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HAYDN

String Quartets "Prussian"

Op. 50, Nos. 1 - 3

Kodály Quartet



Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809)

String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 50, No. 1, Hob.III:44

String Quartet in C major, Op. 50, No. 2, Hob.III:45

String Quartet in E flat major, Op. 50, No. 3, Hob.III:46

Joseph Haydn was born in the village of Rohrau in 1732, the son of a wheelwright. Trained at the choir-school of St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, he subsequently spent some years earning a living as best he could from teaching and playing the violin or keyboard, and was able to profit from association with the old composer Porpora, whose assistant he became. Haydn's first appointment was in 1759 as Kapellmeister to a Bohemian nobleman, Count von Morzin, whose kinsman had once served as patron to Vivaldi. This was followed in 1761 by employment as Vice-Kapellmeister to one of the richest men in the Empire, Prince Paul Anton Esterházy, succeeded after his death in 1762 by Prince Nikolaus. On the death in 1766 of the elderly and somewhat obstructive Kapellmeister Gregor Werner, who had found much to complain about in the professionalism of his young and rested deputy, Haydn succeeded to his position, to remain in the same employment, nominally at least, for the rest of his life.

On the completion of the magnificent palace at Esterháza in the Hungarian plains under Prince Nikolaus, Haydn assumed command of an increased musical establishment. Here he had responsibility for the musical activities of the palace, which included the provision and direction of instrumental music, opera and music for the theatre, as well as music for the church. For his patron he provided a quantity of chamber music of all kinds, particularly for the Prince's own peculiar instrument, the baryton, a bowed string instrument with sympathetic strings that could also be plucked and one that the English scholar Dr Burney thought to have its only proper use on a desert island, where a castaway might accompany himself.

Prince Nikolaus died in 1790 and Haydn found himself able to accept an invitation to visit London. There he provided music for concert seasons organized by the violinist-impresario Salomon. A second successful visit to London in 1794 and 1795 was followed by a return to duty with the Esterházy family, the new head of which had settled principally at the family property in Eisenstadt, where Haydn had started his career with them. Much of the year, however, was to be spent in Vienna, where Haydn passed his final years, dying in 1809, as the French armies of Napoleon approached the city yet again.

Haydn lived during the period of the eighteenth century that saw the development of instrumental music from the age of Bach and Handel to the era of the classical sonata, with its tripartite first-movement form and complementary three or four movements, the basis now of much instrumental composition. The string quartet itself, which came to represent classical music in its purest form, grew from a genre that was relatively insignificant, at least in name, the *Divertimento*, into music of greater weight, complexity and substance, although Haydn, like any great master, knew well how to conceal the technical means by which he achieved his ends. The exact number of

string quartets that Haydn wrote is not known, although he himself listed some 83. The earlier of these, often under the title *Divertimento*, proclaim clearly enough their origin and purpose. Haydn's last quartet, *Opus 103*, started in 1803, remained unfinished and coincided with the appearance of quartets of a new and original kind, from Haydn's recalcitrant and ungrateful pupil, Beethoven. Haydn himself once claimed to have discovered the string quartet by accident. The discovery, if such it was, has continued to have a far-reaching effect on the development of Western music.

Haydn had contemplated writing a new set of string quartets as early as 1784, but events led him to delay the composition of the six that make up the set of *Opus 50* until 1787. Two years earlier Mozart had completed a set of quartets over which he had taken considerable trouble, dedicating them to Haydn, with whom he had now established friendly contact in Vienna. Mozart's quartets owe much to Haydn's example and now Haydn's new quartets have a comparable debt to Mozart. The set that constitutes *Opus 50* was published by Artaria and was dedicated to King Frederick William II of Prussia, the cello-playing king for whom Mozart, after visiting Potsdam in 1789, wrote his three so-called *Prussian Quartets*, and whose favour Beethoven sought in his first cello sonatas in 1796. While Mozart ensures the cello a certain prominence, Haydn is very much more discreet. In publishing the set Haydn showed a degree of duplicity quite worthy of Beethoven, allowing early publication to Forster in London, anticipating the release of Artaria's edition, which should, by rights, have been made available in London through Artaria's commercial partners, Longman and Broderip.

The first of the *Opus 50* set, the *Quartet in B flat major, Opus 50, No. 1*, opens with an *Allegro* in barred C time (2/2), the first time that Haydn had done so in such a movement, showing, it has been suggested, the influence of Mozart. The cello introduces the movement with a repeated B flat, which some have seen as a tribute to the King and his favoured instrument. The second subject is derived from the first and the repeated note against which the first part of the first subject is heard becomes a feature of the movement, taken up by the second and then the first violin and providing an accompanying pedal to the second subject. The repeated note introduces the central development, with its harmonic surprises, and returns as it leads, in the recapitulation, at triple speed, to the end of the movement. The E flat major *Adagio* is in the form of a theme and variations. The theme itself is introduced by the first violin, followed by the second. The second variation is in E flat minor, followed by a return to the original key and theme and a *coda*. The third movement *Minuet*, with motivic links with the preceding movements, frames a contrasting *trio* and is followed by a final *Vivace*, in the now usual tripartite general form, but with surprise after surprise, as the principal theme and key seem about to make their definitive return, eventually accomplished.

The *Quartet in C major, Opus 50, No. 2*, opens *sotto voce* with a first violin principal subject, marked by sudden strong accents. Antiphonal ascending scales from cello and first violin lead to the second subject and the exposition ends with a series of ascending *arpeggios* for the lower instruments. Contrapuntal use of the opening theme is made in the central development. The recapitulation, notably the transition from first to second subject, finds room for imaginative use of the chromatic theme, and the movement ends with a return to the cello, viola and

the *Adagio*. After the customary repetition of the *Minuet*, the last movement starts with first violin *bariolage*, making use of fingered notes and the open A, E and D strings in that order. This, and other uses of alternating strings in this way, are a principal feature of

a movement of considerable originality, the rapider repeated notes suggesting those of the preceding two movements. This *Finale* is monothematic, but falls into the three structural sections now expected, providing elements of surprise and ingenuity within that form.

Kodály Quartet

The members of the Kodály Quartet were trained at the Budapest Ferenc Liszt Academy, and three of them, the second violin Tamás Szabo, viola-player Gábor Fias and cellist János Devich, were formerly in the Sebestyén Quartet, which was awarded the jury's special diploma at the 1966 Geneva International Quartet Competition and won first prize at the 1968 Leo Weiner Quartet Competition in Budapest. Since

1970, with the violinist Attila Falvai, the quartet has been known as the Kodály Quartet, a title adopted with the approval of the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education. The Kodály Quartet has given concerts throughout Europe, in the Soviet Union and in Japan, in addition to regular appearances in Hungary both in the concert hall and on television and has made for Naxos highly acclaimed recordings of String Quartets by Ravel, Debussy, Mozart and Haydn.

