

QUARTETTO I

Allegro assai



TOCCATA
CLASSICS

Anton REICHA

Complete String Quartets Volume Two

Op. 48, No. 3, in E flat major
Op. 49, No. 1, in C minor



Kreutzer Quartet

FIRST RECORDINGS

ANTON REICHA'S VIENNA STRING QUARTETS: VOLUME TWO

by Ron Drummond

This is the second of four CDs devoted to the eight string quartets that Anton Reicha (1770–1836) composed in Vienna, themselves part of a larger project to record all of Reicha's surviving string quartets. In undertaking these recordings – world premieres, all – the Kreutzer Quartet is filling in a major gap in the history of the quartet as a form. At the time of their composition in 1802–5 the Vienna quartets were startlingly original, and their contributions to the form remain as instructive as they are idiosyncratic. The extent of their influence on Beethoven and Schubert is only starting to become clear, but early signs indicate it was not inconsiderable.

A Creative Engagement

Neither the friendship nor the creative rivalry between Reicha and Beethoven has received even a fraction of the scholarly attention it deserves. Even to begin to dig beneath the surface of their relationship – begun in the orchestra at Bonn when both were in their mid-teens and carried on intermittently for the rest of their lives – is to discover a rich intellectual and aesthetic engagement all the more astonishing for having gone unexamined for so long.

Reicha's seven years in Vienna, from late 1801 to late 1808 – the heart of Beethoven's 'heroic' decade – were a crucial period in his own development. As Reicha later recalled,

The number of works I finished in Vienna is astonishing. Once started, my verve and imagination were indefatigable. Ideas came to me so rapidly it was often difficult to set them down without losing some of them. [...] I always had a great penchant for doing the unusual in composition. When writing in an original vein, my creative faculties and spirit seemed keener than when following the precepts of my predecessors.¹

¹ *Notes sur Antoine Reicha*, 1824, transl. Gordon Hallman, in Millard Myron Laing, *Anton Reicha's Quintets for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Horn and Bassoon*, diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1952.

On the first close examination they have enjoyed in over a century, Reicha's Vienna quartets are proving to be simultaneously amongst his most inspired and most experimental works. Though rooted in a thorough understanding of the innovations of Haydn and Mozart, these quartets afford glimpses into the musical future – as if, listening at the dawn of the nineteenth century, Reicha in his string quartets overheard late Beethoven and late Schubert, overheard Schumann and Brahms and Dvořák, overheard Bartók and modern jazz.

For years Beethoven and Reicha had a weekly standing date to meet at a local pub for dinner. Beethoven particularly praised Reicha's cantata *Lenore*; one can hear what he learned from it in the storm of the *Pastoral*. The influence of Reicha's *Thirty-six Fugues for Pianoforte Composed according to a New System*, Op. 36, on Beethoven's *Eroica*² is patent. It may be that their fiercest engagement as friends and fellow journeymen was in the string quartet. Yet it would be a mistake to characterise a very real (if mostly friendly) creative rivalry as being essentially competitive. It wasn't. The innovations of one man tended to inspire or help the other to the deeper and richer exploration of the territory he was already surveying on his own. Beethoven and Reicha, innovators *par excellence*, tended to push away from each other in their explorations, and it was perhaps inevitable that they would eventually lose sight of each other completely. Indeed, from the Classical era, you will not find two composers whose compositional styles and career paths diverge more widely.

One interesting point of divergence lay in their approach to musical experimentation. Beethoven's failed experiments rarely saw the light of day, tending instead to fall by the compositional wayside as he endlessly polished and refined his ideas. By contrast, Reicha wasn't afraid to have his experiments fail, or to make the failures available to others: for him, part of the value of experimentation was, having established a set of experimental procedures, to follow them to their logical conclusion, regardless of the result; only then could one learn from the full range of those results.

Reicha's first formal set of six string quartets, published in two groups of three as Opp. 48 and 49 by Breitkopf und Härtel in 1804–5, constitutes a subtle and intricate response to Beethoven's Op. 18. Three of the four quartets that share key-signatures with the Beethoven occur in the same positions in their respective sets: in both sets, No. 2 is in G major, No. 4 is in C minor and No. 6 is in B flat. This fact would be of little importance if the music itself failed to bear out the closeness of Reicha's engagement with the Op. 18 quartets, but the engagement is not one of close imitation or resemblance – Reicha had no interest in besting Beethoven at Beethoven's chosen procedures. His achievement is precisely that he develops procedures that are uniquely his own, as intricately and rigorously worked out as Beethoven's, and which represent comparably significant departures from the great quartet models of Haydn and Mozart.

² John A. Rice, 'Anton Reicha, Beethoven, and the *Sinfonia Eroica*', paper delivered at The American Musicological Society meeting in Philadelphia, 28 October 1984; also email of 1 April 2013. Peter Sheppard Skærved, in an email received the same day, confirms that his own 'gut feeling is that the two shared a lot of material – that much of what they wrote burst from the conversations they shared. [...] It's impossible to play Op 48 No 1 [completed the year before Beethoven's Third] without having the *Eroica* conversation'.

Reicha delighted in creating thematic puzzles. In his use of sudden, unprepared modulations into remote key-areas, he expanded on the work of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. By the careful deployment of rhythmic, harmonic, melodic and textural juxtapositions, he is able to imply musical effects not explicitly contained in the music; he evokes what is absent from the music by what is present. In the Classical era, only Beethoven in his final string quartets, written twenty years later, would realise the full potential of such techniques. Yet it appears that Beethoven did not wait twenty years to take up the challenge. There is a very real sense in which the three quartets of Op. 59 (written in 1806) are a response to Reicha's Vienna quartets.

