



REVIEW: RECORDING

Heritage: The Music of Madrid in the Time of Goya

Luigi Boccherini (1743–1805), Gaetano Brunetti (1744–1798), Manuel Canales (1747–1786), João Pedro de Almeida Mota (1744–c1817), Cristóbal de Morales (1500–1553)

Cuarteto Quiroga

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Heritage: The Music of Madrid in the Time of Goya promises to contribute to a revisionist history that has been constructed through both scholarship and performance over at least the last twenty years. It nestles amongst writings and performances that expand our knowledge of chamber-music compositions celebrated during the late eighteenth century, illuminating their social significance and their status within an Enlightenment discourse that stretched between a new European intellectual cosmopolitanism and an increasingly expansionist nationalism. Cuarteto Quiroga present one string quartet by each of four composers active at Spanish courts between the mid-1770s and the early 1800s. Luigi Boccherini's inclusion at the beginning of the disc allows for its immediate contextualization – his name being better known than those of Gaetano Brunetti (1744–1798), Manuel Canales (1747–1786) and João Pedro de Almeida Mota (1744–1817).

The processes of recovering, editing, selecting and performing unknown works such as these usually stem from a solid collaboration between performer and researcher, here between the Cuarteto Quiroga and the musicologist Miguel Ángel Marín, as explained in the beautifully produced accompanying CD booklet. The group's biography, as presented here, might have benefited from a little more focus on their expertise in eighteenth-century repertory and their credentials to perform on historically set-up instruments. Instead, the listener gets a long list of general string-quartet accolades that filled me, at least, with little hope for a gutsy performance that maximizes the unique qualities of both the differently tensioned strings and the pre-Tourte bow. The introduction to the group rather suggests that its members subscribe to a timeless ideal of the string quartet and its performance which much recent scholarship has tried to unpick.

While pleasant to listen to, the performances of these works indeed fail to do full justice to the promise of historical revisionism: while the sleeve notes by Marín explicitly lament the loss of the Spanish 'poetic sensibilities that were (in Boccherini and Brunetti) very personal' and the prominence of 'the Austro-Germanic world' in our historical understanding of the string quartet, the performance style remains true to those ideals of beauty of tone and equilibrium of voices that were posthumously celebrated in the quartets of Haydn and Mozart – in the process of the Austro-German elevation of the genre – but that were arguably never central to either their performance or their composition.

The quartets recorded here are nicely varied. To start with, the works by Boccherini and Brunetti follow the three-movement form more common in Italian works, while those by Canales and Almeida Mota each finish with a rousing fourth-movement finale, suggesting a Viennese influence. This may reflect the composers' backgrounds: both Boccherini and Brunetti arrived in Spain young but with exposure to Italian training. Indeed, Brunetti's work, the Quartet in B flat major 1185,

presents interesting operatic references in its topical language: unexpected and dramatic chords interrupt the lyrical flow of the emotional narrative. The performers bring out this feature nicely, yet without the ostentation that a live performance may have solicited and which would have brought the excitement of action-reaction into their rendering. The titling of the middle movement as *Largo amoroso* also suggests a theatrical approach to the string quartet, turning the three-movement piece into a mini-melodrama perhaps, untexted yet full of theatrical emotion rather than rational equilibrium. Boccherini is at his best in the second movement of his String Quartet in E flat major Op. 24 No. 3, *Adagio non tanto*, a fantasia-like movement which the Cuarteto perform with refinement but without sufficient recognition of the music's key performative topos.

Like Boccherini, Canales was a cellist. He stands out here as being the only composer who was Spanish by birth. He was employed at a young age at the court of Fernando de Silva, Twelfth Duke of Alba, in Toledo, where various of his quartet compositions are preserved. The duke had spent three years in Paris as the Spanish ambassador to France. On his return to the peninsula he harboured close connections with the court in Madrid while retaining his international outlook, manifest especially in those cultural interests that led him to become a significant figure in the Spanish Enlightenment (he served as director of the Real Academia Española from the mid-1750s until his death in 1776). Through these connections, Canales is likely to have been introduced to the repertory available at French publishing houses and beyond. It is indeed intriguing to consider how these networks of cultural artefacts and, crucially, practices, of which string-quartet music forms a part, extended between European courts and cities. Reintroducing the listener to Canales, then, is a worthy endeavour not only on the basis of his works' merit (here by way of the String Quartet in G major Op. 3 No. 5). He does not currently feature in the *New Grove* dictionary, and English-language scholarship on him is scant – leaving a field open to interesting future scholarly work (PhD students take note).

Almeida Mota hailed from Portugal and initially made his way in Spain as a singer before entering royal service. It is unclear whether Marín's reference to the composer's position as music master at the chorister school of the Royal Chapel in Madrid, to which he was appointed in 1793, corrects or simply nuances previous information on the composer's position there. His earlier engagements in both Santiago de Compostela and Astorgo suggest further intersections with liturgical repertory from across Catholic Europe: another interesting avenue to pursue. The quartet included on this disc – Op. 6 No. 2 in D minor – probably stems from a couple of decades later and is therefore related to musical activity at the court of Charles IV, who – having taken over from his father upon the latter's death in 1788 – is generally considered to have led Spain into a period of political instability and social dissatisfaction.

