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PETER HÄNSEL, *THREE STRING QUARTETS, OPUS 5*

ED. MARK ALAN LEACH

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The dice might seem to be well loaded against composer Peter Hänsel (1770–1831) with this edition of his Op. 5 string quartets, written in 1797 and published two years later in 1799 by André in Offenbach. Already by this time the genre of the string quartet was acquiring much of the exalted status that it has continued to enjoy more or less to the present day. This means that a particularly high level of critical scrutiny was accorded to any productions in the genre and that – at least initially – Haydn formed the obvious immediate point of comparison. Within a generation the trio of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven would form a closed shop in this respect, and in terms of critical reception and performance the focus has barely widened since. Further, Hänsel was in fact a pupil of Haydn, to whom he dedicated this Op. 5 set ('en temoignage de sa vive reconnaissance, par son devoué Serviteur et Elêve'), increasing the likelihood of pointed comparisons with Haydn's output. The fact that Hänsel was born in the same year as Beethoven raises the stakes even higher. In addition, and still quite unusually for the time, he was a specialist: he composed little but string chamber music, and this output is dominated by his fifty-eight string quartets.

All these factors suggest that the composer's voice might struggle to emerge from any current review of his Op. 5. In his Introduction to this edition, Mark Alan Leach notes the importance of French and Polish traits in Hänsel's style. The latter seem to emerge from the fact that he received his general and musical education from an uncle in Warsaw, and that he was later employed for over twenty-five years as Kapellmeister to Princess Isabella Lubomirsky, whose residences were in Vienna and Łańcut in Poland. Nevertheless, Leach believes that such elements become apparent only in works that came after Op. 5, thus leaving us with the same difficulty. He does suggest, though, that Hänsel was already 'developing a personal vision of Haydn's unpredictability' by this time (viii), and cites a hair-raising example of tonal adventure in the Quartet Op. 3 No. 3. The first movement begins in B flat major and so by any common understanding of the time the work must be defined as being 'in' that key, yet by its end it has shifted to G major via a recapitulation of its second-subject material in the key of D. The finale begins in G minor (the relative of B flat), yet it too finishes in G major, the whole multi-movement work thus forming a radical example of progressive tonality. The current set also features many remote third relations – the D major Adagio of Op. 5 No. 1, for example, begins its reprise in F major – yet I don't believe this is any sort of defining feature of the composer's style. Rather, such 'dramatic' moves were becoming expected by this time; Haydn's later works offer just the most familiar examples of the practice.

It is really in other kinds of harmonic behaviour that Hänsel's individual stamp is most apparent. Above all this can be found in his strong predilection for extended pedal points and the sort of invention that occurs around them. Some of these involve local tonics, but most characteristic is a standing on the dominant, allowing the music to linger, to luxuriate in the sensation of waiting. The function of prolongation is so clearly signalled that a listener has more perceptual room in which to attend to the details that support it. The composer certainly seems to be relying on this in the exquisite passage heard at bars 20–28 of the Minuet of Quartet No. 1, as the upper three players create a maze of criss-crossing stepwise lines above a dominant pedal in the cello. We seem to be invited to sink into the static underlying harmony. At bars 20–26 of the finale of Quartet No. 2 the technique is the common one of progressive fragmentation of a motive, over a dominant pedal, that will lead us to the return of a rondo theme, yet this example has none of the teasing flavour one tends to hear in Haydn's similarly structured retransitions. Rather, it seems to invite us to delight in pure propulsion, as if the music, while continuing to move, is being held in a kind of loop. The repetition of phrase units is less dynamic than meditative.

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What is foregrounded in such cases is harmony's ability to arrest as well as to create a sense of forward motion. In this respect Hänsel shares a preoccupation with Schubert, who was born around the time that Op. 5 was completed. A feature that helps to bring these lulling pedal points into existence is the nearly exclusive use of quadratic phrase rhythms through the whole opus. Binary constructions dominate, and this even extends on a larger scale to a preference for very literal recapitulation sections. Very few phrases in these quartets are not of four- or eight-bar duration, but in this respect Hänsel is quite typical: contrary to popular belief, phrase rhythms were becoming not less, but more four-square around this time. William Rothstein has dubbed this the 'Great Nineteenth-Century Rhythm Problem': 'the danger, endemic in 19th-century music, of too unrelievedly duple a hypermetrical pattern . . . of submitting too complacently to "the tyranny of the four-measure phrase"' (*Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1989), 184–185). While turns of phrase in Hänsel's Op. 5 certainly remind us of his teacher, Haydn's nervous and often angular syntactical style was not part of the inheritance. Yet, as suggested above, it is the adoption of a more relaxed approach to phrase rhythm that seems to allow the magical pedal points to unfold. The slow movements of Quartets Nos 1 and 2 both conclude with fade-outs over tonic pedals that to our ears might well sound Schubertian. The final section of the Andante of No. 2 conveys a sense of stillness through the comparatively rapid ostinato movement of the cello counterpointed by a reduction of the upper parts to simple reiterated melodic fragments, the symmetry of whose arrangement is essential to the affect, one of nostalgia.

