STRING MASTERPIECES OF THE CLASSICAL ERA

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Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

Chamber music in the Baroque era typically necessitated a firm division of roles between melodic soloists and harmonic accompaniment. At that time, harmonic support was generated by the *basso continuo*, a bass-clef melody line with special markings indicating implied harmonies which could be semi-improvised by its players. These implied harmonies were realized by the keyboard (or another instrument capable of playing chords) while the original bass line was also doubled by cello or another low-pitched melody instrument. The most common form of chamber music, therefore, was what was known as the trio sonata: a work for two soloists who would exchange and emulate each other's melodies while receiving harmonic support from the instruments playing *continuo*. By the height of the Classical era, however, these conventions were considered outmoded as composers sought equality and interdependence between all players. Especially in the new genres of the string quartet and piano trio, composers attained this balance amid continual explorations. The Viennese composer, Joseph Haydn made strides in the string quartet, in particular, and popularly he has been remembered as the "Father of the String Quartet." Haydn's quartets inspired Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in his own quartet writing, and together their works inspired Ludwig van Beethoven and every composer who has since then approached the string quartet medium.

Our program tonight finds chamber music still in this transitional phase between the Baroque and Classical eras. Whereas our first two pieces—a duo for violin and cello and a trio for two violins and cello—are more related to the Baroque sonata, the quartet which closes our program offers an example of Classical-era chamber music just as it is reaching maturity. Ultimately, these pieces also demonstrate the advances being made in the quartet genre as, meanwhile, the sonata with *continuo* was falling out of fashion. First on the program is the Sonata in D major for violin and cello by the Italian composer **Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805)** and arranged by the French cellist **Paul Bazelaire (1886-1958)**. Boccherini himself was a cellist and, accordingly, composed many works for his own performance. These include at least twelve cello concerti, over a hundred string quintets (with two cellos), and nearly forty sonatas for cello and *continuo*. It is from this last group that Bazelaire arranged the Sonata for violin and cello. While the violin takes the original solo cello part, the cello plays the *continuo* without the added keyboard. Bazelaire, alongside such luminaries as Johan Halvorsen and Leopold Stokowski, belonged to a generation of musicians who possessed deep interest in the music of the Baroque and early Classical eras, but who saw no need to conform their performance practices to the conventions of those distant eras. Instead, Halvorsen produced his Passacaglia after Handel and Stokowski made his famous Bach orchestrations—excellent works by their musical standards, but also historical atrocities, if we subscribe to contemporary notions of interpreting older repertoire.

The Sonata in D major is in four movements, the first marked *Allegro spiritoso* and occurring in a binary form where both the A section and B section are repeated. To our ears, trained in Classical-era literature, the A section may also come across as the exposition of sonata principle and the B section as the corresponding development and recapitulation; indeed, they would soon evolve into these roles. The A section is cheery and graceful while the B section is initially darker and more exploratory—as would befit a true development section—before returning home to A-section material. Trills and mordents remind us that the Baroque era is not too far in the past, while repeated arpeggios are taken stock-and-trade from the Classical-era playbook. The second movement, *Vivace*, now in D minor, is dramatic and expressive. Its gestures are taken to extremes with quick passagework above an imitative texture, here even more reminiscent of the Baroque. Like the two remaining movements, the second also follows the repeated binary form we encountered in the first movement. The slow third movement is marked *Grave*, and is still in D minor. The descending lines of its A section have a lamenting character to them; the B section is more hopeful, suggesting the happier trajectory the fourth movement will take. Marked *Allegro assai*, this final movement returns to the sunny D major tonality of the Sonata's opening. The often-reiterated declaratory statement which begins the movement is answered by material that is more exuberant and also more resolute.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Trio in A major for two violins and cello, Hob. V:7

