

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

String Quartet in C Major, K. 465

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Introduction

The classical style: simplicity, order, balance, restraint, elegance, and naturalness was an outgrowth of the European enlightenment. It came to dominate most art forms of the 18th century, particularly in the second half. In music it achieved its highest form in the compositions of Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91).

Eighteenth century Vienna was a dominant center of international culture. Its rulers were cosmopolitan and humanitarian. The nobility's cultural interest and benevolent spirit provided an environment in which the "Viennese classical style" could flourish. While the Viennese school was in fact neither monolithic nor homogeneous it is a term that has come to symbolize a dominant form of 18th century art music.

Haydn and Mozart were two of its most notable representatives. These two composers gravitated to Vienna around 1780, Mozart to escape Salzburg, Haydn to give himself a break from Esterhazy. The stimulus of the city and their professional, friendly interaction had a significant effect on their music, particularly their chamber music. Their string quartets exemplify this result.

Interaction and Development

In 1771-2 Haydn composed two sets of string quartets, Opus 17 and 20. These works established him as master of the quartet form. All four instruments contributed to the melodic line, though the first violin continues to dominate. However the baroque use of a basso continuo line is eliminated. The sonata allegro form is used in the first movement, motives are continually developed throughout the movement and greater use of counterpoint is made to provide complexity and drive to the musical line.

Nine years later, Haydn published six quartets as Opus 33, otherwise known as the Scherzi. The sonata form is again used in the first movement. But the traditional Minuet has become a Scherzo and the final movements are either rondos or theme and variations. Continuous thematic development and full equality of instruments is established. Haydn himself stated that they were composed "in an entirely new and

special manner”.¹ He composed them so that the primary harmonic expression is created by dissonance to an explicit triad. With these works the quartet was established as the supreme form of chamber music.²

However one of the most notable characteristics of the works is their humor. Playful themes, displaced rhythms and unexpected rests would have provided amusement to the amateurs who gathered to play through them.

Mozart was obviously inspired by these works of Haydn. His early efforts were not good. Hans Keller states “On the whole, Mozart’s early quartets are quite abominable”.³ Not quite as dogmatic Maynard Solomon believes that in his early chamber music Mozart “seeks to subordinate his melodic impulse to formal restraints... these compositions are not yet unified Mozartean works.”⁴

Prior to starting work on the quartets that he ultimately dedicated to Haydn, Mozart had discontinued composition of string quartets in 1773. This nine-year hiatus ended in Vienna in 1782 when he began this set of compositions. Unlike most of his music that was composed for specific use, these six quartets, the Haydn quartets, were composed in a leisurely fashion over four years. “Scarcely any of his works are more personal than these six quartets.” They were the work of:

long and wearisome labor... a true statement. Evidence of its truth may be found on almost every page of the autograph; hardly another manuscript of Mozart’s shows so many erasures, improvements and discarded beginnings.⁵

Quartet Style

It is interesting to compare the styles of Mozart and Haydn in their contemporaneous quartets. On one hand the composers had a significant influence on each other’s quartet compositions. On the other, each composer’s individual voice can be clearly heard in their works.

With respect to the first point, Jahn states:

Every point that is of interest in Mozart may be paralleled in Haydn... certain peculiarities found in Haydn’s music are predominating elements in Mozart’s.

¹ Alfred Einstein. *Mozart: His Character, His Work*. p. 180.

² Charles Rosen. *The Classical Style*. p. 137.

³ H. C. Robbins Landon, Donald Mitchell. *The Mozart Companion*. p. 95.

⁴ Maynard Solomon. *Mozart: A Life*. p. 122.

⁵ Einstein. p. 185.

Haydn...is usually regarded as Mozart's predecessor; but the compositions on which his fame chiefly rests belong for the most part to the period of Mozart's activity in Vienna, and were not without important influence on the latter. This mutual reaction, so generously acknowledged by both musicians, must be taken into account in forming a judgment upon them.⁶

Haydn had established the basic form of the string quartet and Mozart essentially followed this structure. Prior to the writing of either Haydn's Opus 33 or Mozart's Haydn quartets, Mozart had been inspired by Haydn's earlier Opus 20 of 1772 "From whom I learned how to write quartets"⁷. In reaction he composed an earlier set of six himself in 1773 (K.168-73).