On the other hand, Hänsel clearly follows Haydn's lead in what one might call discursive logic, with movements closely argued on the basis of a limited amount of motivic material. In fact, the limitation of the discourse to a few 'subjects' tends to be particularly conspicuous in string quartets around this time, part of the generic code. While we normally associate this quality primarily with outer movements, it is more widely practised here. The Adagio of No. 1 is haunted by its recurring main figure, a plain arpeggio with a turn. This helps promote a manner of noble simplicity that was increasingly favoured for slow movements as the lighter, more flirtatious types (often marked Andante) lost ground. This forms part of a tendency to emphasize other more or less elevated modes of utterance. In Op. 5 these include frank evocations of baroque language, especially in the use of descending linear intervallic patterns (see the finale of No. 3, bars 104–108), often marked by chains of suspensions (as in the Andante of No. 2, bars 65–68).

Another typical device is the use of chorale texture, where all parts play in even note values. Significant in this connection is a passage cited by Leach from the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* of 1810 on the nature of 'true quartet writing', in which the term *Chorgesang* is invoked to suggest an ideal of equal participation by all players in the texture, so that they form an 'indivisible whole' (xiii). By definition chorale-style writing gives all voices a singable melodic line at the same time. That this textural type tends to be associated with an elevated style seems to be proved by the way in which chorale writing often supports what I have termed 'harmonic mystification' (see *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, ed. Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 188). This is most dramatically illustrated by the opening movement of Quartet No. 3, in which remote harmonic turns are made even more striking by the typical plain crotchet rhythms of chorale style: the more differentiated varied rhythms of surrounding material melt away as 'pure harmony' seems to take over.

On the other hand, such embodiments of a high quartet style are constantly being countered by lower, rustic elements. The trio sections of the first two quartets are picturesquely pastoral, while the finales of the same two works are broadly written contredanses. A very striking facet of Op. 5 as a whole is the generous use of octave doublings, primarily between the two violin parts, and, while these are mostly found in the more popular-sounding materials, this is by no means always the case. This feature was famously associated with Haydn, since his early quartets were highly controversial just on this account. It is hard to forget the suggestion of a Hamburg critic in 1766 that Haydn's use of the feature in minuets brought to mind the image of 'hearing beggars, father and son, singing in octaves' (cited in Floyd and Margaret Grave, *The String Quartets of Joseph Haydn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 146). It may be that by 1797 Hänsel was simply using the feature in a less loaded way, the contrast of low with high forming part of a widely shared pluralistic and 'tolerant' musical style. But it is also possible that the extensive use of octave doublings in Op. 5 forms a

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sort of tribute to Haydn, acknowledging his formative role in the establishment of the genre by recalling a practice that helped secure his fame. (Not that Haydn had entirely abandoned the practice, as his contemporaneous 'Witches' Minuet' from Op. 76 No. 2 would show.) Or it might simply be an in-joke between teacher and pupil.

Rather more concrete acknowledgments of reputable sources can be found in other aspects of Op. 5. While claims of influence have certainly been overplayed in discussions of the Viennese instrumental repertory of this time, a culture of emulation seems quickly to have become part of the generic contract for the string quartet. This may involve the modelling of whole movements on earlier ones or specific evocations of thematic material. It is in fact Mozart whose works are more obviously referred to, nowhere more clearly than in the first movement of No. 3 in D major: this seems to combine traits from the opening materials of Mozart's Quartet K499 and Quintet K593, both likewise in D. (The block-like construction, however, whereby the consequent phrase simply transposes the antecedent, seems to be a Hänsel speciality; he does the same not just at the start of Quartet No. 1 but at the start of his slightly earlier Quartet Op. 4 No. 2.) The clearest reference to Haydn comes with the Trio in No. 3, which strongly recalls the Trio from Op. 76 No. 3, though Hänsel's writing turns out to be fuller texturally and takes on an archaic tinge. This is most obvious in bar 100, when the progression of a Neapolitan-sixth chord directly to a root-position dominant creates the interval of a diminished third in the top part, A♭ to F♯; this was a mannerism from a hundred years earlier. Since Haydn's Op. 76, like Hänsel's Op. 5, was written in 1797 but not published until 1799, we would have to assume that the two personally compared notes. Even if we make the traditional assumption that it must have been Hänsel who borrowed from Haydn rather than vice versa, this should not obscure the individuality of the younger man's approach. This subdued, archaic, hypnotic trio section plays a particular role with respect to a surrounding Allegretto that is in the best up-to-date scherzo style, hyperactive and unpredictable. Indeed, it is perhaps in the three dance movements of Op. 5 that Hänsel's qualities are most readily appreciated; all have an epigrammatic flavour, owing much to the fleet handling of rhythm and texture.

