IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Haydn’s Employment Contract from the Archives of the Esterházy Court

What were the working conditions and social status of eighteenth-century musicians? Not very good. In general, musicians were treated much like all the other servants working at a court—and aside from the church, the court was the only significant patron of music to be found at this time. Musicians usually wore the livery (staff uniform) of the court; to see Haydn dressed in the livery of the Esterházy, turn to Fig. 45-1 in Chapter 45. The rationale for this treatment was that those who provided a service, namely servants, should be treated as such. The fact that a composer’s service involved creating and performing a work of art was of no consequence to the aristocracy of the period. Only with the nineteenth century, and first with the figure of Beethoven, would the concept of “a musical work of art” and the composer as a “great artist” gain widespread currency.

Surviving from the eighteenth century are two documents that shed particular light on the employment conditions of important composers. One is the oath of office that Bach swore to the town council of Leipzig upon his arrival in 1722. Bach promised, among other things, to supervise the music of the principal churches of the city, teach music and sometimes Latin to the boys of the church school, compose music for the Lutheran service (but not music that was not too long or too operatic!), and not leave town without the permission of the council. (The document is given in The Bach Reader, ed. H. David, A. Mendel, and C. Wolff [New York, 1998], pp. 104–105.) Bach’s salary and other benefits are not stipulated. The second such “employment agreement” is the contract that Haydn signed in 1761, when he first entered the service of Prince Paul Esterházy, father of long-reigning Prince Nikolaus. In addition to revealing unexpected tidbits about a Kapellmeister’s daily life—for example, that Haydn had to wait each morning and afternoon at the prince’s chamber to see if he desired a concert that day—this agreement is most informative because it states that the compositions that Haydn created became the sole possession of Prince Paul and not of composer Haydn. Such an arrangement was not, however, uncommon in the eighteenth century; Johann Quantz (see Chapter 42), for example, wrote hundreds of flute concertos for King Frederick the Great, but they were heard only when the king played them and nowhere else, for they belonged exclusively to the king. Eventually, during the 1780s, Haydn signed a much less restrictive employment agreement, and his works began to circulate widely around the major capitals of Europe.

Agreement and Understanding for the Vice-Kapellmeister

This day and year (as indicated at the end of this document), Joseph Heyden, born in Rohrau in Austria, is taken in and appointed Vice-Kapellmeister in the service of his Serene Highness Paul Anton, Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, Right Ruler of Esterházy and Galantha, etc. etc. according to the following terms:

1) Because the Kapellmeister at Eisenstadt [another Esterházy residence], namely Gregorius Werner, is already very old and infirm and has provided this princely house good and faithful service but is now unfit to perform his required duties, it is hereby decreed that said Gregorius Werner, in consideration of his long service, will remain as Chief-Kapellmeister, and that said Joseph Heyden will serve as Vice-Kapellmeister in regard to religious music at Eisenstadt under Gregorius Werner and be his subordinate. In all other things that pertain to music, however, these will be directed solely by the Vice-Kapellmeister.
2) Joseph Heyden will be received and treated as a house staff member. And his Serene Highness graciously places confidence in his belief that [Heyden] will conduct himself in a fitting manner, be mild, lenient, dignified, and composed with the musicians and not treat them in a brutal fashion. When the orchestra is called upon to perform, Vice-Kapellmeister, as all subordinates, will appear in uniform, and this pertains not only to Joseph Heyden, but to all members, that they appear in white stockings and white shirt, with either pigtail or tiewig, and thoroughly powered.

3) Because the Vice-Kapellmeister must set an example for the other musicians, he will conduct himself in an exemplary fashion. Said Joseph Heyden will refrain from all unnecessary familiarity and common association when eating and drinking and conversing, and be mindful of his position so as to encourage a harmonious relationship among his subordinates, keeping in mind how distasteful the consequences of any discord would be to his lord.

4) The Vice-Kapellmeister will be bound to compose such music as his Serene Highness shall command, and not let such compositions be communicated to any other party, much less be copied, but they shall remain for his use only and his rightful ownership, and he shall not, without knowledge and permission, compose for any other person.

5) Joseph Heyden will daily, whether in Vienna or elsewhere in his territories, appear both morning and afternoon at the princely antechamber to inquire whether his Highness wishes a concert be given. If he be so commanded, he will notify the other musicians and be attentive to be sure that not only he but the other musicians as well appear at the stipulated time. To assure proper attendance, he we make note of those who are tardy or who fail to appear entirely.

6) If, however, any dispute or cause for complaint arise among the musicians, the Vice-Kapellmeister will try to resolve such matters that his Serene Highness not be vexed with such trifling bagatelles. But if some important issue arises, which Joseph Heyden cannot resolve, then it is his responsibility to bring it to his Serene Highness so that he might be able to settle the matter.

7) The Vice-Kapellmeister should take charge of all musical activities and all musical instruments with assiduousness. He is responsible that no damage befall them because of inattention or carelessness, and be responsible for maintenance as well.

8) Joseph Heyden will instruct the female singers so that they don’t forget in the countryside those things that they learned at great trouble and expense in Vienna. And because said Vice-Kapellmeister is adept at playing at various instruments, he should keep up this skill in all the instruments in which he is proficient.

9) A copy of this agreement and contract pro forma will be given to said Vice-Kapellmeister and to his subordinate musicians so that he may be able to hold them to the stipulations therein.

10) Nonetheless, it is thought unnecessary to specify in writing all the services required of said Joseph Heyden because his Serene Highness is hopeful that he will of his own free will carry out not only these requirements but all other commands from time to time, which his Highness might deem appropriate from time to time. Also [Heyden] will put the orchestra on a good footing and maintain it in such a state that it brings honor to himself and causes additional princely benefits to be graciously bestowed upon him.

11) In consideration the Vice-Kapellmeister will receive a yearly salary of 400 Rhine-land florins from this Serene Highness to be paid in quarterly installments.

12) For board, Joseph Heyden may eat at the staff table, or receive compensation of a half gulden per diem expense.

13) Finally, this contract, signed with said Vice-Kapellmeister on 1 May 1761 shall be in effect for at least three years. And if said Joseph Heyden shall determine to try his fortunes elsewhere, he will provide his Highness with a half a year’s notice, that is, at the beginning of the third quarter of the year.
14) Similarly, his Highness agrees to keep said Joseph Heyden in his service during this time. Should he be satisfied with his performance, [Heyden] may expect to be promoted to Chief-Kapellmeister. But nevertheless, his Highness remains free to dismiss him during his term of service if that is his will.

In the knowledge of which duplicate copies of this document shall be prepared and executed. Given in Vienna on 1 May 1761.

At the order of his Serene Prince

[by] Johann Stiftel, Secretary