With respect to the second point, Mozart's works were of a sturdier construction. He made little use of Haydn's country humor and unexpected musical turns. In comparison with Haydn's open-air, peasant style, Mozart is a more cerebral indoor composer. In addition, Mozart overcame Haydn's tendency to favor the first violin as the lead voice, particularly in the exposition. By the time he composed the dedicated set of quartets:

His (Mozart's) mastery could not be questioned. In these quartets each part has equal importance in the scheme and the instruments are handled with an ease and freedom which no other composer of quartets ever achieved in quite the same degree. Mozart had passed the experimental stage.⁸

Each composer made enormous contributions to the development of the string quartet form. Their association played an integral part in its development:

Together, they developed the string quartet from a rudimentary chamber sonata into the most intimately expressive of all instrumental forms...without which Beethoven could never have written what he did.⁹

The Viennese Public

The Viennese loved quartet music. While Mozart had no specific commission or venue in which to perform any such compositions, obviously he hoped that the wide-spread popularity of quartet music would fuel an interest in any music he published of this type. But the success of his chamber music was certainly not guaranteed.

⁶ Otto Jahn. *Life of Mozart*. v. 3, p. 7.

⁷ H C. Robbins Landon. *Mozart: The Golden Years*. p.144.

⁸ Thomas F. Dunhill. *Mozart's String Quartets*. v. 1, p 27.

⁹ John N. Burk. *Mozart and His Music*. p. 146.

At this time Wolfgang was known to the public, which meant mostly the nobility, primarily as a pianist rather than a composer. As expected, he composed his concertos for performance. His sonatas were popular. In fact during the time of the composition of the Haydn quartets, 1782-5, he was near the height of his earning power. However his chamber music was found to be obscure and puzzling. In fact Emperor Joseph, the ruling musical dilettante, found both Haydn's and Mozart's chamber works to be too complex.¹⁰ In addition he objected to Haydn's "tricks and nonsense".¹¹ However it must be remembered that at this time Haydn was still considered an outsider from Hungary. While probably the best known composer in Europe, his extraordinary fame from his London tour was still six years in the future.

One current critic of Mozart stated:

It is a pity that in his truly artistic and beautiful compositions Mozart should carry his effort after originality too far, to the detriment of the sentiment and heart of his works. His new quartets, dedicated to Haydn, are much too highly spiced to be palatable for any length of time.¹²

Even the musically sophisticated of Vienna wanted their musical entertainment to be understood upon first hearing. The public's neglect of Haydn and Mozart helped create a tighter bond between them.

Unbounded Friendship

The closeness of the elderly Haydn, age 53 in 1785, and Mozart, age 29, has no known equal in the history of music:

for each understood the importance of the other as did no one else. There has never been such a close, such a mutually helpful association of two composers before or since.¹³

In a biography published within ten years of Mozart's death the author states:

Mozart...became a most sincere admirer of the great and incomparable Joseph Haydn, who had already become the pride of music, and now, since Mozart's death, remains our favorite and our delight. Mozart often called him his teacher.¹⁴

¹⁰ Burk. p. 142.

¹¹ Jahn. v. 3, p. 2.

¹² Jahn. v. 3, p. 3.

¹³ Burk. p. 146.

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 147.

For Haydn's part, his adoration of Mozart was even greater. In a letter contained in the same biography Haydn is quoted:

If I could only impress on the soul of every friend of music, and on high personages in particular, how inimitable are Mozart's works, how profound, how musically intelligent, how extraordinarily sensitive!...It enrages me to think that this incomparable Mozart is not yet engaged by some imperial or royal court! Forgive me if I lose my head: but I love the man so dearly.

It would be difficult to envision higher praise of one musician for another.

The Haydn Quartets

The six string quartets that Mozart planned to dedicate to Joseph Haydn were composed in a leisurely fashion (for him) from the latter half of 1782 to very early in 1785. They were GM, K.387; dm, K.421; EbM, K.428; BbM, K.458; AM, K.464 and CM, K.465. All are masterpieces.^{15 16}

They were written during a period when most of Mozart's efforts were directed towards composing and performing piano concertos. Solomon maintains in his biography that the quartets represented a declaration of Mozart's financial independence. He was able to devote himself to pure music without economic consideration. This was possible in substantial part because at the time he was earning approximately 3,000 florins a year.¹⁷

The quartets were designed to emulate Haydn's Opus 33 published the year before Mozart began. As with Haydn's new style, the parts represented four integrated conversations--however they were more heterogeneous. Unique to Mozart was his introduction of counterpoint to intensify the language of the sonata and a greater use of chromaticism, made most famous in the Adagio introduction to the CM quartet.¹⁸ His dedication to Haydn was long and personal:

To my friend Haydn!

