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"Performing Haydn's The Creation: Reconstructing the Earliest Renditions." By A. Peter Brown

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A. Peter Brown: *Performing Haydn's The Creation: Reconstructing the Earliest Renditions.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. 125p. ISBN 0-253-38820-1

What might be termed the "situational ethics" approach to Aufführungspraxis was summarized two decades ago by a distinguished harpsichordist and entrepreneur: "Honey," he said, "if you can't prove they did it there and then, you can always prove they did it fifty miles away and five years later." More and more, however, musicology is examining "there and then" to establish precise guides to performance practice. Lawrence Dreyfus's recent study of Bach's continuo parts, for example, shows that at various stages of his career the master employed the designation "violone" with every meaning of the term current in seventeenth/eighteenth-century Germany: a small instrument in G at eight-foot pitch, or at sixteen-foot pitch either a double bass gamba with six strings and tuned in D, or a double bass 'cello with four strings and tuned in C — but not indiscriminately or interchangeably. The record market in early music is now dominated by performances claiming to be "original" in editions, instrumentation, tempi, acoustics. One expects any day now an attempt at the ultimate in authenticity, a Complete Works of Beethoven scrupulously recorded on period instruments at the composer's metronome markings and carefully processed to simulate the exact degree of Beethoven's deafness at the time of the première (presumably the *Missa Solemnis* will be represented by two hours of tape hiss). But in the case of a single work such as *Messiah* or *The Creation* with a long documented performance tradition there may exist as many "authentic" versions as there were early performances.

A. Peter Brown's *Performing Haydn's The Creation* is a notable contribution to the serious study of performance practice. In summarizing his argument, we may begin with his conclusion: Haydn's own first edition is an incomplete account of *The Creation.* In 1800 Haydn issued the engraved full score of the work to over four hundred subscribers. This was taken by Eusebius Mandyczewski as his source for the Gesamtausgabe edition of 1922, which in turn has served as the basis of modern scores and performing materials. But the first edition does not represent Haydn's performing versions of the work and his reconsiderations of its orchestration; it seems to have been made largely for financial profit (and probably also as a high-class souvenir, like seventeenth-century printed opera scores). The "definitive" version of the work lies in the surviving manuscript full scores and sets of parts that can be proved to have been employed in performance by Haydn and that bear his autograph corrections and emendations.

Brown prefaces his account of these materials with a chart summarizing the more than forty performances of *The Creation* in Vienna between its première and Haydn's death, all of them marked by the composer's participation or at least presence. The wide variety of forces employed in these presumably authentic renditions falls roughly into three classes: the largest, numbering ca. 180-200 performers divided between 120 or so for the orchestra and 60-80 singers; smaller performances employing between 32 and ca. 92 performers; and chamber versions. The autograph score of the oratorio, given to the librettist, Baron van Swieten, has disappeared. There survive a conducting score employed by Haydn at the Tonkünstler-Societät, an extensively corrected score originally from Haydn's library, a somewhat doubtful score in Graz, and the engraver's score reproduced faithfully in the first edition. The surviving original parts comprise a set from the Tonkünstler-Societät, a set from Haydn's library, and two sets apparently copied after the first edition of the oratorio. The Tonkünstler parts are incomparably the most interesting, since Brown considers that they were used for every large performance conducted by Haydn (p. 24). They seem to reflect a string section of about eighteen first and second violins each, twelve violas, and eleven parts distributed among 'cello, bass, and continuo. Winds and horns are divided into first, second, and third "Harmonie," the last with third flute and contrabassoon. The third "Harmonie" was probably a ripieno, and other parts as well distinguish between solo and tutti. The extensive autograph alterations by Haydn in these parts differ significantly from the published score.

What changes do these new sources bring to our understanding of *The Creation*? First, Brown's tabulation of the forces employed in early performances, rightly understood, gives us some guidelines for contemporary executions. These guidelines are valid, of course, only with instruments approximating the original ones and in a setup resembling that employed for the Vienna performances: chorus, soloists, and continuo behind the conductor and in front of the orchestra, and the orchestra itself arranged with the first and second violins on either side of the conductor, the winds in ascending ranks of the three *Harmonie*, culminating in the trumpets, trombones, and tympani. The fortepiano (in most of the early performances played by Salieri) was employed as the keyboard continuo instrument. The Haydn Estate score, which Brown considers "perhaps the most important source" among the scores (p. 18), contains extensive figuration for the continuo, suggesting its presence throughout the work rather than only in the recitatives, a participation possible on the fortepiano but doubtful on the more incisive harpsichord.

The evidence of the performing materials shows that the colors of the work were brighter in Haydn's own versions than in that of the published score and its modern descendants. One factor in this would have been the employment of male sopranos and altos for the choral parts. More important, however, was Haydn's pervasive conception of solo and tutti effects (extending even to ritornelli in arias) and his employment of additional orchestral color in the form of contrabassoon and bass trombone parts (not published by Mandyczewski but transcribed here in an appendix). Some key moments of the work sound very different indeed in the original version. In the opening chord, for example, the autograph materials specify mutes for the trumpets, timpani, and horns (an indication cancelled from the first edition), and the blazing intensity of the creation of light is underscored (a contradiction in terms) by the removal of the mutes and the addition of the trombone choir to the instrumentation of the printed score. (Incidentally, Brown suggests taking the "Representation of Chaos" at a tempo fast enough to validate the cut-time signature.)

Brown provides sensible and considered chapters on both vocal ornamentation and instrumental bowing and articulation. At the beginning of the latter he observes wonderingly that "the problems of ornamentation have for unaccountable reasons remained at the forefront of the performer's concerns..." (p. 62). *Vanitas vanitatum*, there is little unaccountable about it, but it is time to stem the ever-rising tide of homemade ornamentation. How many teachers of master classes and seminars on performance practice, I wonder, are confronted by students who cannot sing or play a C-major scale in tune but want "some ideas for ornamenting the Da Capo"? As far as *The Creation* is concerned, Brown shows that ornamentation was applied very sparingly, mostly to the soprano part. He struggles with the inconsistencies in articulation marks — especially slurs — between and even within sources, and offers some sensible suggestions for their resolution (pp. 63-64).

Karl Kraus once wrote, "The public doesn't understand German, and in journalese I can't tell them so." Perhaps the most telling (although unformulated) conclusion that arises from Brown's work is one so familiar to any working musician that it needs no statement, and so foreign to some musicologists, critics, and record companies that it is incomprehensible. "Verweile doch! du bist so schön!" — the definitive edition, the definitive performance — is not damnable but merely impossible. As Brown notes, a "complete" score from even one set of original parts for *The Creation* would require a staff for each separate string part just to represent their differing articulations. It is the merit of

studies such as Brown's, not that they give us all the answers, but that they provide the materials for asking the right questions.

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