

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), String Quartet in G major, Op. 33, No. 5 (1781)

It is through the works of Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) that the now familiar string quartet becomes an established and important chamber music configuration. Though there exist examples as far back as the early 17th century of works scored for two violins, viola and cello, prior to Haydn's development of the genre such pieces were typically either arrangements of string orchestra compositions, variants of the Baroque trio sonata with a third solo instrument added and the continuo part reduced to the cello alone, sans harpsichord, or mere anomalies. The decade of the 1760's witnessed Haydn's earliest quartet efforts, opus numbers 1, 2 and 9, each opus consisting of a set of six quartets. These were followed by the six quartets of Opus 17 in 1771, and the six so-called "Sun" quartets of Opus 20 in 1772.

The six quartets of Opus 33 were composed in 1781. The String Quartet in G major, Opus 33, No. 5, is variously listed as Haydn's 29th or 41st work in the genre, depending on the cataloguing system used, on whether the six quartets sometimes designated as Opus 3 are authentic or spurious, and on whether the Opus 1 No. 5 String Quartet in Bb major should actually be considered one of the symphonies. Whatever the G major quartet's exact position, the Opus 33 set clearly comes at a point among his 68 quartets when the 49-year-old Haydn had reached a certain high level of experience, proficiency and maturity in his mastery over string quartet writing. Despite, or perhaps owing to that growing maturity, the six so-called "Russian Quartets" of Opus 33 followed those of Opus 20 only after a hiatus of some nine years. In this regard the noted Haydn scholar, Karl Geiringer suggests that:

"The string quartet had been abandoned temporarily, probably because Haydn felt that further progress along the lines established in his Op.20 was impossible. In the fugue movements of the 'Sun' quartets, a strong concentration of both form and content had been attained, but in time this sort of solution seemed too radical to him and not in conformity with the spirit of the string quartet. The progressive Haydn was not satisfied to use an antiquated contrapuntal form of the baroque period in the young string quartet. He wanted unification and concentration, but not knowing how to achieve them adequately, he renounced the composition of string quartets for the time being and it was not until nine years later that he found a solution to his problem.... The 'Russian' quartets, which according to Haydn himself, were written 'in an entirely new and particular manner', raised the principle of 'thematic elaboration' to the status of a main stylistic feature. Haydn had used thematic elaboration — a method of dissecting the subjects of the exposition and then developing and reassembling the resulting fragments in an unexpected manner — in his earlier works, but never with such logic and determination. Henceforth this device, combined with modulations, ruled the development sections of the sonata form." [From Karl Geiringer, *Haydn: A Creative Life in Music*, University of California Press, 1982].

In addition to the evolving technique of thematic elaboration Geiringer cites, the first movement of Opus 33, No. 5 is full of cleverness, wit, and *double-entendre*. The simple, straightforward, yet curious motto heard at the outset will later serve as a conclusion, and both themes in the exposition trip the listener up with 8 measure phrases unexpectedly divided 3+5 following ones divided, more normatively, as 4+4. The development section features the fragmentation and recombination of thematic material described by Geiringer that becomes the trademark of thematic development in the Classical era; and the four instruments are here treated more nearly as equals than in Haydn's earlier quartet opuses. The development nears its completion with two remarkable and wholly unexpected silences, and concludes with — what else? — The enigmatic motto from the movement's opening, now reinterpreted as a cadence that leads directly into the recapitulation; and the motto subsequently ends the movement as well.

The lyrical, almost operatic second movement, in the key of G minor, is an intriguing three-

part, A-B-A form, the 'B' section, which quickly settles into the mediant key of Bb major, lasting twice as long as the 'A' section. The reprise of the 'A' section is interrupted two measures early with a surprising harmonic shift, and the interjection of a lengthy cadenza-like passage for the first violin, providing dramatic weight to the movement's conclusion, as well as proportional balance to the lengthier 'B' section.

Beginning with the Opus 33 quartets, the typical paired minuet-and-trio third movement of the earlier quartets is now dubbed a *Scherzo*, though the A-B-A pairing of two dance-like ideas in triple meter, the second simpler and more 'pastoral' than the first, is retained. The principle key of G major returns here, as does the witty manner of the first movement ('*scherzo*' being the Italian word for 'joke'), encapsulated in the teasing delay before the end of the first phrase, a prototype for the unexpected addition of 'extra' measures that make the listener wait past the expected conclusion in many of this *scherzo*'s phrases.

The quartet concludes with a charming theme and variations movement based on a straightforward and uncomplicated tune featuring the dance rhythms of a Baroque *Siciliano*. The only unusual move here is the unexpected harmony at the end of the theme's first phrase, suggesting momentarily the closely related key of E minor.

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