

LIR CLASSICS

LIR001 - PROGRAMME NOTES

The Age of Elegance

The flute quartet was a popular medium of the late 18th century. It was an offshoot of the string quartet, which had become the most significant form of chamber music at this time. For variety, the first violin was sometimes substituted by a wind instrument, most commonly the flute. This was partly because many gentleman amateurs favoured the flute, and indeed many chamber works were written with wealthy patrons in mind. Mozart's flute quartets were part of a commission from Le Jeune, a keen amateur flautist who had made his fortune in India and the Far East. Both Frederick the Great of Prussia and George III of England played the flute, and this undoubtedly raised the status of the instrument as well as providing an opportunity for composers to flatter with dedications of pieces which included the flute. Nearly every late 18th-century composer wrote flute quartets, making a total of several thousand to come out of this period.

Johann Christian Bach was born in Leipzig in 1735 and came to London in 1762 where he stayed, more or less, until the year of his death in 1782. His allegiance to this city earned him the affectionate nick-name The London Bach. He was noted by many to be a warm hearted and amiable character. In a letter to his father, Mozart wrote 'I love [Bach], as you know, with all my heart - I have the highest respect for him.' After Bach's death, Mrs Papendick, writing about court life in the 18th century described him as having 'liberal kindness', showing 'general attention to his friends' and being of 'worthy character'. His vast output included 35 operas, over 60 symphonies, 60 concertos and an enormous amount of keyboard and chamber music. He was an inspiration to many, in particular the young Mozart, whose early compositions were much in the galant style of the elder composer: refined and elegant, full of charm, but never too indulgent. Bach was an active member of musical life in the 1760s and 1770s. In 1765, together with Carl Friedrich Abel, he set up the world's first subscription series - a series of ten concerts at Carlisle House in Soho. The series continued, at various venues in the city, until his death. More significantly though, Bach was music-master to the Royal Family. His duties involved directing the Queen's band, composing for and performing in evening concerts for the entertainment of the Queen and members of the Royal Family, and accompanying the King (George III) on the keyboard.

Perhaps it was with the King in mind, or for one of the evenings of royal music-making, that the C major flute quartet was written. It was published in London (1776) in a set of six quartets for flute (or violin), violin, viola and cello. Rather unusually the publication was a joint collaboration with two other musicians who worked at the royal court: Abel and Giardini. Bach wrote three quartets, Abel two and Giardini the remaining one. Bach and Abel both favoured a two-movement

design as in the case of the quartet recorded here. The first movement has a sonata form structure with only a brief development section and is followed by a stately minuet in the form of a rondo. Somewhat unexpected is the urgent and impassioned episode in the tonic minor which shows the influence of Sturm und Drang manifesting itself in music and the arts at this time.

Haydn's contribution to the string quartet has long been documented. He never really indulged in the domain of the flute quartet; what survive are only a few early works and the exact date of composition of the G major quartet is not known. Certainly it had been written by 1768, for in that year it was included in a publication from Amsterdam which presented a set of 6 quartets supposedly 'compose par Giuseppe Haydn a Vienne, opera quinta'. A closer look at the set reveals that some are arrangements of his earlier large scale divertimenti, though there is no evidence to prove that Haydn made, or even approved, these arrangements. The G major work recorded here has no other surviving format and appears to have been originally conceived for flute and strings. It is full of the charm, wit and

high-spirited ebullience associated with the youthful Haydn. The first movement is cheeky and jaunty in character, showing an eccentric genius at work. Essentially monothematic, everything grows out of the three initial notes which frequently re-appear. These three notes are developed in the second half of the movement, where the flute and violin join forces against the viola and cello, rather than all parts moving homophonically, as at the beginning. The second movement, a minuet, is full of Austrian robustness, warmth and charm, and is folk-like in character with an underlying two-part counterpoint that is idiosyncratic of the composer's early minuets. The Adagio is evocative of Gluck's opera Orfeo, which had received its first performance in Vienna, in 1762. The flute and viola share most of the thematic material, supported by an Alberti-style accompaniment on the violin. The closing Presto Assai is a bustling number in 3/8 with playful alternations of forte and piano.

