evidence of his authorship of the whole work.

Musical devices which paint the text abound. Brash, abrupt falling figures accompany the lyrical alto aria (no. 2) illustrating the Lord making a footstool of his enemies. A jocular tenor duet (no. 4) accompanied by a rustic tune in the strings reflects the common folk making offerings. A solo trumpet makes a surprise appearance at *Judicabit in nationibus* (no. 7) to herald the Day of Judgment, in keeping with its Scriptural role. Undulating figures in parallel thirds, typically used for breezes and waves in Baroque opera, depict a brook (no. 8). The double fugue which concludes the work (no. 10) juxtaposes a chromatically descending "Amen" with a tongue-twisting *Et in saecula saeculorm*, accelerating into an exciting *più allegro stretto* at the conclusion.

In 1733, two prominent musicians sought positions at the Dresden court of the new Elector of Saxony, Friedrich Augustus II. One was Johann Sebastian Bach, who submitted a magnificent concerted *Missa,* the same Kyrie and Gloria he later reused in what we know as the B Minor Mass. Another was Jan Dismas Zelenka, a 20-year veteran violone player and composer in the court orchestra. Neither man got the job of *Kapellmeister,* though both later received largely honorary titles. The opera-loving elector chose instead Johann Adolf Hasse, husband of the reigning diva, soprano Faustina Bordoni. That Bach was destined for immortality and Zelenka for obscurity reflects in part the general neglect by music historians of Bohemian composers (Mozart's mentor Mysliveček foremost among them). On hearing this mass – but without claiming equality for the rival composers – we can clearly hear that Zelenka's omission from the pantheon of Baroque composers is undeserved.

When the father of Friedrich Augustus (as well as his rumored 300 illegitimate siblings), Augustus the Strong made the decision to convert to Catholicism in order to become the King of Poland, the Dresden court went into high gear to produce suitable music for the newly-built Catholic court chapel. Zelenka himself had already written 150 compositions, mostly sacred, before his job application in 1733, including our *Missa Nativitatis* in 1726. As evidence of its high regard, a copy of this work was found in the estate of Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, court composer in Berlin and Sebastian's second surviving son.

Zelenka's Christmas Mass reflects not only the sumptuous elaboration of the Mass text but also the high degree of instrumental virtuosity in the legendary Dresden court orchestra. In addition to the strings, there are prominent parts played by two trumpets, two oboes, and – a specialty of the Dresden band – transverse flutes (as opposed to the more commonly used alto recorders). Zelenka features them prominently in the *Domine Deus* (no. 3), isolating the flute duo from the unison violins and violas without cellos, bass, or keyboard continuo. The soprano and alto soloists respond in elegant *galant* phrases to the flutes, creating a pastoral setting for the "lamb of God" referred to in the text. It's entirely possible that Johann Sebastian Bach was inspired by this movement – or one similar to it – when writing for flute duet over pizzicato strings in his own *Domine Deus* in the 1733 Gloria later incorporated into the B Minor Mass.

The Mass is divided into movements, although the textual units are much larger than in the more familiar Bach setting. The Kyrie opens with a tuneful phrase finessed with a graceful appoggiatura (in gender-insensitive musical terminology, a "feminine ending"). This is the signature of the *galant* style, what J.S. Bach reportedly called "the beautiful Dresden ditties" [*Dresden Liederchen*]. Soloists and choir enter without regard for the penitential text, and the *Kyrie* and *Christe* are intermixed with no change of movement, key, or loss of momentum.

In the signature movement of a Christmas Mass, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, the trumpets are released from their genteel role in the *Kyrie* to engage in a three-level dialogue from heaven to earth with the oboes and strings. "Peace on earth" lasts but a few measures before the hymn of praise resumes. Throughout the mass, the secular spirit of the Dresden Catholic court prevails. Ten measures of B Minor suffice for the *Et incarnatus*, and the *Crucifixus* duet in G Major is positively sunny. This isn't all that surprising for a court that could switch from Protestant to Catholic for political gain with nary a theological qualm.

The *Sanctus* departs from the *stile moderno* of the concerted movements (with independent parts for the instruments) to the *stile antico*, the polyphonic style of the sixteenth century championed by Zelenka's teacher in Vienna, J.J. Fux. The playful minuet of the *Benedictus*, however, sports another opportunity to display *galant* flute virtuosity.

The one element missing from this Mass which is found in many, possibly most, Baroque works for the Nativity is a pastorale or siciliana (e.g., the *Pifa* in *Messiah*), the lilting, cradle-rock over a drone bass imitating the folk music of the shepherds. Zelenka clearly prefers to draw the attention of the electoral court to the regal magnificence of the occasion rather than to its rustic origins. Although the two-fold *Agnus Dei* is written in the most austere antique style, there is no attention to "peace on earth" when the text calls for it; rather, the third iteration, *Dona nobis pacem* ("grant us peace") rises into an extravagantly florid fugue topped off by the climactic entry of the trumpets.

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