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## **Haydn opus 33 #1**

Joseph Haydn's opus 33 string quartets are widely held to be the first set wherein the composer displayed full maturity in his mastery of the form – this in spite of their brilliantly experimental opus 20 precursors. The opus 33 quartets are dubbed “Gli Scherzi”, a reference to Haydn's replacement of the more usual Minuet movement with a lighter, quicker Scherzo in each work.

Opus 33 no. 1 is set in the rare key of B minor: rare for Haydn, and almost unique within the entire standard quartet canon. This oddness seems to affect the music from the very outset of the first movement, the opening bars at first unsure whether to proceed in major or minor. The progress of the entire movement is beset with difficulties: moving in fits and starts, stuttering at times, halted by eloquent pauses, often changing its mood on impulse. It is rhetorical rather than melodic music, questing in nature, and is over as soon as it reaches firm ground, almost by definition. The second movement is a very brief Scherzo, alternating a clever main section with a luminous Trio in B major. Following this, the slow movement evokes the world of a stately, quiet dance – perhaps in reparation for the missing Minuet – which proves both adventurous and beautiful as it unfolds chromatically through many modulations. The Finale, a breathless Presto, is an exciting romp which places the first violinist in the virtuosic spotlight, requiring swift arpeggiation, fiddle-like string crossings, and a constant ranging over all registers.

Note by Misha Amory