

## The London Haydn Quartet & Eric Hoeperich January 19, 2019

By Morgan Luethe

January 19<sup>th</sup> saw the return of the renowned London Haydn Quartet and frequent collaborator, clarinetist Eric Hoeperich. The concert presented two mature works of the Quartet's namesake as well as a staple of the clarinet repertoire, the B-flat *Quintet* of von Weber, and the evening handily delivered on the promise of a superb musical experience. Having, for some years now, been working their way through the mammoth project of recording a complete cycle of Haydn's string quartets using period instruments and performance practices, the London Haydn Quartet's presentations of this music never fail to impart the group's ever increasing love and understanding for it to their audience. Appearing with Hoeperich, himself an renowned figure in the early music field, their combined musical forces have the captivating effect of bringing historical style and spirit of this music to the fore.

First in the night's offering was the Op. 64, No.4 Quartet, a piece written at the beginning of the composer's unprecedented late period. Off the hop, the listener is struck by the lushness that this music launches into; the quartet's opening passage has the undeniable glow of the instruments mid to lower ranges. At performances where historical instruments and playing practices are used, it's worthwhile paying attention to the quality of the collective sound being produced. From the outset of this performance, the quartet's warmth of sonority was thoroughly inviting to the ear and the player's sense of balance while working in with the sounds of period instruments was readily apparent. Particularly compelling was the group's rendition of the finale, which was imbued with all the rustic peasant humor that characterizes the most buoyant aspect of Haydn's genius.

Bringing the concert to its midway point was another significant Haydn quartet, the so-called *Friedhofsquartett* (Op.76, No.5). With an eye on the economy and clarity of the enlightenment artistic aesthetic, this performance was a highlight of the evening. Here, tempo and dynamics were tightly controlled, showing that Haydn's material doesn't need to lean on any exaggerated sentimentality in interpretation to make it interesting or to help it in getting its point across. This was most evident in the expansive slow movement which, the group pointed out in their prefacing comments, is the emotional heart of the entire piece. The Quartet's ability to play tenderly while still maintaining the unindulgent poise of the classical idiom made their rendition of the famous *Largo* all the more compelling in its authenticity. Following the peace and clarity of the slow movement, and the subsequent comfortable ländler-styled *Menuetto*, an ebullient and frenzied *Presto* finale brought the work to a thrilling close.

Carl Maria von Weber's Op. 34 *Clarinet Quintet* made up this concert's second half, and called up upon the considerable skills of Eric Hoeperich, who joined the group in this performance. The London Haydn Quartet have collaborated with Hoeperich before and having previously recorded the respective clarinet quintets of both Mozart and Brahms in recent years. On the strength of those performances alone, listeners could expect a similar outstanding musical experience. While the players did not disappoint in this aspect, the Weber *Quintet* (while remaining a pillar of the repertoire, nonetheless) came up musically slight in comparison to the other two masterpieces of the genre to which this group has already lent superb interpretations.

No one can fault Weber's music for a lack of wit or charming effect; his work is always consistent in its quality and style. However, even with the support of such excellent performers bringing it to life,

Weber's might be criticized being somewhat foursquare by comparison, especially when set against the two Haydn works played just before. Hoeperich's playing was dulcet and sweet and breathed life into Weber's winking clarinet passagework, while the players of the Quartet executed their largely supportive orchestral role with colour and leanness. Weber's strongest music, apart from his influential opera, *Der Freischütz*, resides in his music for clarinet; like his two successful concertos for the instrument, the *Quintet* brings both the seductive and virtuosic powers of the clarinet to the fore. No, this music doesn't have the same emotional magnitude of similar works of Mozart or Brahms, but it *does* make for really pleasant listening, nonetheless. Aside from its comparative plainness, the audience was dealt a convincing performance of this piece, and Weber's reputation as a minor master was cemented in our ears.

If anyone remembers the last time the London Haydn Quartet and Eric Hoeperich played in Edmonton (January 2016), they'll recall the undeniable quality of that performance. On that occasion, two middle-period Haydn quartets and Mozart's *Clarinet Quintet* were on offer. This time around, in a concert program of similar format, these experts again delivered a memorable, historically keen musical experience.