



MOZART: Quartet in C Major, “Dissonance”

Notes on the Program

By Noel Morris ©2020

Its opening bars cascade through a series of unorthodox crunches and dissonances, which perhaps served as a wink and a nod from one genius composer to another.

Leopold Mozart was an overbearing father. While he had lovingly raised his son Wolfgang to be a worldly and extraordinarily accomplished artist, Leopold proved incapable of stepping back. A professional composer and violinist, Leopold enjoyed riches well beyond his rank (thanks to his son's success) and intended to ride that wave for the rest of his life—until Wolfgang rebelled.

In 1781, Mozart left his father and his job in Salzburg and headed for the city. There, he married and became a central figure “in the Viennese beau monde,” according to biographer Maynard Solomon. Luxuriating in proceeds from a dizzying lineup of con-certs and commissions, Mozart lived a charmed if hectic life as a freelancer—which makes the composition of his “Haydn” Quartets exceptional. There doesn't seem to be a commission or a particular concert connected to the set which he completed in 1785.

By then, Franz Joseph Haydn was arguably the most important musician in all of Europe. Working in isolation for the Esterházy family at a remote estate in Hungary, Haydn had developed two major art forms: the symphony and the string quartet. Back in Vienna, he befriended young Mozart (some 24 years his junior); they enjoyed long evenings playing quartets together—Haydn on second violin, Mozart on viola. And so it was, Mozart extended a most extraordinary gift to his benevolent friend, presenting six string quartets with the following dedication:

To my dear friend Haydn,

A father who had resolved to send his children out into the great world took it to be his duty

to confide them to the protection and guidance of a very celebrated Man, especially when the latter by good fortune was at the same time his best Friend. Here they are then, O great Man and dearest Friend, these six children of mine. They are, it is true, the fruit of a long and laborious endeavor, yet the hope inspired in me by several Friends that it may be at least partly compensated encourages me, and I flatter myself that this offspring will serve to afford me solace one day. You, yourself, dearest friend, told me of your satisfaction with them during your last Visit to this Capital. It is this indulgence above all which urges me to commend them to you and encourages me to hope that they will not seem to you altogether unworthy of your favor. May it therefore please you to receive them kindly and to be their Father, Guide and Friend! From this moment I resign to you all my rights in them, begging you however to look in-dulgently upon the defects which the partiality of a Father's eye may have con-cealed from me, and in spite of them to continue in your generous Friendship for him who so greatly values it, in expectation of which I am, with all of my Heart, my dearest Friend, your most Sincere Friend,

W. A. Mozart

The C Major Quartet, known as the “Dissonance” Quartet, is the last of Mozart's “Haydn” Quartets, and must have come as a surprise to the people who gathered at a private residence to hear the premiere. Its opening bars cascade through a series of unorthodox crunches and dissonances, which perhaps served as a wink and a nod from one genius composer to another.

It happened that Mozart's father, Leopold, was in town and heard that first performance. Later, Leopold recalled meeting Haydn who said to him: “Before God and as an honest man I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name.”

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This is an ASO premiere.

JOSEPH HAYDN



In northwestern Hungary, near the Austrian border, there is an opulent 126-room palace beside a road called Joseph Haydn utca.

Asplendorous, gold-flecked labyrinth of Rococo architecture, this grand estate once served as the summer playground for Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, better known as “Nikolaus the Magnificent.” Nikolaus was a member of the high nobility with a taste for the extravagant—and probably never imagined that one day, his front driveway would be named after one of his servants.

Joseph Haydn was the son of a country wheelwright. At the age of eight, he became a Vienna choirboy and gradually worked his way into the musical establishment. Serving the Esterházy family for nearly three decades, he followed his prince from palace to palace, producing music according to the prince’s whims. He gained a reputation for being Europe’s most important composer—all the while wearing livery and sleeping in servants’ quarters.

