

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1 | Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

In 1790 the Esterházy court's musical forces were substantially reduced after the death of Prince Nikolaus, and Haydn was placed on a small annual retainer. The new prince graciously freed Haydn to perform elsewhere for additional income, and in 1791 he accepted an offer to perform and conduct in London. His concerts there were a great success. English composer Charles Burney reported that Haydn "electrified the audience" and excited more attention than had ever been caused by instrumental music in England. Haydn's London engagements were also extremely lucrative, and he returned for another extended visit in 1794.

Haydn experienced something new during his London visits—concerts that were open to the public in large halls. The contrast between this and the Viennese setting of intimate aristocratic salons was striking. Haydn's creative response can be heard in the grand Op. 74 and Op. 76 quartets that followed his first and second London visits. They feature attention-getting introductions, accentuated dynamic and harmonic contrasts, more expressive slow movements, and much virtuoso part writing.

Opus 76, No. 1, is a quartet of many surprises. It opens with all voices playing three powerful chords, but these are only to gain the audience's attention. What follows is the cello alone playing a melody line as though beginning a fugue. But no fugue develops as the other instruments in turn play variants of the opening melody. After the movement is well underway, Haydn adds fugal countermelodies in complex passages filled with many dynamic and harmonic shifts.

The *Adagio sostenuto* is quiet and moving, with a somber chorale giving way to lyrical dialogs between pairs of instruments over pulsing accompaniment. The *Menuetto* is faster than expected and less a traditional minuet than a *Scherzo* as the minuet would become in the hands of Beethoven and other later composers. The movement's *Trio* section is an amusing little peasant dance played freely in the first violin over guitar-like plucking by the other instruments.

The stormy fourth movement defies convention and opens in the "wrong" key of G minor rather than the quartet's home key of G major. Under this tension, harmonies pull back and forth between minor and major keys throughout the movement. As the movement approaches its conclusion, the music pauses dramatically. The movement's opening melody returns, now no longer in a dour G minor but in a cheerful G major played high and sweetly by the first violin. Haydn saves an even bigger surprise for the movement's final moments. After another dramatic pause, a new little tune, brightly trivial compared to all that preceded it, skips cheerfully to the quartet's conclusion.

Guitar Quintet in F major, Op. 143 | Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968)

Castelnuovo-Tedesco's talents as a composer and pianist blossomed early and at age thirteen he entered the Cherubini Conservatory in Florence. By 1910 he had already composed his first publishable piece for piano. Having attracted the attention of Alfredo Casella who promoted his works in Italy and abroad, Castelnuovo-Tedesco rapidly rose to fame and spent the years between the World Wars in Florence as a freelance composer and pianist.

The anti-Semitic campaign in Italy forced him to flee with his family in 1939. After a year in Larchmont, New York, they settled in Beverly Hills, California, where he not only composed film scores and taught, but continued to produce a steady stream of operatic, orchestral, choral, vocal, chamber, and piano works. Critics were especially harsh with Castelnuovo-Tedesco even by the 1930s, judging that he had not lived up to his initial promise. Over 200 of this prolific composer's works have been published, but full assessment cannot properly be made because many of his works—some that he considered his most significant—remain unpublished and unperformed.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco's lifelong interest in Spanish music first surfaced in 1915 with his song cycle *Coplas*, Op. 7, based on popular Spanish poetry. His involvement with the guitar began at the International Festival in Venice in 1932 when Andres Segovia solicited a work from him, resulting in his *Variations across the Centuries*, Op. 71. Spanish idioms naturally inhabit his works for guitar, notably his popular Guitar Concerto, op. 99, and the Quintet for guitar and string quartet, Op. 143, works also written for Segovia.

Composed in 1950, the Quintet follows a broad four-movement design. The first, in regular sonata form, contrasts a theme first played in parallel motion by the bowed strings, with a gentler second theme notable for its chromatic descents, which become greatly elaborated in the continuation.

The Andante is marked "mesto" (sad), a mood set by the muted viola playing the main theme; the strings are muted throughout. We encounter a number of striking sonorities—the ensuing chromatic descent in the cello, the "toiling" of doubled guitar and cello in the second section, the guitar decoration of the main theme's return, and the "Souvenir d'Espagne" (Reminiscence of Spain), featuring the chordal guitar and solo violin. A "quasi cadenza" for the guitar leads to its first utterance of the main theme more than halfway through the movement, doubled again by the cello. The movement dies away in string harmonics.

Harmonics also play a role in the lively Scherzo, marked "alla Marcia." They contribute to the unusual opening sounds in which the viola plays chromatic descending trills. The composer introduces some jazzy syncopations leading to a jaunty "trio" section marked "*Grazioso e burlesco*."

