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FLINDERS QUARTET

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART 1756-1792

String Quartet No. 14 in G major, K.387 (composed 1782)

- I. Allegro vivace assai
- II. Menuetto
- III. Andante cantabile
- IV. Molto allegro

Mozart had just heard Haydn's Opus 33 set of quartets in Vienna in 1781 and he was immediately inspired to compose for quartet again. This dedication to his muse reveals a self deprecating humanness in Mozart that is often overlooked. He reveals the agony of the long creative endeavour. These works had numerous rewrites and and he was often working on more than one string quartet at a time.

Haydn heard these works for the first time at Mozart's home. According to a letter Leopold wrote to his daughter, Nanerl, Mozart had declared, "Before God, and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste, and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition."

To my dear friend Haydn,

A father who had resolved to send his children out into the great world took it to be his duty to confide them to the protection and guidance of a very celebrated Man, especially when the latter by good fortune was at the same time his best Friend. Here they are then, O great Man and dearest Friend, these six children of mine. They are, it is true, the fruit of a long and laborious endeavor, yet the hope inspired in me by several Friends that it may be at least partly compensated encourages me, and I flatter myself that this offspring will serve to afford me solace one day. You, yourself, dearest friend, told me of your satisfaction with them during your last Visit to this Capital. It is this indulgence above all which urges me to commend them to you and encourages me to hope that they will not seem to you altogether unworthy of your favour. May it therefore please you to receive them kindly and to be their Father, Guide and Friend! From this moment I resign to you all my rights in them, begging you however to look indulgently upon the defects which the partiality of a Father's eye may have concealed from me, and in spite of them to continue in your generous Friendship for him who so greatly values it, in expectation of which I am, with all of my Heart, my dearest Friend, your most Sincere Friend,

W.A. Mozart

The first movement is at the same time conversational and operatic showing Mozart in his comfort zone. The themes are characterised by lightning quick dynamic changes and emphasis on chromatic movement. These elements are used in the other movements in a bold step towards unifying the piece. The quirky second movement with its off beat accents and chromatic movement gives a nod to the musical humour of Haydn. It may not seem so hilarious now, but at the time, it was a musical riot. This jaunt is followed by the emotional gravitas of the third movement. With the surety and comfort of C major, Mozart weaves his magic spell and delivers a poignant and heartfelt centre, worthy of his master. The fugal last movement is reminiscent of his symphony No. 40 (Jupiter). The writing of a true genius with the last tip of the hat to Haydn's "Joke" quartet in the final bars.

JOSEPH HAYDN 1732-1809

String Quartet Op. 33 No. 2 in E flat major (The Joke) (composed 1781)

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Scherzo: Allegro
- III. Largo
- IV. Presto

Haydn and Mozart are inextricably linked in their development of the quartet. Haydn is known affectionately as “Papa Haydn” and indeed, the string quartet as we know it today owes him a debt of thanks. However, Haydn was just as influenced by the young precocious Mozart in his own exploration of the possibilities presented by the string quartet.

As the inspiration for countless composers that were to follow, Haydn’s string quartets (which number 68) are the benchmark of the genre. In particular, the Opus 33 set are inventive, personal and worth much investigation.

This set of six quartets (it was standard to produce works in sets, so as to maximise the revenue from sales and make it more attractive for gentry to buy the published works to play in their homes) were composed in 1781 and were dedicated to the Grand Duke Paul of Russia. The Duke’s wife had a Viennese apartment and it was there that most of them were given their first airing on Christmas day.

According to Haydn, these quartets were written in “an entirely new and special way” to those that preceded. (Namely the Opus 20 quartets written some ten years earlier.) Some cynical critics allude to this as merely a marketing ploy or an effective tagline. Regardless, this quartet certainly enters a comedic territory not familiar in the language of the string quartet. Everyone deserves a good laugh - even during a string quartet concert.

These quartets are sometimes called “Gli Scherzi” as they are the first ones to include a Scherzo (a playful, quirky type of movement) rather than the standard Menuet.

