

Discuss and account for the differences in woodwind and brass writing between NAM 2 and NAM 4

The years between the writing of NAM 2 and NAM 4 saw a great change in the approach to instrumental writing. As the Classical period gave way to the Romantic, increased expressive demands went hand in hand with the development of new and existing instruments to allow the writing of more complex instrumental parts. This meant composers had a greater palette of timbres available and consequently the music was able to contain much more variety; the roles of individual instruments varied throughout as the orchestra was exploited in new ways.

There is a vast difference between the quantities and range of instruments used in the two works: the *Lamentatione Symphony* is scored for 2 oboes, bassoon and 2 horns (besides strings), giving the impression of a chamber work, whereas the *Prelude to Tristan and Isolde* features 3 flutes, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones and tuba.

Not only does this make a vast difference to the dynamic volume of the music, but also to its character in terms of the palette of instrumental colours available to the composer. Wagner manages to create a multitude of contrasting timbres with the instruments used in varying combinations, whereas the sound world of NAM 2 is much more limited in scope.

The reasons for this difference are of course down to technology and convention. One must also take into account the fact that Hadyn was writing for a specific, and rather small group of players at the Esterhazy household. Wagner had far more players, and advanced instruments available – many instruments used by Wagner were not invented, or still in the early stages of their development at the time Hadyn was writing.

French horns were the first true brass instruments to establish themselves in the orchestra. In the early 18th Century they were used mainly for special effects, though by the middle of the century two horns were normal in an orchestra, as can be seen in NAM 2. Though the instrument had a limited range of tones, the style of music required little of the horn, and a pair added warmth and fullness to the orchestral sound. In the 19th Century, the romantic qualities of the instrument began to be exploited: its ability to ‘sing’ a tune with power and nobility while remaining subtle in quality, and being able to supply unobtrusive inner harmonies. Wagner uses the four horns (the standard number in the 19th Century symphony orchestra) to fulfil both these functions. The oboe was the first woodwind instrument to enter common use in the symphony orchestra. Two oboes have been standard since the mid-18th Century, as NAM 2 illustrates.

Hadyn gives the wind instruments little independence in NAM 2. The bassoon doubles the cello, the oboes are linked to the violins, while the horns hold sustained notes until bar 100, where they finally get some melodic material. In line with the convention of the time, the strings are at the forefront of this work; it is the winds’ role to hold together the harmony (such as the oboe sustaining in bars 1, 3 and 5 while the violins syncopate), and to add some weight to important lines in the music.

By contrast, NAM 4 uses the woodwind and brass in a variety of different roles: they hold down the harmony through sustained notes (for example in bars 16-32, in which they accompany the strings), they play a significant colouristic and textural role, and take solo passages (such as the flute in bars 12-13). As such, the wind are as important as the strings in this music, allowing the melody to be passed around continually, the tone colour ever-changing.

The change in treatment of wind instruments, from a role that was subservient to strings to a position of equality, developed over a long period of time, and was due to fashion and technology – as the

instruments developed to cope with more advanced material, they became more attractive to composers looking to experiment with new sounds.

The basic instruments of Hadyn's time meant that the composer was limited in terms of the material he could write. Dynamically, there is still very much a Baroque-style terraced effect, with only forte and piano used, and no gradation between them. Wagner, however, makes full use of his more modern instruments; capable of greater dynamic and pitch range, which is shown in the presence of many more performance directions including dynamic gradations leading to a greater expressive effect.

In the 18th Century, horns were only able to play the notes of the harmonic series. Thus any tune given to the instruments had to be very high in pitch if stepwise was required. Extra tubing had to be added to the instruments when required to play in different keys. In the Hadyn piece, the horns indeed are restricted; when they do play the tune, it is simple – one might ask if Hadyn deliberately wrote it thus so that the horns could play it. By the time Wagner wrote *Tristan and Isolde*, horns and the other brass were equipped with valves, so became able to play much more complex melodic lines (such as that in bar 32-36), and change key without adding tubing.

Overall there is a much greater range of pitch in NAM 4. The instruments are used to their extremes, compared to the more conservative writing in NAM 2. Hadyn keeps the instruments in safe middle registers with fairly narrow tessitura, whereas Wagner uses the higher notes to heighten his dramatic climaxes. There is also greater movement between registers in NAM 4, incorporating some large leaps. Romantic composers were more willing to take the instruments to their limits as they became more stable in terms of tuning and tone quality, coupled with increased expressive demands.

The melodic lines themselves are fairly different. Hadyn uses regular phrase lengths – often of 8 bars, but Wagner creates much more variety – from very short question and answer phrases to endless, flowing melodies. Hadyn structures his phrases using patterns – such as the walking bass effect and sections of repeated notes (bars 74-80) in the bassoon part, and scales (bars 26-31) on the oboe. Wagner too repeats and develops his motifs, using sequences and scales; however, these are more a part of the harmonic movement of the music than an integral ingredient in the structure of each line in the way it relates to the material around it.

One important aspect of the music which differs significantly is texture. In the *Lamentatione* movement, the writing is almost entirely homophonic, with little part independence. In contrast to this, Wagner uses the instrumental groups and the individual parts contrapuntally and antiphonally, creating dialogue as the melody passes around. Bars 36-43 are a good example of this. Although there is much doubling, and some homophony, the instruments are, overall, independent. The doubling here is for effect –for the creation of new timbres, unlike the Hadyn which uses the technique in order to add some weight to the instrumental lines.

From the simple, minimal scoring in Hadyn's *Lamentatione* Symphony to the extravagant and varied instrumental parts in Wagner's *Prelude to Tristan and Isolde*, the difference in the approach by these composers to woodwind and brass writing could not be greater. The works are products of their eras: the compositions were dependent on the number and quality of instruments available to perform the music, tied to the technology and conventions of the day. Wagner's music would clearly be unplayable on the instruments of Hadyn's time, and its intensely expressive character shows how different was the aesthetic of music in the Classical and Romantic periods.