

Opus 20 No. 2 in C Major

The first quartet of Op. 20 that Haydn entered in his catalog was in F minor, a key with four flats, the most flats of any key signature in the opus. The second quartet was in A major, a key with three sharps, the most sharps of any key signature in the opus; so it seems appropriate that the third quartet would be in C major, a key with no sharps or flats. The tonics of the first three quartets, F–A–C, form a major triad on F.

The last quartet of the first half of the collection is also the last of the three quartets with fugal finales and the one with the most subjects. Haydn wrote only one later quartet that ends with a fugue: Op. 50 No. 4. The equality of the voices in a fugue might seem ideally suited for the string quartet, but in fact the rigid rules of fugue do not go well with the conversational ideal of chamber music. In real conversations, the participants are never truly equal; one or two voices usually dominate the discussion. In spite of Beethoven's fugal quartet movements, the future lay in bringing elements of fugue into sonata-form. This was something that Haydn begins to explore in Op. 20, as can be seen in this and the other quartets.

After two somewhat old fashioned, first violin-dominated quartets, coming to the C major quartet is like falling through the looking glass into a whole new world.

First Movement: Moderato. Haydn starts by turning everything upside-down. The opening is scored for a trio: the melody is in the cello in a high range above both the second violin and the viola. (This creates an instability that will only be resolved by the last quartet in the opus. Quartet No. 2 is thus not a complete work in itself. This is echoed by the second movement which is also incomplete by itself and requires the third movement to reach completion.) This is repeated, transposed to G major with the violin taking the cello's part in a high register and with a correspondingly high second violin. After a full stop played in unison by all four parts, the theme starts again in C major and in the second violin, but it is cut off abruptly by the first violin. This kind of opening, with a theme given in the tonic, dominant, and tonic again is characteristic of a fugue, but no one would have mistaken this for a fugue.

At the start of the development, Haydn continues to explore the sound of the cello by giving it a series of bold statements spanning as much as two octaves, each answered by the first violin. This friendly rivalry ends with a musical handshake, a measure of playing in parallel at the octave. The opening theme returns, this time in the viola, beginning a series of stretto entries, another suggestion of fugal procedures.

The C major quartet is even more monothematic than the F minor; but, as in the A major quartet, the recapitulation is greatly reduced by eliminating repetitions of the opening theme: the first thirty-one and a half bars of the exposition are

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reduced to only eleven and a half bars.

Second Movement: Capriccio. Adagio. The C minor second movement takes us into the world of the theater. The first part is dramatic, with declamatory statements in unison alternating with solos for the cello and first violin and ending on a dominant G followed by a short rest. The second part is a lyrical, serenade-like aria for the first violin, also ending on a dominant G followed by a short rest. The players are instructed to go on to the minuet without a break.

Third Movement: Menuet. Allegretto. The minuet is in rounded binary form. The first refrain begins with a prolonged triad on C, over repeated C's in the cello. In the second refrain, the first violin accompanies himself with his open G string to produce a drone effect while the melody and its accompaniment in the second violin and viola emphasize half-steps. The opening refrain is repeated, followed by a coda to be played on one string over a sustained G in the second violin.

The drones suggest the music of the peasantry and the street musicians of Vienna, worlds Haydn new quite well. This might have been one of the things his critics objected to. Many years later, even one of the most high-minded and serious of all his quartets, the famous "Emperor" (Op. 76 No. 3), with its variations on Haydn's own hymn to the Emperor, included the sound of drones in its first movement.

The C minor trio is quite remarkable for its references back to both the drones and semitones of the minuet and also to the declamatory passages of the second movement. It begins with a cello melody that is actually a continuation of a figure introduced just before the end of the minuet section by the first violin and at the same time is based on the cello solo in the opening section of the preceding movement. The first refrain concludes with a passage of unison declamatory material, again recalling the second movement, and it ends on a dominant G as did both parts of the second movement. The second refrain continues with more unison declamation leading to a held G in the first violin accompanied by semitones in the second and the viola, ending with a final dominant G. The second refrain is not repeated and leads directly back to the minuet, where the movement at last finishes at the only tonic C cadence in either this or the preceding movement. This will be reached four times if all the repeats are taken.

Fourth Movement: Fuga a 4tro Sogetti. Adagio. This fugue on four subjects dances along in a steady eighth-note pulse in 6/8 time. The first violin leads off with all four subjects in order plus an additional statement of the chromatic first subject. Meanwhile, the viola enters with the second, third, and first subjects, followed by another statement of both the second and third subjects. The second violin comes next, with all four subjects in order. Finally after a delay, the cello comes in with only the first and second subjects.

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The next section is very much like a development section. The subject are broken up into fragments that are played in various combinations with each other, modulating widely. Near the end of this section, there is a passage of stretto entries of the first subject with the first violin playing it in inversion against itself; Haydn marks this "al rovescio".

A pedal point in the cello on a low G marks the beginning of the last section, which returns to the tonic C major tonality. Then the first part of the first subject (one note repeated, then a leap up and a chromatically descending scale) is heard twice in imitation by the cello and viola and then by the two violins. Sixteenth notes appear in the first violin and then spread to the other parts while the cello plays first just the descending scale, then the entire fragment in reverse. This is reduced to just its last notes (a leap down and a repeated note), and this is taken up by all the parts intermixed with cascades of sixteenth notes. All the subjects return again and the movement ends with a passage in unison based again on just the first measures of the opening subject

"Laus Omnip. Deo – Sic fugit amicus amicum"
"Praise God Almighty - Thus friend flies from friend."