

Opus 20 No. 3 in G Minor

Just as the F minor quartet began the first half of the opus, this quartet in G minor was listed as the first of the second half, the first of the quartets that didn't end with a fugue. This is Haydn's only quartet in G minor (if we don't count the "Rider" (Op. 74 No. 4), which is really just in G) and it is the third of the four homotonal quartets of the opus, since the slow movement is in G major and all of the movements except the first end in G major.

The entire quartet is characterized by sudden starts and stops, interruptions, and unexpected shifts.

First Movement: Allegro con spirito. The first movement is almost entirely built from the opening seven (4+3) bar theme. The strong rhythmic drive is suddenly broken at the end of the transition by a figure made up of oscillating sixteenth-notes followed by two eighth-notes, a sixteenth-note descending scale, and a quarter note. A fanfare of repeated notes in all the parts leads to a rather skittish violin solo. Just before the end of the exposition, a shortened version of the interrupting figure returns.

In the development, the interrupting figure returns twice in its shorter version, each time interrupting the development of the opening theme. It is reduced to just two sixteenth-notes and two eighth-notes for a final comic appearance.

As in the F minor quartet, the development of the main theme continues into the recapitulation. The skittish violin solo is also extended. A final appearance of the interrupting figure leads into a coda (this time included in the repeat of the second half) based on the opening theme. At the end, there is a fortissimo run in the first violin up a sixth, from D to B-flat followed by the final chords, played piano.

Second Movement: Menuet. Allegretto. The proportions of both the minuet and trio are unusual. Both refrains of the minuet are unusually long: the first refrain is made up of two ten-bar phrases, ending on on the dominant, while the second refrain is 42-bars long. Together, they fall into a miniature sonata form. The trio has a first refrain is twenty bars long, but the second is only fifteen bars followed by four beats of rests before returning to the repeat of the minuet.

The whole of the minuet section is based on the opening five-bar phrase, starting with a leap from D to B-flat followed by a descent to a series of repeated notes. The leap recalls both the leap of a fifth at the start of the first movement (an interval that changes with each reappearance of the theme), but also recalls the fortissimo run at the end of the first movement, now an octave lower and not filled in. When this returns in the recapitulation, the interval is filled in and the passage is marked "con forza".

The trio is in E major. The first violin plays a flowing stream of eighth-notes over a lightly scored minuet accompaniment that only comes to a rest at the end of

each refrain. The second refrain ends on a G major chord. There is no repeat, just a four beat pause before the minuet returns in G minor.

Third Movement: Poco Adagio. The third movement, in G major, starts out sounding like it might be a theme and variations, but this proves instead to be the first theme of a sonata-form movement. The transition starts after only three phrases and takes a completely unexpected turn: long, held notes in the upper three parts over a flowing sixteenth-note melody in the cello. The cello switches to an accompanying figure while the first violin plays a slow-moving theme of its own, followed by the cello melody. Soon a repeated-note fanfare in the first violin leads to a passage of bariolage in which the violin plays D alternately on a stopped G-string and open D-string. (It is bariolage that gives the "Frog" quartet, Op. 50 No. 6, its nickname.) This marks the end of the exposition, which is then repeated.

The development opens with the opening theme in the viola, followed by the cello theme. Then the cello repeats the opening theme in a high register, reaching above the second violin and viola. The cello theme makes an extended reappearance in the first violin. Both the first violin and the cello take up the opening theme, which is combined with the cello theme in the first violin. A return of the bariolage, now in the second violin, signals the end of the development.

The recapitulation begins, not with the opening theme, which does not appear again, but with the violin solo. This is followed by the cello solo and the bariolage again, this time in the viola. The third movement ends without a repeat of the second half.

The combination of themes in counterpoint and the exchange of material in this movement owes much to fugue.

Fourth Movement: Finale. Allegro di molto. Even though only three quartets in Op. 20 have fugues as their last movements, some writers refer to Op. 20 as having four fugal finales. The present high-spirited movement owes so much to fugal procedures that it might well be considered "fugal" even though it is clearly in sonata form. There is nothing like a fugal exposition, but the fugue-like opening motives are passed from part to part and are used in imitative passages and stretto, much like the subjects of a fugue would be treated.

The opening motive in the second violin, with its leap of a sixth, and its accompaniment in the cello, comes from the opening of the minuet. The following descent from B-flat to F comes from the cello part at the beginning of the first movement. The answer in the first violin is in two parts: the first a repeated note and a leap of a fourth and the second oscillating sixteenth-notes and two eighth-notes that are similar to the interrupting figure in the first movement. Virtually everything in the movement comes from these first few measures, much the way a fugue is constructed from its subjects, but with much more freedom.

"Laus Deo et B.V.M. cum O.s St.s"
"Praise God and the Blessed Virgin Mary with all the Saints."