

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL

1685 – 1759

BAROQUE ERA

BIOGRAPHY

- George Frideric Handel was born in Halle, Germany and died in London, England.
- Although he wanted to become a musician, his father sent him to the local university to study law. Handel continued his musical studies on the side, and when his father died a year later, he left school to pursue music as his career.
- As a young composer, Handel studied opera in Italy and choral music in England. He eventually became an English citizen and lived in London until his death.
- He led three different opera companies and wrote over 25 operas. When Handel's own company went bankrupt, he stopped writing operas and focused his composing efforts on oratorios. It was at this time that he wrote his most famous work, *Messiah*.
- Handel was very famous during his lifetime. He regularly wrote music for royal events and coronations. *Water Music* was written for a river concert held by King George I. The king and other aristocrats floated upon one barge while 50 musicians played Handel's music on another. In addition, thousands of Londoners listened from the banks of the River Thames. The king was so pleased with the performance that he ordered it to be repeated at least three times, up and down the river.
- Handel is buried in Westminster Abbey in a section of the building called Poet's Corner, due to the large number of poets, playwrights, and musicians who are buried or memorialized there, including Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and William Shakespeare.

FUN FACTS

- When Handel was a young boy, he practiced on a harpsichord that had been hidden in the attic so that his father wouldn't hear.
- He wrote vocal music in many languages, including German, Italian, Latin, and English.
- Handel was so well-respected in London that he was allowed to choose the performers for his operas. This led to fierce competition, even resulting in an on-stage fight between two sopranos who had to be physically separated and dragged from the stage.
- At the first performance of Handel's *Messiah*, the king stood up on the first note of the "Hallelujah Chorus." This practice has been continued by audiences ever since.
- Mozart greatly admired Handel's music, and is reputed to have said, "When he chooses, [Handel] strikes like a thunder bolt."

FAMOUS WORKS

- *Messiah* (oratorio)
- *Giulio Cesare* (opera)
- *Water Music* (orchestral work)
- *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (orchestral work)

RECORDING

Track 13: "Hallelujah Chorus" from *Messiah*



George Frideric Handel

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

1732 – 1809

CLASSICAL ERA

BIOGRAPHY

- Franz Joseph Haydn was born in Rohrau, Austria and died in Vienna, Austria.
- His parents were quite poor and couldn't read music, but they were enthusiastic folk musicians who frequently sang and played with their neighbors. They encouraged their son's musical talents by sending him to live with a choirmaster in a larger town ten miles away. Haydn was six years old at the time.
- Haydn soon learned to play the harpsichord and the violin, while continuing to improve his singing voice. He was eventually offered a place in the boy choir at the cathedral in Vienna, where he worked for nine years.
- When his voice changed, he was dismissed from the choir. It was at this point that Haydn began his career as a composer and music teacher.
- Haydn was soon hired as a full-time court musician by Prince Esterhazy, with whom he lived and worked for 29 years. His main responsibility was to compose music for family events, balls, and worship services. He also performed regularly, conducted the prince's orchestra, and directed operas for special court performances.
- After the prince's death, Haydn travelled around Europe to attend performances of his music (he had become quite famous while working for the Esterhazy family). All the while, he continued to write music for the family, who supported him until his death.
- Haydn died in 1809 and was buried at the Esterhazy's estate in Eisenstadt. He is remembered today as the "father of the symphony" and the "father of the string quartet" although he truly excelled in every musical genre.