Of particular note is the slow second movement: Haydn’s exploration of colour with the blending of the instruments as well as the layering of different lines underneath the repeated melody make it one of the most sublime of this set. But it is the last movement that keeps the audience guessing. We won’t give the game away, but the punch line is self evident.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN 1770-1827

String Quartet No. 4, Op. 18, No. 4 in C minor (composed 1799-1800)

- I. Allegro, ma non tanto
- II. Scherzo. Andante scherzoso quasi Allegretto (C major)
- III. Menuetto. Allegretto
- IV. Allegro

Beethoven’s Opus 18 set of string quartets reflected the age of enlightenment setting in which they were composed. The first movement in particular takes the string quartet from the relatively sedate classical court into the turbulent stadium of the romantics. Beethoven waited until he was nearly thirty to write his string quartets. By this time, Mozart was nearing the end of his life. While one can’t really compare the numerical value of Beethoven’s sixteen quartets against Haydn’s 68 and Mozart’s 26, it is fair to say that the first of these in his Opus 18 set paved the way for many new advances. Beethoven attended many of Emmanuel Forster’s twice-weekly quartet parties, so he knew the medium intimately. At this time, the string quartet was still largely an amateur pursuit and it was Beethoven’s advances in his writing that forced it into the professional arena.

As Beethoven began work on his first string quartets, Haydn was beginning work on his last - his Opus 77 and part of his Opus 103. Indeed, Beethoven copied out the entire Opus 20 E flat quartet by Haydn. He certainly felt the weight of this master, even if they didn’t necessarily get along as teacher and student.

One of Beethoven’s teachers, Christian Neefe, had written that a composer must be a student not just of notes but of humanity. He said you need a “Meticulous acquaintance with the various characters of men with the passions. One observes the nuances of feelings, or the point where one passion changes into another.”

These nuances of feelings are what sets these works apart.

This piece seems to announce a new age of music with its turbulent mood changes. It is the only quartet of the set in a minor key, and the choice is no accident.

Pianist and scholar Charles Rosen writes in his book on the 32 piano sonatas:

"Beethoven in C minor has come to symbolize his artistic character. In every case, it reveals Beethoven as a Hero. C minor does not show Beethoven at his most subtle, but it does give him to us in his most extrovert form, where he seems to be most impatient of any compromise".

We all know the fifth symphony and its triumphant journey from C minor to C major. The same happens in this quartet written years before its symphony sibling.

While the first movement uses the standard sonata form, the exploration within those parameters is showing Beethoven's strong desire to shake conventions of the past. Accented offbeats, swift dynamic changes and key changes all make for riveting and challenging listening. The work does not have a slow movement and instead we have scherzo-like dance full of contrapuntal magnificence followed by a more standard menuet.

The last movement rondo (with a tune that keeps returning interspersed with other material) seems to set challenges for the listener at every turn. Just when the music seems to be gaining momentum, he changes pace and key to a legato chorale. Beethoven's tempo change to prestissimo right at the very end is indicative of the extremes to which he was turning. Extreme harmony shifts, extreme dynamic contrast, extreme mood swings and extreme tempo markings. It all makes for extreme excitement.

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FLINDERS QUARTET

Flinders Quartet is instantly recognisable as one of Australia's most loved chamber music ensembles. Its dynamic and stirring performances of a full spectrum of repertoire have audiences and critics articulating their esteem, and the quartet is a highly respected force in Australian chamber music.

"... the quartet sounded as if they had been playing together for a lifetime: unity of interpretation, tight ensemble, fine balance, matched tone, and fluent dialogues between solo and collective lines." The Australian (May 2014)

FQ regularly commissions and premieres works by Australian composers. In 2015, the quartet premiered works by Andrew Ford, Tom Henry, and Sweden's Mattias Lysell, while Elena Kats-Chernin and Stuart Greenbaum commissions are slated for 2016. In its ongoing mission to further the Australian tradition of chamber music, FQ has previously commissioned and premiered works by Peter Sculthorpe, Ian Munro, Calvin Bowman, Richard Mills, Ross Edwards, Paul Dean, Paul Grabowsky, and Katy Abbott.

The quartet is regularly invited to perform and tour for chamber music presenters such as Musica Viva, and is in demand at festivals throughout Australia often in association with some of the country's finest talents, including Slava Grigoryan, Kristian Chong, Ian Munro, Paul Dean, Karin Schaupp, Genevieve Lacey and Jayson Gillham. International engagements have taken them to the UK, Singapore, Canada, and most recently, Sweden and Finland.

FQ's first commercial CD release, *Reinventions* with Genevieve Lacey, was received with great critical acclaim, and was re-released on the ABC Classics label in March 2015. Also on the ABC Classics label is FQ's ARIA-nominated 2011 release, *Fandango*, with Karin Schaupp, and September 2015 release *Intimate Voices: Sibelius String Quartet*.

"... intense clarity and fluid partnership..." The Courier Mail, reviewing Intimate Voices (September 2015)

FQ's 2016 performance schedule includes their annual Melbourne subscription series, a collaboration with pianist Benjamin Martin, and recitals and masterclasses in various parts of metropolitan and regional Australia.

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