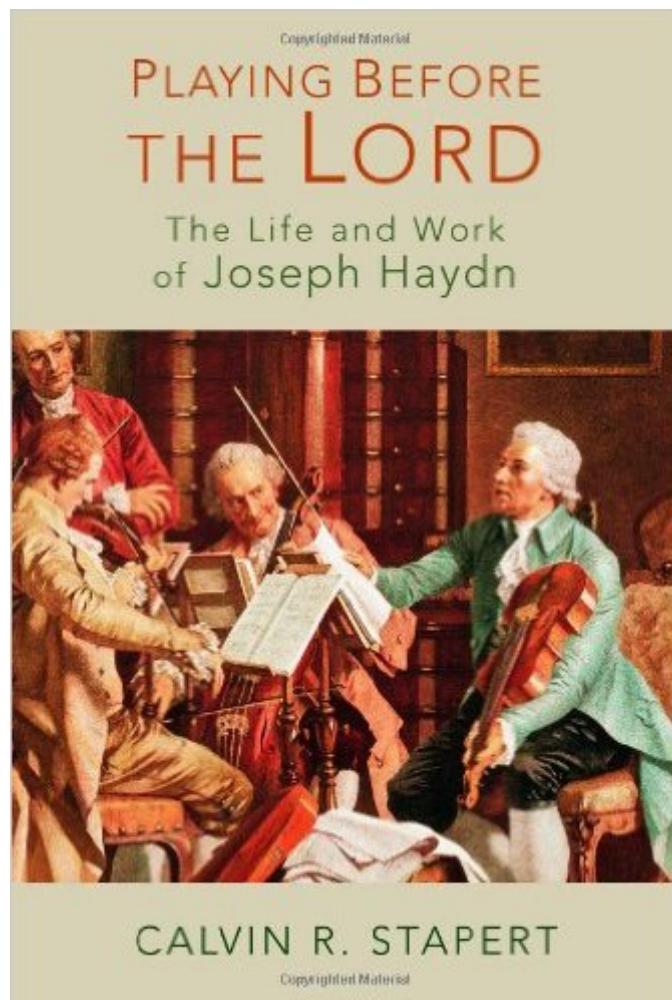


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Playing Before The Lord: The Life And Work Of Joseph Haydn



Synopsis

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732â€”1809) has been called the father of the symphony and the string quartet. A friend of Mozart and a teacher of Beethoven, "Papa" Haydn composed an amazing variety of music -- symphonies, string quartets, concerti, masses, operas, oratorios, keyboard works -- and his prolific output celebrates both the heights and depths of life. In this fascinating book Calvin Stapert combines his skills as a biographer and a musicologist to recount Haydn's steady rise from humble origins to true musical greatness. Unlike other biographers, Stapert argues that Haydn's work was a product of his devout Catholic faith, even though he worked mainly as a court musician and the bulk of his output was in popular genres. In addition to telling Haydn's life story, Stapert includes accessible listening guides to *The Creation* and portions of other well-known works to help Haydn listeners more fully appreciate the brilliance behind his music.

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Customer Reviews

Being a great fan of the music of Joseph Haydn, over the years I have accumulated all of his music on CD, and nearly all of the books written in English. One thing the liner notes of the CD's have in common; they frequently present outdated or just plain incorrect information and give no idea where it was obtained. One thing the books have in common is that most of them are written BY musicologists FOR musicologists. The net result is that for a music fan, getting accurate, readable information is a tough row to hoe. Calvin Stapert has managed to present authoritative and up-to-date information in a form which is accessible to the intelligent layman who has at least a nominal amount of knowledge about music. He does far better than most at presenting things

chronologically, without wandering out on a tangent across the decades as so many do. Thus, if you are wanting to maintain the thread of the story, it doesn't require a handful of bookmarks to be able to go back and catch up! A nice feature is a 'listener's guide' for the 'Stabat Mater'. It walks you through the listening process with the poem on the left side of the page, and the musical information (the key, tempo and instruments) alongside to the right. I realize the work that went into just this one section, but a few more of these, for example, an expansion of 'The Creation' walk-through in the Appendix, would have been most welcome. Stapert's avowed intention of spreading the word about this great music is well adhered to. If you are looking for an entry level biography into the life and music of Joseph Haydn, this is the best choice I have seen in a long time. The price is unbeatable for the value, and if you gain greater appreciation of the music of this greatest of composers in the Classical Era, you will have also gained much on the road towards your personal music horizon.