A Journey to the Centre of European Music

He was born Antonín Rejcha in Prague on 26 February 1770. His father died ten months later. Raised by a mother and stepfather who were unable to provide for his education, he ran away from home at age ten, first to his grandfather in Klatovy and then, at twelve, at his grandfather's urging, to Wallerstein in Swabia, where he was taken in by his uncle, Josef Reicha, a composer and principal cellist in the celebrated orchestra of the Count, Kraft Ernst Oettingen-Wallerstein. Germanicising his name to Anton Reicha, the boy immersed himself in the study of flute, violin and piano.

In 1785 Josef Reicha was appointed *Kapellmeister* to the court of Maximilian Franz (brother of Joseph II) at Bonn. Young Anton joined the orchestra there, playing flute and befriending another youngster, a fifteen-year-old violinist named Ludwig van Beethoven. Anton took music-lessons from Ludwig's teacher, Christian Gottlob Neefe (who introduced him to Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*), and on his own initiative he began composing. Along with Beethoven, he enrolled at the University of Bonn and there pursued his studies in philosophy, mathematics and logic with a passion that would remain lifelong. In his memoirs he wrote that he and Beethoven 'were inseparable companions'³ during the Bonn years.

Reicha's uncle insisted that he flee the French invasion of Bonn in 1794. Settling in Hamburg, the 24-year-old Anton taught music for a living and continued his academic studies. He gave up performing, and began a lifelong devotion to the philosophical and theoretical explication of music and music pedagogy, backed up with ceaseless compositional experimentation. By late 1797 he had composed at least fifteen string quartets.

In 1799 Reicha moved to Paris with two completed operas in hand, seeking success in a highly competitive field – something that would always elude him. But two new symphonies were well received, and he made numerous important friends, among them Cherubini and Méhul. Still, his repeated failure to negotiate the politics surrounding French opera and secure a commission soured him on the process. These experiences led him to develop, as he later wrote, 'a peculiar aversion to taking the steps necessary to have my works performed. I considered this a waste of time, and preferred to remain at work in my study'.⁴ It also led him to quit Paris for

³ *Notes sur Antoine Reicha, op. cit.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Vienna late in 1801, where he renewed his friendship with Beethoven and became a devoted friend to the aged Joseph Haydn.

From a compositional standpoint Reicha's seven years in Vienna were quite probably the most important years of his life. The fifty-odd works written during this time are without question his most stylistically diverse and radically experimental. They include the 36 Fugues, Op. 36, written 'according to a new method' that left its traces in Beethoven's *Eroica* and late fugues; *L'art de varier*, Op. 57, an encyclopaedic set of piano variations; ten string quartets; ten string quintets; and numerous other chamber works, symphonies and choral works, including a Requiem.

In late 1808 Reicha settled permanently in Paris where, as in Vienna, he supported himself teaching privately and continued to compose. Around 1812, at the behest of the professors of flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon at the Paris Conservatoire, he began the series of 25 wind quintets that would make him famous. Over the next decade he systematically explored the possible permutations of wind-quintet sonority, and simultaneously perfected large-scale sonata-structures that could accommodate as many as five principal themes.

In 1814 he published the first of the musical treatises that would secure his posthumous fame, the *Traité de mélodie*. Together with the *Cours de composition musicale*, published in 1816, it led to his appointment as Professor of Counterpoint and Fugue at the Paris Conservatoire in 1818. These and other works were widely translated (by Carl Czerny among others) and became standard teaching tools through most of the nineteenth century. In his most controversial work, the *Traité de haute composition musicale* (1824–26), he advocated the development of quarter-tone notation, proposed speaking choruses and formulated a 200-piece orchestra. The final volume of this work, containing Reicha's speculations on the future of music, was published in the month that Berlioz signed up for Reicha's class at the Conservatoire. Berlioz, who would later base his treatment of the viola theme in *Harold en Italie* on Reicha's procedures (and whose theme clearly echoes the theme from the variation movement of Reicha's G major string quartet, Op. 48, No. 2⁵), went on to fulfil several of Reicha's predictions.

Reicha married Virginie Enaust in 1818; they had two daughters, Antoinette Virginie (born in 1819) and Mathilde Sophie (born in 1824).

Though he continued to experiment compositionally (most notably in the *Études de piano*, Op. 102), in general the music of Reicha's Paris years was relatively conservative. In this as in so much else, Reicha's path was the opposite of Beethoven's: Beethoven's experiments grew bolder with time, becoming more self-assured even as they staked out increasingly rarefied musical territory. Reicha, by contrast, was at his most radical early on. Out of the many new structural and expressive possibilities he explored during the Vienna years, he chose those few that he found to be the most promising, and spent the rest of his life refining them. (Even the wind quintets, which came later, had their antecedents in the quintets for viola and wind quartet that Reicha wrote in Vienna.) During his second period in Paris, with increasing self-assurance and, more often than not, genuine inspiration Reicha

⁵ Recorded on Toccata Classics TOCC 0022.

explored the narrower musical path he had so carefully chosen. An understanding of that choice is crucial to the understanding of his development as a composer. Further, developing a full appreciation of his compositional *œuvre* is predicated on understanding that it contains everything from the pedestrian to the profound, from the driest of pedagogical works to the juiciest of musical inventions.

He continued to write opera, and even occasionally managed to get them staged; none was successful. Nevertheless, he considered *Sapho* (1822) to be amongst his greatest achievements. The fame that the wind quintets and treatises brought him meant that Reicha was able to find publishers not only for his new music but for many older works as well. Unfortunately, the fact that both old and new works received high opus numbers has made it difficult to establish an accurate chronology for them.

Though Reicha outlived Beethoven by nine years, he ceased writing large-scale musical compositions after 1826. Instead, he concentrated on finishing his last great treatise, *L'Art du compositeur dramatique*, published in 1833. He was granted French citizenship in 1829 and received the Legion of Honour in 1831. As well as Berlioz, his many students included Arriaga, Farrenc, Franck, Gounod, Liszt and Onslow. Indeed, his influence on the Romantic generation of composers was so extensive and so varied and his posthumous fame so incommensurate that one might reasonably describe him as the secret pivot-point of the Romantic era. He died on 28 May 1836.

