

J. Wesley Haynes

11/7/02

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### Haydn's String Quartet Op.76 no.4 in B flat

Franz Joseph Haydn was born 1732 in a small town near the Hungarian border called Rohrau. Haydn received his first musical training at the age of five from his uncle. At age eight Haydn became a choirboy at St. Stephens Cathedral in Vienna. There Haydn acquired a great deal of practical application but received no training in music theory. When Haydn's voice changed he got kicked out of the choir and worked as a freelance musician playing the violin and keyboard. Haydn became a master at counterpoint by studying Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum*, and took lessons in composition from Nicola Porpora, a famous Italian composer. By 1761 Haydn was working for Prince Paul Anton Esterhazy, a member of one of the richest and most powerful Hungarian families, and a big patron of the arts. This was the most ideal circumstances for Haydn to develop as a composer. Eventually Haydn became Kapellmeister and was in charge of all the musicians, writing the music, and directing the performances. Then Haydn became internationally known, because he was allowed to embark on a trip to London and perform his music (Palisca, 465-466).

Haydn composed everything: symphonies, concertos, piano pieces, small ensemble pieces and many other works. Haydn is probably most famous for his string quartets, because they personify his personality and chronicle his growth as a composer more than any of his other works. Haydn composed string quartets for the entirety of his creative life, and in a sense Haydn and the string quartet grew up together. Haydn is

thought to have innovated and pioneered the way for the string quartet. The string quartet is comprised of two violins, a viola, and a cello, and despite the similarity of timbre these instruments produce they are considered to be one of the most expressive small ensembles. (Hughes, 5). Haydn found it much easier to write symphonies than he did string quartets though. The orchestra offered more opportunities to build and release tension, and had a Variety of color and contrast... The string quartet was restricted to the varying dynamic that its four instruments could obtain with likeness of timbre and sound production. Despite this Haydn made great use of their dynamic possibilities (Ayres, 1).

Haydn got into composing string quartets by playing and composing for serenades that would perform in the streets. Haydn referred to these compositions as his Divertimenti a Quattro. Divertimenti a Quattro refers to the “four-part divertimenti of his older contemporaries in Bavaria and Austria: men with unfamiliar names like Zach and Camerloher and Strzer, whose music was tuneful and popular and who therefore looked down on by the austerer North Germans for preferring dance tunes to counterpoint” (Hughes, 8). Twelve of Haydn’s divertiementi a Quattro survived and were packed in sets of six as Op. 1 and Op. 2.

Op. 76 no.4 in B flat is considered to be one of Haydn’s greatest string quartets, but to understand the greatness of the work one must understand the circumstances under which Haydn composed it. After returning from London in 1795 Haydn was working for Prince Nicholas the Second of the Esterhazy family, and was in the final years of his life. Prince Nicholas 2<sup>nd</sup> was a big patron of the arts like his father but wasn’t nearly as sympathetic (Hughes, 47). Nicholas 2<sup>nd</sup> didn’t have the musical ear like Nicholas 1<sup>st</sup> nor did he have the personality. Haydn and Nicholas 2<sup>nd</sup> didn’t get along with each

other and there was an instance at an orchestral rehearsal where the prince entered the room and made a criticism, and Haydn replied in the presence of all the musicians “Your Highness, that is my business.” Nicholas then stormed out of the room furious. There was another time when the Prince referred to Haydn in the third person in which he said, “He will conduct a symphony tomorrow.” Haydn immediately objected to the mode of address for it was only appropriate towards a lackey (Landon, 298).

The Prince at the time had left Esterhaza and set up residency at the palace in Eisenstadt, and spent his winters in the capital Vienna. So Haydn was dividing his time between Vienna, and the small town where he started his duties as a young man. Haydn’s main duties were composition, performances, and a mass each September (Hughes, 47). The mass each September was Haydn’s only formal duty as Kapellmeister, and it was to commemorate the name-day of Nicholas 2<sup>nd</sup>’s wife, Princess Marie Hermenegild, who Haydn had a very close relationship with. Every year after 1795, with the exception of 1800, Haydn composed a mass, six all together, including The Creation and The Seasons. Some time in 1796 Count Joseph Erdlody commissioned six string quartets from Haydn. The six quartets of Op.76 were composed the same year they were commissioned, and there is evidence that shows Haydn was playing the quartets at the piano for guests in early 1797 (Ayres, 297). “But the pieces were not published until 1799, and there must be some reason for this because Haydn wrote to Artaria in 1799 that...

I am most grateful to you for the copies of the quartets you sent me, which are a great credit to me and- because of the legible engraving and the neat title page- to you. Herr Count Joseph Erdody wrote me many kind things and thanked me for

having made them available to the world at last. I hope that His Excellency will have received his copies by now. In a little while I will send the 5<sup>th</sup> quartet in D major, and then the last in E flat' (Ayres, 297)

The key words in this letter are "at last," which suggests that due to Haydn's current work at the time with *The Creation* it is possible that Haydn didn't have time to prepare the scores adequately for the engravers (Ayres, 298). Op.76 was originally issued by Artaria in two sets of three, with Haydn's portrait on the title page. The manuscripts were announced in the *Wiener Zeitung* with the statement that "Nothing which our house has ever published equals this addition" (Ayres, 298). Haydn however had a problem because Artaria got the quartets before a firm in London did called Messrs. Longman Clementi & Co.; and Haydn had an arrangement with them "whereby they should have the opportunity of producing the quartets first" (Ayres, 298). Artaria did publish the quartets first but there are no signs that show that Haydn was fined for breach of contract (Ayres, 298).