“Haydn had his hands full,” according to biographer Georg Griesinger. “He had to conduct all the music, help with the rehearsals, give lessons, [serve as librarian, manage the court musicians], and even tune his own keyboard instrument.” Sometimes he found himself coaching singers and conducting two different operas in the same week. In spite of a jam-packed schedule, Haydn managed to produce reams of music—operas, concertos, chamber works, symphonies and string quartets.



Nikolaus was an avid music lover and amateur musician. Unlike the Esterházy family who came before him, he didn’t like Vienna, and favored the remote, country palace he had built for himself between 1760 and 1784. Sparing no expense, he included a concert hall, an opera house and a marionette theater while keeping an entire orchestra on staff to entertain a constant stream of dignitaries, including the Empress Maria Theresia in 1773.

Today, the Esterházy Palace (or Esterháza) stands, in some ways, as a hulking symbol of unsustainable excess, yet its role in the development of music is irrefutable.

“I was cut off from the world,” said Haydn. “There was no one to confuse or torment me, and I was forced to become original.”

And that, he did. Haydn is often referred to as the father of both the string quartet and the symphony.

Well into the 1700s, the symphony had been a light entertainment lasting maybe ten or twelve minutes; at times it functioned as a way to summon people to their seats. Haydn developed the form into a grand musical statement that could exceed half an hour.

“My prince was always satisfied with my works,” he told Griesinger. “Not only did I have the encouragement of constant approval, but as conductor of an orchestra, I could make experiments, observe what produced an effect and what weakened it, and was thus in a position to improve, alter, make additions or omissions, and be as bold as I pleased.”

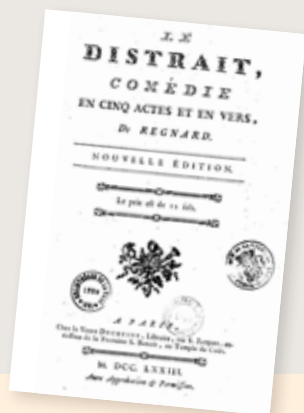
HAYDN: Symphony No. 60, “Il distratto”

In 1774, a popular play found its way to Esterházy Palace, the French farce *Le distrait* by Jean-François Regnard. In it, the absentminded Leandre gets himself into increasingly silly predicaments (along the lines of Inspector Clouseau). Apparently the play tickled Haydn’s funny bone; he sat down and produced a suite of incidental music, including an overture, some intermission music, and a finale. This music was then refashioned into the Symphony No. 60. The play’s name, “The Distracted,” is usually listed in Italian—*Il distratto*.

After the premiere, the *Pressburg Zeitung* reported:

The finale, upon incessant applause of the audience, had to be repeated. In this number . . . the absent-minded gentleman on his wedding day forgets that he is the bridegroom . . . The musicians start the piece with great pomp, and it takes them some time to remember that their instruments are not tuned.

In fact, the Symphony No. 60 is packed with this sort of musical humor—all to represent the bumbling Leandre.



HAYDN: Symphony No. 60, “Il distratto”

First ASO Performance: March 5, 1974 | John Nelson, conductor

Most Recent Performance: July 22, 1995 | Yoel Levi, conductor

Instrumentation: 2 oboes, 1 bassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

HAYDN: Cello Concerto No. 2

Haydn wrote the Cello Concerto No. 2 for a performance at Esterháza featuring his principal cellist Anton Kraft in 1783. A gifted musician, Kraft studied composition under Haydn. At some point in the 19th century, people began to wonder if the D major Concerto was

actually the work of Kraft, himself. These notions were put to rest when, in the 1950s, the autograph manuscript surfaced at the Austrian National Library in Vienna, and scholars were able to authenticate Haydn’s handwriting.



Anton Kraft

HAYDN: Cello Concerto No. 2

First ASO Performance: May 4, 1947 | Henry Sopkin, conductor | George Sopkin, soloist

Most Recent Performance: May 17-19, 1990 | Yoel Levi, conductor | Ralph Kirshbaum, soloist

Instrumentation: 2 oboes, 2 horns, strings