A Brief Overview of the String Quartets

It is not yet known precisely how many string quartets Reicha wrote. Barring fragments, isolated movements and pedagogical works, it appears that at least 37 complete quartets have survived.⁶ Twenty were published during his lifetime; between his death in 1836 and 2004, not one was reprinted. As recently as 2000, the Swedish pianist and Reicha scholar Henrik Löwenmark discovered fourteen previously unknown autograph string quartets in the Reicha collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, together with the autographs of two published quartets, Op. 48, No. 2, and Op. 95, No. 2. The German scholar Ludwig Finscher notes⁷ the existence in the Wiener Stadtbibliothek of a letter dated 1 October 1797 from Reicha to the music publisher Artaria, in which he offered for publication fifteen string quartets in five sets of three; Artaria declined them all. It may be that some or all of the fifteen quartets mentioned in Reicha's letter are to be found among the sixteen that Löwenmark discovered at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

Dating the later quartets is problematical. If, as appears likely, the autograph scores for most of the published quartets did not survive, it may never be possible to establish their order of composition with certainty, especially the twelve published during Reicha's later Paris years, which appear to be a mix of old and new works. The fourteen-year gap between the publication of the eight quartets of 1804–5 and the twelve of 1819–24 offers a sharp

⁶ My booklet essay with Volume One of this series lists the twenty published quartets in their order of publication, with, for the first eight, my parenthetical suppositions as to their dates of composition.

⁷ Ludwig Finscher, 'Reicha, Anton', in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Bärenreiter Metzler, Kassel, 1994–2008.

contrast between the startling growth in Reicha's worldly success and fame during the intervening years on the one hand and, on the other, the pronounced diminishment in both musical quality and bibliographic usefulness (for parsing compositional order) of the later sets of quartets compared with the earlier ones. Moreover, the first eight quartets were published only once, whereas the latter twelve were published two or three times and thus achieved much wider circulation.

Six String Quartets, Opp. 48 and 49

Both the sequence and substance of the works in Reicha's set of six quartets Opp. 48 and 49 simultaneously echo and counter those of Beethoven's Op. 18, placing in high relief the differences in their compositional procedures and the extent of Reicha's creative engagement with and critique of Beethoven's cycle. Playing off Beethoven's already established sequence, Reicha devised his own so that each man's set would begin with a quartet in a key not shared by any of the quartets in the other man's. Of the five quartets that follow in each set, three of those that share keys are in the same positions in both, the second, fourth, and sixth. Both sets also contain quartets patterned after quartets in Mozart's set of six dedicated to Haydn: Beethoven's homage to Mozart comes fifth in his set, taking as its point of departure the fifth quartet in Mozart's set; Reicha follows suit, paying homage in the third quartet of his set to Mozart's third. These patterns, which some might dismiss as ephemeral, find flesh and bone in the substance of the works themselves.

On 22 January 1803 Carl van Beethoven, acting as his older brother's secretary, wrote to the Leipzig music-publishers Breitkopf und Härtel, enclosing, in addition to several works by Beethoven, a number of works by Reicha for them to consider. (Such advocacy by Beethoven or his proxies on behalf of another composer's work is all but unheard of.) Among these was a set of three string quartets – to a near certainty, the three quartets of Op. 48 that Breitkopf und Härtel published the following year. This letter thus sets an outside date of 22 January 1803 for their completion. Given that Reicha arrived in Vienna in late 1801, the letter places the composition of Op. 48 much closer to the publication of Beethoven's Op. 18, the latter half of which appeared in the autumn of 1801. It makes sense that, in the heat of his renewed friendship with Beethoven, who was quickly becoming world-famous, Reicha would hunker down and get to work on a set of quartets as radical in its own way as Beethoven's.

The Breitkopf und Härtel plate-number for the three Op. 49 quartets (published in 1804 or 1805) is 257 – and therein lies a mystery, as the plate-numbers for two stand-alone quartets, Opp. 52 and 58, also published by Breitkopf und Härtel, are lower, respectively 246 and 254. It may have simply been that all three of these publications were in press at the same time (along with several other of Reicha's chamber and solo-piano works), and that Opp. 52 and 58, less demanding from a production standpoint, were completed first. Certainly there is good reason to believe, given the almost total absence of duplicate opus numbers in Reicha's published output, that Reicha assigned the numbers himself, at least in the case of the Breitkopf und Härtel publications.

That he intended Op. 49 to form a set with Op. 48 (plate 215) is clear, given the correspondences of key-signature and placement with the six works of Beethoven's Op. 18 – the two halves of which, despite the single opus number, were published separately, six months apart, in a manner not unlike Reicha's six. (Indeed, both forms of publication for sets of six, under two opus numbers and under one, also occurred in Haydn's *œuvre*.)

Of the four Reicha quartet publications from Breitkopf und Härtel, Op. 49 appears to be the most error-ridden typographically. Most of these are minor and easy to correct, but an entire bar was dropped from the first violin part of the C minor Quartet, near the end of the trio of the minuet, the contents of which fortunately could be guessed at given the nature of the material in the bars on either side of it.

String Quartet in E flat major, Op. 48, No. 3 (1802–3)

- I *Allegro moderato*
- II *Largo*
- III *Menuetto: Allegro assai*
- IV *Fuga: Allegro vivace*

In the G major quartet, Op. 48, No. 2, recorded on Vol. 1 of this series, Anton Reicha pays intimate homage to Beethoven's G major quartet. Here, with the E flat quartet that rounds out Op. 48, he goes even deeper with Mozart, with a loving and carefully crafted tribute to the E flat Quartet, K428, the third of the six quartets Mozart dedicated to Haydn. For Reicha, an homage or tribute of this kind means an engagement, a unique, fully articulated response that takes multiple aspects of the work being honoured as the myriad points of both exploration and departure for a new work of thoroughgoing originality, a creative companion intricately contoured by and to its source of inspiration. Entire theses could be written on the minute interrelationships between these two E flat major string quartets. Many listeners who bring an intimate familiarity with the Mozart to their first hearing of the Reicha may respond with some puzzlement – one which can be cleared away by developing a comparable familiarity with Reicha's quartet.