A father who had decided to send his children into the world at large, thought best to entrust them to the protection and guidance of a famous man who fortunately happened to be his best friend as well. Behold here, famous man and best friend, my six children. They are, to be sure, the fruit of long and arduous

¹⁵ H.C. Robbins Landon. p. 143.

¹⁶ Dunhill. v. 1, p. 26.

¹⁷ Solomon. p. 293.

¹⁸ Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. p. 705.

work, yet some friends have encouraged me to assume that these children will not go quite unregarded, and this flatter me into believing that they may one day bring me some comfort. You yourself, dearest friend, have shown me your approval of them during our last stay in this capital. Your praise above all encourages me to recommend them to you, and leads me to hope that they will not be entirely unworthy of your good will. May it please you therefore to receive them kindly and to be their father, their guide and their friend...

The quartets were introduced in two sets. Mozart's father, Leopold, who had recently been increasingly estranged from his son, received the first three while still in Salzburg. The second group was played during Leopold's last visit with his son in Vienna in the spring of 1785. The night of their introduction must have been extraordinary. The four members of the quartet were Joseph Haydn and Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf on violin; W.A. Mozart on viola and Wanhal as cellist. In a letter to his daughter from Leopold he reported to her that Haydn, just 13 years his junior, said to him at the conclusion of this performance:

I tell you before God, and as an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer I know, either personally or by reputation: he has taste and moreover the greatest possible knowledge of the science of composing.¹⁹

String Quartet in CM K. 465

Mozart's string quartet in C major, K.465, was the last of the six quartets composed and dedicated to Joseph Haydn. Like most quartets of the late classical period it is divided into four movements. The first movement is in C major and marked allegro. The second is andante cantabile in the dominant key of F major. The minuet begins in G major and ends in C major. On the other hand the trio shifts to c minor. Both are at allegretto. The last movement indicates molto allegro and it begins and returns to C major after passing through Eb and Ab major.

The key modulations and variance in tempos are quite standard for a quartet of this period. What is not standard is the adagio introduction of 22 measures at the beginning of the first movement. This short length compares with over 800 measures in the remainder of the quartet. Yet because of the chromaticism written into these first few measures, they have received more attention than the remainder of the quartet and earned for the entire piece its name "The Dissonance (or Dissonant)".

¹⁹ H.C. Robbins Landon. p. 125.

Charles Rosen states:

The string quartet—four-voice polyphony in its clearest non-vocal state—is the natural consequence of a musical language in which expression is entirely based on dissonance to a triad. When there are fewer than four voices, one of the non-dissonant voices simply must play two notes of the triad... More than four voices gave rise to questions of doubling and spacing, and the woodwind quartet created problems of the blending of tone-color. Therefore only the string quartet and the keyboard instrument allowed the composer to speak the language of classical tonality with ease and freedom... The keyboard had the disadvantage of less striking linear clarity...²⁰

Clearly Mozart picked the best vehicle available to create clearly defined angst in the form of musical chromaticism. In addition, the Dissonance has the only slow introduction amongst the last ten of Mozart's string quartets. This contrast in tempos helps create an even stronger contrast between the darkness of the quartet's introduction and its ultimate burst of brightness and light. The result has kept musicologists questioning Mozart's motives ever since.

It is possible to feel that this introduction satisfies ear and sense as a kind of deliberate enveloping of the musical substance in a mist in order that the radiant C major subject of the allegro may appear the more sunny. But, the procedure occurring in Mozart, the riddle remains, for though he is often curiously ambiguous in his moods, he is perhaps never, with this single exception, so in his methods.²¹

The repetitive eighth note C3 in the cello introduction establishes the likelihood of a movement in C. What is immediately ambiguous is whether it will be C major or C minor. The Ab and Eb from the viola and second violin create the alternate possibility of Ab major. However before the first four measure phrase is concluded the cello falls to B while the first violin enters on an A, pushing aside the possibility of Ab major. The first violin's A is quickly established as the supertonic of a diminished G triad even though it is played against the ending of the first four notes of an a minor scale from both inner voices.

The cello cannot sustain the B against the diminished G triad of the first violin. The diminished triad is carried into the second four bar phrase by the cello falling another half step to eighth note pulses of Bb. Meanwhile the G of the first violin becomes again a

²⁰ Rosen. p. 138.

