

## HENSCHEL QUARTETT

**“The Seven last words of Our Savior on the Cross”  
in a new “Haydn style” version by Spanish Royal Court  
composer José Peris for string quartet and mezzo-soprano  
performed at the Vatican in presence of  
Pope Benedict XVI on March 19, 2010**

When the Henschel Quartet received the honorable invitation by the Vatican to perform for Pope Benedict XVI on his name day the Quartet decided that this should be the opportunity to introduce the new compelling Peris arrangement of Haydn’s Seven Last Words. The Vatican invited the German mezzo-soprano Susanne Kelling to take the voice part at this occasion.

**José Peris Lacasa**, composer and musical assessor to the Spanish national patrimony and organist at the Spanish Capilla del Palacio de Madrid, completed his studies in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and Darius Milhaud and in Carl Orff’s “Meisterklasse für Dramatische Komposition” in Munich.

Professor Peris Lacasa has created a new version of Haydn’s “Seven Last Words” in which for the first time the leading part is taken up by a solo voice, a mezzo-soprano. Haydn’s original work for string quartet was a commission by a capitular in Cádiz at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to celebrate Good Friday in the church of Santa Cueva and became one of Haydn’s most famous compositions.

In the original work from 1786, each of the seven sonatas (representing seven mediations) were introduced by a spoken explanatory Latin text accompanied by a short sermon. In Peris Lacasa’s version, the voice assumes the part of the first violin in each of the seven sonatas, the literary phrase always corresponding with the musical phrasing. In the original, the quartet composition had spoken comments by a priest with each corresponding sonata. In today’s version, only the music is interpreted, and in general without intervention of a priest.

Composer José Peris Lacasa on the performance: “This performance in the Vatican dedicated to a fundamental work in Christian spirituality is a great honor for me. This work is the result of my dedication to sacred music since the days of my youth. Different works reflect this dedication: the *Concierto Espiritual* on a poem of Cristo de Velásquez de Unamuno, the *Te Deum* for the commemoration of the Royal Monastery of the Spanish Court, among others. I think that my sacred music is part and parcel of a tradition of Spanish polyphonists that goes back to the composers of the XVIth century.”

The world premiere of Peris Lacasa’s version in Madrid was performed by the **Henschel Quartet** on the Spanish court’s unique Stradivarius collection to an enthusiastic reception at the Royal Court during Holy Week in 2008 with Spanish mezzo-soprano Ana María Sánchez.

On March 19, 2010, the quintet version was performed in presence of Pope Benedict XVI, on his name day, at the Vatican’s Sala Clementina. The solo part for lyrical mezzo-soprano was sung by Susanne Kelling.

Michael White of the New York Times said of the Vatican performance:

**“[Haydn’s “Seven Last Words”] was wonderfully performed, with all the physical, full-blooded vigor for which the Henschel players are known and an exactingly secure relationship between the instruments and the voice.”**

