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Mozart Quartet, K. 464

Mozart and Haydn were well acquainted, and each was fully cognizant of the other's genius – not always the case among great contemporaries in music history. Haydn told Leopold Mozart that his son Wolfgang was the greatest living composer known to him. Mozart, for his part, upon hearing Haydn's opus 33 string quartets, penned six great quartets of his own which were an explicit homage to the older composer, his so-called "Haydn Quartets"; they are considered to be his first mature works in that genre.

The Quartet in A major, K. 464, is the fifth of these, written in the winter of 1785. It was later to command the admiration of the young Beethoven, and to influence directly his own A major Quartet, opus 18 no. 5. Mozart's quartet is a paradigm of High Classical style, combining as it does a perfect command of form, a sophisticated sense of counterpoint, and an effortlessly galant demeanor.

The first movement is sunny, engaging, and fluidly paced. Each idea is presented in a simple manner at first, and then revisited at once in a more complex form, with voices overlapping one another contrapuntally. In the central development section, surprising modulations and changes of texture offer a darker contrast to the movement's essentially radiant character; here the music seems to have more difficulty progressing, halting completely on two occasions and having to feel its way gradually back to familiar ground.

The Minuet is simple and clever at the same time. Its main idea is in two connected parts – a unison statement, and a dancing reply – which are then combined and intertwined all throughout the main section, in every imaginable permutation. The result is a diverting variety of ideas and textures, achieved with great economy of means. A Trio section, in a different key, provides a smoother-textured, less learned contrast.

The slow movement, a theme and variations, begins sotto voce with a tender melody in the first violin, simply accompanied; the theme is largely confined to a low register, which lends it an intimate, whispered quality. Although the shape and texture of this theme are quite simple, the harmonization is not – replete with chromatic motion, it presents a starting point of great richness. Six extraordinary variations and a coda follow. Each instrument of the quartet is featured in its own variation, and interspersed between these there are two others, one a shadowy, dramatic minor variation, one a luminous return to major which emphasizes rhythmic simplicity and imitation. Perhaps the most

notable variation is the cello variation, where an almost drumlike bassline supports gently moving upper lines.

The finale lies poised between two worlds, having on the one hand the familiar Mozartean playfulness, on the other a more introverted, gentle sighing character. Marked *Allegro non troppo*, this ambivalent movement features a falling chromatic figure, followed immediately by a flirtatious reply; amazingly, these two snippets are the sum total of thematic material for the entire movement, a full-length sonata-allegro form. Because they are used in such a variety of ways, in sequences, strettos, over pedal points, combined and recombined, inverted, and so forth, the music is fresh and surprising throughout. Somewhere before the return of the opening material, an extra motif is picked up, a bouncing 8th-note idea, which happily accompanies the original material when it reappears. A hushed, teasing *pianissimo* brings the movement to a close.

Note by Misha Amory