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CLASSICS
Mozart
String Quartets
Viennese Quartets K. 168–173
ENGEGÅRD QUARTET

Mozart's 'Viennese' Quartets

In this album, the Engegård Quartet presents Mozart's so-called "Viennese" quartets, composed in the summer of 1773. This set of six quartets represent a new stage in Mozart's development as a composer, following earlier quartets K. 80 "Lodi", the set of three quartets known as "Divertimenti" K. 136-138, and the six "Milanese" quartets K. 155-160.

The year 1773 was a peaceful one in the Habsburg monarchy and the nobility spent the summer at their sumptuous palaces in the countryside. Empress Maria Theresa, now reigning in cooperation with her elder son Joseph II, preferred the magnificent Schönbrunn to her residence in nearby Vienna during the hot season. Being on leave from their duties as court musicians (Wolfgang was by now concertmaster) of the prince-archbishop of Salzburg, father and son Mozart could achieve little in terms of patronage or engagements. Finding material for study and the company of colleagues who remained in town filled their days. They already knew Vienna and had seen many of its sights. Composing six string quartets, in addition to work on other pieces during these weeks, does not appear to have been a particularly burdensome task.

A characteristic of the present series is the way Mozart experiments with form. Haydn had established the four-movement quartet, which settled into a basic formal scheme: a fast sonata-form movement, followed by a soulful slow movement and a *menuetto*. Sometimes the *menuetto* would precede the slow movement. The fast finale – often a rondo – with rapid passages and playful invention, would send the audience off in good spirits. There were, of course, exceptions to this scheme in Haydn's works, but Wolfgang continues to explore further possibilities, surprising us in several of the six quartets.

Quartet in F major, K. 168

The first of these quartets already introduces the new and more sophisticated style of the young composer. Inspired by Joseph Haydn, 24 years his senior, and by sacred music, Mozart writes two thoroughly contrapuntal movements.

The first theme of the opening *Allegro* evades the normal eight-bar scheme. After a *forte* statement of three bars, the music seems to hold its breath before continuing in *piano*. Mozart often surprises us by weaving themes from seemingly disparate motives. The end of the exposition brings a motive in hushed unison from the two violins. As usual, the exposition is repeated. The middle part, or development section, unfolds the potential of the main theme to a degree that is rare for the 17-year-old, before recapitulating the exposition. The development and recapitulation may also be repeated, though this is seldom done nowadays.

The F minor *Andante* transports us to one of Vienna's dimly lit Gothic churches. A four-part canon *con sordino,* played as if in a hidden gallery, makes us forget the tumultuous outside world. Plaintive chromaticism suggests a sad occasion. The head motive may be a gesture of reverence to Joseph Haydn, quoting his fugue from Op. 20 No. 5. The contrast with the following uncomplicated F major *Menuetto*, with its B major *Trio*, is striking and may come as a relief.

The final *Allegro* is another result of Wolfgang's contrapuntal studies. A full-blown fugue with a four-bar theme, it demonstrates that a learned manner can also be highly humorous. There are no dynamic markings, as in some other movements in these quartets, which leaves much to the musicians. Initially well behaved, each voice waits its turn to repeat the theme, starting from above with the first violin. Later, they are less patient, interrupting after just two bars (*stretto*), and even turning the theme on its head (*inversion*). A unison, happy ending invites applause.

Quartet in A major, K. 169

The second of these works is in many ways a reminiscence of earlier quartets and resembles a divertimento. Fast repeated notes in the middle parts propel the melody of the first violin forward and counterpoint is not as central as in its predecessor. The *Andante* is rather fast-flowing, so there is no truly slow movement.

The opening *Allegro molto* in ¾ contains little more than a hint of a second theme, and the playful imitations of the short middle section provide only limited contrast. This movement is relatively brief, however, and the longer D major *Andante* is clearly the centrepiece of the work. In two very similar sections divided by only eight bars, it is rich in thematic material and dramatic modulations. Semiquaver triplets convey an underlying sense of nervous energy.

The *Menuetto* is rhythmically interesting, with a touch of *hemiolae* (2/4 bars within a ¾ framework). Its *Trio* section unexpectedly takes us to the unusual key of B major. It is a duo from beginning to end, with the violins playing in octaves, as do the viola and cello.

The final *Rondeau* (*Allegro*), with its main theme in octave leaps, brings two contrasting sections

– the second in A minor – and a short episode between repetitions of the rondo theme. Short and easy-going, it is an apt conclusion.

