

Il mondo della luna – *The World on the Moon* – premièred in 1777 at Eszterháza

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

Libretto by Carlo Goldoni

Running time: 167 minutes

Performed by Concentus Musicus Wien in 2009

Buonafede	<i>Dietrich Henschel</i>	Bass
Clarice, his daughter	<i>Christina Landshamer</i>	Soprano
Flaminia, his other daughter	<i>Anja Nina Bahrmann</i>	Soprano
Lisetta, his maidservant	<i>Maite Beaumont</i>	Contralto
Ecclitico, a bogus astronomer	<i>Bernard Richter</i>	Tenor
Ernesto, a gentleman	<i>Vivica Genaux</i>	Contralto
Cecco, his servant	<i>Markus Schäfer</i>	Tenor
Conductor	<i>Nikolaus Harnoncourt</i>	
Stage Director	<i>Tobias Moretti</i>	

**Synopsis**

ACT 1 – Ecclitico and his students are observing the Moon, eager to establish the presence of human life there. They persuade the ill-humoured Buonafede that a better life exists on the Moon. Ernesto and his servant Cecco enter, and it emerges that Ernesto and Ecclitico are in love with Buonafide’s daughters, while Cecco loves Lisetta the maid. Ecclitico convinces them that Buonafide can be tricked into allowing a triple wedding. Buonfide agrees to take a potion which he’s told will transport him to the Moon. He bids everyone farewell: his daughters imagine that he is dying but they are placated by a false will mentioning handsome dowries.

[Interval]

ACT 2 Ecclitico’s garden disguised as the Moon – Buonafide awakes to the sound and sight of dancing and he’s prepared before meeting the Emperor of the Moon (Cecco in disguise). The old man, now rather a forlorn figure, woos Lisetta who spurns him. She’s about to be crowned the Queen of the Lunatics. Buonafide is duped into sanctioning the marriage of his two daughters. When he discovers the deceit everyone asks his forgiveness.

ACT 3 In Ecclitico’s house Buonafede agrees to forgive everyone, and the triple wedding is sanctioned. Ecclitico announces that he’s giving up astrology and everyone commends the good fortune that the World of the Moon has brought.

Operatic Context

This plot became one of Goldoni's most popular libretti. Paisiello set it twice (with different titles). A singer who'd played Ecclitico in a 1775 production became a member of the Eszterháza opera company, and he may have suggested the libretto to Haydn. Appropriately with its triple marriage theme, it was first performed to mark the wedding of Prince Nicolaus I's second son to Countess Maria Anna Weissenwolf. This première may not have been particularly successful: no contemporary revivals are known, either at Eszterháza or elsewhere.



The libretto satirises the self-confidence of the Age of Reason. It's a typical example of the *dramma giocosa* genre: Flaminia and Ernesto are the serious characters, whilst Buonafede, Lisetta and Cecco are at the comic end of the spectrum, and Clarice and Ecclitico occupy the middle ground. Haydn's music resourcefully highlights these divisions, particularly in contrasting Act 1 arias for each of the female characters. Buonafide's Act 2 aria engages the listeners' sympathy as the old man describes his happiness in the make-believe World of the Moon.

Haydn recycled numbers from this opera in a range of later works: Symphony No.63 (c.1780), his *Missa Cellensis* (1782), and in more than one of his 1784 string trios.

Joseph Haydn

Haydn is best remembered as a composer of symphonies (more than 100), string quartets (at least 70), as well as choral works (oratorios & church music). Opera nevertheless formed a substantial part of his output, and dominated his life for more than a decade after creating *Il mondo della luna*. He first wrote operatic music in the 1750s when he lived in Vienna and earned income from a variety of sources. For one Singspiel company he wrote two operas – both now lost – and he also composed extra individual numbers when required.

His first extant opera dates from the first years of his employment at the Esterházy court, the richest in the Austrian aristocracy. Between 1761 and his death he was to serve four successive Esterházy princes, and all but one of his surviving operas were written for the family. At first these were performed at their main Schloss Eisenstadt residence in the hall theatre (now called the *Haydnsaal*) south east of Vienna.

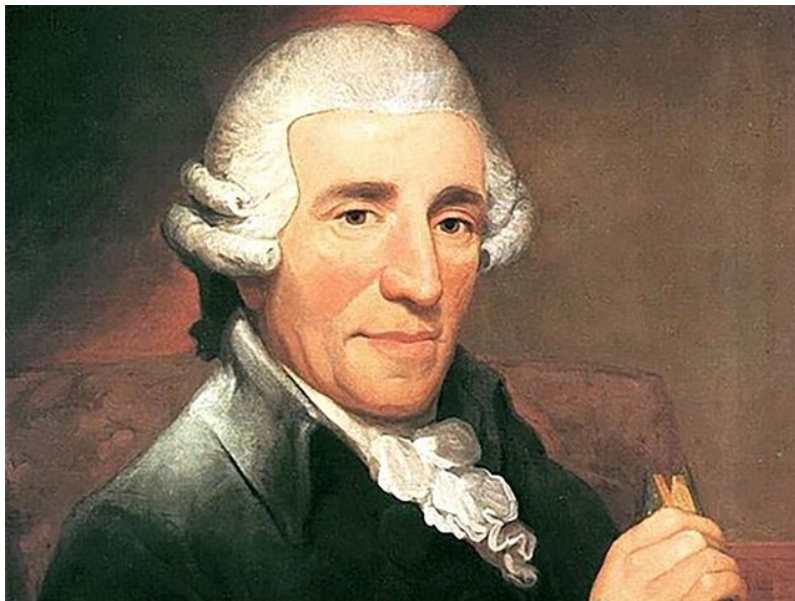
From 1768 onwards the performances took place more than 30kms further south east in Eszterháza, a new summer palace built by Prince Nicolaus, the second and most extravagant of Haydn's masters. There were two theatres, the larger allowed 400 people to watch Italian opera and plays. From 1773 a second smaller theatre was devoted mainly to marionette performances.

