

# Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator, The Leni and Peter May Chair

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## Symphony No. 22 in E-flat major, *Philosopher*, Hob. I:22

### Joseph Haydn

Joseph Haydn's appointment as Vice-Kapellmeister of the immensely powerful Esterházy Court, in the spring of 1761, marked a watershed moment in his career. He had been born into relatively humble circumstances: his father was a wheelwright who doubled as village sexton, his mother a cook for the local count until she started giving birth to her 12 children, of which Joseph was the second. As a child, he demonstrated enough musical aptitude to gain a prestigious spot as a boy soprano in the choir of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. When his voice changed (and his usefulness in the choir ran out), he got by as an essentially unemployed musician in a Vienna that hardly lacked for musicians, eking out a livelihood as an accompanist, music teacher, and street musician. In 1759 he secured his first official post, as Kapellmeister for Count Ferdinand Maximilian von Morzin, whose country estate was based in Bohemia.

Due to belt-tightening at the court, the job didn't last long, but at least it served as a stepping-stone to the position that would shape Haydn's career. He began acting as a musical consultant to Prince Paul Anton Esterházy shortly before he received his official contract on May 1, 1761. In the early years, the players he directed traveled with Prince Paul Anton and Prince Nikolaus (who came to power upon Paul Anton's death, in 1762) to the court's palace in Vienna, and its summer residences in Eisenstadt (some 30 miles to the southeast), and the castle of Kitsee (overlooking the Danube).

It is for this musical staff that Haydn composed all of his early and middle-period symphonic works, beginning with his Symphonies

Nos. 6–8 (the famous triptych subtitled *Morning, Noon, and Evening*). Haydn was perpetually occupied composing new works for his musicians' use and his prince's delectation, upholding an astonishingly high standard of composition in the midst of almost unimaginable productivity. As Haydn recalled of these years, in an interview with his biographer Georg August Griesinger:

My sovereign was satisfied with all my endeavors. I was assured of applause and, as head of an orchestra, was able to experiment, to find out what enhances and detracts from effect, in other words, to improve, add, delete, and try out. As I was shut off from the world, no one in my surroundings would vex and confuse me, and so I was destined for originality.

There is no evidence that the nickname *Philosopher* was Haydn's own, but it did

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### In Short

**Born:** March 31, 1732, in Rohrau, Austria

**Died:** May 31, 1809, in Vienna

**Work composed:** 1764

**World premiere:** probably in 1764 at the Esterházy Palace in Eisenstadt, Austria, with the composer conducting

**New York Philharmonic premiere:** March 22, 1962, William Steinberg, conductor

**Most recent New York Philharmonic performance:** February 24, 2004, Antonio Pappano, conductor

**Estimated duration:** ca. 16 minutes

become attached to his Symphony No. 22 during his lifetime, since it was inscribed by a period hand on the manuscript instrumental parts for the piece that reside in the Estense Library in Modena, Italy. The moniker seems entirely apt for this symphony, especially for its grave first movement, where it is hardly a stretch to imagine a deep thinker pacing solemnly about his study as an archaic chorale-style melody repeats over and over, adjusting its key to the movement's harmonic progress. Haydn employs a dark-hued ensemble of two English horns, two French horns, bassoon, and strings, an unusually constituted grouping that underscores the work's serious mien. The eminent Haydn scholar H.C.

Robbins Landon pronounced that

the opening movement is perhaps the most original movement in all Haydn's symphonies, a kind of chorale prelude where the chorale is given to the cors anglais [English horns] or horns *fortissimo*, supported by *piano* strings with muted violins.

Identifying a movement as the single most original one in Haydn's hundred-plus super-imaginative symphonies is surely an exercise in futility, but this *Adagio* is unquestionably extraordinary.

**Instrumentation:** two English horns, bassoon, two horns, harpsichord, and strings.

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## Emphasis on English Horn

The orchestration of Haydn's Symphony No. 22 is unique among his symphonies, eschewing high woodwinds entirely and employing only pairs of English horns (which are effectively alto oboes) and horns, in addition to the usual complement of strings, plus bassoon and harpsichord continuo. The resulting soundworld is striking and evocative, but the rarity of English horns would have rendered this piece inaccessible to many orchestras of the time. This gave rise to alternate versions. In 1770 a Parisian publisher offered this symphony in a version in which the English horns are replaced by standard oboes, and in 1773 the Parisian firm of Venier published a rather different version that had already been circulating in manuscript as far from the mainstream as Spain and, it appears, South America.

This later edition, in which the English horns are replaced by flutes, dispensed with the opening movement entirely. It began instead with the *Presto*, continued with a newly composed slow movement (today believed not to be by Haydn at all), and concluded with the *Menuetto* and the *Finale*. Doubtless the Venier edition was more marketable, thanks to its less exotic instrumentation and its more predictable layout; but in retrospect one can see that it managed to excise precisely what is most memorable about Haydn's original.



New York Philharmonic English horn  
Ryan Roberts playing the instrument that was  
a rarity in Haydn's time