

## Haydn String Quartet op 50 no 1 in B flat

Allegro

Adagio

Menuetto – poco Allegretto

Vivace

Upon receiving a copy of Haydn's 'Paris' symphonies, the cello-playing King of Prussia sent a gold ring to the composer who was so touched by the gift that he resolved immediately to dedicate his next set of quartets to the king. The first of these op. 50 quartets opens with a gesture surely intended as a salutation to its dedicatee – two bars of solo cello. However with this we enter at once into a mysterious world; one bass note is repeated as though accompanying an unheard melody, or perhaps coaxing one into existence. Since there is no other context, we cannot tell if we are listening to a slow or a fast movement or if it is in a major or minor key. The explanations come almost in clue form as the other instruments enter – cadential figures which would normally find their function as endings become beginnings and we feel as though this is a continuation of a conversation which started long before. The puzzling nature of the cadential figures continues to haunt the movement throughout the development section as we examine them from all angles, in different keys and registers. Even the relatively swift preparation for the recapitulation gives the impression of happening upon the solution almost by accident.

The Adagio variations find each instrument trying to out-do the previous one in increasingly elaborate ornamentation though Haydn's characteristic warmth and wisdom shine through in the gentle simplicity of the movement's conclusion. While the previous set of six quartets, op 33, might have led us to expect a scherzo movement at this point, we find instead a traditional old-fashioned Menuetto next, albeit one containing as much humour as any scherzo. The work finishes with an action-packed movement which at first seems like it might be a straightforward Rondo but turns out to be a full-scale sonata movement.

Since Mozart and Haydn had met in 1784, shortly before these op 50 quartets were written, many people have tried to find the ways in which Mozart's influence might be perceived in the composition of these works. However, if anything the op 50 quartets are more Haydn than ever – their rigorously argued logic is based often on astonishing economy of material, and the music offers its explanations with generosity and a delightful twinkle in the eye.

### **Beethoven String Quartet op 18 no 3 in D**

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro

Presto

To begin his D major quartet, Beethoven makes use of the same trick as Haydn in the opening of op 50 no 1 by starting with one instrument playing alone for two bars. However, where Haydn had the lowest instrument repeating one note eight times, Beethoven has the highest instrument play two notes which introduce the interval from which the whole work finds its source; the choice of the ascending minor seventh as a starting point is a revolutionary stroke of genius. The conjunction of the question posed by this ambiguous interval together with the radiance of the ascending scale motif in the bass line is something which leaves its impression on us throughout the piece.

The choice of the key of B-flat for the Andante lends a suspended feeling to the movement as though it is taking place in a dream world. Certainly its hugely expanded development with forays into the remote and rarely visited keys of D-flat major and E-flat minor creates a beautiful but highly unstable environment, with the original minor seventh from the first movement still making playing a strategic role.

Back in the daylight of D major again the scherzo finds a quirky playfulness, amusing itself both with elements from the first movement and setting up new games to play in the finale. The high-spirited tarantella-style dance which finishes the work certainly shares plenty in common with Haydn finales (for instance op 33 no 2) but it concludes

with a coda surely influenced by Mozart's 'Jupiter' symphony in its particular form of ingenuity. Here Beethoven devises a denouement in which all the elements of the work are combined; the original seventh is finally replaced by a triumphant octave and the original ascending scale is allowed to turn round and skip back down again providing resolution for every element with the best possible humour.

© Catherine Manson 2013

### **Mozart Clarinet Quintet in A, K581**

Allegro

Larghetto

Menuetto

Allegretto con variazioni

The jewels in the crown of Mozart's oeuvre for clarinet are without question the Quintet for clarinet and strings K581, and the Clarinet Concerto K622, both composed for his friend, Anton Stadler. By 1789, Stadler had risen far above the station of "arme Schlucker", as Mozart described him in 1782, and become well established in Viennese musical life. In 1787, he and his brother were appointed to the K.K. Hofkapelle, where they received the considerable annual salary of 400 florins. From Mozart's entry in his "Verzeichnüss aller meiner Werke", we know that K581 was completed on September 29, 1789. Unfortunately the autograph has been lost, but various bits of evidence relating both to K581 and to K622 can be pieced together to produce a convincing version of what the composer intended. Without question, Stadler possessed a special clarinet, a "basset" clarinet, capable of playing a third lower than a conventional clarinet. The shape and design of the instrument was revealed on discovery of programmes in Riga containing illustrations of Stadler's instrument. Mozart made liberal use of these low notes in both works, usually through extended arpeggiation, and occasionally in melodic figures. The range spans more than three octaves and allowing the clarinet to

act as a soprano as well as a baritone, often alternating between the two in a sort of uncanny operatic dialogue.

The Quintet was first performed on 22 December, 1789 in a concert for the Tonkünstler Societät in Vienna's Hoftheater, naturally, with Stadler playing his special clarinet. The work can certainly be included among the most beloved of Mozart's compositions. It manages to encompass everything that chamber music should. As the clarinet moves in and out of the ensemble, one minute a part of the "tutti" texture, the next, a glorious soloist, we listen to Mozart's unending inventiveness and complete mastery, a music that is intimate, varied, expressive, humorous, perfectly balanced and always engaging.

© Eric Hoeplich, 2013