As Eszterháza Kapellmeister, Haydn was responsible for directing the music at both theatres. From 1775 a full-time opera company at Eszterháza performed works by Gluck, Cimarosa and

most other Italian opera composers. 1786 was the busiest year: 125 performances of 17 operas, including eight for the first time at Eszterháza. The 1790 season came to an abrupt end as Prince Nicolaus died (while Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro* was being prepared). As none of his successors was interested in opera, the house and both theatres fell into disrepair.

At its zenith the court opera employed 40-45 people, including instrumentalists. As a centre of Italian opera outside Italy it could be said to vie with London and St Petersburg. Recalling Haydn's *L'infedeltà delusa*, Empress Maria Theresa later said: 'If I want to hear good opera I go to Eszterháza.'

Between 1762 and 1784 Haydn was pleased to have composed 16 Italian operas and five German operas. These include the following Eszterháza premières: *Lo speziale* (1768 comedy), *L'infedeltà delusa* (1773 comedy), *L'isola disabitata* (1779 serious), *La fedeltà premiata* (1781 comedy), and *Armida* (1784 serious). Gradually however he came to realise that the European public was more interested in his instrumental compositions. In the 1780s he was increasingly preoccupied with meeting this demand, and by 1787 he felt overshadowed by Mozart as an operatic composer.



Curiously his last – and only extant opera not written for the Esterházy princes – was written in London during his first 1791 visit, though it wasn't performed until 1951. While his reputation was crowned by successful oratorios in the closing years of his life, some complete Haydn operas and many extracts were still being widely distributed (eg *Armida* produced in Turin in 1805).

As a theatrical composer Haydn's works lack Mozart's psychological insight and sure-footed dramatic pacing. However he compares favourably with other Italian opera composers of his era, with his rich orchestration and individual harmonic and melodic content. Some Gluck influence can be detected, for example improved continuity; and – like Mozart – an interest in creating mounting excitement in act finales by linking up to ten consecutive sections.

Goldoni (whose unusual libretto proved extremely popular)

Carlo Osvaldo Goldoni (1707-1793) was an Venetian playwright and librettist. His works include some of Italy's most famous and best-loved plays, admired for their ingenious mix of wit and honesty. The lives and values of the emerging middle classes are often dramatised. Although he wrote in Italian (and French), his plays also make rich use of Venetian vernacular and colloquialisms.

Goldoni wrote libretti while serving as literary director of the San Giovanni Crisostomo, Venice's most distinguished opera house. Mozart and Haydn used libretti by Goldoni during the same era, but note that Mozart was twelve, while the older composer was in his late thirties:

- Lo speziale (The Apothecary) by Haydn (1768)
- La finta semplice (The Pretend Simpleton) by Mozart (1769)
- Le pescatrici (The Fisherwomen) by Haydn (1770)

Goldoni initially focused on tragedies, before appreciating his own aptitude for comedy. By 1743, he'd perfected a hybrid style of playwriting (combining the model of Molière with his own wit and Commedia dell'arte). In 1761 he moved to Paris, where he received a position at court and was put in charge of the Théâtre-Italien. He spent the rest of his life there, writing memoirs and composing most of his popular plays in French.



An Afterthought about Drottningholm etc

Drottningholm Palace Theatre reconstructed for the King of Sweden – and used to perform Italian Opera between 1764 and 1792 – has survived in its original eighteenth century state, with authentic stage machinery etc. It's exactly contemporary with Haydn's theatrical career, though Eszterháza was definitely built on a more ambitious scale. It might be difficult to establish whether any Haydn opera was performed at Drottningholm (before the twentieth century), but this Swedish theatre gives us a good idea of what courtly productions would have looked like during Haydn's lifetime.



The Teatro Olimpico – above – constructed by Palladio in the late 16th Century is a well-known precursor. It's one of the Vicenza settings chosen for Losey's *Don Giovanni* (which featured Kiri te Kanawa and other stars).

Selected Musical Biography

CONDUCTOR: NIKOLAUS HARNONCOURT (1929-2016) was an Austrian conductor renowned for historically informed performances. In 1953 he founded the period-instrument ensemble Concentus Musicus Wien with his wife Alice. Around 1970 Harnoncourt began conducting opera and concert performances (including Monteverdi at La Scala). Initially specialising in Baroque music he later expanded his repertoire to include Classical and early Romantic works, whilst maintaining a focus on historically accurate tempi and dynamics. Haydn operas became one of his specialities.