Quartet in C major, K. 170
It is quite uncommon to open a string quartet with a variation movement. Here, the tempo is *andante* and the movement could easily serve as a slow movement. The theme, with its rising major triad, is easy to remember, and the four variations are rather simplistic and without repeats. As was often the case during this period, the original theme is repeated at the end.

The short *Menuetto* takes second place, with its *Trio* in C minor. After these uncomplicated movements, the *Un poco adagio* stands out as the main achievement of K. 170. Reminiscent of an operatic aria, the accompanying voices hesitantly avoid the first beat of the bar. The first violin takes the role of the heroic soprano.

The *Rondo*, with three couplet sections – one of them in the minor – and a coda, brings the expected humorous release.

Quartet in E flat major, K. 171
Listening while reading the score may help avoid confusion, and in the opening *Adagio/Allegro assai* it is indeed useful. The music is not written to be enjoyed in this manner, though. The opening gesture is severe, making you expect a slow and schoolmasterly movement. Soon adopting a more *dolce* character, it rather abruptly comes to a halt on the dominant, followed by a *fermata*. Was this just a slow introduction? The ensuing slow *fugato*, based on the inverted three-note motif from the beginning, does not reveal its function as the start of an *Allegro assai* until the ninth bar. Thereafter, all solemnity is forgotten and the expected pace of a first movement is finally reached. Mozart lets the opening return at the end, however, thereby creating a very rare symmetrical form.

As in K. 170, the *Menuetto* now follows. Its asymmetrical periods would unsettle a dancer used to eight-bar phrases. The *Trio* is a canon between the first violin and the viola, one of many examples of important melodic material appearing in the middle voices of this quartet.

The C minor *Andante con sordino* evokes Baroque associations. Johann Sebastian Bach, or one of his elder sons, seems to pass by in the background. More than a third of the movement is in only two parts, with the cello accompanying the first violin or the viola joining the second.

The finale, again an *Allegro assai*, holds no further enigmas. It is structured more as a sonata form than the usual rondo. In sweeping ⅜, it could be a *Kehraus* – a quick, final dance to clear the hall.

Quartet in B minor, K. 172
A beautiful quartet without any formal experiments, this work places the slow movement in second place. The opening *Allegro spiritoso* opens with a statement consisting of three hefty chords, soon followed by unison quavers. It then develops in a manner similar to earlier quartet *Allegros*, with the bass line maintaining the tempo and the other voices sharing melodic and virtuosic material. The middle section introduces a new theme rather than developing earlier material further.

The *Adagio* in E flat major is of beguiling beauty. The first violin soars above a gently rocking accompaniment – any analysis seems an offence.

In the *Menuetto*, the viola takes the lead in a canon before being joined by the first violin. Its *Trio* was originally marked *pizzicato*, and the Engegårds wisely choose to preserve this distinctive sound quality.

An uncomplicated sonata-form *Allegro assai* brings the quartet to a joyful conclusion. Fast triplets provide a touch of virtuosity, and the final three chords recall the opening of the first movement.

Quartet in D minor, K. 173
K. 173 is the only work in this series written in a minor key. D minor would also be the key of one of his greatest mature quartets ten years later. The opening motif is familiar from the initial gestures of K. 136 and especially K. 169, but how different is the mood here? It feels like the beginning of a slow and sombre movement. The designation *Allegro moderato* seems to have been added by Father Leopold, as in other movements in these quartets. The second theme has an insistent, repetitive character that colours much of the middle section and the coda.

The gentle *Andantino grazioso* in D major is an easy-going rondo, quite unusual for a slow movement. The *Menuetto* returns to the minor and is more elaborate than most in Mozart's early quartets, while its F major *Trio* rejoices in fast triplets.

This quartet series ends with a plaintive fugue. The theme is introduced by the cello, followed by each voice in turn ascending to the first violin. In the second half, the theme entries chase one another ever more rapidly before being called to order by a solemn ecclesiastical coda, ending on a *tierce de Picardie* D major chord. A worthy finale! For almost ten years, Mozart would write no more quartets.

Morten Carlsen
Norwegian Academy of Music
Edited by Philip Dutton – Composer

Engegård Quartet

Arvid Engegård &
Laura Custodio Sabas – Violins
Juliet Jopling – Viola
Jan Clemens Carlsen – Cello

Formed under the midnight sun in Lofoten in 2005, the Engegård Quartet has rapidly become one of Norway's most sought-after ensembles. Their bold, fresh interpretations of the classical repertoire combined with a deep attachment to their Scandinavian roots has attracted international acclaim and inspired some innovative partnerships and programming.

