

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 20, No. 2

Moderato

Capriccio: Adagio

Minuetto: Allegretto

Fuga a quattro soggetti

Joseph Haydn

(1732-1809)

Haydn's voluminous output alone does not explain his powerful musical and cultural influence. His eighty-three string quartets and some forty-five piano trios, though daunting in number, are also overwhelming in their stylistic breadth and ingenuity. They move across the boundaries of the Baroque and the Classical and, in the later quartets, lick the edges of Romanticism.

The move to a freer, more emotional expression was occasioned by the end of Haydn's 29-year tenure (1761-1790) as *Kappelmeister* in the court of the Hungarian aristocrat, Prince Paul Anton Esterházy. That, coupled with two highly successful visits to London, gave Haydn a wider musical exposure. Freed from musical and financial obligations, Haydn went to London where, under the direction of the German violinist and impresario Johann Peter Salomon, he became an international celebrity. Fame did not ruin Haydn, however, for the London years proved to be some of the richest in his compositional life. For the first time he heard music played in public halls by professional musicians for a general public. This more democratic approach to music freed him from the decorative style demanded by the aristocratic amateur players and audiences.

Prior to this, however, Haydn's music had already taken on new emotional depths as a result of the *Sturm und Drang* movement that stressed the importance of faith and the senses as opposed to the logic and reason of the Enlightenment. Startling evidence of this are the six quartets of Op. 20 composed in 1772. They were known by two nicknames, "The Sun Quartets," or, probably more appropriately, "The Great Quartets." Central to them is a freer style, the development of the cello parts, and use of counterpoint.

This new-found freedom is quickly recognized in the first movement of the Op. 20, No. 2 Quartet, with the freeing of the cello from its traditional role as accompaniment. We are invited into the Quartet with the usual graciousness and elegance we expect from Haydn, but do not be fooled. Beneath that is a rising tension and growing passion that comes to full force in the following Capriccio. It is this second movement that underscores Haydn scholar Elaine Sisman's portrayal of the "Shakespearean Haydn," that is, "the capricious juxtapositions of high and low, serious and comic, that reflect his deepest proclivities...the casting aside of rules in original ways." (*Haydn and His World, Princeton University Press*) Indeed, Haydn breaks all the rules in the Capriccio, even down to its tempo marking of *adagio*, one we do not usually associate with a *caprice*. Here the implication is freedom rather than gaiety. The third movement Menuetto is perhaps Haydn's nod to tradition, but, even with that, it is hardly ordinary, with mid-air leaps for the violin and continued use of unison playing so powerfully employed in the previous movement. If we expect tradition in the fugue of the final movement, we will not find it in this one with its four voices running in all directions including *al rovescio*, roughly defined as a retrograde or "crab" movement.

Welcome to the new world of Haydn, one that would prepare the way for Mozart and Beethoven, but remain unique to itself.

