Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
May 7-8-9, 2021
95th Season / Subscription Concert No.8
Michael Allsen

This closing concert of our 95th season begins with a feature for concertmaster Naha Greenholtz, Haydn's *Violin Concerto No. 4*. We then bring our season-long tribute to Beethoven to a close with his largest sacred work, the titanic *Missa Solemnis*. The Madison Symphony Orchestra and Chorus are joined by four distinguished vocal soloists for this immense work: soprano Alexandra LoBianco, mezzo-soprano Briana Hunter, tenor Clay Hilley, and bass Kenneth Kellogg.

Haydn composed this concerto for the private orchestra of his patron, Prince Esterházy. A work of subtle virtuosity, it is set in the standard three-movement Classical form: an expansive opening, a songlike slow movement, and a fast-paced finale.

Franz Joseph Haydn
Born: March 31, 1732, Rohrau, Austria.
Died: May 31, 1809, Vienna, Austria.

Concerto No. 4 in G Major for violin and Orchestra

- **Composed**: 1760s.
- **Premiere**: Unknown, though probably at the Eszterházy court in the 1760s.
- **Previous MSO Performances**: This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration**: 20:00.

Background
In 1761, Haydn took a position in the court of the fabulously wealthy Hungarian Prince Paul Anton Esterházy. For the next 30 years, Haydn—who rose to the rank of *Kapellmeister* (chief musician) in 1766—was employed exclusively by the Esterházy family and his work schedule and what he composed were almost entirely determined by the court. For example, the court divided its time between the Esterházy palace in Eisenstadt, near Vienna and the magnificent country estate known as Esterháza, 30 miles east, across the Hungarian border—meaning a biannual move for all of the hundreds of servants, including musicians. Haydn seems to have thrived in this environment, and composed hundreds of works for the Esterházies, from operas and symphonies to chamber music. The court had its own small orchestra, generally no more than 15 players, but including several fine

musicians. One of these was the concertmaster, Alois Luigi Tomasini. Tomasini had initially been hired as a valet, but the Prince, knowing of his musical talent, sent Tomasini to Venice to study violin. (Tomasini probably studied with Leopold Mozart as well, and later took composition lessons from Haydn.) When Haydn joined the court in 1761, Tomasini was the principal violinist, and all four of Haydn's violin concertos were likely written for him.

What You'll Hear
Though it is conventionally listed as his *Violin Concerto No. 4*, this work may be the earliest of the four, written relatively soon after Haydn joined the Esterházy court. Scored for strings only, it is laid out in the conventional three-section form, beginning with a fast movement (*Allegro moderato*). The orchestra lays out a pair of relaxed, genial themes, which are then picked up in decorated form by the solo violin. The solo line develops these themes with several surprising turns to the minor, before a full recapitulation, and a solo cadenza. The movement ends with a short coda. The *Adagio* is simply lovely, with a lyrical theme and gentle accompaniment laid out by the orchestra before being taken up and embellished by the solo violin. The middle section begins with a brief moment of uneasiness, and culminates in a short solo cadenza, before the orchestra returns to the opening music. The good-humored finale (*Allegro*) is tied together by a lively theme heard at the beginning, this alternates with contrasting material, including some brilliant passages for the soloist.

Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* (Solemn Mass) the last and largest of his sacred works, is a massive setting of the Latin mass, though Beethoven's music for these deeply traditional texts often reflects his own distinctive spirituality.

Ludwig van Beethoven
Born: December 17, 1770 (baptism date), Bonn, Germany.
Died: March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria.

Missa Solemnis, Op. 123
- **Composed**: Between 1818 and 1823.
- **Premiere**: April 7, 1824, St. Petersburg, Russia.
- **Previous MSO Performances**: 1947, 1948, and 2003.
- **Duration**: 72:00.

Composing "a grand sacred work"

Though, unlike his onetime teacher Haydn, he was never employed by an aristocratic patron, Beethoven benefited throughout his career by his friendships with members of the Viennese nobility. One of his most faithful supporters was Archduke Rudolph, a member of the Hapsburg dynasty, and brother of the reigning Austrian Emperor. He had first come to Beethoven for piano lessons when Rudolph was a teenager, and their relationship remained close for nearly 25 years. Rudolph granted financial backing, but also remained personally friendly and supportive to the composer, even as Beethoven became more eccentric and withdrawn. For his part, Beethoven composed several works dedicated to Rudolph: two of his piano concertos, the piano sonatas "Les Adieux" and "Hammerklavier," the "Archduke" piano trio, the *Grosse Fugue* for string quartet and other works. When it was announced that Rudolph would be raised as a Cardinal and enthroned as Archbishop of Olmütz (Olomouc), Beethoven immediately offered to compose a mass for the occasion. In June 1819, he wrote to Rudolph: "The day when a solemn mass by myself is performed as part of the ceremonies for Your Imperial Highness will be the happiest day of my life, and God will inspire me, so that my poor gifts may contribute to the glorification of this solemn day."