It may be that at the time of its composition, in 1802, the *Allegro moderato* [5] was the longest movement for string quartet ever written. Its Mozartian opening gestures soon shift into profoundly un-Mozartian musical evocations of the changeful horizon. Throughout the nearly eighteen-minute duration of this opening movement, Mozart's sensibility is celebrated, distorted, and transformed in ever-changing ways.

The *Largo* [6] which follows is one of Reicha's most soulful utterances, a kind of variation movement in all but name. 'It's so very strange and beautiful,' writes Henrik Löwenmark, 'and sounds like no one else but Reicha. A sort of baroque plaint coupled with a Berliozian spaciness, emptiness, stillness. When the tremolos come in and the violin figure is repeated several times as a sort of prolongation, it's just gorgeous.'⁸ (This music was published the year Berlioz was born, one of many composers that Reicha would come to influence more than is commonly

⁸ E-mail to the author, January 2006.

recognised.) One can almost hear Mozart's corresponding slow movement echoing softly in the interstices of Reicha's *Largo*, like another season in the same place. And familiarity with the Reicha will allow it to be heard in the interstices of the Mozart as well.

In the final two movements Reicha begins to draw away from Mozart. After the long opening, each succeeding movement is shorter than the previous one. The *Menuetto* and *Trio* [7] are like an inversion of the opening minutes of the quartet, in terms of contrasts – more traditionally beautiful music arising from and subsiding back into harsher, and not the reverse, as before. Reicha pulls this gesture off with considerable wit in the minuet and an at times incantatory round dance in the trio.

An autograph manuscript of the fugal finale [8] can be found in Reicha's unpublished treatise, *Die Grundsätze der practischen Harmonie* (c. 1803, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms 2512); no other autographs for this quartet are known to have survived.

String Quartet in C minor, Op. 49, No. 1 (1803–4)

- I *Allegro assai*
- II *Adagio, sempre piano e sostenuto*
- III *Menuetto: Allegro*
- IV *Finale: Allegro*

Reicha's C minor string quartet occupies the fourth position in the set of six quartets, Opp. 48 and 49, thus echoing the placement of Beethoven's C minor in Op. 18. Of the two works, Beethoven's is the more conservative, straightforwardly linear in development, composed with flair and élan, reasonably well-worked motivically, with no proper slow movement but a delightful minuet and rushing finale. Reicha's quartet casts a wider net, unfolds non-linearly, is full of sharp contrasts and unexpected transitions, of hushes and clashes, dissonances, lyrical lines sometimes intertwined with barbed. Clearly, despite occasional echoes passing between the two quartets, Reicha's concern, as the one responding, was to diverge as widely and as rigorously as possible from almost every aspect of Beethoven's quartet, and to do so with integrity; the extent of his success grows more apparent with each new hearing.

The modern premiere was given by the Vranitzky String Quartet at the Church of the Ascension in Seattle on Friday, 20 November 1998. My first half-dozen hearings of the work occurred during rehearsals for that concert. At one rehearsal in early October, I was struck by a comment made on three occasions by the first violinist, John Kim: 'This sounds like Franz Schubert!' The latter two times he played the relevant passages from the Reicha: a rhythmical figure in the first case, a melodic shape in the second. My jaw dropped: despite a number of hearings, the Schubert resemblance hadn't occurred to me, and yet with Kim's specific musical illustrations the resemblances were unmistakable. I suddenly realised that the Schubert family quartet-readings during the second decade of the nineteenth century must have included Reicha's Vienna quartets. Indeed, the rhythmical and

melodic figures John Kim quoted are so characteristic of late Schubert that I can't help but wonder whether Kim's discovery constitutes the first demonstrable antecedent to musical gestures until now thought to be Schubert's invention.

Henrik Löwenmark notes⁹ that some of the characteristic Reichen gestures to be found in the Vienna quartets include: 1) the sudden shift to a higher kinetic energy, with faster figurations and thickened textures; 2) unison figurations on two or three octaves; 3) sections of two-part writing, with (for example) the two violins in octaves on one part and the viola and cello in octaves on the second, creating a sense of open space; 4) the use of tremolos that are quasi-orchestral in style; 5) tight rhythmical unity in all four parts, or in three; and 6) a fullness in the writing for the lower registers. The second, fourth and fifth of these characteristics are clearly to be found in Schubert's quartets, especially the earlier ones.

Löwenmark points out¹⁰ that the opening *Allegro assai* [1] contains a clear reference (even if themes of this type were quite common, a heritage from Bach and his colleagues) to Mozart, to the *Fantasia* in C minor, K475, and the first movement of the C minor Piano Concerto, K491. Though Reichen's movement is not a fugue, what I hear – in the sometimes raw clash of string-textures, the harsh sonorities, the startling shifts in register and direction, the unprepared modulations, the patterns of alternation – is a prefiguring of Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*. (For entirely different reasons, the fugue capping Reichen's E flat quartet [8], in its raw propulsive energy, if not in its Haydnesque concision and brevity, could be considered its own pre-echo of Beethoven's late fugal masterwork.) Reichen's seeming prescience is perhaps not as outlandish as one might at first think. Clearly, Beethoven found more than a few of his friend's compositions to be enduringly memorable, and it is easy to imagine him recalling Reichen's E flat *Fuga* and C minor String Quartet with affection as he turned to his own labours.

