

Mozart gets the nod

JIM'S PRESENTATION ON 27th JUNE 2020

String Quintet in D major K.593 (1790)

- I *Larghetto – Allegro – Larghetto*
- II *Adagio*
- III *Menuetto. Allegretto – Trio*
- IV *Allegro*

Grumiaux Trio with Arpad Gérecz (violin) and Max Lesueur (viola)

Recorded in May 1973 in La Chaux de Fonds, Switzerland

For all its professional frustrations, 1773 was a fruitful year for the seventeen-year-old Mozart. In Vienna he produced a set of string quartets, K.168–173, under the influence of Haydn's recent quartets opp. 9, 17 and 20. Autumn saw the composition of the 'little' G minor Symphony, K.183, the earliest of his symphonies in the regular repertoire today. Then in December he wrote his first keyboard concerto, K.175, and revised and completed a string quintet, with two violas, he had begun some time between his return from Italy and his Viennese sojourn. The immediate stimulus for this relatively novel instrumental combination (the numerous quintets Boccherini composed in Madrid from around 1770 all use two cellos) seems to have been a Notturmo in C major by Mozart's Salzburg friend and colleague Michael Haydn, younger brother of Joseph. Throughout his life Mozart loved the dusky sonority of the viola, always his instrument of choice when he played chamber music with friends. Beyond that, prompted by Michael Haydn's charming, lightweight Notturmo, he was evidently eager to explore a medium that enabled him to indulge his fondness for dark, saturated textures and rich inner part-writing.

Not until the spring of 1787, after he had achieved mastery of the string quartet medium in the six *Haydn* Quartets and the lone *Hoffmeister* Quartet, K.499, did Mozart return to the string quintet with a contrasted pair of works, K.515 and 516, and composed his last two in the winter and early spring of 1790–91, at the end of a creatively lean period when his finances and, so far as we can infer from his correspondence, his spirits were often at a low ebb. When Artaria published K.593 and K.614 in 1793, their title pages carried the dedication 'Composto per un Amatore Ongharesa'. The identity of the 'Hungarian amateur' who apparently commissioned the quintets remains unknown, though one possible clue is a later statement by Mozart's widow that the composer had 'done some work' for Johann Tost, the second-violinist-turned-entrepreneur of Haydn's Esterházy orchestra. Perhaps Mozart had been introduced to Tost (a wealthy man following his recent marriage) by Haydn on one of the older composer's intermittent visits to Vienna. If we can trust the recollections of the elderly Abbé Stadler, as reported by Vincent Novello in 1829, Tost, Haydn and Mozart played K.515, 516 and the newly composed K.593 together in December 1790, with Haydn and Mozart alternating on first viola.

The **String Quintet in D major K.593**, of December 1790, is characteristic of late Mozart in its wiry, faintly abrasive contrapuntal textures. Indeed, in its first and last movements this is one of the most consistently polyphonic of all Mozart's works. Unique in

Mozart, and a probable model for Haydn's *Drum Roll* Symphony, No. 103, is the symbiotic link between the Larghetto introduction and the main Allegro. Not only does the theme of the latter evolve from the former, but the Larghetto makes a surprise return in the coda, just before the movement ends with a blunt repetition of the Allegro's opening eight bars— the kind of beginning-as-end pun Haydn enjoyed. Haydnesque, too, is the way the second subject turns out to be a variation and elaboration of the rather whimsical opening, now enriched by canonic imitations from second violin and second viola.

The G major Adagio, in full sonata form, is one of Mozart's most exalted slow movements, a more private, esoteric counterpart to the Andante of the *Jupiter* Symphony. In the development Mozart takes a sighing descending phrase from the main theme through remote tonal regions, and then ushers in the recapitulation with an unearthly, floating sequence that seems to suspend time and motion.

For all its bright D major sonorities, the minuet moves with an absorbed grace. Befitting the contrapuntal inclinations of the whole quintet, Mozart works the guileless nursery tune, formed from daisy chains of descending thirds, in close canonic imitation, initially between first violin and first viola, and then involving the whole ensemble. The trio [*featuring my beloved pizzicato – Jimbo*] sounds like a yodelling Ländler refined (with some elegant dialoguing) for the salon.

Based on a quicksilver tarantella tune that slides chromatically down the scale (bowdlerized into a more conventional zigzag pattern in the earliest printed editions), the finale is a contrapuntal tour de force, achieved with that insouciant lightness of touch typical of the composer's late style. In the recapitulation Mozart enriches the second subject— a tiptoeing fugato that suggests an opera buffa conspiracy—with snatches of the slithering opening theme, creating an intricate web of five-part counterpoint worthy of the *Jupiter* Symphony.

Based on booklet notes by Richard Wigmore for a 2009 Hyperion recording of the Quintets by the Nash Ensemble