²¹ Blom. p. 238.

supertonic lead into a downward modulation to f minor. Again the inner voices dissent and the cello does not confirm the f minor until it pulses through A to Ab as in enters the third four bar phrase.

In this phrase the first violin establishes a c minor triad supported initially by the cello's Ab. The second violin creates tension by maintaining the f minor of the previous phrase. The viola sustains the tension with chromatic passages, but near the end it shifts to a run compatible with c minor. The cello pulses on through G to F, again not sustaining the first violins c minor until it reaches a sustained Eb in measure 12.

The fourth four-measure phrase displays chromatic runs in each of the lower voices. The top violin valiantly sustains the c minor.

This c minor is maintained in the top voice through most of the last six measures. The four lower voices begin to change their purpose. Through the use of three eighth note pickups to each measure, together with a quarter note down beat the lower voices begin to win the game of establishing the ultimate key. Over and over they begin to sustain a C major dominant seventh on the beat notes in spite of some dissonance in the passing tones. In the last measure of this introduction all lower voices hold this chord for the entire sustained measure. Beginning on C the first violin starts in protest but finally agrees with the other voices on the last two beats as it drops to B..

In spite of the chromaticism, the C major triad is always an acceptable outcome. So there is no contradiction when the allegro portion of the movement breaks free. And in a historical context, the degree of chromaticism is not extreme when compared with baroque composers such as J.C. Bach, William Byrd or the English madrigalists. The difference that seems to provoke a concentration of attention that has been given few other passages of such short duration is that composers earlier than Mozart placed their chromaticism within an overall context in which it does strike the listener as such a contrast. Mozart's results are different in that the remainder of the piece is so "limpid"²² in comparison.

Maynard Solomon is more florid in his analysis and praise of these measures. The hyperbole is quite unusual in his biography of Mozart:

²² Ibid. p. 239.

Without knowing precisely where we are, we know that we are in an alien universe. Laocoon is in the grip of the writhing serpents. Reality has been defamiliarized, the uncanny has supplanted the commonplace. In this introduction, Mozart has simulated the transitions from darkness to light, from the underworld to the surface, from the id to the ego. For, whatever our metaphoric frame, this music is ultimately about confinement and emergence. And now the Allegro theme emerges soaring and liberated, having already achieved release, transcended the fear of annihilation, freed itself from a burdensome confinement, shed the harmonic ambiguities, chromaticism, and pungent dissonances of the Adagio in favor of the simple brightness of an achieved C major.²³

Haydn himself stated it far more simply. “Since Mozart wrote it this way, he must have must have had good reason to do so.”²⁴

But what about the remainder of the quartet? While the introduction is often considered apart from the remainder of the piece, it appears in various transformations throughout. The tension of the opening bars resolve into “the classical lilt and charm of the Allegro proper”²⁵. However at the point of reprise the c minor references return. Again in the trio the opening sonority returns, sharply contrasting with the upbeat minuet. The development section of the fourth movement again references the c minor opening.²⁶

Like all of his chamber music, the first movement is in the sonata allegro form. Designed to be played before a small audience, it does not require an introduction with great fanfare characteristic of most of Mozart’s orchestral pieces. His use of counterpoint intensifies the musical line.

The second movement is written with incredible tenderness and febrile intensity. It is probably the most expressive of any of Mozart’s quartet slow movements. The series of suspensions, resolutions and contrapuntal devices give the second violinist an incomparably beautiful starring role. As Solomon rhapsodizes over the introduction, Jahn states of the andante cantabile:

It belongs to those wonderful manifestations of genius which are only of the earth in so far as they take effect upon human minds; which soar aloft into a region of blessedness where suffering and passion are transfigured.²⁷

²³ Solomon. p. 201-2.

²⁴ Burk. p. 363.

²⁵ Arthur Cohn. p. 1960.

²⁶ H.C. Robbins Landon. *The Mozart Compendium*. p. 223.

²⁷ Jahn. v. 3, p. 12.

The minuet is fresh and vigorous, plunging into a new key. The trio, that shifts into minor mode provides a beautiful contrast not only in keys, but also phrasing, dynamic contrasts and melodic intervals.²⁸

While the format of the string quartet tended to focus on the first movement in Mozart's time, thus allowing it to dominate the piece, Mozart tended to give greater weight to the finale through emotional intensification. The fourth movement of CM, K.465 is no exception. It is in a classic rondo form: quick, easy flowing with great depth of beauty in the finale. The falling fifth motive is used repeatedly throughout. All things considered it is a very fitting finale to an extraordinary set of quartets.