The quartet's debut CD was praised as 'breathtaking' in The Strad, while their second release won Pizzicato magazine's 'Supersonic Award'. Their CD of works by Grieg, Sibelius, and Olav Anton Thommessen was praised by Tully Potter in Music Web International as 'what Grieg lovers have been waiting for'.

The Engegård Quartet has a busy concert schedule throughout Scandinavia and further afield. They have performed in some of Europe's finest venues including the Mozarteum in Salzburg and Prague's Rudolfinum, as well as several tours to South America. The Engegård Quartet have been delighted to appear in international festivals such as Delft Chamber Music Festival, SoNoRo Festival in Bucharest, and Heidelberg's Streichquartettfest.

Deeply committed to today's composers and to keeping the string quartet repertoire alive and developing, the Engegård Quartet has commissioned several works throughout their career. They have focused first and foremost on Norwegian composers including Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje, Olav Anton Thommessen, Therese Birkelund Ulvo and Cecilie Ore. International commissions have included Olli Mustonen, Philip Dutton and Julian Anderson.

The Engegård Quartet's acclaimed collaborations with the jazz violinist Ola Kvernberg and hardanger fiddler Nils Økland and have led to commissions including the Telemark Quintet from Nils Anders Mortensen, and Hypnagogia and The Flight from Ola Kvernberg. Several of these commissions have been recorded by the Engegård Quartet.

On the classical front, the Engegård Quartet has had the honour to work with (among others) Sir András Schiff, Leif Ove Andsnes, Olli Mustonen, Paul Lewis, Dènes Várion, Nobuko Imai, Kim Kashkashian and Emma Johnson MBE.

The Engegård Quartet's concert and recording programs reflect their passion for the core quartet repertoire and their desire to discover and share new musical worlds. They have recorded the complete string quartets by Robert Schumann, Catharinus Elling and Johan Kvandal, and are recording the complete string quartets by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. You will find the Engegård Quartet's recordings on 2L, BIS, Simax and LAWO Classics.

From psalms to polkas, Norway's folk music tradition has been part of the Engegård Quartet's repertoire from the start. They have recently released several folk music videos, many in their own arrangements for string quartet.

Members of the quartet are deeply involved in bringing superb chamber music to Norway – Arvid Engegård as Co-Founder and Artistic Director of the Lofoten International Chamber Music Festival, and Juliet Jopling as Founder and Co-Artistic Director of Oslo Quartet Series. The Engegård Quartet's own '1-2-3 Festival' focuses on one composer over a long weekend and has proved immensely popular ever since its inaugural year of 2016. Every November, in "Nynorskens hus", right in the center of Oslo, this classical mini festival provides a feast of chamber music, song, piano works, and lectures. Read more on 123festival.no.

Arvid Engegård plays a Jean Baptiste Vuillaume violin (1858) on loan from Dextra Musica. Laura Custodio Sabas plays a Jean Baptiste Vuillaume violin (1857). Juliet Jopling plays a Pietro Giovanni Mantegazza from Milano (1790) on loan from Dextra Musica and Jan Clemens Carlsen plays a Giacomo Zanoli cello (1737) on loan from Dextra Musica.

The Engegård Quartet is supported by the Norwegian Arts Council.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1765–91)

String Quartet No. 8 in F major, K. 168
1___Allegro__03:54
2___Andante__03:45
3___Menuetto and Trio__02:05
4___Allegro - 01:44

String Quartet No. 9 in A major, K. 169
5___Molto allegro__03:14
6___Andante__04:54
7___Menuetto and Trio__02:14
8___Rondeau. Allegro__01:34

String Quartet No. 10 in C major, K. 170
9___Andante__04:12
10__Menuetto and Trio__02:26
11__Un poco adagio__03:33
12__Rondo Allegro__02:27

String Quartet No. 11 in E-flat major, K. 171
13__Adagio – Allegro assai – Adagio__04:33
14__Menuetto and Trio__02:14
15__Andante__02:35
16__Allegro assai__02:25

String Quartet No. 12 in B-flat major, K. 172
17__Allegro spiritoso__03:41
18__Adagio__03:02
19__Menuetto and Trio__02:48
20__Allegro assai__03:17

String Quartet No. 13 in D minor, K. 173
21__Allegro moderato__04:40
22__Andantino grazioso__02:32
23__Menuetto__03:13
24__Allegro moderato__02:36

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