The effervescent theme of the Finale recurs throughout in different variants, often accompanied by open fifths. Outstanding features of this movement include the central expressive section to be played "like a popular song" and the "recitatives" for the guitar, the

first plaintive and the second based on the “popular song.” Toward the end Castelnuovo-Tedesco cleverly combines the main theme and the “popular song,” followed by a coda that races “impetuously and wildly” to its conclusion. —note by Jane Vial Jaffe

Guitar Concerto in D Major, RV 93 | Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Born in Venice in 1678, Antonio Vivaldi was the most original and influential Italian composer of his generation. Most of his composition was done during his forty-year service as director and teacher at the *Ospedale della Pieta*, a Venetian home for foundling girls which became a celebrated conservatory and concert center. One of his most important achievements was laying the foundations for the mature Baroque concerto. He codified the concerto form, becoming the first to regularly use the *ritornello* form in the fast movements of his concerti, and establishing the typical three-movement (fast-slow-fast) structure. His concept was adopted in most of Italy and in France by 1725 and remains to this date a standard throughout Western culture.

Vivaldi's *Concerto in D major RV93* was originally written for two violins, lute and continuo. Emilio Pujol has added a viola part in his arrangements of these works. The *Allegro* begins with an orchestral tutti, striking a lively popular note in its folk-dance rhythm and going on to a fanciful interplay between major and minor. In the ensuing alternation between solo guitar and tutti, Vivaldi enhances the range and brilliance of the soloist's statements on each of its reappearances. The *Largo* reveals the instrument's singing qualities, and the guitar gracefully elaborates a melody over sustained notes from the strings. In the tradition of baroque performance practice, Sharon Isbin adds her own embellishment in the repeats. It is certainly among the loveliest works ever written for guitar or lute. The energetic concluding *Allegro* is a bright epilogue, with highly effective virtuoso passages. This work is available on the five CD box set *Sharon Isbin: 5 Classic Albums* (Warner Classics).

String Quartet in C-sharp minor (“Crisantemi”) | Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Giacomo Puccini was born into a family of church musicians in the Tuscan town of Lucca and was expected to succeed his father as *maestro di capella* at the cathedral as Puccini had done for four generations. However, his father died when Puccini was only six years old, and he was free to pursue a different career in music. Puccini composed in many genres after attending the Milan Conservatory, but he built his career on the composition of operas. Little else that he wrote has survived in the performance repertoire. An exception is his String Quartet in C-sharp minor, which is still performed as written and also in its arrangement for string orchestra.

Puccini wrote the quartet—in a single night, he said—in January 1890 after receiving news of the death of Prince Amedeo, Duke of Savoy, a member of the Italian royal family. He dedicated the quartet to the memory of the Duke and titled it “Crisantemi”, or “Chrysanthemums”, because those flowers were commonly used then in memorial services. Puccini thought highly enough of “Crisantemi” to re-use its two principal melodies in his opera *Manon Lescaut*, which he composed in 1893.

The String Quartet in C-sharp minor is written in a single movement with a simple ABA structure. The first violin plays the role of operatic lead throughout the piece and begins the quartet with a passionate rising and falling aria. The first section ends with a dramatic outburst and a final restatement of its opening notes. After a short pause, the second section begins, its aria even more melancholy than that of the first. In an especially beautiful passage, the cello joins the first violin to sing the aria together. Without pause, the first section returns little altered to complete the quartet.

Quintet in D Major for Guitar and Strings, G.448 “Fandango” | Luigi Boccherini (1742- 1805)

Of all the Italian composers who devoted themselves to instrumental music, Boccherini was one of the greatest. As a child, he showed prodigious talent in cello and composition studies, and made his public debut as a cellist at age thirteen. His reputation grew as both performer and composer, and he gained appointments at Vienna in 1757 and at Lucca in 1763. In 1766, he undertook an extensive concert tour that lasted for several years. In 1770, he was appointed to the service of the Infante Don Luis, brother of the King of Spain, as exclusive composer and as performer. He subsequently served appointments to the King of Prussia and at Potsdam before returning to Madrid, where he remained for the rest of his life, dying in poverty.

Boccherini was a prolific composer, and during the 1790s his music was much in demand in Paris, London and Madrid. His chamber music, especially his quartets and quintets, was immensely popular in its time. Music historian Charles Burney wrote in 1776: "There is perhaps no instrumental music more ingenious, elegant, and pleasing, than his quintets: in which invention, grace, modulation, and good taste, conspire to render them, when well executed, a treat for the most refined hearers and critical judges of musical composition."

It was in Madrid, in the 1770s, that Boccherini began composing his famous string quintets (for string quartet with an additional cello), among the first of their genre. Boccherini's six guitar quintets were written (or adapted) in 1798 - "transcribed by me for the guitar for the sole use of the Marquis de Benavente."

The Guitar Quintet No. 4 in D major exhibits a wealth of melodic invention along with a tender sentimentality and a certain degree of melancholy. The “Pastorale” is elegant and quietly reserved in its Hispanic character. The “Allegro maestoso” features the cello, reminding us of Boccherini's prowess on the instrument. A slow “Grave” introduces the Spanish-themed Fandango dance which becomes ever more exuberant. As Casanova described seeing a fandango in Madrid in 1767: “Each couple, man and woman, taking no more than three steps at a time and clicking castanets to the sound of the orchestra, make a thousand gestures, take a thousand attitudes with a lasciviousness with which nothing can compare. This dance is the expression of love from beginning to end, from the sigh of desire to the ecstasy of enjoyment.” In all, this quintet presents a charming picture of 18th century Madrid, masterfully melding grace and impishness with a festive popular mood.