Although Joseph Haydn practically invented the string quartet, he did little to advance the string trio. In fact, the majority of his two-dozen trios were composed in the 1760s and might still have been intended as Baroque trio sonatas as they are scored for two violins over a non-descript "bass" part, perhaps to be played in tandem by harpsichord and cello in the old manner. Many of these are, additionally, in antiquated two or three-movement schemes as opposed to the four-movement pattern which Haydn himself would promote in the string quartet. In the trios though, the center of gravity often rests on the minuet, an Italian convention that Germanic composers would gradually abandon. Only one of these trios is specifically for violin, viola, and cello—the ensemble which Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in his Divertimento, K. 563 and, ultimately, Ludwig van Beethoven in his five string trios would pursue to this genre's Classical-era apex. Yet, the single trio by Haydn with viola is still significant in that it might be the first-ever composition for this grouping of instruments. Otherwise, there is a set of six trios for two violins and cello or ideally flute, violin, and cello which Haydn mailed to an English patron in 1784 where the flute was a popular instrument among amateurs. These, however, are largely recycled from music he had composed earlier and, thus, cannot be taken as representative of any comprehensive later thoughts on the string trio as a genre—just an appeal to the existing market. The simple answer, then, seems to be that, once Haydn had become deeply engaged with the creation of the string quartet, he quit pursuing the trio, except under special circumstances. Notwithstanding, these trios are still nice compositions, and they present a different side of Haydn's compositional idiom than we would ordinarily expect from the "Father of the String Quartet." The 1760s was the first decade in which Haydn was employed by the Esterházys, the most prominent family among Hungarian arts patrons. He was then writing prolifically in order to appease Prince Nikolaus who was not only a music lover but also a capable performer on the string instrument known as the baryton. In one letter, Nikolaus demanded, "*Kapellmeister* Haydn is urgently enjoined to apply himself to composition more zealously than heretofore, and especially to compose more pieces that one can play on the baryton." Over the course of a decade, Haydn would, indeed, produce more than a hundred trios featuring the Prince's instrument for this patron's personal usage. These are again separate from the string trios (with which we are concerned tonight) as well as the set of six flute trios Haydn later sent to England. Yet, Haydn only produced his first significant string quartets—the Opus 9 set—in 1769 or 1770, so that the trios from the immediately preceding years are important forerunners. Here, Haydn is wrestling with the strict division of labor of Baroque trios while also refining his compositional abilities in regard to melody, harmony, and formal structure. If the trios themselves are not mature works, then certainly they allowed the first string quartets of a few years later to attain this status and place Haydn in the vanguard of Germanic quartet composition.

The Trio in A major is in two movements of relatively equal length. The first movement, marked *Moderato*, is in the same repeated binary form we found in the Boccherini duo with its hints of sonata principle. Much of the material of this movement is derived from a single motive heard at the outset: an ascending figure which pauses midway through its climb to repeat a single note. Certainly in the first movement, the lines of the two violins are far more ornate than that of the cello, suggesting the connection to the Baroque trio sonata even if there are no figures for realizing implied harmonies on keyboard. Often the cello is simply left to echo ideas already presented in the violins. The balance, however, shifts in the second movement, *Tempo di Menuet*, where the cello gains prominence, especially toward the movement's end. Despite its title and its simple triple meter, this movement is not actually a minuet, but a theme with the character of a minuet followed by three variations. Within each section, we once more encounter the repeated binary form. The texture of the theme is homophonic with the equal participation of all three instruments. The first variation highlights the first violin with quick triplet passagework; the second violin offers limited commentary before a summarizing drone at this variation's end while the cello gives a stabilizing pulse, mainly in quarter notes. The second variation is a respite of sorts while the third gives prominence to the cello through dancing eighth-note figures over which the melody soars in the first violin.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet No. 10 in C major, K. 170

When the young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart began writing his earliest string quartets around 1770, it was not to the example of Joseph Haydn that he looked, but to the Italian masters, especially Giovanni Battista Sammartini, the leading Italian composer of instrumental music who he had recently met while in Milan. Mozart's initial seven quartets, including the first nicknamed, *Lodi*, and then a cycle of six, collectively referred to as the *Milanese Quartets*, reflect this Italian influence in their melodic character as well as their three-movement format (only later did he add the fourth movement to the *Lodi*). His next set of six quartets are markedly different, however, and were produced after a visit to Vienna in summer 1773. Evidently, he had come into contact with the recent quartets of Haydn (i.e. Op. 9, Op. 17, and Op. 20) or at least those of another Germanic composer active in the writing of quartets. His new *Viennese Quartets* appropriately reflect this influence in their integrated textures and four-movement layouts. Ultimately, these travels—first to Milan and then Vienna—were essential for Mozart's education as the string quartet was not a particularly well-cultivated genre in his native Salzburg where other genres of chamber music predominated, ones which in retrospect now seem odd or at least unfamiliar.