After Op.76 Haydn only composed two more quartets before his death. His last eight quartets show no sign of fatigue on his part though. If anything they embody his entire creative life with all his idiosyncrasies that spanned over a half century. "Nowhere is his thematic and structural concentration so powerful, his contrapuntal writing so strong and closely woven, his ranging through the furthest reaches of key so searching and profound" (Hughes, 48). Haydn surpasses some of his best finales based on folksongs and dances with exhilaration and closeness of texture. Haydn's typical two-part writing reaches its fullest potential whether in "orchestral harshness of lyrical vocal intimacy, dancing lightness or profound meditation" (Hughes, p.48). "Through

symmetry, and long continuous phrases, Haydn uses an endless variety of phrase structures. Through these pieces we get a sense of a lifetime of experience in life and music that no young mind could have conceived” (Hughes, p. 48).

Haydn was great at reshaping and changing the sonata form. With a lesser composer the sonata form was something that they had to conform to. For Haydn the sonata form was a tool. Haydn’s codas were particularly good when he would choose to further the development of thematic material, which he neglected in other parts of the movement. When Haydn used the monothematic principle it gave him the opportunity to insert new music which had nothing to do with the original statement. Haydn was an expert in the transposition of material from one section to another. Haydn would also change the order of the themes in the recapitulation. Haydn reverses the procedure he used in the D minor quartet of Op 76 for the first movement of the quartet Op 76 no 4 in B flat. Haydn places the material that occurred before and after the second group in the transition in the restatement. The first movement of Op 76 no 4 is monothematic, because the main themes are of the same genre, but two subsidiary contrasting themes are in each group so the listener doesn’t get bored” (Ayres, p.299). “The opening of No. 4 in B flat might be taken as a locus classicus of Haydn’s mature handling of both instruments and thematic material” (Hughes, p. 50). The first violin’s melodic ascent sounds almost improvised and spontaneous with the chord held softly by the lower strings, but the phrase is balanced by its answer. The piece then seems to grow outward from the rhythm and melodic line of the melody” (Hughes, p.50). The melody has wonderful flexibility and continuity of phrase-structure and transiscency of scoring. “Through this the viola creates a very distinctive voice. The second subject in this piece is a mirror-image of the

first, with the cello playing the melody against a chord held by the violins and viola. If there is anything more beautiful than this it is the expansions and variations of both versions in the recapitulation” (Hughes, p. 51).

The second movement of Op 76 no 4 is adagio, and is written in the sub dominant key of E flat major. The second movement is also monothematic and can be analyzed in an A-B-A-Coda fashion. A, being bars 1-30, and ending on the dominant. Then a short link of five bars leads back to E flat. The B section is bars 35-51 with a middle section based on the opening theme moving from E flat minor, through A flat minor and F minor, then finally returning to the threshold of E flat. The returning A section, bars 52-65, gives a canonic treatment at first to the theme, and end in E flat. The coda, starting at bar 65 to the end of the piece has a rhythmic transformation of the opening five notes maintaining a monothematic feel (Ayres, 309). You can also think of this movement as a fantasia, or an extended development of the first two bars. The simple five note theme is clothed and surrounded by equally important counterpoints. The theme is extended and accompanied by reiterated quavers then passed from the first violin to the seconded. The first violin then adds decoration that the cello imitates. The theme is then played in the tonic minor. The reiterated quavers become more important with the main theme in the cello and the decoration by the first violin. The theme is augmented by the cello minus the last note. The return in E flat is then given a four part canonic treatment. The coda has a rhythmic transformation of the first five notes and “finally it is cut by one note, and the harmony at the end possesses the dark brooding qualities for which Beethoven has become legendary” (Ayres, 309).

The minuet is very dance-like and tuneful. It seems to float along with a playful interplay of the instrument through call and response, and cute accents.

“The main tune of the finale has the vernal freshness of an English song and its part-writing is correspondingly vocal” (Hughes, 51). This may have been inspired by the time in London when Haydn spent some his evenings with a London Glee Club. The design of this “movement is something new: an apparently strait forward A-B-A, major-minor-major pattern which, however, instead of ending after the first repetition of the first section, suddenly gathers speed and takes off in an extended free development, gathering up elements from both parts of the movement in its flight” (Hughes, 51)

Haydn’s late string quartets make extensive use of enharmonic modulations, and third related keys. The contrast of mode is very strong as well. In the first movement of the Op 76 no.4 in the exposition Haydn places part of the second subject in the dominant minor instead of the dominant major, something that is found mostly in his earlier work. This rediscovery of resources might have been inspired by Beethoven’s use of it in two of his Op 2 sonatas published in 1796 dedicated to Haydn. Haydn extended the major minor contrast though, so it could be included in other movements. The slow movement of no. 4 makes poetic uses of change of mode as well (Landon, 354). The B flat major quartet also makes great use of a motif that occurs in all the movements, so that the different thematic material seems to come from the same source (Landon, 355). There are many things to take into account with Haydn’s string quartet Op76 no.4. Haydn was coming to the end of his life, he had to deal with a new boss, he was giving lessons to Beethoven, and he was in the middle of composing *The Creation* and *The Seasons*. Despite these obstacles Haydn still pushed on and pushed the envelope of the string quartet.

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