

**Programme notes by Chris Darwin. Use freely for non-commercial purposes.**

**Josef Haydn (1732-1809) String Quartet in F sharp minor, Op 50 No 4 (1787)**

*Allegro spiritoso*

*Andante*

*Menuetto: Poco allegretto*

*Fuga: Allegro molto*

Sharp practice doesn't usually spring to mind when we think about Haydn ('*Anybody can see that I am a good-natured fellow*'), but around the time that he wrote the Op 50 quartets his dealings with his publishers were decidedly dodgy. In 1784, pressed for time and eager for cash, he responded to a request from the London publisher Forster for three new piano trios by sending just one of his own but padded by two more, under his own name, that his ex-pupil Pleyel had recently sent him. The fraud was soon discovered and Haydn settled with Pleyel out of court. Three years later he offered Forster his six Opus 50 quartets and six 'Paris' symphonies for 25 guineas claiming that neither set had been offered to anyone else. In truth, both sets had already been sold to Artaria, his local publisher. Haydn was caught out again; he tried to blame a copyist and the admittedly dilatory behaviour of Artaria.

The publishing history of Op 50 took an unexpected turn in 1982 after a Melbourne concert celebrating Haydn's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday. A local woman approached maestro Christopher Hogwood with a plastic bag which turned out to contain Haydn's autograph score of four of the Op 50 quartets. Her ancestor had emigrated to New Zealand in 1852, packing the manuscript, along with his Amati violin, as an insurance against hard times. Despite a microfiche being placed in a Wellington library and the manuscript itself being shown to a local professional quartet, main-stream scholarship remained unaware of its existence, with the result that there were serious errors in all published editions, some of which are now corrected.

The fourth quartet is an oddity, not only because it is the only one of the set in a minor key, but because of the way the minor is used. The whole work is unsettled, trading the witty, easy conversational style of his other, major-key Op 50 quartets and the passion of his earlier minor-key *Sturm und Drang* works for an unusually constricted inwardness. The music seems to express concerns, and then leave them hanging.

The work contrasts episodes in minor and major keys. The first movement starts in the 3 sharps of F# minor but turns to the 6 sharps of F# major shortly before the end of the second half. The second movement starts again with 3 sharps but in A major and then, in the first variation turns, to A minor. By contrast with what has gone before, A minor sounds eerily remote despite having no sharps or flats.

Characteristically of Haydn, the themes of the different movements share various elements. For instance, the last movement's somewhat inscrutable fugue theme echoes motifs from all three of the previous movements. It impressed Donald Tovey: '*the quietest and deepest of all instrumental fugues since Bach*'.