The six *Viennese Quartets* are organized by ascending thirds, so that the first is in F major, the second in A major, the third C major, then E-flat major, B-flat major, and D minor. This final, minor quartet is unique in that it is the only minor-key piece among Mozart's early chamber music. Mozart's father, Leopold, ordered the quartets in this manner, and he generally made some small editorial additions, but presumably not without the agreement of his son. It is important to note the conversational tone of these quartets. No longer does the first violin dominate to quite the extent it had even as of the *Milanese Quartets*. Instead, other instruments take turns as soloists, so that all spend at least some time in melodic and harmonic accompaniment roles. In particular, in the String Quartet No. 10 in C major, K. 170, which we hear tonight, the viola has special solo parts in the slow third movement. This conversational tone is a hallmark of the mature Classical idiom whereas earlier chamber music had firmly segregated soloist and accompanist roles to different instruments. The four-movement structure, consistently adopted in all six quartets, still provides for some formal variety. Indeed, the C-major Quartet, although in four movements, does not adhere to the increasingly standard pattern of fast-slow-minuet-fast. It opens with a theme and variations marked *Andante*, places the minuet second, then gives the slow movement, and concludes with a fast rondo. Structurally, it is the most unusual of the cycle.

The first movement, marked *Thema. Andante mit Variationen*, begins with a playful theme which contains some dramatic uses of silence. The texture is homophonic and, though the first violin has the most ornate line, all four instruments offer this two-part theme in harmony. The first variation features quick sixteenth and thirty-second-note figurations in the first violin over a respectful accompaniment from the others. It is their turn to speed up with busy triplet figures in the second variation while the first violin gracefully soars above. Again there is a dramatic use of silence which allows single instruments to penetrate from the group texture, especially the viola. The third variation pairs the two violins for rhythmically irregular music which obscures the sense of meter. In the fourth and final variation, the initially blissful melody is interrupted by a witty device which becomes a motive of its own as the variation progresses. The movement then closes with a reiteration of the theme. The second movement, *Menuetto*, adheres to the conventions of this stylized dance movement. Its A section remains in C major, but transfers to simple triple meter. The section opens in partnership between the two violins, although the first violin ornaments its line later. The contrasting B section—the trio—is in the parallel key of C minor, although it is not without touches of its own relative major, E-flat. Afterwards, we return to the A section.

The third movement, marked *Un poco Adagio*, follows in G major, a closely related key to C major. The first violin presents a longing melody over a sparse accompaniment in the other three parts. Toward its conclusion, the second violin, as if recognizing the first's desire for community, finally joins the first for quicker sixteenth-note figures. Other instruments take turns as soloists at the movement's center, starting with viola, then second violin, back to first violin, and finally the two violins together. Each plays a variant on some part of the first violin's initial melody, before the full melody is repeated once more by the first violin. This time, the second violin, though still respectful, is quicker to join its comrade. The fourth movement, *Rondeaux. Allegro*, returns to C major. Its principal theme has an element of call-and-response between a thinner texture without cello at a *piano* dynamic and a fuller texture, at *forte*, and again with cello. Contrasting sections build on this idea with the first section utilizing the two violins exclusively. The second contrasting section, now in A minor, again opposes textures with the first violin always dropping out before the entrance of the cello, repeatedly shifting the weight from higher to lower registers. The third contrasting section is imitative with entrances in the order: first violin, second violin, cello, and viola. The fourth contrasting section includes a duet for first violin and cello which grows to include all four instruments, before the return of the principal theme, in an elaborated fashion, finally brings close to the piece.

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About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer graduated with his Master of Music in Music History and Literature from the University of Louisville in May 2019 following the completion of his thesis, "Liminal Aesthetics: Perspectives on Harmony and Timbre in the Music of Olivier Messiaen, Tristan Murail, and Kaija Saariaho." He has shared this pioneering research through presentations given at the American Musicological Society South-Central Chapter's annual meetings in Asheville, NC and Sewanee, TN and at the University of Tennessee Contemporary Music Festival in Knoxville, TN. During his studies in Louisville, he was the recipient of the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship and was employed at the Dwight Anderson Memorial Music Library where he did archival work for the unique Grawemeyer Collection which houses scores, recordings, and documentation for over five thousand entries by the world's leading contemporary composers. Previously, Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College in Natchitoches, LA. Then, from 2014 to 2016, Jackson served as director of the successful chamber music series, Abendmusik Alexandria. He has remained a concert annotator and organizer, acting as Director of Scholarship of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival. A special project he is developing for the 2020 festival, "A Scholarly Presentation in Lecture and Music: Solomon Northup in the Central Louisiana Sugarhouse," has recently been awarded a prestigious Rebirth Grant by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. Aside from his studies, he is a choral singer, music blogger, and award-winning nature photographer.

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