Still, Charles IV – inward-looking and hands-off in his leadership – continued to nurture the cultural life that his father, Charles III, had established at court. By the time he acceded to the throne in 1759, Charles III had gained valuable experience from positions as Duke of Parma and Piacenza, King of Naples and King of Sicily. From his years in Italy he had acquired a certain cultural urbanity, furthered by his education in the fine arts. It was Charles III, then, who first installed Francisco Goya – the painter used as the linking feature between the four composers on the disc – at the royal court, while his son merely affirmed the connection by providing the painter with a more formal position. While the Goyan link – actual contact in three cases and a more tangential link via cultural fields in the case of Canales – serves well to establish the prominence of the arts and, crucially, investment in and self-display through culture at the Spanish courts, it teases as much as it satisfies; it is exactly the relationship between the royal households, neatly captured in Goya's much-debated paintings, that demands consideration. While Brunetti's large oeuvre, for instance, certainly warrants further exploration, hearing the recording raises questions regarding the repertory's original purpose: Charles III was a keen violinist himself, so are we to assume that he partook in these works' performance? To what degree did this repertory, composed at the different courts and dedicated to the composers' patrons, function as calling cards as the composers were 'lent' across courts? How did the rivalry between Charles III and his sidelined half-brother, the Infante

Don Luis, play out culturally, especially considering the latter's employment of Boccherini, who had already established an international reputation as a virtuoso performer?

Such questions lead to a larger issue: how exactly can the collaboration between research and performance work? What is performance-based research in this context and how can the act of engaging with and re-feeling this music physically allow us to perform the revisionism that the scholarly work desires? Put differently, what exactly is revisionist in this performance and how, as performers, can we actually contribute to historical revisionism?

Much work remains to be done, particularly in English-language scholarship, to put the musical activities of Spanish courts and cities on the European and global maps, and this recording is a welcome *amuse-gueule* to inspire such work. In this context, the recording presents significant work. Still, the quartet could have stretched the boundaries of expression, challenging Marín in turn to give this repertory its due far beyond merely trying to establish parity with Haydn and Vienna. Why not allow Canales, Almeida Mota and Brunetti to teach us a trick about the way in which we perform Viennese repertory? Scholars such as Elisabeth Le Guin, Nancy November, Edward Klorman, Dean Sutcliffe and Mary Hunter (as well as I) have contributed significantly towards the reconstruction of the string quartet's socio-culturally nuanced performance meaning, questioning in the process the audience–performer polarity that history's gradual march to the concert hall brought with it. This recording – intricate, studied, suffused with moments of true beauty – might have benefited from engaging with this performative revisionism more closely. The CD cover does indeed nod to the string quartet's sociable purpose: the photograph of the Cuarteto is fused into Goya's 1784 portrait of the family of the Infante Don Luis, breaking down the barriers between performers and audience just as Goya himself did both here and in his later family portrait of the royal family around Charles IV by placing himself in the act of painting into the frame.

A more difficult problem, perhaps, arises from the medium chosen to present performative revisionism: are recordings themselves not by definition too embroiled in the standardization and normativity of performance practices and idioms that we ultimately want to question? How can performers and scholars use the multiple audio-visual media available today creatively to overcome the lack of visuality and interactivity of the recording? Incidentally, the sometimes-disappointing balance choices, which hide prominent passages and extreme contrasts, highlight the need to include the producer as a key player in any performative revisionism.

The figure of Francisco Goya – firmly established in the art-historical canon – could have offered more occasion to rethink the performance: even during his early phase, into which these works fall, Goya endorsed the portrayal of the ugly as integral to art's purpose. His paintings were controversial, and his personal struggles, so prominently displayed in his later years, already haunted his works prior to his royal commissions. Significantly, he interacted with his subjects and topics with an immediacy that no spectator could escape. The microphone placement on the CD counteracts this sense of interaction in favour of individual performers' beauty of tone: a lost opportunity. While interesting and certainly a welcome contribution for both lovers of eighteenth-century repertoires and all of us attempting to teach a richer, culturally wider curriculum, I for my part will ask my students to cut their critical teeth on the issues in performative revisionism presented here.

Music historian and violinist **Wiebke Thormählen** explores music as a social and educational activity at the intersection of domestic and public music-making, with a particular focus on arrangements of large-scale works, domestic devotional music and the engagement with opera in the home. She is co-investigator on the AHRC-funded project 'Music, Home and Heritage: Sounding the Domestic in Georgian Britain'. Notable publications include the *Routledge Companion to Music, Mind and Well-Being: Historical and Scientific Perspectives* (2018, co-editor) and *Sound Heritage: Making Music Matter in Historic Houses* (Routledge, 2021, co-editor), a collection bringing together musicologists, historians, and museum and heritage professionals. As Area Leader in History at the Royal College of Music, London, she investigates the historical and current roles of music-history teaching in higher education.