Haydn: Symphony No. 26 in D minor, 'Lamentatione': Movement I
(For Unit 3 Developing Musical Understanding)

Background information and performance circumstances

No composer of symphonies has surpassed Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) in terms of combined quality and quantity. Symphony No. 26 in D minor is relatively little known, but has many interesting and unusual features. The name Lamentatione (Italian for ‘Lamentation’) is confusing, because the plainsong melody quoted in bar 17 was associated with the Passion narratives sung in church in Holy Week, not with the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

The symphony, from c.1770, is one of several with Sturm und Drang characteristics. Sturm und Drang ('Storm and stress') was an artistic movement in Germany in all the arts, which climaxed in the 1770s.

The aim was not, as with most mid-18th-century art, to charm and please, but to disturb, even frighten, and display (by contemporary standards) extremes of emotion. To some degree Sturm und Drang is a precursor of Romanticism.

Aspects of our set movement that link it to Sturm und Drang include:
• Beginning in a minor key. Most mid-18th-century pieces began in major keys, which were more 'pleasing', less disturbing.
• The tense harmony in some of the minor-key writing, which is due principally to diminished seventh chords and to the suspensions associated with the syncopations.
• The rhythmic tension of the opening where violins, doubled by oboes, are syncopated against an on-the-beat bass part for lower strings and bassoons.

Symphony No. 26 was composed while Haydn was in the service of the Esterhazy family in present-day Hungary, for an orchestra that was small by his later standards. Because the Passiontide plainsong is present, the work may well have been heard in church, perhaps in a concert rather than in the course of a service. It was certainly not music for the concert hall in the manner of the ‘London’ symphonies of the 1790s.

Performance Forces and their Handling

Haydn wrote for:
• Violins I and II
• Violas
• Cellos
• Double basses
• 2 oboes
• Bassoon
• 2 horns in D.
There was no conductor: Haydn would have directed from the violin. There may have been a keyboard continuo (indicated here as ‘cembalo’).

**Strings**
- String parts are simple by the standards of most later orchestral music. There is just a little double-stopping in the violins, as at the end where, for additional fullness of sound, both parts play repeated three-note tonic chords. Everything is *arco*, with some *staccato* to help articulate successions of quavers.
- There are usually separate parts for violins I and II, but sometimes (as at the start) they are in unison.
- Violin I is generally higher than violin II and more active.
- Violin I generally has the main melodic interest, but violin II doubles the plainsong melody in the oboe (e.g. bar 17, etc.), while violin I plays a broken-chord descant in quavers.
- Violas usually often just double the cellos, either in unison or an octave higher.
- Double basses always double the cellos an octave lower.

**Oboes**
- Oboes generally double the violins at the unison or octave. Only rarely (see the closing bars) do they have independent parts.
- Oboes often play simpler versions of the violin parts (as in bars 57–63): 18th-century oboes were not always easy to play.
- Oboes take a few long rests (notably in the *piano* section near the start (bars 9–16), thus providing contrast of sonority and texture, and a little relief to the players.

**Bassoon**
The bassoon plays in passages where the oboes play. It doubles the string bass line.

**Horns**
- ‘Natural’ horns were used: that is, the instruments lacked the valves introduced in the early 19th century. Haydn’s players could only draw on the notes of the harmonic series, which limited them, except towards the top of the range, to the notes of a single triad.
- Often natural horns had inserted special additional pieces of tubing which were known as *crooks*. A crook transposed the harmonic series to the key most convenient (usually the tonic) for that piece or movement. Whatever crook was used, the music was written in C (without key signature); so in our movement, with horns in D, written C sounds as D – a *minor seventh* below.
- In the F major part of the Exposition, Haydn avoids horns altogether. Neither concert F (the tonic) nor C (the dominant) was among the notes available to him.

**Cembalo**
The anthology score has ‘Cembalo’ (= harpsichord) in brackets against the first stave of the bass part, implying persistence of the Baroque-style continuo. It is in fact far from certain that Haydn expected to hear a harpsichord in this movement; but if one were used it would have helped in particular to fill out the opening eight bars, where strings and wind together create only a rather lean two-part texture. If the work were performed in church, a small organ may have been used instead.
Dynamics
- As in much 18th-century music, dynamic markings (just f and p) are few, but important.
- The bracketing of the opening forte means that this marking is editorial: Haydn would have assumed that a movement would begin ‘strongly’.
- The piano marking for the plainsong labelled ‘Christ’ (bar 26) is indicative presumably of the Lord’s suffering.
- At bars 67–68 the piano repeat of bars 65–66 provides an echo effect.

Texture

Number of parts
- The number of instrumental lines normally exceeds the number of parts, because of doubling.
- In bars 1–8 and similar passages, there are essentially only two parts, each doubled in octave(s) plus horns prolonging or doubling some notes. This prominent two-part texture is a reminder that in much Classical music interest is polarised between melody and bass, with other parts being just subsidiary ‘filling’.
- Away from bars 1–8 and similar passages, we find mainly three-part and four-part writing.

Type of texture
- Often a prominent melody in one or more instruments is accompanied by the other parts – this is commonly referred to as melody-dominated homophony.
- The main melodic interest is often in violin I as customary in Haydn’s time, but the plainsong used as second subject is in violin II, in order that the higher and more agile countermelody can be taken by violin I.
- Occasionally all parts move in the same rhythm, notably in bars 9–12. Such rhythmically-uniform homophonic writing may be termed chordal or homorhythmic.
- The two-part opening bars (1–8) and similar passages are contrapuntal: the parts are clearly differentiated rhythmically. The counterpoint combines different melodies, and is not imitative (as would happen if different parts had overlapping entries of the same or similar melodic material).