There's a sense in which the bizarre architecture of digressions, the interlocking mosaic of themes, the very intensity of the *Allegro assai* are what make the following *Adagio, sempre piano e sostenuto* [2] possible, the transformative power of its yearning, layered simplicities magnified by the immense effort that preceded it. This second movement is one of the finer examples of Reichen's repeated turning to and adaptation of older musical forms, from the Renaissance and Baroque, for the matter of his musical transfigurations; certainly his active fascination with older modalities predated Beethoven's, and may have contributed to Beethoven's later taking them up, most famously in the *Heiliger Dankgesang*. The movement opens with a plaintive melody on second violin alone. The first violin joins after two bars, followed, at similar intervals, by viola and cello. The structure is shy of fugue; it's like a slow round in its simplicity. The melody is almost Baroque in its open-endedness; the mood deepens through accretion, the development of ever-shifting layers of juxtaposed sound. Harmony moves not by the dictates of logical progression, but by the incidences of staggered periodicity, like wind moving over a layer of still air close to the ground, stirring up languid eddies in a litter of autumn leaves.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The *Menuetto* and *Trio* [3] seem to have acquired something of the forward-looking intensity and complexity of the opening movement, with a layer or two of the repose of the *Adagio* mixed in; the viola has a fat, wistful line heard a few times that is so conducive to relaxation it can raise a laugh – although stormy weather is seldom far behind.

The *Allegro finale* [4] features a beautiful melodic hook that alternates between the first violin and cello; the middle parts are busy with accompanying figures. Löwenmark points out¹¹ that Reicha is very fond of this kind of gesture, which occurs with some frequency in his work – in the cello quintets, flute quartets and violin sonatas, among others. The rising-scale motif in the second theme of the first movement, which also appears in the *Adagio*, returns in the rising figure at the beginning of the finale.¹² In most of the close to a dozen performances of the C minor Quartet I've heard (by five distinct groups, including the Kreutzer and Zemlinsky Quartets), the opening melody in the first violin has been played with yearning lyricism, a singing line, and is given prominence in the mix of voices. Peter Sheppard Skærved takes a different approach, playing the melody plainly and at low volume, keeping it reined in dynamically and rhythmically, tightening and lowering its profile, so that the surrounding voices almost drown it out. Then, on the second appearance of the melody, played on the cello, it is given slightly more prominence, and over the course of the movement, on subsequent repetitions by both instruments it is allowed to expand. Another striking feature of the final movement is its rhythmic intensity. If one thinks of its forward momentum as being a wave, then the rhythmic locus, whatever tempo is decided upon, is situated past the crest, down the far slope of the wave: a rhythm always about to crash but never quite doing so, almost out of control in its head-long rush.

Ron Drummond is a writer, editor, publisher and independent scholar, focusing on historical Jesus research, Shakespeare studies, the Czech émigré composers of the Classical era, and the long-term prospects for human settlement of the solar system. His long essay 'The First Woman on Mars' recently appeared in issue No. 13 of the art-journal White Fungus, and his luxury edition of John Crowley's classic fantasy novel Little, Big (1981) is scheduled for publication shortly.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Sentence adapted from Henrik Löwenmark's e-mail to the author, 9 January 2014.

REICHA QUARTETS, IN FLESH AND BONE

by Peter Sheppard Skærved

In many years spent performing and studying the chamber music of Anton Reicha, it has become clear to me and my colleagues that his music demands a very particular approach, and, however much it might seem to relate to the performing techniques that we might use to play the music of his friends – whether Beethoven, Cherubini, Pierre Rode or Pierre Baillot – Reicha's music demands something different. The unifying feature of a rehearsal of Reicha's chamber music is the number of times that the 'musicising' will break up into exclamations of disbelief, wonder, outrage and laughter: 'He's not doing that?' and 'I don't believe it!' are the most common exclamations to punctuate a Reicha rehearsal. All the way from these relatively early quartets to the jaw-dropping *Duo Concertant* which he wrote for Pierre Baillot shortly before Baillot's death (and, indeed, his own) in 1836, it seems to me that Reicha requires that all of his players constantly 'think for themselves', in the course of performance and rehearsal. The texture of the Opp. 48 and 49 Quartets can, on the page, easily be mistaken for Haydn, in outward appearance – but Reicha's writing has a very particular quality, not unlike crime or mystery novels where, at any moment, the smallest gesture or clue can completely change the direction of the plot or outcome. In these works, it feels that any player might turn the thrust of the argument(s) Reicha is making. Put another way, the act of playing these works is not unlike a four-handed piece of what the outstanding improviser Keith Tippett described to me as 'spontaneous composition'.¹

In an article for *Contemporary Music Review*,² I noted that the early-nineteenth-century approach to quartet-playing and -composition was far from the 'one-direction' interpretation which is familiar today:

Perhaps the biggest bugbear that the string quartet has faced with the turn of the millennium has been the question of pre-planned interpretation. [...] Well into the nineteenth century, the most common method of playing string quartets was 'reading'; until the second decade of that century, the majority of works in the medium were designed to function within the ambit of sight-reading. Felix Mendelssohn wrote his quartet, Op. 12 (1827), for the Parisian quartet of Pierre Baillot, which sight-read exclusively; he enthused at the excitement and quality of the performance. Also worth bearing in mind is the fact that the first chamber work with strings by Ludwig van Beethoven to appear in 'full score' was the quintet in C major, Op. 29, in a celebratory edition in 1825. The practice, the expectation of study and preparation of a quartet using a *Partitur* would be alien to composers of the period.³

¹ Conversation with the author, Dartington, 1995.