Editing Op. 5 has provided its share of headaches for Mark Alan Leach, so much so that he oddly states that the task has been 'an exercise in interpretation' (95); it is hard to see how it could ever be anything else. Still, one can understand the frustrations, and many of the greatest of these involve dynamics. There can hardly be a single case in Op. 5, for instance, of a crescendo marking that is aligned at the same point of the four individual parts. In the case of the crescendo found in this edition at bar 19 of the first movement of No. 1, for example, the sources suggest three separate alignments, none of which is ultimately chosen by Leach when he lines the marking up for all four players. The *piano* indication given for all performers at bar 20 of the finale of No. 2 is based only on the cello part of the original; the other three parts give the dynamic at different and much less likely places. Another vexation is provided by dynamic markings that are simultaneous in the four parts but of different intensity; in many cases the first violin is marked louder than the others, though sometimes the stronger dynamic is given to the cello. While trying to create consistency may seem natural to the modern editorial mind, there are passages where the differences might have been allowed to stand, where indeed they might be readily justified. In bar 46 of the Adagio of No. 1, for example, there seems no reason why the cello's original *fortissimo* should be replaced by a *forte* so as to match what the accompanying inner parts are given. It is a climactic melodic interjection by the player; its wider histrionic leap down by more than two octaves to the last note of the motive compared with two earlier manifestations of the same shape, leaping an octave less and marked *forte*, would seem to make sense of the louder dynamic.

On such occasions the alteration seems to be based on an idea of instrumental blending that may be somewhat anachronistic. Should such an intimate ensemble need to maintain in most cases a uniform dynamic level? At bar 74 of the first movement of No. 3 Leach suppresses the crescendo marking given to the cello alone, shifting it to a bar later when the three upper instruments have already begun a uniformly marked crescendo. A much more individual sense of agency within the texture is created if the cello can be heard to precipitate the change of dynamic rather than simply tucking in behind the others at a later point. A perhaps more serious case concerns the suppression of certain varied articulation markings. At bars 111–112 of the finale of No. 3 the original staccato marking given to first violin is replaced by a two-note slur so as to

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match the original version of the theme. But this is one of those occasions when retransitional figuration runs into the return of a rondo theme, so that one is aware of the return only shortly after it has happened. The subtlety of the changed articulation given in the source that would support this understanding is sacrificed to a matching version that spells out the structural return to the listener. This loses the teasing quality that is such an idiomatic part of rondo technique in this period. Nevertheless, Leach has overwhelmingly made sensible decisions, supported where necessary by a later print of the parts that appeared in the early 1800s from Simrock in Bonn. The only other frustration concerns a rigorous policy of not supplying cautionary accidentals, which can catch out the score-reader from time to time.

On the evidence of this edition, Peter Hänsel is a figure well worth getting to know. For all the vigour and bite that appears through this opus, the most characteristic tone seems to be gentle, sweet, even – dare one say – civilized. In this respect he is nearer to a contemporary like Kozeluch than a Dittersdorf or even a Haydn. His artistic persona seems to have been perceived similarly at the time, with a review of 1809 mentioning modesty ('bescheiden'; cited in Horst Walter, 'Haydn gewidmete Streichquartette', in *Joseph Haydn: Tradition und Rezeption. Bericht über die Jahrestagung der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, Köln 1982*, ed. Georg Feder, Heinrich Hüschen and Ulrich Tank (Regensburg: Bosse, 1985), 28). While we might imagine that the 'Beethoven paradigm' would have quickly rendered such a mode of utterance obsolete, some material evidence suggests a different story: editions of Hänsel's quartets continued to be available for sale well past his death in 1831.

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NICCOLÒ JOMMELLI, *DEMOFOONTE* (NAPOLI 1770)

ED. TARCISIO BALBO
Napoli e l'Europa 1
Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2009
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Ricardo Muti's decision to revive a masterwork from the opera seria repertory of his native city of Naples for the 2009 Salzburg Whitsun Festival season, with additional performances in Paris and Ravenna, offered the opera world the rare opportunity to hear under optimal circumstances a mature work by one of the most acclaimed composers of the mid-eighteenth century, the fourth setting of Pietro Metastasio's *Demofoonte* composed by Niccolò Jommelli for Naples in 1770.

Audiences hearing Jommelli's music in 2009, probably for the first time, were astonished at its beauty and power. At the same time, some found the neo-classical plot puzzling, if not slightly shocking, and others were confused at having women or men in treble voices singing the heroic roles Jommelli originally composed for the great castrato singers of his day. Fortunately, opera houses and music festivals continue to book operas from this period, for only with frequent exposure can we begin to appreciate the glories of the mid-century classical style, and, regardless of its idiosyncrasies, enjoy it on its own terms rather than as a historic artefact.

In the middle of the eighteenth century the Arcadian reform libretto and the new classical Italian musical style had combined to take Europe by storm. Librettists purged their tragedies of comedy and the supernatural and strove to emulate ancient Greek drama and French classical tragedy. Like his contemporaries, Metastasio focused on heroic figures from ancient history such as Demofoonte. At the same time Italian music had begun to assume periodic aria forms that were clearly classical in process. It avoided polyphony and imitation, concentrating all its attention on a single melody with slowly moving harmonic

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