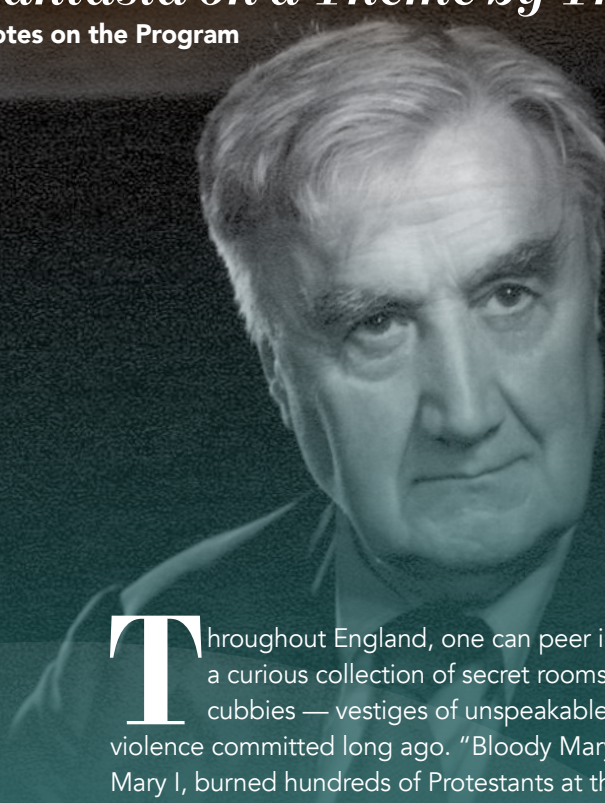


RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Notes on the Program

By Noel Morris ©2021



Throughout England, one can peer inside a curious collection of secret rooms and cubbies — vestiges of unspeakable violence committed long ago. “Bloody Mary,” Mary I, burned hundreds of Protestants at the stake. Her successor and half-sister, Elizabeth, reversed the policy and murdered Catholics. At their peril, people hid bibles, rosaries and the occasional priest. These were treacherous times for church musicians, and Thomas Tallis lived at its epicenter.

Throughout his life, Tallis clung to the Roman Catholic faith and survived the terrible Tudors by adapting his music to the needs of the Crown. Under Elizabeth, he became the chief composer to the nascent Church of England. Incredibly, she granted him, along with William Byrd, a 21-year monopoly on printing polyphonic music (he essentially had a monopoly on writing harmony).

In 1567, Tallis wrote nine tunes for the Archbishop’s Psalter. The third found its way into English hymnody set to the ominous words:

When rising from the bed of death,
O’erwhelmed with guilt and fear,
I see my Maker face to face,
O how shall I appear?

More than 300 years later, it was this hymn, with its uneven meter and tasty shifts between major and minor, that caught the attention of Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Vaughan Williams was a patriot. Coming of age at a time when modernism was beginning to overwrite English heritage, he took to the countryside to collect and preserve the native folk music.

During his travels, he noted that Sunday mornings were central to musical life, but was not so impressed by their bounty.

“It ought no longer to be true anywhere,” he wrote, “that the most exalted moments of a church-goer’s week are associated with music that would not be tolerated in any place of secular entertainment.” In 1904, Vaughan Williams, an avowed atheist, decided to give church singing an upgrade: he compiled and edited the definitive English hymnal. Sifting through thousands of melodies — hymns, folk songs, Tudor music, plainsong, and even writing a few of his own tunes — he arranged musical companions for every occasion in the life of the church.

The English Hymnal came out in 1906. In 1910, he returned to the anthology for inspiration. Using the Tallis melody, he wrote the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* for the Three Choirs Festival at Gloucester Cathedral.

It’s worth noting that Tallis, who literally held the monopoly on polyphonic music, took the concept of polyphony to an extreme, especially in his motet “Spem in alium,” which is made up of 40 separate parts. (Atlantans might remember hearing the piece at the High Museum installation called [**The Forty Part Motet by Janet Cardiff**](#).)

To a lesser extent, Vaughan Williams creates a similar effect by crafting independent parts within the texture of an orchestra. The *Tallis Fantasia* calls for two separate string orchestras and a string quartet.

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS:
Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis
Scored for string orchestra.

A portrait of Tyshawn Sorey, a Black man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark button-down shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a dark, textured wall. A large, stylized orange quote mark is visible to the right of his head.

TYSHAWN SOREY: *For Roscoe Mitchell*

From the Composer:

For *Roscoe Mitchell* is the first of two single-movement works for soloist and orchestra that I composed during the politically and environmentally tumultuous era of 2020 and largely draws inspiration from performances with Mitchell during recent years, most recently evidenced on his 2017 ECM recording titled *Bells for the South Side*. Much like Mitchell's iconoclastic work over the past six decades, my music seeks to deal with sound and the absence of sound. For Mitchell (and likewise for myself), space, sound, and silence are aspects in music that are of equal importance. I find myself identifying very strongly with this idea because I find that a lot of music today is more concerned about "getting to something" or "going somewhere immediately" than it is about being drawn inward towards the infinity that exists within a given moment and staying with that moment as time passes. This infinity of the moment, coupled with Mitchell's aesthetic ideal, is realized by the vivid evocation of timelessness that is central to the work in its overall formal and sonic design.

Let me reiterate that this composition is for soloist (in this case, cello) and orchestra. Why not simply call this a "cello concerto?" Of course, *For Roscoe Mitchell* may be viewed as a "cello concerto" — but in many regards, it is far from what a concerto represents. (The fact that it is in a single movement without a fast-slow-fast schema is a few of many key reasons why I assert this point.) Rather, this is a composition for cello and orchestra. The conjunction "and" is emphasized here to illustrate my intentions — i.e., this piece calls for both the soloist and the orchestra to be heard together as a single unit in conversation with itself and not as a duel between the two entities. The typical soloist-orchestra hierarchy that is often demonstrated in the concerto genre is not present anywhere — the soloist is not the protagonist; the orchestra is not the antagonist; there are no flashy, technical passages to listen for; and, finally, there is no cadenza to close out the piece. There is only the moment for the listener to follow, from one event (or sound) to the next.

