

## Opus 20 No. 1 in E-Flat Major

According to the catalog of works that Haydn kept for himself, the quartet now known as No. 1 was actually intended to be the last quartet of the set.

A score of this quartet that Beethoven made about 1793 to study (study scores had not yet been invented!) has survived. When, in the next year, he was asked to write quartets, he instead composed the string trios of Op. 9. His own first quartets date from 1798 but they show no obvious signs of influence from Op. 20 No. 1.

Finishing up a collection notable for its diversity, this quartet is a study in contrasts.

**First Movement: Allegro moderato.** A composer for orchestra can repeat a melody with different combinations of instruments; a string-quartet composer has only limited resources of color, but here Haydn demonstrates the variety of textures that can be achieved with four similar-sounding string instruments. All four possible trio and all six possible duo combinations are used (including all three possible "antiphonal" duos where two parts in unison are answered by the other two parts in unison). Of the four possible solos, only the viola is missing.

The first movement has much in common with that of the C major quartet, the last in the first half of the opus. The opening trio for violin, viola, and cello resolves the instability created by the cello-lead opening of that work (and thus reinforces the current work's positioning at the end of the opus). The second violin takes up the theme, transposed up a fifth (as in the earlier quartet) and the viola and cello switch roles. After a run up the scale for a solo second violin, a duo for the two violins is followed by the first of the antiphonal duos: a motive (which is actually a variation on the opening theme at the tonic) in the first violin and viola is answered by the second violin and cello. Finally, all four parts come together in unisons and octaves, a strong statement of unity in the face of all the different combinations preceding and to come.

The transition, made up in part of ideas from the first theme, features a sporadically accompanied solo for the first violin. In the opening theme, Haydn used overlapping phrases which contrast with the more disjointed ideas of the transition.

The second group begins with the second antiphonal duo: the two violins are answered by the viola and cello. This is followed by a short cello solo which is an expanded version of the little cello outburst at the end of the initial statement of the main theme. (In the development, this becomes the subject of a dialog between the cello and the first violin, similar to the violin-cello dialog in the C major quartet.) After a passage in four parts, there is a duet with the melody in the cello accompanied from below by the viola. The first violin takes up the cello melody while the viola continues its accompaniment. The exposition ends with a

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passage for the two violins in parallel, accompanied by the viola and cello, and finally an ascending passage in the first violin paralleled by the viola that leads back to the opening or, slightly modified the second time, to the development.

After only three measures of development, Haydn surprises us with the opening theme in the tonic, this time for the two violins with cello accompaniment; but after two measures, it becomes apparent that we are still in the development. Towards the end of the development, the opening theme is presented in a passage of stretto entries (also a feature of the C major quartet). This is followed by the violin solo from the transition that leads, not to the second theme, but directly into the recapitulation.

In the recapitulation, the opening theme is reduced to a single statement followed by the third of the antiphonal duos: the first duo is repeated, but this time the second violin and viola are answered by the first violin and cello. In the second group, the cello-viola duo is turned right-side up: the viola now has the melody, accompanied from below by the cello and answered by the first violin, now accompanied by the second. This echoes the resolution of the present movement's resolution of the instability introduced by the opening of the C major quartet.

**Second Movement: Menuet. Un poco allegretto.** The contrasts continue in the minuet movement. The first phrase ascends, forte, in a jagged line that covers an octave and a fourth over a syncopated accompaniment in long notes. The second phrase, piano, ascends in a smooth line in the violin's lowest octave, with all four parts moving together in parallel.

The second phrase of the second refrain brings back the opening measures of the first refrain, transposed to B-flat, the dominant of E-flat; but Haydn surprises with B-flat *minor*! The next phrase puts this right by switching to B-flat major.

The trio starts in the subdominant, A-flat, before modulating back to E-flat, and is a real trio for two violins and cello until the last phase of the second refrain. Then the viola joins in and the music returns to the opening of the minuet – but in F *minor*, the relative minor of A-flat. Instead of E-flat for the seventh of the scale, Haydn uses a variant minor scale with E-natural, a note not found in either A-flat or the home key of E-flat! The second refrain is not repeated, and is followed, after a long rest, directly by the E-flat start of the minuet; a very jarring contrast indeed!

**Third Movement: Affettuoso e sostenuto.** The slow movement, in A-flat major like the start of the trio, contrasts sharply with the rest of the quartet (and the rest of the opus!) by having almost no contrasts at all. It is in standard sonata form, but without any of the contrasts or drama that that would normally imply. Except for the violin solos that mark the ends of the exposition, development, and recapitulation and slight accents that mark the second theme, the entire

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movement is played *mezza voce* (dropping to *piano* and *pianissimo* at the very end) in a continuous eighth-note flow of very close four-part counterpoint. This unusual movement inspired Mozart in the A-flat major slow movement of his own E-flat major quartet, the third of the set he dedicated to Haydn (K482).

***Finale: Presto.*** The runs, leaps, syncopations, light scoring, and dynamic contrasts of the finale are the exact opposite of the previous movement, a real celebration of freedom.

It is also a celebration of endings, certainly appropriate for the last quartet in the opus. The descending scale and two rising notes of the opening theme is a variation on the ending of the first movement. This opening idea is played by the two violins in parallel thirds and passes to the viola and cello an octave lower to lead into the transition with its leaps and syncopations. The second theme makes use of an ascending scale in the violins and more syncopations, countered by a descending scale in the viola and cello. The descending scale from the opening returns for the cadence theme.

An attentive listener might think that the players had accidentally taken one too many repeats: the first measures of the development are identical to the first measures of the exposition. After a couple of bars, a shift in tonality makes it clear that it is indeed the development, which omits the second theme altogether. The recapitulation is quite straight forward.

Haydn neatly wraps it all up in the last measures, which are virtually identical to the end of the first movement, bringing to a satisfactory conclusion both a quartet and an opus of extreme diversity and contrasts.

***"Soli Deo et cuique suum"***  
***"To God alone and to each his own."***