² 'The String Quartet now ...', *Contemporary Music Review*, Volume 32, Part 4, 2013, pp. 295–304.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

Study and performance of chamber music of this period leads many of us practitioners to conclude that the feints and surprises in Beethoven, Reicha, Haydn and their colleagues are aimed at the players themselves, to experience as they 'read' in the salon environment for which the works were conceived. The shaping of such pieces, even when they are known deeply, seems to demand dynamic balance between individuals, and shared reactions to the way works 'take aim' at the players themselves. Nowhere do I feel that is more the case than in Reicha's quartets. In the *Contemporary Music Review* article I continued:

By the end of the twentieth century, the practice of high-level quartet playing had become oriented towards a highly 'thought-out', perhaps monolithic, approach to interpretation. [...] Many lifelong players in quartets find rationalising the two basic models of a 'super-controlled' performance aesthetic with democratic or egalitarian politics difficult. The first model is a hangover from the late nineteenth century, when touring virtuosi, such as Lady Wilhelmina Neruda Hallé or Henryk Wieniawski, would 'lead' three other players, often standing, in 'quartet evenings' in the various cities that they visited, leading to the moniker 'primarius' for the quartet 'leader' in Germany. This dictatorial approach informed much quartet playing during the twentieth century; some brilliant, but 'top-down', performances were the result; for instance, my teacher Norbert Brainin is an example of how exciting this practice could be. When its hegemony crumbled, particularly in Europe, a peculiarly un-dynamic playing aesthetic took its place, often to be witnessed in the very quartets who were trained by the great *primarii* as they themselves turned to teaching at the end of the century. They had a tendency to advocate a highly pre-ordained approach to scores, with careful attention paid to structure and voicing, but a less dynamic approach to the real 'life' of a work, its internal ebb and flow, disputes and concordances. Many of us find this practice as suffocating as the old 'primarius' system.⁴

I am aware that the approach my colleagues and I choose to take is not congruent with a 'civilised' approach to Classical chamber music. Goethe's famous remark to Mendelssohn's teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter, about quartet-playing makes it very clear that what interested him about 'four rational persons conversing together' is that 'one learns something from their discourse, and becomes acquainted with the peculiarities of their particular instruments';⁵ Conversation and discourse are not by definition always (in fact, hardly ever) harmonious, and as Goethe points out, there is much to be gained from the distinctions between the various instruments (and, by extension, the people playing them).

To clarify what this analogy means for playing Reicha quartets, imagine that you are walking through a landscape, perhaps with a goal in sight, with a group of friends, all of whom, including you, are single- (even bloody-)minded, confident and cantankerous, and are capable of talking over one another, while recognising that you all have something to say. The route has not been agreed, although the destination apparently has. You all

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁵ Lorraine Byrne Bodle, *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues*, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2009, p. 445.

stride off, full of energy and conversation, and at various times the group fragments, diverts and even separates, as each of you follows your own ideas, all inspired by, and perhaps even germane to, the area you are exploring. There might be some unity of purpose, and there might be elements of leadership, of hierarchy (if intermittent), and there might even be unanimity. But overall, the effect, the ‘walk’, is heterogeneous.

Now here’s the most unexpected thing: Reicha’s freedom, his discursiveness of meaning and expression, feels most present when he is at his ‘strictest’. These passages are where his fascination with the function of fugue in quartet-writing becomes so interesting. The approach required to ‘enter into the world’ of the *Allegro Vivace* fugue which ends the E flat major Quartet, Op. 48, No. 3, is one where each of us endeavours to produce the most individualised personal energy and shaping [8]. I observe that, in this fugue, where each entry is ‘real’ – that is, as close to the effect of a canon without being one – each player has to ‘fight his corner’, to insist on his own primacy. Imagine, if you will, a ‘quodlibet’ (‘everyone for himself’), with all its participants singing away in strictly controlled counterpoint but each utterly convinced that his material is unique and speaks for itself. This is not a contradiction; indeed, I would argue that the troubling power of the (very different) first movement of Beethoven’s C sharp minor Quartet, Op. 131, which is equally ‘strict’, is that each player is required rigorously to pursue a similar quest, although with very different material.

Reicha himself seems very interested in what happens when you force multiple players to act as one, as can be felt performing the ‘Imitation of the Aeolian Harp’ movement of his 12 Duos, Op. 84, for violin and cello (1804?).⁶ In this piece, the two players never play together; instead, they ‘hocket’ at high speed, making for a deliberately uncomfortable result, as they have to produce a single line from never playing ‘together’. There’s no question that this composer takes pleasure in placing impediments in our way – like the wonderful challenge for pianists of playing his fugue (Op. 36, No. 7) based on the opening theme of Mozart’s ‘Haffner’ Symphony, full of two-octave leaps. He clearly enjoys the ‘splash’.

To return to the E flat major Quartet, Op. 48, No. 3, the pugnacity of its short finale [8] is all the more marked by its contrast to the pastoral character of the opening *Allegro moderato* [5]. This movement ‘looks back’, not only to works familiar to modern listeners, such as Mozart’s ‘Hunt’ or Haydn’s ‘Rider’ Quartets, but to the less tightly wrought chamber works of Dittersdorf, Vanhal and Michael Haydn, which were familiar to Vienna-based players and listeners. This large-scale movement, five times as long as the finale, contains more than a hint of the discursive, but directed, conversation of the *salons* which was such an important influence on the evolution of a new chamber-music language in the years around the French Revolution. This movement is the epitome of my ‘quartet players going for a walk’.

A score is in many ways not unlike a script for a play. It is expected that different performances or productions of any play will enter its world from different standpoints. It is also expected that different ‘readings’ will activate its integers in variegated ways, too diverse to list. It is further expected that in any production the

⁶ Anton Reicha, *12 Duos pour violon & violoncello précédés d'un petit Traité sur l'harmonie à deux parties*, Op. 84, Gambaro, Paris, n.d.

actors will inhabit their characters in various manners, and the situations which result, so that they 'live' in some way. It is, I have always presumed, the same with a score.

