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## **Haydn, Quartet opus 76 #5**

By the time he wrote his opus 76 Quartets, Joseph Haydn was over sixty, widely traveled, and probably the most renowned living composer in Europe. After thirty years of a cloistered existence as the court composer at Esterhazy, he “went public” upon the death of his patron, Count Nicholas, in 1790; assisted by the impresario Johann Peter Salomon, he made his name enduringly in London and in Vienna. This shift had a palpable effect on his compositional style. In his last twelve symphonies, and his last four sets of string quartets, the gestures and the sound-sense are more robust and self-assured as the composer plays to the public concert-hall; while the composer sacrifices none of his capacity for innovation and surprise, we feel that we have left the arena of experimentation and discovery that characterized the Esterhazy years.

In fact, the six opus 76 Quartets were not written for the public, but were commissioned by the Hungarian Count Erdödy, who enjoyed having them to himself for two years (in the meantime, Haydn cannily sold them to two separate publishers in London and Vienna). As a set, they are unquestionably the most popular and most often performed of his many quartets, and some would say his greatest quartet masterpieces as well. Number five follows on the heels of three giants: number two, the “Quinten”, number three, the “Emperor”, and number four, the “Sunrise”, all relatively traditional works in regard to form and key structure.

This fifth quartet, then, is more of a maverick quartet. The first movement is cast not in the usual “sonata allegro” form, with its emphasis on momentum and drama, but rather in a kind of variation form that uses alternation between major and minor, with a fleeter, more buoyant coda. Despite some stormy, turbulent writing in the minor section, the movement as a whole gives an impression of lightness and grace.

By contrast, the extraordinary slow movement becomes the emotional and substantive center of the work. Marked “Cantabile e mesto” - songful, sad - the movement is cast in the exotic key of F-sharp major, a key that seems to lift off the ground, to occupy a separate plane quite distant from the more friendly and ordinary D major of the preceding movement. This is gliding, exalted music, hymnlike but also tender and intimate. This music evokes, partway, the world of “The Seven Last Words of Christ”, Haydn’s earlier masterpiece, but here there is no bowing of the head in resignation; if anything, the entire movement occupies some afterlife, free already of any restraint.

With the minuet, we are back with jolly Papa Haydn, playing his usual tricks: sudden dynamic changes and contradictions of the expected  $\frac{3}{4}$  meter rule the day. The cello counters with a more shadowy texture in the minor-key Trio. Then comes the Finale, which begins, startlingly, with movement-ending chords and pauses - a trick, perhaps, picked up from London's unruly public spaces, a way of getting attention for what is to follow? This movement is distinguished by its accompanimental device: an rapidly repeated interval shared by a pair of instruments, over which the lighthearted main melody is played out. One of the most joyous and fun-loving finales of his entire output, there is no end to the high jinks to be heard here: games of leapfrog, passages that dwindle to almost nothing, outbursts of mock-rage, surprise arrivals, and finally a triumphant, exuberant ending.

Note by Misha Amory