

Programme notes by Chris Darwin. Please use freely for non-profit activities

Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805) String Quartet in F major Op. 64/1 G.248 (1804)

Allegro molto

Adagio non tanto

Allegro vivo ma non presto

Supernumerary double-bass player and singer Leopoldo Boccherini and his wife Maria, though of only modest means, enthusiastically encouraged the artistic talents of their children. They became dancers, poets, opera singers, librettists and in Luigi's case by his late teens not only an internationally renowned cellist but also a recognised composer of string duos, trios and quartets. Following the death of his father in 1766, Luigi, with a violinist friend Manfredi, planned to travel from their home town of Lucca to seek their fortune in London. En route they stopped in Paris, where they so impressed the nobility that they were offered orchestral posts in Madrid by the Spanish Ambassador. The London plan was jettisoned and the pair went to Spain.

Luigi spent the rest of his life in Spain mainly as composer and chamber musician to the Bourbon royal court and other nobility. He also managed to hold the position of *compositeur de notre chambre* to the Prussian court of amateur cellist Frederick William II while continuing to live in Madrid. He attached himself to the Spanish court's string quartet thereby inventing the 2-cello quintet. He was an immensely prolific composer writing hundreds of string trios, quartets and quintets. In Madrid, he was somewhat isolated from the musical developments taking place in central Europe, and his style is uniquely his.

The 19th Belgian musicologist François-Joseph Fétis wrote in his universal encyclopedia:

Never was there a composer... who [so] had the merit of originality; his ideas are all individual, and his works so remarkable in every respect, that one is tempted to believe that he knew no other music than his own. ... His ideas, always graceful, often melancholy, possess an inexpressible charm through their naivety. ...

Boccherini is not known now save in France. Germany disdains his naive simplicity. ... Spohr... the celebrated German violinist and composer was asked what he thought [of a Boccherini quintet], he answered "I think that this does not deserve to be called music!"

Contemporary taste, like Fétis, recognises the virtues of Boccherini, despite his not building on the classical tradition started by Haydn.

Today's quartet is the last he completed. It is dedicated to his patron Luciano Bonaparte, who after falling out with his younger brother Napoleon, had been sent to Madrid in November 1800 for a year as ambassador extraordinary. He successfully wooed the Bourbon court by providing concerts and dances to the nobility, helped by Boccherini's advice. Boccherini is probably reminding Bonaparte of this junketing just before the recapitulation of the first movement, when he quotes the well-known *fandango* that he had previously used in a popular 2-cello quintet from 1788 and in its arrangement for a quintet of guitar and strings in 1798.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. The Violin 2 part is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (F major) and a common time signature. It features a melodic line with a slur over the final two notes. The Viola part is in alto clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature, mirroring the Violin 2 part. The Cello part is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature, playing a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth-note triplets. The triplets are marked with a '3' below the notes.