FUN FACTS

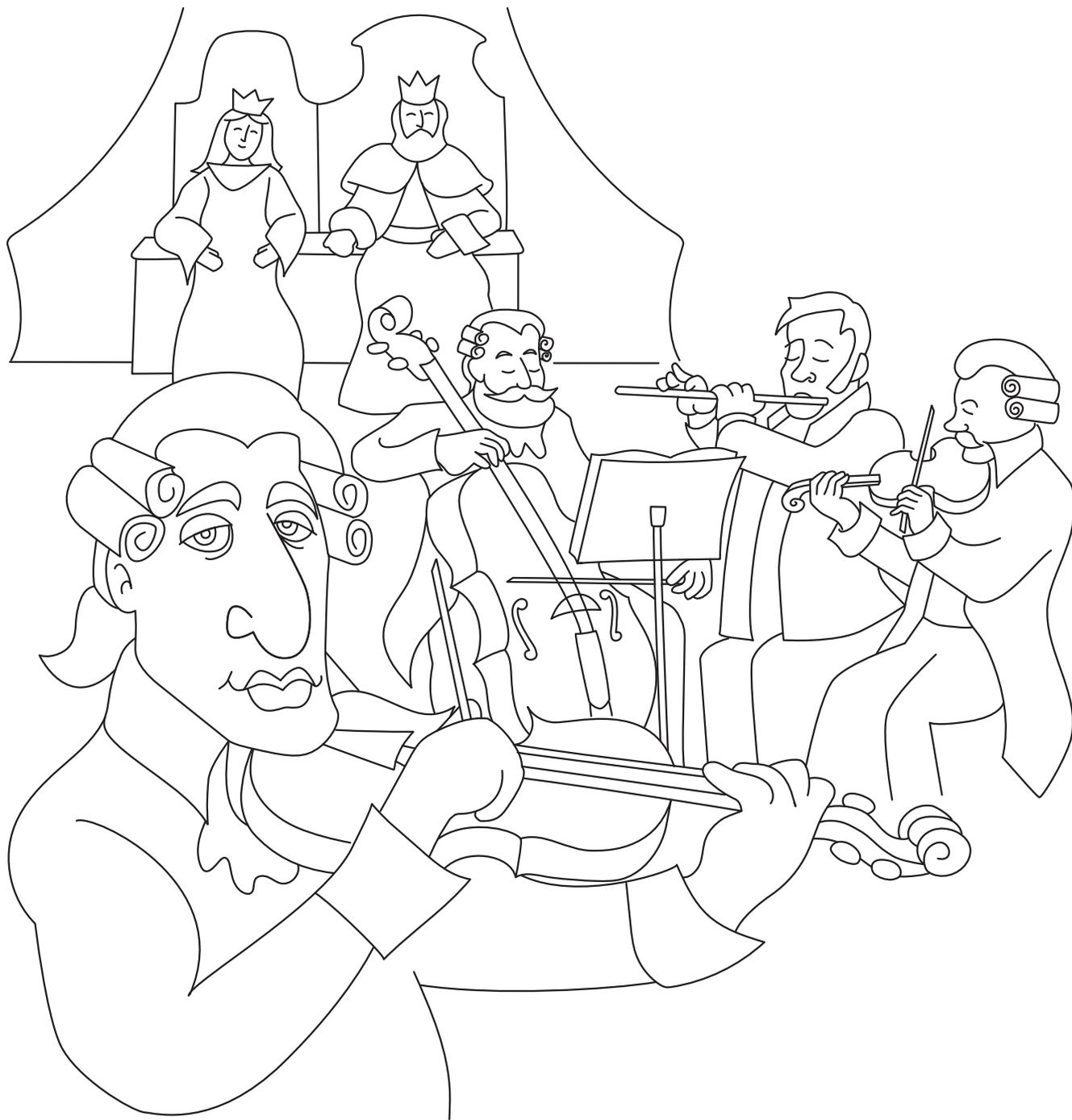
- As a young choirboy, Haydn was not always properly fed by the choirmaster. Later in life, he said that his motivation to sing came from the hope of being asked to perform for royalty, who usually gave food to their performers.
- He was known to be a modest and generous man, often volunteering his services for charitable concerts and fundraisers. The musicians he worked with called him "Papa Haydn"—a sign of the respect and affection they had for the composer.
- Haydn's last days coincided with Napoleon's attack on Vienna. It is said that a French officer came to personally apologize for the attack. He paid his respects to the composer by singing an aria from one of his oratorios.

FAMOUS WORKS

- *The Creation* (oratorio)
- *The Seasons* (oratorio)
- String Quartet No. 3 ("Emperor Quartet")
- Symphony No. 94 in G major ("Surprise Symphony")

RECORDING

Track 14: "Theme and Variations" from Symphony No. 94 in G major ("Surprise Symphony") (excerpt)



Franz Joseph Haydn

SCOTT JOPLIN

1868 – 1917

ROMANTIC ERA

BIOGRAPHY

- Scott Joplin was born in Texarkana, Texas and died in New York City.
- His parents were laborers who played the fiddle and mandolin in their spare time. His father, a former slave, worked for the railroad, and his mother worked as a house cleaner.
- Joplin's parents did not have the money or the means to support his musical talent (educational opportunities for African-American children were very limited at that time). But his mother supported her son by letting him practice on pianos in the homes she cleaned.
- A German immigrant and former music professor who lived nearby offered to give him lessons for free. Joplin credited this man's kindness as the starting point of his later success as a professional musician.
- As a young man, Joplin journeyed north, playing the piano in bars and saloons to support himself. He spent time in St. Louis, Missouri and Chicago, Illinois, where he performed at the World's Fair of 1893.
- In the late 1890s, he began to publish music. One of his initial pieces was "Maple Leaf Rag" for piano, which became the first piece of sheet music to sell more than one million copies.
- Although Joplin wasn't the first ragtime composer, he quickly became the most well-known one. His compositions are considered classic examples of the style.
- He died at the young age of 49 from dementia. His brief career resulted in 44 ragtime pieces, one ragtime ballet, and two operas.
- Joplin and other ragtime composers are celebrated today for creating a new American sound that paved the way for jazz and big band swing.

FUN FACTS

- Ragtime music resulted from a combination of African-American musical styles with European forms and melodies. At first it was called "ragged time," because the lively, syncopated rhythms sounded as "ragged as a torn piece of cloth."
- At the time, some people spoke out against this new kind of music, saying it could cause brain damage and ruin a person's character.
- Joplin didn't like the fast tempo at which others were playing ragtime, so he started adding a notice to the bottom of his printed music: "Notice! Do not play this piece fast. It is never right to play ragtime fast. Author."

FAMOUS WORKS

- "Maple Leaf Rag"
- "The Entertainer"
- *Treemonisha* (opera)

RECORDING

Track 15: "Maple Leaf Rag"

The WORLD'S FAIR of 1893



Scott Joplin