Rudolph's coronation was planned for March 20, 1820, but Beethoven had actually been sketching a setting of the mass for some time before writing his letter to Rudolph. However, the "solemn mass" was not even close to being finished in March 1820—it would in fact be three more years before he completed the score. Composing this enormous work was a clearly a personal struggle. His friend Anton Schindler, reported that one day in August 1819, he arrived at Beethoven's following a noisy argument between Beethoven and his servants. The servants had both quit and the neighbors were upset. Schindler and a few friends entered the house, and "behind a locked door, we heard the master singing parts of the fugue of the [*Gloria*]—singing, howling, stamping. After we had been listening for a long time to this almost terrifying scene, and were about to go away, the door opened, and Beethoven stood before us with distorted features, fearful to behold. He looked as if he had been in mortal combat with the whole host of contrapuntists, his everlasting enemies. His first utterances were confused, as if he had been disagreeably surprised at our having overheard him."

This was a trying time for Beethoven. After the tremendous burst of creativity during what has been known as the "Heroic Decade" (1802-1812), he composed few large works over the next six years. Personal problems seem to taken precedence over composition. By 1812, Beethoven was completely deaf, and was increasingly isolated. His unsuccessful affair with the woman known only as his "immortal beloved" (probably Antonie Brentano) that year, was his last lasting

attachment to a woman, and it seems that he reconciled himself with remaining a bachelor forever. He was estranged from his brother Johann, and his brother Caspar Carl died in 1814, leaving Beethoven co-custodian of his nephew Karl. Beethoven's obsessive attempts to gain sole custody of his nephew dominated the next several years, reaching a peak of nasty litigation against the boy's mother at the very time he was attempting to finish the *Missa Solemnis*.

The composition of his innovative "Hammerklavier" sonata in 1818 seems to have been a crucial turning point: he returned in an active way to composition and produced a dazzling series of works over the next eight years. The twin peaks of this late period are the *Missa Solemnis* and the *Symphony No.9*, completed in 1824. Though he missed the March 1820 deadline for Rudolph's coronation, Beethoven continued to work periodically on the *Missa Solemnis* between work on the ninth symphony and other projects. An autograph score of the *Missa* was delivered to Archbishop Rudolph on March 19, 1823, adding the inscription "From the heart, may it go to the heart."—nearly three years to the day after the intended event.

The *Missa Solemnis* had grown far beyond a traditional setting of the Catholic mass, and it proved difficult to get it performed in Vienna. It was far too big to be sung as part of an actual church service, and the Catholic authorities in Vienna forbade the performance of the mass text in a purely concert setting. One of Beethoven's aristocratic admirers, Russian Prince Nicholas Galitzin, arranged for a premiere by the Philharmonic Society in St. Petersburg, later writing an enthusiastic account to the composer in Vienna: "The effect on the public cannot be described, and I have no fear of exaggerating when I say on my part that have never heard anything so sublime…" In May of 1824, after another patron, Prince Lichnowsky, intervened with the Church censors, Beethoven programmed the *Kyrie, Credo*, and *Agnus Dei* of the *Missa*—billed as "Three Grand Hymns with Solo and Chorus"—on a concert that also included the premiere of his *Symphony No.9*. There was no complete performance in Vienna until 1845, long after Beethoven's death.

The Music—A Personal Vision

There are no texts as steeped in tradition as the Latin texts of the mass, the central ritual of the Roman Catholic Church. For more than 1500 years, the texts of the "Ordinary" of the mass—*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus,* and *Agnus Dei*—have been sung at Catholic services, and they have been set to music thousands of times, from plainchant to polyphonic settings to elaborate versions for chorus and orchestra. Beethoven's previous setting of the mass, the *Mass in C* of 1807 is a

fairly conventional piece, very much in the style of masses by Mozart and Haydn. In the *Missa Solemnis*, it is clear that he set out to do something new.

Beethoven was not a practicing Catholic, but his religious faith was strong, if unconventional. In 1818, he wrote: "God above everything! For an eternal, all-knowing Providence guides the fortune and misfortune of mortal men." In working on the *Missa Solemnis*, he took great pains to make sure that he properly understood every word of the Latin text. He did not actually change the texts themselves, but the way he set those texts to music subtly reflects his personal spiritual vision. Beethoven the humanist, for example, sets the words *et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis* (and on earth, peace towards men of good will) with a clear stress on *homibus* (men). In contrast, Beethoven disposes of *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum* (I believe in the Holy Spirit)—one of the foundations of Catholic belief—with tremendous haste.