In theatre, it is expected that the most powerful example of this 'inhabitation' is to be found in the 'soliloquy'. Two or three decades into the nineteenth century, this dramatic device became commonplace in quartet- and quintet-writing. But Reicha's use of soliloquy, in the *Largo* of Op. 48, No. 3 [6], is novel for the chamber music of its time, especially in continuing for a whole movement. The *mis en scène* of this particular movement breaks many of the 'rules' that would be retroactively applied to the notion of 'pure' classical chamber music in the twentieth century, as it uses gambits, such as *tremolo*, which would later be seen as suitable only for the orchestra or opera pit. It has more than a hint of 'melodrama', in the sense that would be understood at the time, and dominated the boulevard theatres of Paris by the end of Reicha's life. In this *Largo*, the first violin, the 'Hamlet' (for the sake of argument) in this scene, asks his 'question' five times, 'varying' it in the manner which had been made popular by Reicha's friend and colleague Pierre Rode, through understated layering of ornamentation and instrumental colour. There are allusions to Rode's epochal first G major *Air Varié*, Op. 10, in more than one of Reicha's early quartets. A scholar would be quick to point out that Reicha was, consciously or not, evoking the earlier improvisational practice of C. P. E. Bach, whose C minor *Fantasie*, H75, was published in a periodical in the 1750s with two over-layering versions of Hamlet's 'to be or not to be', as 'Hamlet, der über den Selbstmord raisoziert' ('Hamlet, considering suicide'), to be sung, spoken (or contemplated?) by the player. Reicha's three other players do not 'accompany', but provide 'landscape', reflecting and impinging on the musings of the 'soliloquist' with varying degrees of comfort and threat. For the final, abbreviated statement of the material, they offer a contrapuntal reaction to each motif of the soloist, resulting in a more 'quartet-like' texture, except that the first violin does nothing to indicate that he might have noticed. From his standpoint, it is his soliloquy to the end.

There is another link between the performing materials available to actors or musicians up till the mid-1800s. Performers were not handed complete texts from which to learn their parts for a play or musical work. No quartet- or quintet-player of the eighteenth or nineteenth century would expect to study the works except by playing them. They couldn't, since 'full scores' were not available until many years later. In 2013, researching the archive of the Norwegian virtuoso Ole Bull, I discovered his 'writing-out' of the opening of Mozart's C major Quartet, K465, 'Dissonance'. Bull died in 1880, and the first edition of the full score of Mozart's quartets would not appear until 1882. So, in order to study this troubling opening, he would have needed to write it out. This lack of full score, like the lack of a playscript, is another reason for my argument that the very nature of the music itself is to be found in the interactions and reactions of players negotiating their 'shared stage', both conceptual and very physical, and the conflicts, the jockeying for position, which result. Rehearsing without a full score is now recognised as offering vital entrée into the world of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music, and one which casts doubt over the earlier primacy of score-led 'interpretation'. Indeed, that word is used increasingly rarely

by today's players; the harpsichordist Julian Perkins (renowned for his work on Handel and Scarlatti cantatas) recently told me that he rejects it as interfering with the most important aspect of performing, the 'what happens when you do it'.⁷

Of course, Reicha does not use technical or musical devices that would be unfamiliar to the players of his day. There's just the sense, irresistible over years of playing his music, of an interest in increasing the strain, the human drama, which is chamber-playing. An example of this 'strain' is offered by the second subject of the first movement of the C minor Quartet, Op. 49, No. 1 [1]. With the exposition statement of this theme, in G minor, the dominant key, the 'forte' galloping material in second violin, viola and cello, threatens to overwhelm the first violin. This struggle is heard twice, as the exposition is repeated. When the material returns in the recapitulation, in the home key, the 'tonic' C minor, the 'galloping' motif is introduced hesitantly, almost apologetically, 'piano'. The first violin does not have to struggle; its primacy has been established (momentarily). This version is only heard once, as there is no 'second repeat'. The question, when this passage is played, is whether this drama is symbolic or real. Put another way, should there be an actual crisis, with a sense of technical strain, or should it just be alluded to, without, if you like, 'breaking sweat'? I find that Reicha enjoys the conflict, that the crisis (for the first violin) is real. He returns to it a number of times in the work – for instance, assailing the first violin with the slashing chords of his colleagues in the second section of the *Menuetto*, the third movement [3].

This struggle between participants, which I suggest is but one element of Classical quartet-playing, is paralleled by Reicha in the contradictions within the musical material itself. Throughout the Opp. 48 and 49 Quartets one can hear melodies and motifs which 'destabilise' themselves. The tune at the opening of the Finale of Op. 49, No. 1 [4], cannot 'decide' whether it's in 'compound' ('6/8') or 'simple' ('3/4') time. There's no clear pulse or beat in the 'accompanying' material; and the cello adds to the 'problem' with a markedly aloof 'augmented' version of the opening motif, played at the same moment, as a five-bar cadence. The tension, tentativeness even, in the material of the first violin is highlighted and heightened by the 'unhelpful' behaviour of its colleagues. The resulting anxiety-filled silence propels a unison outburst, breaking out indignantly, like a Bach or Handel oratorio 'crowd scene'.

But back to our 'play': for our 'poor players' to take on the roles allotted to them in script or score, they will have to 'do stuff'. From a formal point of view, the 'doing stuff' in a play might be read as simply a way to create the framework, the machine of themes, ideas, the 'argument' of the text. Yet, whatever the purpose of writing a play or script, what cannot be avoided is that this 'doing stuff' makes 'stuff happen', that it is impossible, and probably undesirable, to avoid the concrete ramifications of a score or text. In a crowd scene, for example, people bump into one another; when a door is slammed, it vibrates on its hinges, and moments where stillness is demanded will create silence of various qualities. All of these things are not 'notated' for in moments of heightened intimacy or drama. 'Words strain,/Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,/under the tension, slip, slide, perish,/

⁷ Conversation with the author, London, November 2013.

Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place./Will not stay still!’⁸ T. S. Eliot was not writing a play but, to a degree, he was playing with ideas arising from the experience of seeing and hearing music performed; he knew that the point of it all was what happened in the gaps.

