

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) String Quartet in G major K387 (1782)

Allegro vivace assai

Minuetto & Trio - Allegro

Andante Cantabile

Molto Allegro

The early 1780s were a time of great change for Mozart. He had had a resounding success in Munich with his opera *Idomeneo*, a success which made him resentful of his junior status in the service of the Salzburg Archbishop Colloredo. Mozart forced a break with the Archbishop, allowing a move from Salzburg to Vienna in 1781, to the annoyance of his father Leopold. Mozart was also occupied in the Weber household, transferring his affections from the unobtainable Aloysia to her sister Constanza and marrying her in August 1782, further souring relations with his father. Eventually, in the summer of 1783, Mozart and his wife made a three-month conciliatory visit to his father in Salzburg, leaving behind their infant son Raimund Leopold, who died shortly afterwards. Despite these emotional upheavals, the musical freedom gained by the move to Vienna allowed Mozart's composing to flourish. His opera *Die Entführung* and the "Haffner" Symphony rocketed him to fame.

During this period, Mozart was working hard on the set of six quartets that he would dedicate to Haydn. These quartets were directly inspired by Haydn's Op 33 set and famously were generously praised by Haydn, who in turn was inspired by Mozart in the writing of his subsequent quartets. Unlike Beethoven, Mozart left very little trace of his process of composing. Constanza remembered how he would roam, preoccupied, around the house, apparently doing nothing; then, when he finally started to 'work', writing down a composition, he would chatter away to her about domesticities. But some problems were too knotty to be sorted even by Mozart's internal thought processes; one such is the beginning of the second half of this G major quartet's last movement. The viola introduces a rising chromatic motif, which is then passed between cello and viola as the music modulates. Early versions of the quartet show that Mozart initially gave these sequences entirely to the cello, with the other three instruments providing slow-moving chords. But he could not find a sufficiently elegant solution to the problem of how to assign the notes of these chords to the upper three instruments. After three draughts, he eventually hit on the solution of alternating the crotchets between the viola and cello, leaving only the two violins to fill in the harmonies. For the listener, there is not a lot of difference, but Mozart was writing for Haydn.



As an illustration of the thematic unity of this quartet, look at where this chromatic motif crops up. It has its origins in the rising chromatic quavers (*) of the second bar of the first movement, and the corresponding falling quavers of bar 4. Our attention is drawn to them by a *subito piano* and they bring chromatic interest to the straightforward key of G major. The motif reappears in the bizarrely alternating *forte* – *piano* rising crotchets of the *Minuetto*, and again, inverted, near the beginning of the last movement against accompanying quavers in the viola.