The *Missa Solemnis* also stands as one of the most strenuous choral works ever written. The scoring of the work means that choral voices seldom have a chance to rest in the course of over 70 minutes. Beethoven also uses a rather dense orchestration that makes constant projection critical, and the parts are often difficult contrapuntal lines in extreme vocal range. It is equally challenging for the solo singers—as in the closely contemporary ninth symphony, Beethoven uses his soloists as an ensemble, with few lengthy aria-style passages, and relatively few long stretches of rest.

What You'll Hear

The *Kyrie* is relatively conventional in form: as most composers had done before him, Beethoven used a three-part form, as suggested by the form of the text—*Kyrie eleison* / *Christe eleison* / *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy / Christ have mercy / Lord have mercy). The opening *Kyrie* begins with solemn chords, and polyphonic woodwind lines that blend seamlessly into the first entrance of the soloists. The *Christe* is more plaintive, with contrapuntal lines from the soloists answered by the chorus. The final *Kyrie* is a recapitulation of the opening mood. The calm coda serves as the perfect counterbalance to the rather dark opening.

The *Gloria* is much more complex, in keeping with the complexities of the text Beethoven set to music. The majestic music of *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (Glory to God in the highest) returns at several points as a kind of motto linking the movement together. This opening section has a quieter contrasting episode, but builds to a climactic fugue on *glorificamus te* (we glorify You). The next section is generally quiet and happy, with a couple of brief flourishes on *Jesu Christe* and

filius patris (Son of the Father). The lengthy central section is dominated by the soloists. Beethoven then uses the *Gloria* music to set *Quoniam tu solus sanctus* (for You alone are holy), and them launches into a monumental closing fugue on *in gloria Dei Patris* (in the glory of God the Father). This seems to work its way to a conclusion, but then the intensity doubles for the closing *Amen*.

Credo—the Nicene Creed—is the longest text of the mass, and once again Beethoven uses a multi-sectional form. A forceful theme sung by the basses at the outset serves as a unifying musical motto. The entire opening section is carried by the chorus and remains in this same mood. There is a distinct change of character and key at *Qui propter* (Who for us and our salvation descended from Heaven)—and a nice bit of musical word-painting with rapidly descending lines on *descendit*. The soloists make their first entrance on *Et incarnatus*, which is not in a major or minor key, but in a Dorian mode reminiscent of Medieval chant. Beethoven makes full use of the dramatic break between *sepultus est* (was buried) and *et resurrexit* (and He rose again) with an exultant choral phrase. He disposes of a great deal of text—and a great number of central Catholic doctrines—relatively quickly in a gentle fugue, beginning on *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*, saving the most exciting moments for *et vitam venturi saeculi* (and the life of the world to come). *Amen* is a lovely closing moment for the soloists and orchestra.

The *Sanctus* (Holy, holy, holy) begins with a restless and slow orchestral passage and the intonation of *Sanctus* above sober trombone chords. A more excited passage and brief fugue on *Hosannah in excelsis* (Hosanna in the highest) round off this brief opening section. Beethoven titles the section that follows *Praeludium*. One of the relatively few long instrumental passages in the *Missa Solemnis*, it relates to typical Austrian church practice of the day, where the organ would improvise a brief prelude as the Host is elevated before the *Benedictus*. There is a beautiful violin solo that extends above a hushed intonation of *Benedictus* (Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord) by the chorus basses, and its expansion by the soloists. Typically, the first *Hosanna* fugue is repeated at the end, but here Beethoven creates an entirely new fugue from the violin solo's motives, beginning with a grave statement by the trombones. This is only a brief episode, and the violin returns to bring the movement to a serene conclusion.

Agnus Dei (Lamb of God), one of the shortest texts of the mass, is here given a tremendously expansive treatment. It begins in a somber mood in the lower voices of the orchestra and chorus, supporting the bass solo. This gradually expands to solos by the tenor and mezzo-soprano. At *Dona nobis pacem* (Grant us peace) the meter shifts to 6/8 and Beethoven begins a grand double fugue culminating in

soaring lines from the female soloists. There is another break in texture: suddenly trumpets and drums interject a distinctly military note, before Beethoven begins a magnificent fugal finale with a long military "interruption." In his score, Beethoven wrote "a sign of peace" as one last series of timpani strokes is finally pushed aside by the chorus in a final triumphant statement *of Dona nobis pacem*.

[An MSO Historical Footnote: One of our previous performances of the *Missa Solemnis*, on May 23, 1948 (pictured here), was one of the more significant concerts in our history: it was the farewell concert of our first music director, Dr. Sigfrid Prager. Prager led the orchestra (then called the Madison Civic Symphony) from its founding in 1926, and the chorus (Madison Civic Chorus) from its founding a year later. The 1948 program was in the University Stock Pavilion, which hosted many of the orchestra's and chorus's programs from the 1920s through the early 1970s. A set of recordings of this performance unexpectedly surfaced in 2013. If you'd like to read the intriguing story behind these recordings, and hear a few excerpts from the 1948 concert, click here.]

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