Between 1770 and 1777, Baron Van Swieten, an influential Viennese musical patron, had served as an Austrian envoy to the court of Frederick the Great in Berlin, and on his return brought a selection of J.S. and W.F. Bach manuscripts to Vienna. In the early 1780s he began holding musical gatherings at which works of the Baroque masters were performed, and among those who attended was Mozart. In a letter dated 10th April 1782, Mozart wrote to his father '...I go every Sunday at twelve o'clock to Baron Van Swieten's, and there, we play nothing but Handel and Bach. I am just putting together a collection of Bach fugues...' It is probably because he frequented these gatherings that he was motivated to make arrangements of fugues by J.S. and W.F. Bach. 21 fugue arrangements (for string trio, quartet and quintet) survive in Mozart's handwriting, and all but six of these have slow introductions (preludes). Scholars are divided on whether Mozart made all, or indeed any, of these arrangements himself, and the authenticity of the slow introductions has not yet been proven. The work recorded here is a trio arrangement of J.S. Bach's Fugue No.8 in D# minor (from Book I of the 48 Preludes and Fugues for keyboard) which is made more string-friendly in its transcription by a transposition to D minor. The prelude is an original composition and it is hard to believe that Mozart did not write it. The phrase structure, chromaticism and, in particular, the dark cadential resolutions onto the flattened 6th chord are all hallmarks of the composer's style.

Hoffmeister was a very active musician in late 18th-century Vienna, and was enormously prolific as a composer. At least 350 of his works include the flute, and among them are 25 concertos, 12 quintets and 46 quartets with strings and 125 duets; however, he also wrote 60 symphonies and much of his fame rested on his numerous operas. Particularly popular was the opera *Der Königsohn aus Ithaka* of 1795 which was performed not only in Vienna, but also in Budapest, Prague, Hamburg, Weimar and Warsaw. In 1783 Hoffmeister established a publishing house at a time when the Viennese music publishing business was still in its infancy. Initially this was to promote his own compositions but he later published music by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Vanhal and Pleyel, including many first editions. Hoffmeister was a personal friend of all these composers (in a letter, for example, Beethoven referred to Hoffmeister as his 'most beloved brother').

As a flautist and composer for that instrument, Hoffmeister was held in great esteem. The *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* of 1800 described his position in flute literature as follows: 'Of all composers who have recently written so diligently for the flute, thereby contributing to the instrument's rise and the furthering of its skillful playing, Hoffmeister's name must be mentioned first. How many and how varied are his compositions for the flute? And where are the flute players among whom his works are not popular?' The A major quartet from Op.27 must surely have delighted flautists of the day since it frequently resembles a *Quatuor Brilliant*: a flute concerto in disguise. The flute writing is dazzling and virtuosic, yet always idiomatic; this is wonderfully illustrated in the *perpetuum-mobile* finale which oozes opera buffa style.

Pleyel spent his formative years in Austria where initially he studied with the Bohemian composer Vanhal. In 1772, in Eisenstadt, he became both Haydn's pupil and his lodger. A close friendship was formed, which remained throughout their lives. After travelling to Italy in the early 1780s, Pleyel then settled in Strasbourg. However, the French Revolution soon brought musical activities to a halt, and consequently he did not hesitate to accept an invitation to London to conduct the Professional Concerts of 1791-2, a rival series to the Salomon Concerts which were being directed by Haydn. Whilst professionally Haydn and Pleyel were effectively in competition, their personal relationship was never marred; they continued to compliment each other, dine together and attend each other's concerts. In 1795, Pleyel settled in Paris where he spent the rest of his life. Being something of an entrepreneur, he opened a music shop, a publishing house and a piano factory.

Considering his involvement in so many businesses, Pleyel's compositional output is astounding: as well as composing many symphonies and concertos, he particularly favoured writing chamber music, perhaps because as a businessman he knew he could make more money in the sale of such music to the wealthy amateur musician! The influence of Haydn is omnipresent in all his music. Having heard a performance of some of Pleyel's string quartets, Mozart wrote a letter to his father stating 'They are very well composed and most pleasant to listen to: you'll hear at once who his teacher was. It would be a good and fortunate day for music, if someday Pleyel were able to be the new Haydn for us!' Mozart could quite easily have said the same of the flute quartet recorded here. It is a brilliant, cheeky composition, bursting with Haydnesque wit and surprise, whilst the chromaticism, use of diminished chords and Neapolitan relationships exhibit the harmonic vocabulary of the mature Viennese style. The first movement is a fully-fledged sonata form movement and, as with much of Haydn's music, there is an element of monothematicism - the whole movement appears to grow from the seeds sown in

the first four bars. The second movement in the tonic minor is an atmospheric piece, presenting two contrasting themes - a dark, almost menacing, staccato motif, and a flowing cantabile melody. Particularly clever is the moment near the end of the movement when the music appears to have finished, only to restart - a musical coup Pleyel had surely learnt from his elder master! The finale is a capricious rondo with virtuoso passages for all four players, though worthy of mention is the extended solo section in F# minor for the viola. Pleyel saves his best joke until the end: the constant interruptions and deliberate excessive cadencing leave the listener disorientated, wondering when and if the movement is actually going to end!

Richard Wade, July 2001