

Joseph Haydn, *Kaiserhymne* (1796/97)

Abstract

Austrian composer Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) is generally considered the “Father of the Symphony,” but he also made significant contributions to the development of chamber music. A musically gifted child, Haydn began his training as a chorister at the age of five. While singing in the choir of Vienna’s Stephansdom, he also learned to play several instruments and studied composition. After struggling to make a living as a freelance musician for about ten years, Haydn was offered the position of deputy music director at the Esterházy court in 1761 and became its music director five years later. A very wealthy and influential Hungarian aristocratic family, the Esterházy greatly appreciated and promoted Haydn’s work and music and even provided him with his own orchestra. He spent most of his career, from 1761 to 1790, in their service.

This is a recording of the Austrian Kaiserhymne [Imperial Anthem], for which Francis II, the last Holy Roman Emperor and later Emperor of Austria, commissioned Austrian composer Joseph Haydn to compose the melody. The original text was written by Lorenz Leopold Haschka, but it was changed for each subsequent emperor. The hymn was completed in 1797, when the Holy Roman Empire was fighting revolutionary France during the War of the First Coalition. Fearing that their monarchy might be threatened by the French Revolution – and France’s military successes – the Habsburg dynasty sought to create traditions and symbols that would strengthen their subjects’ bond with their sovereign. The Kaiserhymne, also known by its first line, “Gott erhalte Franz, den Kaiser” [God Save Francis the Emperor], was sung at public events and ceremonies. Today, Haydn’s melody is mostly known as the German national anthem, which it became in 1922, using lyrics written in 1841 by Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben.

Source

Source: Joseph Haydn, *Kaiserhymne*, lyrics by Lorenz Leopold Haschka, 1796/97. Performer: unknown. Available from the Internet Archive, Folksoundomy, https://archive.org/details/GottErhalteFranzDenKaiser_201309

Recommended Citation: Joseph Haydn, *Kaiserhymne* (1796/97), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/the-holy-roman-empire-1648-1815/ghdi:audio-5035> [February 16, 2025].