Disclaimer: As I often do not like to publish program notes, I believe that what the listener hears is solely informed by their experiences. However, I felt it necessary to publish notes here given the nature of what is "expected" in this piece, ad nauseam. This is all to request for the listener to put any and all expectations aside — expect nothing — and let the piece do what it does. I hope this music will speak to the listener in some way or another. — T.S.

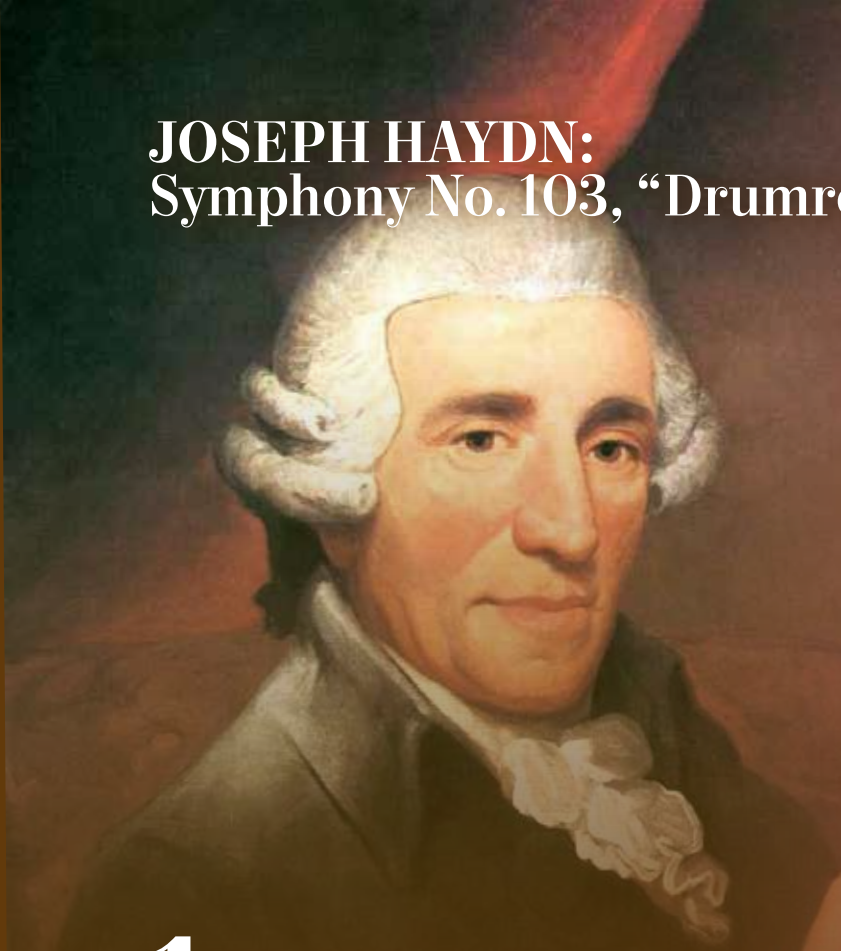
TYSHAWN SOREY: *For Roscoe Mitchell*

This is an ASO premiere.

Instrumentation: solo cello, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani + strings

JOSEPH HAYDN: Symphony No. 103, "Drumroll"

Atlanta
Symphony
Orchestra



1 761 saw the beginning of one of music's great marriages between genius and circumstance: Franz Joseph Haydn, the "father of the symphony," entered the service of the opulent Esterházy family. Working primarily for Nicholas I, he donned a servant's uniform and followed his prince, who liked to hop between palaces around the Holy Roman Empire. Although he had a wife in Vienna, Haydn worked mainly at a sprawling estate called Esterháza, just inside the Hungarian border. "I was cut off from the world," he wrote. "I was forced to become original."

In those years, Esterháza served as a destination for Europe's most powerful people, and a veritable laboratory for music. The prince provided Haydn with singers, an orchestra, an opera house, and a puppet theater; and Haydn created. He wrote hundreds of works, dozens of symphonies, and conducted over a thousand operas.

By the end of 1789, he was among the most celebrated composers in the world. After having spent a joyous Christmas season in Vienna where he hustled between concerts, quartet parties, and holiday festivities, he bemoaned his return to the Hungarian estate. "Well, here I sit in my wilderness," he wrote, "forsaken, like some poor orphan, almost without human society, melancholy, dwelling on the memory of past glorious days . . . all those delightful musical evenings that can only be remembered and not described?"

As it happened, Haydn's time at Esterháza was about to end. On September 28, Prince Nicholas I died, leaving his title and estate to Paul Anton II, a man who was indifferent to music. The new prince released the composer and his orchestra. With a decent pension in his pocket, Haydn packed up his music and went home a free man.

Haydn's celebrity was not limited to the Austrian capital. For some years the impresario Johann Peter Salomon had been trying to lure him to London. Just three months after the death of Nicholas, Salomon prevailed. Haydn crossed the English Channel and stepped into one of the happiest chapters of his life.

"Hardly a concert did not feature a work by him," wrote biographer Georg Griesinger. Between 1791 and 1795, Haydn wrote twelve symphonies for Salomon. The "Drumroll" gets its name from the solo tympani in the opening. Written for the spring concert season in 1795, it shows a 63-year-old composer at the height of his powers.

HAYDN: Symphony No. 103, "Drumroll"

Instrumentation: **2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani + strings**