Critical Reaction

Shortly after the dedication of the Haydn quartets, a German review stated of the quartets:

Mozart is the best and most accomplished piano player I have ever heard; it is only a pity that in his artful and really very beautiful writing, by searching for novelty, he reaches too high, which means that sensibility and heart gain but little; his new Quartets...which he dedicated to Haydn are really too highly seasoned—and which palate can withstand that for long? Forgive the metaphor from the cookbook...²⁹

In Italy they were no more easily accepted. According to Mozart's widow, Constanze, the quartets occasionally had a curious fate:

The late Prince Grassalkovich, for example, had these quartets performed by some of the players in his Kapelle. Time and again he cried, 'You are not playing correctly' and when they assured him that they were, he tore up the notes on the spot.³⁰

It is likely that Mozart's Dissonance quartet will always be controversial. It is hard to listen to the introduction, paired with the remainder of the quartet and not recognize the startling juxtaposition of the two. Like other outstanding musical oddities: Beethoven's horn entry in the Eroica; J.C. Bach's extraordinary dissonant passages; the meaning of Elgar's Enigma Variations; musicologists will always wonder and debate. These musical incidents do not allow for clear categorization.

²⁸ Dunhill. v. 2, p. 22.

²⁹ H.C. Robbins Landon. *Mozart: The Golden Years*. p. 194.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 142.

Mozart's Final Years

When Mozart first arrived in Vienna in 1781 he was 25 years old he became enormously successful in publishing his compositions and performing his later piano concertos. As his compositional skills continued to develop and he began to write the masterworks of his later years he developed musically beyond the capacity of most of his peers. A review dated 1790 stated:

This great master had from his early acquaintance with harmony become so deeply and inwardly intimate with it, that it is hard for an unskilled ear to follow his works. Even the skilled must hear his things several times.³¹

Dittersdorf, noted composer, (and second violinist at the first performance of the Dissonance quartet) had a similar opinion. In his autobiography he reported a conversation he had with emperor Joseph II in an interview shortly after the premier of the quartet:

He is indisputably a great original genius, and I have never yet found anyone who possessed such an astonishing wealth of ideas. I wish he were not so lavish with them. He leaves his hearer out of breath: for scarcely has one thought through one idea, than stands there already in its place another, which drives out the first, and this goes on continuously without cease, so that in the end none of these real beauties can be preserved in the memory.³²

The relative sophistication of Mozart's later works that were produced in Vienna began to run dry the rush of financial and popular success he had achieved upon his arrival. The ordinary music lover and the conservative critic could not keep pace with his development. He was charged with capricious musicality designed to be appreciated solely by the refined connoisseurs. As stated earlier, he himself described his Haydn quartets as the product of "a long and laborious labor". This labor was exerted by a composer who was famous for transcribing whole pieces without the need for editing. He referred to the quartets as not for the general musical public but:

Compositions which I keep for myself or for a small circle of music-lovers and connoisseurs (who promise not to let them out of their hands).³³

³¹ H.C. Robbins Landon. *The Mozart Compendium*. p. 386

³² *ibid.* p. 387.

³³ Solomon. p. 486.

It is somewhat ironic that Mozart was the first composer to attempt to live apart from the traditional patronage system of the church and nobility and try to make a financial success of producing music for the public. Then, as he developed as a mature master of the classical style, he needed to go beyond what the public wanted in their music. He was not able to sustain his compositional independence from the public

In his last years the immediate approval of his music waned and his productivity declined. His last four quartets, the Hoffmeister and particularly the three Prussians, were not of the same intensity as his Haydn pieces. The Prussians were written for the King of Prussia who was a cellist. While the cellist parts are elaborate, in total the quartets are considered superficial compared with the Haydn set.³⁴ Most of Mozart's productivity shifted to opera at this time when he produced his greatest operatic masterpieces in an attempt to alleviate his spendthrift induced financial crisis.

Conclusion

Mozart's late music was not well understood by his contemporaries. While Haydn sometimes suffered the same fate in these years in Vienna, he at least lived to see his own immense trans-European popularity. However this was derived not by his compositional output in Esterhazy or Vienna, but rather from his phenomenally successful tours to London beginning in 1791. In this same year Mozart died at 35, having never gained a secure position or financial stability. Perhaps this precarious position is what drove him to produce such an enormous output of music during his first five years in Vienna. If so, we are the undeserving beneficiaries of his incredible drive to create the music that his close friend treasured so highly.

³⁴ Blom. p 242.

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