

## Album Notes by Mario Lord for Analekta Records

History has handed down to us the image of “Papa Haydn” as a man who was benevolent, affable, good-natured and blessed with a wonderful sense of humour. To remember him only for this image, however, is to forget that he was also audacious, energetic and proud, a realist with a pragmatic spirit and an astute businessman. It is also to forget that his genius was acclaimed throughout Europe, and that no one would have contested his status as the “father of modern music.”

The string quartet was developed as of about 1760. A new musical genre, its origin can be traced to diverse sources in Italy, France, Austria and Bohemia. Contrary to the symphony, which is derived from the operatic overture, the string quartet is not the result of the evolution of one precise early music genre. Rather, it developed little by little as the fruit of a variety of individual experiments. In this respect, those of Joseph Haydn were the most decisive, and he can be considered as the true creator of the genre. His ten F#m Quartets (ca. 1757-1760) are five-movement suites, similar to the divertimenti for string quartets.

The 18 quartets Opus 7, 17 and 20 (1769-1772), however, each have four movements, including a minuet. They are also more refined, more expressive, and more serious (several of the opus 20 quartets end with a fugue) than their predecessors. When Haydn published the six Opus 33 quartets in 1781, he declared: “They are altogether of a new and particular style, since I haven’t written any for 10 years.” These works had a great impact, influencing many composers, including Mozart. They accorded new importance to thematic work, while achieving a well-balanced synthesis between the “galant” style and the “savant” (scholarly) style. The string quartet was then acclaimed as an established genre.

Haydn went on to write many more, and each was an experimental field containing many hidden treasures. Haydn wrote 78 string quartets in all. In 1799, Prince Lobkowitz commissioned Haydn to write some new quartets, no doubt a series of six as was the fashion. Prince Lobkowitz, one of Haydn’s and Beethoven’s major patrons, was himself an accomplished musician. He played the violin, the cello and sang, in fact singing the bass part in *The Creation* on several occasions.

Haydn started working on the commission, but at the end of the year had only completed two of the quartets. He had been absorbed by the amount of work required by writing a major oratorio, *The Seasons*, which he completed only by 1801. In a letter dated July 1, 1800, Haydn admitted to the Leipzig publisher Breitkopf Härtel that “the difficulties encountered in composing *The Seasons* and my current weakness prevent me from working on two things at once.” . . . .

Although these quartets are from Haydn’s last creative period, they are not the work of a declining mind. Quite to the contrary, until age and ill health took their toll on his body, the composer was in full possession of his means. Even in his final works, his inspiration sparkles with a limitless imagination and exquisite sensitivity governed by clear reasoning. He built themes with incomparable command and played with their elements in combinations that were always new and unexpected. His creative spirit did not support one single wrinkle of age.

The first movement of the **Quartet in G major, Opus 77, No. 1** is an Allegro moderato characterized by the well-articulated march rhythm of its main theme, while the second theme is more lyrical, adding a feeling of greater intensity. A superb Adagio in a mono-thematic sonata form without repeats follows. Its theme, first exposed by the instruments in unison, is directly inspired by elements borrowed from the first movement. The third movement, a Menuetto marked Presto, is in fact a lively, surprisingly ardent Scherzo with a first violin part that explores the instrument's top register to dizzying heights, incorporating leaps of two octaves or more. As with the two preceding movements, the theme is first played in unison. Enlivened by accents in popular style, the writing includes several canonic sequences.