

Haydn and the String Quartet

Joseph Haydn was born on March 31, 1732 in the tiny village of Rohrau in eastern Austria near the Hungarian border, about 60 miles southeast of Vienna. His father was a wheelwright, village mayor, and enthusiastic folk musician; his mother had been a cook. He was the second of twelve children, six of whom survived childhood. Haydn's musical talents showed early and when he was five, he went to live with a relative in Hainburg, his father's native town. There he sang in the choir and received some musical training. When he was eight, he was taken to Vienna to be a choir boy at St. Stephen's Cathedral, one of the leading musical centers of Europe. There he studied singing and playing the violin and keyboard instruments. When he was seventeen, his voice changed and he was no longer able to sing high choral parts. He was dismissed from the choir and forced to earn a living serenading in the streets and giving music lessons. He met the great poet and opera librettist Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782), and through him he became valet and accompanist to the Italian opera composer Nicola Porpora (1686-1768) who taught him Italian and "the true fundamentals of composition". He studied hard, completing exercises in counterpoint from the textbook *Gradus ad Parnassum* by Johann Joseph Fux (1660-1741) and studying the works of Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, a son of the famous Johann Sebastian Bach and a leading composer of the mid-18th century. Eventually, he obtained a position with the Freiherr Karl Joseph von Fürnberg (ca 1720-67). Then in 1759, he became Music Director to Count Karl von Morzin (1717-83), who was soon forced to disband his musical establishment. Finally, in 1761, Haydn became vice-Music Director to Count Paul Anton Esterházy (1711-62). When Prince Paul Anton died a year later, he was succeeded by his brother, Prince Nicolaus I (1714-90). On the death of the previous Music Director in 1766, Haydn was promoted to take his place, a position he was to hold for the rest of his life.

Many years later, Haydn told his biographer the story of how, in 1750, when he was 18, Freiherr von Fürnberg asked him to provide music for four musicians playing two violins, viola, and cello. More likely, this happened around 1757 to 1760, when he was 25 to 28, not 18. The quartets that he wrote in response to this request may or may not have been the first true string quartets; the dates of other possible early quartets are not known with enough certainty. They proved popular and circulated in manuscript in Austria and beyond. Eventually they found their way to Paris, Amsterdam, and London. Nine were collected and published, starting in 1764, in two sets of six each (filled out with the string parts of a symphony and two sextets for strings and horns). These sets are now known as Opus 1 and Opus 2 and they made Haydn famous throughout Europe without his realizing it. They are considered to be the oldest works by a known composer that have been in performance continuously from the day they first appeared to the present.

The Amsterdam publications included a tenth quartet, replacing the symphony Op. 1 No. 5, but it was missing in the versions that later became standard. It

Haydn and the String Quartet

wasn't until the 1930's that it was rediscovered and published as Op. 0.

All ten of these early quartets, which Haydn called "cassatio" and later "divertimento a quattro", are in five movements instead of the four that later became standard. The second and fourth movements are always minuets. Usually, the first and last movements are fast, with a slow movement in the center, but sometimes the first is slow and the middle is fast. The last movement is always fast.

When Haydn joined the musical establishment of the wealthy and powerful Esterházy family in 1761, his contract gave his employers ownership of everything he wrote, so he could not accept commissions or publish anything without permission. Prince Nicholas kept him busy writing trios for violin, cello, and his favorite instrument, the baryton (a sort of viola da gamba with sympathetic strings in the back) as well as symphonies, keyboard sonatas, concertos, and other works, including operas which were produced at the Esterházy court. Meanwhile, many other composers, such as the Italian Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805), who was in Vienna in 1760-1761 when he may have encountered Haydn's early quartets, and a number of Austrian composers, including Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736-1809) (who later taught harmony and counterpoint to Beethoven) and Johann Baptist Vanhal (1739-1813) (who later played quartets with Haydn, Mozart, and another leading composer, Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf (1739-1799)) were also writing quartets.

It wasn't until about 1768 to 1770 that Haydn returned to the quartet genre with the set of six now known as Op. 9 and a second set, Op. 17, in 1771. It is not known how he came to write these quartets. One speculation is that the Prince and his concert master, Luigi Tomasini (1741-1808), heard the Op. 2 quartets of Luigi Boccherini on a trip to Paris and requested that Haydn write some of his own to be performed by Tomasini and the Esterházy musicians. For these quartets, Haydn dropped the second minuet. The first movement is usually moderato, but one quartet from each set starts with a slow movement and two more are presto. The second movement was always a minuet which was followed by a slow movement and a fast finale. One quartet from each set is in a minor key. The first violin tends to dominate.

Opus 20 followed in 1772 (the year of Symphony No. 45 in F-sharp Minor, known as the "Farewell"). Haydn was now 40 years old. These quartets all have an allegro or moderato first movement. The minuet is placed second in three and third in the other three. The last movements are still always fast, but in place of the more usual sonata form, three of the quartets end with fugues. Two are in minor keys and in four of the six, all of the movements share the same tonic, but in different modes. This set was a marked advance over the previous sets in terms of counterpoint, conversational style, and a creative approach to forms. They were still called "divertimenti a quattro", and they continued to be published in Paris, Amsterdam, and London, probably without the involvement or even knowledge of

Haydn and the String Quartet

their composer.

After these eighteen quartets, Haydn was once again busy with other things, including a large number of opera productions.

