

Music Views and Reviews by Kathy Wolfe

Mozart's 'Haydn' string quartets

"Mozart, *String Quartets No. 14, K. 387 and No. 15, K. 421*" ("Haydn" Quartets 1 and 2, 1782-83), Cleveland Quartet; Telarc CD 80297

"Mozart, *The String Quartets,*" Amadeus Quartet; Deutsche Grammophon CD 423 300-2 (6 CDs, complete)

The "Six Quartets Composed and Dedicated to Joseph Haydn by His Friend W.A. Mozart," string quartets Nos. 14-19 (K. 387-K. 465; 1782-85), were a revolution in musical science. Telarc's recent release by the Cleveland Quartet of Mozart's first two "Haydn" Quartets, No. 14 and No. 15, (CD 80297) is a fine, one-disc introduction to these works. More Cleveland Quartet Telarc releases are to come, but this is the only Mozart now available.

Those willing to delve fully into Mozart's breakthrough are urged to compare the approach to the same pieces in the 1970s complete Mozart string quartet recordings of the incomparable Amadeus Quartet, now on a six-CD set from Deutsche Grammophon. The difference is very clear and instructive. You will also be able to trace the leap in Mozart's thinking before, and after, his "Haydn" quartets.

The close friendship between Mozart (1756-91) and the older Haydn (1732-1809) is one of the most beautiful demonstrations of the workings of human creative progress.

Haydn first conducted a musical revolution of his own, virtually inventing the classical string quartet and symphony during 1771-81, beginning with his "Sun" Quartets Opus 20 in 1771-72. Young Mozart, 17, encountered these earlier Haydn quartets during a short visit to Vienna in 1773, and was immediately inspired to compose

his six quartets Nos. 8-13, K. 168-173. These 1773 Mozart quartets might be called his "early Haydn" quartets.

Mozart did not write string quartets again for almost 10 years.

Haydn's revolution culminated in his famous "Russian" Quartets Opus 33 of 1781, which, Haydn characterized, "are in a new, entirely particular manner." Amadeus Quartet first violinist Norbert Brainin calls the new form in Opus 33 "Haydn's *Motivführung*." Best translated "leading principle" or "seed concept," the *Motivführung* is a musical statement with the germ of an already-growing idea, which generates new ideas at an increasing rate.

Mozart's revolution

Mozart had just moved to Vienna in 1781, and plunged happily into Haydn's Opus 33, declaring, "It was from Haydn that I learned how quartets must be written." Mozart labored particularly hard on a new set of quartets throughout 1782-84, writing, "I like to work slowly and with careful consideration." Now the fact of Haydn's inspiration was written out in a long, loving dedication. The last of the six "Haydn" quartets, the famous "Dissonant," was finished on Jan. 14, 1785.

The new works, which Haydn, on violin, and Mozart, on viola, played for friends and family in January-February 1785, created for the first time an "integrated" composition, a work which from beginning to end is a unified, indivisible concept, developed from a single seminal idea. It is a specific *ordered development*.

The real music of such a composition is a "thought-object," a unit idea in the composer's mind, which G.W. Leibniz called the "monad." It appears "between the notes." Representa-

tion in sound of this one concept, the point of the composition, requires very clean polyphonic transparency.

Comparing performances

The Cleveland Quartet's performance of the first "Haydn" Quartet K. 387 in G has great energy, and good phrasing and humor despite a rapid clip. Especially in the difficult fugal finale Allegro, whose densely compacting multiple voices Mozart rewrote several times, there is excellent transparency amongst different singing voices.

The Amadeus version at first seems almost schmaltzy, Viennese, in comparison. It has more elaborate phrasing, wider dynamics, and broader tempi. Its superiority is heard at the end, for it demonstrates the *unity* of all four movements in a way the Cleveland disc misses. While each movement of the Cleveland Quartet performance is exciting, it is hard to see the relationship, for example, between the second movement's Allegro and the third movement's very different Andante cantabile.

The Amadeus Quartet does not just perform the notes, but that which is in-between. They have understood Mozart's single thought-object, and then read the notes to cause the experienced dissonances and differences among voices to correspond, over four movements, to that unifying thought-object.

Other enjoyable recordings by the Amadeus Quartet are the single disc of Mozart's "Hunt Quartet" K. 458 ("Haydn" Quartet 4, 1784) and Haydn's "Emperor Quartet," Opus 76 No. 3 (1782) on Deutsche Grammophon (CD 410 866-2); and their complete Beethoven quartets, a seven CD-set on Deutsche Grammophon (CD 423 473-2).