

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel: *Gartenlieder* Op. 3

Stephanie Martin: *The Road Not Taken*

Missa Brevis for Three Voices

Jessica French: *Awake, O Sun*

Thy Will Be Done

Strengthen for Service

Franz Josef Haydn: *Missa in angustiis* (“*Nelson Mass*”) Hob. XXII/11

In 1842, composer Felix Mendelssohn was invited to visit Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Buckingham Palace, where he amazed and delighted with his skills at the piano. When it came time to ask the queen to choose one of his songs to sing with him, she selected one of her favorites, a song entitled “*Italien*.” After they performed it together, Mendelssohn had to swallow his pride and confess that he had not actually composed the song: it had in fact been written by his older sister, Fanny.

Fanny Hensel (1805-1847) was one of two musical geniuses in the Mendelssohn family. But as she watched her younger brother rise in his career as a composer and performer, she was expected by her family and society to extinguish her artistic ambitions and prepare for a life as a wife and mother. It wasn't until the last year before her death that she published anything under her own name, rather than under her famous brother's. And despite the constraints that were placed upon her, she avidly composed, and recent scholarship efforts have brought to light hundreds of fantastic works for piano and voice.

In 1846, Hensel started a Friday singing group that regularly met at her house, and they had the privilege of reading through her new compositions. When Hensel began receiving the offers of musical publication, she chose her *Gartenlieder* choral songs as her Opus 3 (her 3rd published work.) These a cappella works tenderly depict the beauty of nature, morning, and springtime.

Although it has taken well over one hundred years, many barriers have been lifted for women composers. Stephanie Martin is a Canadian composer and conductor who teaches at York University in Toronto and Jessica French is a Seattle-based composer with a background in organ performance. Both Martin and French can boast numerous composition awards, publications, performances, and recordings of their repertoire. They thoughtfully infuse their chosen texts with sublime harmony and evoke keen emotion with their mastery of mixed-voice ensembles.

Franz Josef Haydn (1733-1809) was reaching the end of a long, successful career by the time he composed his *Missa in angustiis* (“*Mass for distressful times*”). For nearly 30 years, Haydn had worked as the music director for the Esterházy court, Hungary's most powerful noble family, regularly composing new works for the

prince. This lucrative opportunity was followed by two big trips to London, where he earned the admiration of the concert-going public and was handsomely paid for his symphonic performances. (Not only was Haydn's music the most influential for a young Mozart and Beethoven, "Papa" Haydn also left a legacy as the "Father of the Symphony.")

After these London tours, Haydn was commissioned again by the Esterházy family to compose a new musical mass in honor Prince Nikolaus II's wife's name day. Haydn and Princess Marie Hermenegild were good friends, so it no surprise that this commission was repeated each year for five more years. It was in 1798 that he composed the *Missa in angustiis*, and Europe was indeed facing distressful times: Napoleon was in command of a sizable army, with eyes on Italy, Austria, and Egypt.

It is not entirely clear how Haydn's *Missa in angustiis* came to be known as *Nelson Mass*, named for the famed Lord Horatio Nelson, a flag officer for the British navy, but we do have two clues. Clue #1: that same summer that Haydn's mass was being composed and premiered, Admiral Nelson handed Napoleon his first significant military defeat in the Battle of the Nile. Clue #2: two years later, Nelson visited the Esterházy palace, where it is likely he would have heard a performance of the piece and even met Haydn.

The *Nelson Mass* is a spectacular work that follows the regular Catholic liturgy. The first movement, *Kyrie* ("Lord have mercy") is dark and commanding. The second movement, *Gloria* ("Glory to God in the highest") is celebratory and features a quartet of vocal soloists. The largest movement, *Credo* ("I believe in one God"), begins and ends heroically, but features a slower and more tender middle section.

The *Sanctus* movement ("Holy, holy, holy") is introduced with a heavy, deliberate quality, but later rekindles the celebratory energy of the *Gloria* movement. The fifth movement, *Benedictus* ("Blessed be the Lord") is the most turbulent of the piece, with relentless dynamic contrasts and minor-key harmonies. The last movement, *Agnus Dei* ("Lamb of God"), starts off serenely, featuring the vocal soloists, but ends with a majestic energy.

Upon hearing *Nelson Mass*, you may gain a third clue as to its title: this piece is nothing less than heroic, and what could be more fitting than to name it after the military commander who reversed the European balance of power?