

Josef Haydn (1732-1809) String Quartet in B minor Op 33 no 1 (1781)

Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Allegro di molto

Andante

Finale: Presto

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 of manufacturing over a hundred Trios for viola, cello and Prince Esterhazy's baryton during the previous decade 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 Esterhazy palace. In 1779 the Prince engaged a lively young singer, Luigia Polzelli, with whom Haydn developed a passionate relationship. Whether she served as a stimulus or a distraction, or even both is not known, but 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". This advert 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 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.

Haydn's B minor quartet is the most intense of the six Op 33 and the only one in a minor key. The *Allegro moderato* is one of Haydn's mono-thematic movements with the opening phrase providing much of the material. Though restricted, the material allows Haydn to lead us off in different tonal directions before settling on the home key of B minor. Where the contrasting second subject should occur, we get the same theme but now in D major. The lack of a contrasting second subject requires Haydn to be especially inventive in the second half of the movement.



The *Scherzo* second movement is a faster, forward-driving *Minuet* rather than the very fast, one-in-a-bar type of *Scherzo* that came later. The seventh bar contains an example of *bariolage* (variegated) bowing where the same note is alternated across adjacent strings. Haydn uses this technique extensively in a later quartet (op 50 no 6) leading to the nickname 'The Frog'. The *Presto* finale requires great dexterity from the upper strings with rapid arpeggios and more *bariolage*-like string crossings. The movement is in serious, sonata form and shows that the now almost 50-year old composer has significant alternatives for his last movements to the fugues of his Op 20 quartets.



Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) String Quartet No 2 Op 56 (1927)

Moderato

Vivace scherzando

Lento

Karol Szymanowski was born in 1882 to an affluent family who had settled after the partitioning of Poland in Tymoszwówka, between Kiev and Odessa. His early musical training was at home and in nearby Yelisavetgrad, but at 19 he moved to Warsaw to study. With three other composers he founded *Young Poland in Music*. Its outlook shared the transcendentalism of the *Young Poland* movement in literature: 'Art has no aim... art stands above life, penetrates the essence of the universe.' He travelled to Berlin and Vienna, and was much influenced by the late German romantics, particularly Richard Strauss. He travelled widely to Paris, Sicily and North Africa, and his style moved away from Strauss towards Debussy and Ravel and was heavily influenced by the exotic imagery of Arab mythology. It was in this style that he composed prolifically during the first world war, isolated on the family estate at Tymoszwówka. Major works from this period include his first violin concerto, his first string quartet and his third symphony.

The October Revolution of 1917 destroyed the family home and, temporarily, his musical creativity. He occupied himself writing a novel on erotic love, *The Ephebe*, whose ideas and characters fed into his opera *King Roger*. The independence of Poland in 1918 allowed him to return to Warsaw. The change of location and heightened Polish nationalism rekindled his musical creativity. His new style was inspired by Stravinsky and, against his previous convictions, incorporated elements of folk music, particularly that of the Tatra mountains. *King Roger*, his second violin concerto, and the second string quartet all show this new style.

The second quartet introduces strong folk elements into basic classical structures – sonata form, theme and variations, rondo. The *Moderato* first movement is based on the traditional sonata form with an opening theme on muted violin and cello, two octaves apart. Its rhapsodic flow is brutally interrupted by discordant *sul ponticello* (bowed near the bridge) outbursts reminiscent of Janáček. The second movement is a Rondo with variations; the melody, the strong rhythms and wild outbursts are all inspired by Tatra folk music. The third movement is a four-part double fugue, again with themes that are of folk origin.

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) String Quartet in G major, op.106 (B.192) (1895)

Allegro moderato

Adagio ma non troppo

Molto vivace

Finale: Andante sostenuto; Allegro con fuoco

Dvořák, a professional viola player, wrote chamber music throughout his life; his first official opus was a two-violin string quintet written when he was 20, closely followed by his first string quartet. Over the next 34 years he composed fourteen string quartets, three string quintets and a sextet as well as piano trios, quartets and quintets. Between his eleventh quartet in 1881 and his twelfth quartet (the well-known 'American') there is a

twelve-year gap. This was the time when his international reputation grew thanks mainly to appreciative British audiences. Their admiration for his work, and lack of prejudice against his native folk music, gave him the freedom to develop his own musical style. The interest of the Novellos in publishing his music also gave him welcome leverage to secure increased fees from his long-standing publisher Simrock – he had six children to maintain. In August 1885 on the fourth of nine visits to England, he paid a brief visit to Brighton, staying for a couple of days with the Novellos at 7 Victoria Mansions. He was enchanted by the bathers (public, English, female, lovely), the boats (countless, large and small) and the band (playing Scottish folk-songs); he wrote home “*everything is enchantingly lovely so that nobody who has seen it can ever forget it.*”

His visits to England were interrupted by Mrs Jeanette Thurber's invitation to be artistic director of her new *National Conservatory of Music in America* based in New York. Her aim, to which Dvořák was sympathetic, was to develop a national American style of art music. Dvořák immersed himself in spirituals and plantation songs from the South, and transcriptions of Amerindian melodies. During his stay in America, Dvořák returned to quartet writing with what was to be his best-known quartet the *American*, in his words something “melodious and simple” - and none the worse for that.

Today's G major quartet, his thirteenth, was written at the end of 1895 soon after his return home from America. He was living with his family in a house that he had built with the proceeds of his English trips on a country estate owned by his brother-in-law. Shortly afterwards he also finished what was to be his last quartet, which he had started towards the end of his stay in America.

The G major quartet is more complex than the melodic simplicity of the *American*. The raw material, presented at the beginning, is rhythmic and episodic rather than melodic, with each of the first four bars containing a



different motif; however, these motifs are soon transformed into a confident *risoluto* theme. It contrasts with a more tender triplet-based second subject, which will reappear in the last movement.



The *Adagio* has a dark, melancholy, Slavic theme, introduced by the violin. It is repeated throughout the movement in a variety of different moods and keys. Dvořák's good cheer returns in the *Scherzo*. In the first of its two trios the violin echoes a gentle theme from the viola.



A brief *Andante* introduces the theme of the final *Allegro con fuoco*. The *Andante* returns to introduce the middle section, which is a meditation on the second subject of the first movement. Other elements from that movement also contribute including the tumbling triplets of the opening third bar. The movement's main *Allegro* theme returns and after some characteristic Dvořák sliding key-changes we romp to the finish.