To me Reicha seems fascinated by what actually takes place when players ‘play’. His music demands that we allow it to ‘happen’, that we don’t shy away from its impact on ourselves, whether players or listeners. It refuses to be boxed up, framed, varnished, to remain polite, in the past. Reicha, like his old friends Beethoven and the Rombergs, began his professional life as a player, part of the Bonn *Kapell*, instrument in hand. When I was young, he was talked of as something dry, a mere theorist. His music, played and lived, reveals him to be very far from being an abstract thinker: he is truly flesh and bone.

⁸ T. S. Eliot, ‘Burnt Norton’, *Four Quartets*, Faber and Faber, London, 1944, p. 17.



TOCC 0022

my week so much richer and fuller than they otherwise might have been.’

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Photo: Leif Johanson

The **Kreutzer Quartet** – Peter Sheppard Skærved and Mihailo Trandafilovski (violins), Morgan Goff (viola) and Neil Heyde (cello) – has forged an enviable reputation as one of Europe's most dynamic and innovative string quartets. They are the dedicatees of numerous works, and over many years have forged creative partnerships with composers including Sir Michael Tippett, David Matthews, Michael Finnissy, Judith Weir and Hafliði Hallgrímsson. They have a particularly strong relationship to a cross-section of leading American composers, having collaborated intensively with the great George Rochberg in the last years of his life, as well as working closely with such figures as Elliott Schwartz, and the prolific symphonist Gloria Coates. They are Artists in Residence at Goldsmiths College and at Wilton's Music Hall in London. Their work in collaboration with art galleries has garnered much attention and large audiences, working particularly closely with the National Portrait Gallery and Tate Gallery, St Ives. For Toccata Classics they have recorded two CDs (tocc 0058 and 0059) in their cycle of the complete string quartets of David Matthews; of Volume One, containing the Quartets Nos. 4, 6 and 10 and the *Adagio* for string quartet, the American critic Robert Reilly wrote that 'The Kreutzer Quartet plays this music with staggering conviction and skill.'

INSTRUMENTARIUM

Peter Sheppard Skærved, violin: Antonio Stradivari, 1698 ('Joachim'), from the collection of the Royal Academy of Music, London

Mihailo Trandafilovski, violin: Antonio Stradivari, 1699 ('Kustendyke'), from the collection of the Royal Academy of Music, London

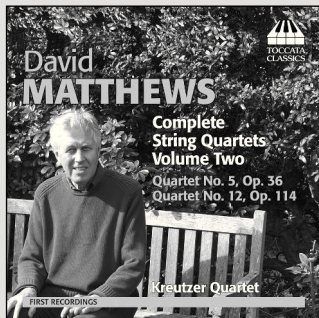
Morgan Goff, viola: Daniel Parker, 1715

Neil Heyde, cello: Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, 1840

More from the Kreutzer Quartet on Toccata Classics



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TOCC 0059

'When I first listened to the David Matthews Fourth String Quartet late at night after my return from England, I was stunned. How is it, I wondered, that music of this quality, written in 1982, is being heard by recording only now? This is an indictment of the musical establishment, as it is a complete vindication of what Toccata Classics does – and how well it does it. What we hear in Quartets Nos. 4, 6, and 10, along with the *Adagio* for String Quartet, is some of the most concentrated, penetrating writing for this medium in the past 30 years or more. It is musical thinking of the highest order and quartet writing in the great tradition of Beethoven, Bartok, Britten, and Tippett, all of whom Matthews mentions as influences. Though he does not list Janáček, I am tempted to add his name because of the condensed punch of these works and Matthews's ability to express so much in so few bars.

These works are full of exquisite moments. Some of the music is searing, much of it dances and sings, and some of it is achingly beautiful and tender. It is all brimming with life. I found the *adagio sostenuto* in Quartet No. 4 and the *Lontano* movement in the Tenth Quartet to be heart-stoppingly beautiful. The great good news is that this is Volume One in what will be a complete cycle of Matthews's eleven quartets – though a twelfth quartet is on the way. The Kreutzer Quartet plays this music with staggering conviction and skill. This release exemplifies the mission of Toccata Classics and why such a label is absolutely necessary.'

Robert Reilly, CatholiCity

'the Kreutzer Quartet gives its collective all in accounts of manifest commitment and burning conviction. The sound is a touch raw in the Fifth Quartet but with an ideal balance and perspective in the Twelfth, while the composer supplies typically insightful notes. The remainder of this series could not be more keenly awaited.'

Richard Whitehouse, *International Record Review*



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Producer: Peter Sheppard Skærved

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The Czech-born composer Anton Reicha (1770–1836) was an exact contemporary of Beethoven, and his close friend from their mid-teens. The music of each man demonstrates an awareness of what the other was doing: they showed each other their compositions-in-progress. But although Reicha was closely associated with one of the best-known names in western culture, his own music has been grievously neglected: only his woodwind quintets have achieved any currency. Of his vast cycle of almost forty string quartets just one had been recorded before – an omission this ambitious project intends to put right, thereby revealing one of the most inventive and engaging spirits in classical music.



TOCC 0040

ANTON REICHA Complete String Quartets, Volume Two

String Quartet in C minor, Op. 49, No. 1 (1803–4)

26:58

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|---|-------|
| [1] | I | <i>Allegro assai</i> | 10:36 |
| [2] | II | <i>Adagio, sempre piano e sostenuto</i> | 4:51 |
| [3] | III | <i>Menuetto (Allegro)</i> | 5:52 |
| [4] | IV | <i>Allegro</i> | 5:39 |

String Quartet in E flat major, Op. 48, No. 3 (1802–3)

31:48

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|---------------------------------|-------|
| [5] | I | <i>Allegro moderato</i> | 17:11 |
| [6] | II | <i>Largo</i> | 6:14 |
| [7] | III | <i>Menuetto (Allegro assai)</i> | 5:22 |
| [8] | IV | <i>Allegro vivace</i> | 3:01 |

Kreutzer Quartet

Peter Sheppard Skærvæd and Mihailo Trandafilovski, violins

Morgan Goff, viola

Neil Heyde, cello

TT 57:46

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