To read this marvelous book is to find a companion--a companion for many golden hours of listening to music. Many people who love Classical music, it's safe to say, occasionally feel alone in their musical interests. But here is an opportunity to come alongside a musically-wise writer who'll take you by the hand, so to speak, and share meaningful things he hears: like the way the violins and horns trade places in the slow beginning of Symphony No. 15. Having arrived in a new key, the horns sustain a long note while the violins sing; upon returning to the home key, it's the violins who hold a note and the horns who play their own version of the violins' main melody. The ensuing Presto, Stapert suggests, is like the frolicking of boisterous pranksters, disrupting a serenade (as in act 2 of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*). Then, a few pages later, we learn exactly how the exposition of the first movement of Symphony No. 6 manages to unfold in ever shorter phrases (roughly 8 + 7 + 6 + 5 + 4) and yet still achieve symmetry! These insights are clearly audible and delightful to any attentive listener. They come framed by accurate biography that digests for us the best Haydn scholarship. Stapert writes with an unpretentious grace befitting the music he celebrates. His is the most enjoyable book on music, written for nonexpert readers, that I have found in many years.

Playing Before the Lord by Calvin Stapert is a treasure for both the professional musician and the ordinary person who knows a little about music from lessons learned earlier, and maybe from trying a bit of composing and writing poetry, but always eager to learn more. Stapert is professor emeritus of music at Calvin College in Michigan and he is more than qualified to teach and share his knowledge of music and Haydn. Franz Joseph Haydn was baptized on April 1, 1732, perhaps born

on March 31, in a village near the Austrian-Hungarian border. At age six, he was sent to live with the Franck family nearby, where he would begin school. He was instructed in "reading, writing, catechism, singing, and almost all wind and string instruments, even in timpani." Haydn said. He obviously had talent in music and soon (1740s) was sent to Vienna to be a choir boy. Using dates and decades as subheads, Stapert follows Haydn from choir boy to freelance musician; music director in the 1750s; Vice-Kapellmeister and then Kapellmeister at the Esterhazy Court in the town of Eisenstadt, Austria in 1761. Stapert analyzes how Haydn puts together the musical notes and phrases; how he plans for each instrument to join in at the appropriate moment, adding "solos integral to the whole." He describes Haydn as a composer "with an unerring sense of musical form and an uncommon ability to recognize the developmental potential in simple musical materials." And with diagrams and examples of notes on scales, Stapert shows the reader how Haydn did it. Haydn is especially famous for his oratorio called The Creation and Stapert has added an Appendix to his book describing it. Haydn's work included concertos, keyboard sonatas and trios, masses, operas, songs, string quartets, opuses, symphonies, and more. Stapert loves Haydn and his "huge and diverse output" of music, and Stapert's book is biography, as well as a listener's guide. Haydn stayed with the Esterhazy Court for much of his adult life with trips back and forth to Paris, London, and Vienna, where he also composed, performed, and saw publishers and friends. He counted Mozart and Beethoven among his friends, lucky three! Haydn saw his musical talent as a gift from God, and Stapert says that Haydn "often penned at the end of his scores: *Laus Deo! -- Praise to God!*" Besides The Creation, Haydn is famous for Stabat Mater, in honor of the Virgin Mary, still popular in music of the church year; and his symphonies called The Seasons, and Surprise. He is also known as composer of the tune for John Newton's hymn, "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken" (1779). Stapert would like to see Haydn's work become popular again and it may happen. Stapert's book is an excellent way to learn more about Haydn and his music. May it encourage musicians and other readers to "play it again...." --Lois Sibley

I read this book before I was performing a Haydn concerto in a competition. It helped illuminate Haydn's style, such as his interest in surprise. His life is fascinating from his early start composing to getting expelled from school to his internships. There is a great and detailed explanation of the oratorios. I recommend this book for anyone interested in music, composition and what shaped Haydn.

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