

Programme Note by Chris Darwin: please use freely for non-commercial purposes

Josef Haydn (1732-1809) String Quartet in D Op 33 no 6 (1781)

Vivace assai

Andante

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale: Allegretto

In the course of the five years from 1768 to 1772, Haydn published three sets of quartets, the Op 9, 17 and 20, in which the older Divertimento form evolved into the true string quartet with free and independent parts. The exercise during the previous decade of manufacturing over a hundred Trios for viola, cello and Prince Nikolaus Esterházy's baryton (a sort of bass viol with an extra set of resonating and pluck-able strings) had schooled Haydn in writing for individual string parts without an accompanying harpsichord. This technical facility, his extraordinary structural genius, and the continued maturing of his creative powers happily came together to produce in the Op 20 quartets six works of revolutionary genius. But then Haydn wrote no more quartets for a decade, until the Op 33 set of six in 1781. Probably all his energies were used directing the music for 50 operas (5 his own compositions) and various marionette productions at the Esterházy palace. In 1779 the Prince engaged an attractive though not very good young singer, Luigia Polzelli, with whom the unhappily married Haydn developed a passionate relationship. Despite the substantial shortcomings of both her voice and her husband's violin playing Prince Nikolaus retained them for Haydn's sake. By 1780, energy flowed back into his symphonies and Haydn started to compose string quartets again.

He announced the Op 33 set to potential subscribers as "brand new *à quadro* ... written in a new and special way, for I have not composed any for ten years". Such advertising was maybe a bit of a come-on to revive the market, but the new set are altogether more relaxed and confident than the Op 20s. They have jokey *scherzi* rather than serious minuets, less "*Sturm und Drang*", more major than minor and a variety of different finale forms replacing Op 20's intellectual fugues. The Op 33 set appeared in Vienna just as the 26 year-old Mozart arrived there in pursuit of a freelance career. Haydn's new quartets catalysed Mozart into writing more quartets of his own, resulting in the famous set of six quartets that he dedicated to Haydn.

Tonight's quartet, the sixth of Haydn's Op 33 set, with its jaunty 6/8 rhythm, may well have provided some of the inspiration for the 'Hunt' quartet in Mozart's set. Haydn's writing is democratic – more of Goethe's ideal of a conversation between intelligent equals than some others of the set. One of his democratic devices in the first movement is for the first violin to hold a long high note, while the lower parts develop the material. Not only is the first violin kept occupied but the high note transforms the music. Mozart famously (thanks to Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*) demonstrated the power of this trick with the oboe's entry in the *Adagio* of his *Gran Partita* Serenade for 13 wind which was composed in the same year as this Haydn quartet. At the start of Haydn's second movement the first violin holds a high A for 18 *Andante* beats (rising to 22 later in the movement) while the second violin and viola play together.



Mozart 'Hunt'



The *Scherzo* is indeed jokey, but at the tempo of the conventional *Minuet* movement, rather than at the faster speed that became usual. The last movement has variations on two alternating themes the first in the major and the second in the minor: : ABA₁B₁A₂ . Haydn's ending characteristically wrong-foots the unforwarned listener.