

DT501/1 History of Music: Classical/Romantic

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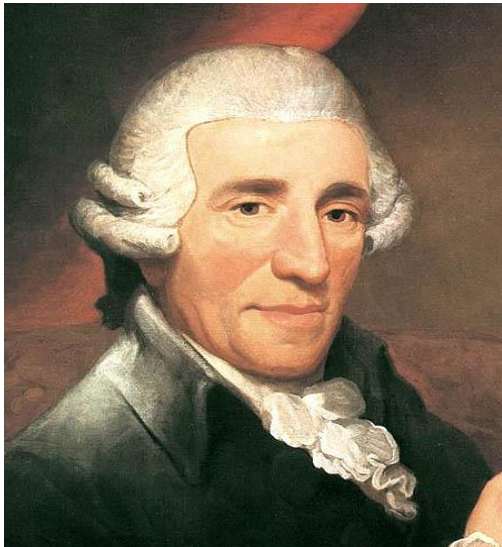
Lecture 9: Chamber Music (1)

The String Quartet

Origins of the String Quartet

- Unlike the classical symphony or concerto, no immediate precursor to the string quartet can be cited.
- Possible forerunners include:
 - the practice of performing four-part works intended for orchestra with one instrument per part.
 - the Baroque trio sonata: for two melody instruments with continuo.
- With the decline of the continuo composers began to realise the advantages of retaining the 2 violins and cello of the trio sonata and adding the viola to thicken the texture.
- The earliest string quartets were known as divertimentos – a term usually reserved for ‘light’ entertainment music – even though many were quite serious in tone.
- It was not until the 1780s that the term ‘quartet’ become common as a designation for serious music.

Joseph Haydn: Father of the String Quartet



- Often called 'the father of the string quartet', Haydn transformed the genre into the most prestigious form of chamber music.
- His most important contributions came after 1780 by which time he had successfully renegotiated his contract so that he could sell his music.
- Composed a total of 68 string quartets.

Haydn's Op. 33 String Quartets

- Groundbreaking set of six quartets composed by Haydn in 1781 for the Viennese publisher Artaria. Written in what he described as 'a new and special manner'.
- Innovations of the op. 33 quartets
 - new level of independence and conversational interaction amongst all the instruments, distinction between melody and accompaniment not always clear, interchangeable or transformed from one to the other.
 - *thematische arbeit*: consistent application of motivic development. Motivic material pared to a minimum, subjected to constant transformation.
 - All four movements of different character integrated into a coherent whole. Balance between serious and light, popular tone.

First movement: fast sonata *allegro*

Second and third movements: alternate between scherzo and slow movement – *largo*, *adagio* or *andante*

Final movement: fast entertaining *presto* or rondo

Motivic Development.

- String Quartet Op.33 No. 2, first movement
 - opening phrase bars 1–4: theme presented in the first violin.
 - continuation phrase bars 5–6: opening upbeat motive rhythmically condensed and opening leap expanded from a 4th to full octave.
 - bar 7: further compression to straight semiquavers.
 - bars 12 –14: all instruments engage in a conversation style exchange with the six-note motive from the opening.
 - bars 17–18: further rhythmic compression.
 - bars 19-22: recasting of the rhythm from the opening theme.
 - bars 23–28: new material.
 - bars 29 –32 closing section: further recombinations of earlier motives.
- String Quartet Op 50, No. 1, B-flat Major, first movement
 - entire exposition based on the development of two principal motives: a) a repeated note which first appears in crotchets in the cello b) a six-note figure which first appears in the first violin in bar 3.

Sonata form: String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 33, No. 2, first movement.

EXPOSITION	BAR	KEY
First Subject Area	1	Eb
Transition	13	mod. To Bb
Second Subject Area	21	Bb
Closing Section	29	Bb
DEVELOPMENT		
Development of material	33	Bb-Ab-f-Eb-c
False recapitulation	59	c ends on V of Eb
RECAPITULATION		
First Subject Area	63	Eb
Transition	70	ends on V of Eb
Second Subject Area	78	Eb
Closing Section	87	Eb

Haydn's musical wit



- Haydn's musical wit emanates from his transgressions of the conventions that he himself did so much to establish.
- Examples:
 - String Quartet No. 1 in B minor, op. 33, opens in the wrong key. Pretends to begin in D major.
 - the second movement of the 'the Joke' string quartet is deliberately simplified to the point of parodying folk music.
 - the false ending of 'the Joke' quartet.

Mozart



- Composed six string quartets between 1782 and 1785 that were influenced by Haydn's op.33.
- During this period Mozart became friends with Haydn. They played together in string quartets at social gatherings in Vienna; Mozart on viola, Haydn on first violin.
- Mozart's total output of string quartets numbers 26.
- While his quartets are highly regarded, the quintets in C major K515 and G minor K516 of 1787 are counted among his greatest chamber works.

Mozart's 'Haydn' String Quartets

- Development – reveals the influence of Haydn in subjecting his themes to a more rigorous developmental process than usual.
- Chromaticism – the openings of K465 and K428 are intensely chromatic.
- Contrapuntal texture – Mozart's intense study of Bach during this time can be observed in the abundance of contrapuntal textures.
- Contrasting styles – typically Mozartian mastery over several distinct styles.
 - *Sturm und Drang*: first movement of K. 421
 - fusion of galant and learned (contrapuntal) styles: finales of K. 464 and K. 387
- Intense slow movements: Mozart's elaborate and richly ornamented second movements are generally more weighty than Haydn's and feature characteristically lyrical cantabile melodic writing.

Beethoven



- Published his first set of six quartets Op. 18 in 1800.
- Beethoven took several years to write this set as he knew they would be compared to the quartets of his teacher Haydn.
- Composed a total of 16 quartets.
- The late quartets nos. 12–16 and the Große Fuge composed after 1825 are considered amongst the greatest and most complex musical works of all time.

Prescribed Listening

Joseph Haydn: String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 33, No. 2, 'The Joke' (first and last movements)

Prescribed Reading

First two sections of the Grove article on the 'String Quartet'

Taruskin, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, pp. 539–555.

For more detailed discussion on Haydn's contribution to the string quartet see:

Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 111–142.