Structure

The movement is in a fairly simple sonata form.

Exposition (bars 1–44)
- As in so many sonata-form movements, Haydn’s Exposition has:
  - Music in the tonic key (D minor) – the ‘first subject’ – bars 1–16.
  - Music in a closely-related key, F major (the relative major) with different melodic material – the second subject – bars 17–44.

There is no modulating transition or bridge passage between these two sections, as often happens in sonata form.
**Development** (bars 45–79)

As in so many sonata-form movements, Haydn’s Development has:

- Key(s) other than those previously heard, before returning to the tonic.
- Reuse of themes already heard in the Exposition.

Haydn

- Begins in F major, the closing key of the Exposition.
- Later visits G minor (bar 55).
- A minor (bar 65).
- Touches on F major (bar 76).
- Regains D minor (bar 79) just in time for the Recapitulation.

Much of the Development is based on the first subject (e.g. at the start), with elements of the second subject (bars 65–73).

**Recapitulation** (from bar 80)

The Exposition is repeated with some changes, the most important of which is the return of the second subject (bar 100) in D major, the tonic major – so that the original major-key music does not re-appear in a minor key.

The closing bars stand apart as very much a closing section, and may be termed a *coda*. (The similar but shorter ending of the Exposition can be termed a *codetta* – a ‘little coda’.)

**Tonality**

- Tonality is based on major and minor scales and is dependent on *functional harmony*.
- In the Exposition, the change from D minor at the start to F major (the relative major) is conventional, even predictable, for the time.
- The Development begins by continuing in F major for 10 bars. Two minor keys are important after this: G minor (the subdominant minor, from bar 55) and A minor (the dominant minor, from bar 65).
- The most memorable tonal moment is the change to D *major*, the tonic major, for the second subject in the Recapitulation (see above under **Structure**). Modulating from tonic minor to tonic major (or the reverse) within a movement was uncharacteristic of Baroque music – it was fairly common from the Classical period onwards, sometimes as a means of creating a change of mood.

**Harmony**

- The harmony, as normal in the Classical period, was *functional* – notably with much emphasis on the special tonic and dominant functions of chords I and V(7) in establishing tonality in perfect cadences and elsewhere.
• The prime importance of chords V(7) and I can be seen particularly clearly in bars 9–12, with I–Vb in D minor heard four times in succession.

• Bars 57–65 (part of the Development) has a circle of fifths.

• There are a few diminished seventh chords – these help to create harmonic tension in minor-key writing. Examples are in bar 4, and in the A minor passage from the Development (bars 69 and 71).

• Suspensions also create harmonic tension, as for example in parts of the first subject (bars 1–8 and 13–16). There is a double suspension (two suspensions simultaneously) at the end of the Evangelist’s first passage in the second subject (bar 25), and a characteristically Classical-period triple suspension (or ‘appoggiatura’ chord at the end of the passage marked ‘Christ’ (bar 31).

**Melody**

• Like much plainsong, the second subject melody is predominantly stepwise, with just a few small leaps, the widest of which is a perfect 5th. The violin I countermelody provides effective contrast with continuous disjunct movement largely based on broken chords.

• The main melody of the first subject (bars 1–8, violins) is much more varied. Each of the first three phrases has repeated notes in syncopated rhythm, then an upward leap, including a striking major 6th in bar 4, leading to a stepwise descent that creates suspensions against the bass.

• The contrasting idea in bars 9–12 consists chiefly of four semitone descents (F–E) alternately in low and high octaves, the higher ones elaborated with appoggiaturas and trills. The effect, given the piano dynamic, the minor-key harmony, and the rests, is almost of four sighs – contrasting with the tense and forte syncopated opening.

• Bars 1–16 and similar passages employ periodic phrasing, that is, the music has regular balanced phrases in multiples of two and four bars. In the second subject, derived from plainsong, the phrasing is less regular.

• There is sequence in bars 53–56 (Development – based on the ‘sighing’ motif), and in the circle of 5ths (bars 57–63).

**Rhythm and metre**

• The most striking rhythmic feature is the syncopation at the opening and in related passages. The lower part is on the beat all the time, in crotchets, while for each of the first three two-bar phrases, the upper part begins with a quaver, then has crotchets, each beginning on the second (weak) quaver of a beat.

• Rests are skilfully used for purposes of articulation. The opening passage ends on the third crotchet beat of bar 8, with a rest on the fourth beat separating it clearly from the following contrasting idea. (Baroque composers tended to prefer greater rhythmic continuity; clear separation of phrases was an important part of Classical rhetoric.) The rests in bars 9–12 serve to separate the four ‘sighs’ (see above, ‘Melody’).
• The metre is simple quadruple (four crotchet beats in each bar) with the signature C. In modern performance the given tempo, Allegro assai con spirito, may suggest a minim beat – but the word assai is ambiguous (‘very’ or ‘rather’). It perhaps wise not to take the movement so fast that the Passiontide plainsong begins to sound jaunty.

Further reading

The items on the following list, though of considerable interest, are not to be regarded as essential reading.