In 1779, he signed a new employment contract. The clause that gave sole ownership of his works to his employers was dropped and Haydn quickly signed deals with the Viennese publishing firm of Arteria and the London firm of William Forster. A new set of quartets, Op. 33, followed two years later. Haydn's original plan was to sell manuscript copies to a limited number of subscribers before they were made available in print. He claimed that they were composed in a "new and special way". This has been the source of much argument among scholars. Some say it was just a clever advertising slogan, while others point to a shift to a lighter style. Still others suggest a new way of using motives derived from the accompaniment as themes. The fugal finales are gone; three last movements are rondos and two are sets of variations. The dance movements are now labeled scherzo or "joke", a term Haydn did not use in his later quartets even though many of the minuets are more "scherzo" in character than these scherzi. Beethoven frequently used the term in his own works. The second of the set is the famous "Joke" quartet and the third is the "Bird". Opus 33 is known as "Russian" (from the dedication of a later edition to the Grand Duke of Russia, later Czar Paul), or "Maiden" (from the picture on the cover of an early edition) quartets or as "gli scherzi".

The single, easy quartet of Op. 42 was probably written around 1784 or 1785. It was published by the noted publisher and composer Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812), who often published sets of single quartets by multiple composers. He also commissioned Mozart's "Hoffmeister" quartet, K499. There is also a letter from Haydn in 1784 that refers to a commission from Spain for a set of three "easy" quartets, but it is not known whether this was one of them or whether the any of them were ever written at all. Op. 42 was the first quartet that Haydn called "quartetto" instead of "divertimento a quattro".

The next set of quartets, Op. 50, didn't appear until 1787. In the meantime, Haydn met Mozart (1756-1791) in Vienna and the two spent much time together along with Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf (whose own single set of quartets was published in 1788) and Vanhal playing quartets and Mozart's string quintets. It was late in 1782, the year of Op. 33, that Mozart started work on the six quartets that he dedicated to Haydn. They were published by Arteria in 1787, "the fruit of a long and laborious study". They show many evidences of the influence of Haydn's Opp. 20 and 33, but are at the same time six highly original masterpieces.

Haydn's Op. 50, dedicated to Wilhelm II, King of Prussia and so nicknamed "Prussian", in some ways returns to the technical complexity of Op. 20; the last movements are all sonata-form except No. 5, which ends with a fugue. This is also the first quartet opus with all of the minuet movements placed third, a pattern that became the general rule for Haydn's later quartets; though not without

Haydn and the String Quartet

exceptions. Number 6 of the set is the well-known "Frog" quartet.

After Op. 50, sets of quartets started appearing more frequently. The two sets of "Tost" quartets, the Op. 54/55 pair (1788) and Op. 64 (1790) were nicknamed after Johann Tost, Viennese merchant and former leader of the second violins at Eszterháza, whose violin technique is often said to have influenced the writing of the first violin part in these quartets. They were written more with the popular market in mind than Op. 50 had been. These sets include the famous "Razor" (Op. 55 No. 2) and "Lark" (Op. 64 No. 5) quartets.

In 1790, Prince Nicholas Esterházy died. His successor, much less interested in music, disbanded the Esterházy musical establishment. Haydn was kept on as a composer, but with very limited duties. Almost immediately, the London violinist and concert promoter Johann Peter Salomon (1745-1815), showed up and signed an agreement for Haydn to visit London, which he did early the next year, crossing the channel on New Year's Day. There he arranged for public performances of some of the quartets of Op. 64.

Haydn returned to Vienna in July of 1792. The Op. 71/74 pair was completed the following year, dedicated to Count Anton Georg Apponyi (1751-1817). He returned to England in early 1794 but was back in Vienna to stay in the summer of 1795. In the following year, he started work on the first of the two great oratorios that would dominate the last years of his career, *The Creation* (1796-98) and *The Seasons* (1799-1801). Other than his last string quartets, he no longer worked on major instrumental pieces.

His best-known set of quartets, Op. 76, which includes the famous "Emperor", "Sunrise", and "Fifths" quartets, was commissioned by Count Joseph Erdödy (1754-1824) and completed in 1797. Another commission came in 1799, this time from Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian Lobkowitz (1772-1816), who also commissioned Beethoven's first quartets. Haydn finished two quartets that same year, but old age was starting to get the better of him and a planned third quartet was never completed. The two completed quartets were published as Op. 77. An additional two movements from an unfinished quartet in D minor, completed in 1803, were published in 1806; it is not certain whether this was to have been the third quartet of the Lobkowitz commission or was the result of some other commission. Haydn died on May 31, 1809 during the siege of Vienna by Napoleon's army. He was seventy-seven years old.

Ignace Pleyel (1757-1831), a former pupil of Haydn's and composer of a number of string quartets of his own, moved to France; in 1797, he gave up composition in favor of music publishing (and years later, piano building). In 1801, he published the parts for the complete set of Haydn's quartets, 80 in all (including the non-quartet works in Opp. 1 and 2; Op. 3, no longer thought to be by Haydn; and the quartet version *Seven Last Words* (as seven separate numbers); but omitting Op. 0). Later editions added Op. 77 and the incomplete Op. 103 as they became available. In 1802, he published miniature scores of four

Haydn and the String Quartet

of Haydn's symphonies followed by miniature scores of all of Haydn's string quartets. Symphonies, string quartets, and other ensemble music commonly circulated, either in manuscript copies or in published editions, as sets of parts. These were the first miniature scores published, making these works readily available for study by musicians and music lovers alike. The opus numbers for all of Haydn's quartets, even when he arranged for their publication himself, were assigned by the publishers and so varied from edition to edition. Even the order of works within an opus frequently varied by publisher. Editors often altered Haydn's scores to make them more "correct". Pleyel's editions became the basis for all the editions of Haydn's quartets until the late 20th Century when new editions based on original manuscripts and other early sources finally appeared.