

Development and Recapitulation 1800-1826

No excuse is needed for making this section serve two functions in the first movement of the quartet's history, since examples have already been given of Haydn's confusion of the two, his placing of development within the recapitulation and, more rarely, recapitulation within the development. Moreover, the period under review, roughly the first quarter of the nineteenth century, was one in which the creation of new string quartets took place in a culture increasingly aware of past achievements in the genre. The life of the quartet was becoming centred in its history. In 1801 Pleyel published his *Collection complète des quatuors d'Haydn dédiée au Premier Consul Bonaparte*, including all the genuine quartets up to op.76 (except 'op.0') and also giving respectability to the cuckoos in opp.1 and 2, and to 'op.3'. Like all previous quartet publications, this printed the works in parts, for the use of players, but Pleyel soon followed it with an edition of miniature scores in ten volumes, suggesting the growth of an audience wishing to study the music at home or follow it at the newly developing quartet concerts. This new attitude to the string quartet as an object of study, coupled with the already mentioned scrupulousness of publicly performing ensembles in requiring long periods of preparation, would help to circumscribe the repertory. Thanks to Pleyel, performers and listeners became aware of the abundance of masterpieces already composed in the medium, and if more were needed they could be drawn from existing celebrated sources: Haydn's 'London' symphonies, six of which were published by Pleyel in quartet versions in the 1790s, or Mozart's operas, which similarly were regarded as fair game by publishers. There was even an antiquarian revival of early quartets other than Haydn's: six by Gassmann, for instance, were published in 1804, thirty years after the composer's death, and lengthily, seriously reviewed in the leading musical periodical of the day, the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*.

This overloading of the present with the past, nowadays familiar in all the arts, seems to have affected the string quartet first, partly because its whole development had been swift, so that its history could be easily comprehended (after all, elderly players who welcomed Pleyel's 1801 edition might in their youth have greeted the publications of Chevardière and Hummel), partly because of the inherent conservatism of anything stable enough to be called a medium, and partly because the repertory was already so well stocked, with nearly a hundred works by Haydn and Mozart alone. The situation was one to make any young composer think long and hard before embarking himself on quartet composition, and it is not surprising that Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), the rising star of Bonn ambitious to shine in the musical capital of Vienna, should have prepared his début in the quartet, as in the symphony, with great care. After his arrival in Vienna in 1792 he concentrated on the lesser genres of the piano trio and the string trio, and only in 1798 began the set of quartets which he finished in 1800 and published the next year, his op. 18.

Beethoven op. 18

Beethoven was thus working on his first quartets while Haydn was composing his last, and Robbins Landon has suggested that the older master's failure to complete his 'Lobkowitz' sextet was a withdrawal in the face of his pupil's achievement (one need feel no sorrow for the frustrated patron: he became the dedicatee of Beethoven's op. 18, his op. 74 quartet and other major works). Certainly it does not seem realistic to blame failing creative powers when after op. 77 Haydn wrote *The Seasons* and the *Harmoniemesse*. But if Haydn was overawed by Beethoven's early quartets, Beethoven was far from blind to what had been done in the medium by his two great predecessors, so that within op. 18 the development of a new voice – the first authentic new quartet voice for thirty years – is itself intimately connected with aspects of reprise.

Yet one should be cautious about pointing influences, for if Haydn can contain foreshadowings of Bruckner, then certainly Beethoven can include remembrances of Haydn and Mozart without these having been copied as such. For example, the use of short answering phrases at the start of the F major quartet, no. 1, and at that of the G major quartet, no. 2, is distinctly Haydnish, but it is also a perfectly natural way of setting forth elementary material, and in neither case is the consequent movement under Haydn's shadow: Beethoven is far from the imitation practised by so many composers from Albrechtsberger to Gyrowetz. For even though, like those followers, he makes little attempt to emulate Haydn's adjustment of the recapitulation, he

introduces his own kinds of structural complication, not least a persistent binding of a movement with a small motif (notably in the first movement of the F major quartet) and a great expansion, even by comparison with Haydn's last quartets, of the variety of material to be exposed. And, significantly, the one movement that does toy with the reprise in something like Haydn's manner, the opening allegro of the G major quartet, is also one in which Beethoven's own personality comes most forcefully to the surface, the recapitulation being summoned by an insistent monotone figure and then entwined in new counterpoints:

30 Beethoven: Quartet in G op. 18 no. 2, first movement

This is something very different from Haydn, for whom the reprise is a humorous necessity, for in Beethoven's example it is transformed, newly urgent, helping to make the sonata not a return journey but a voyage of discovery.

As one might expect, this new, quintessentially Beethovenian conception brings a new importance to the coda, of which there are notable examples in all the outer movements of the first four quartets. In the C minor quartet, no. 4, for instance, the coda restores the minor mode after the recapitulation has, following a common convention, brightened into the major at the point where the secondary material returns. Unlike other recent first movements with minor endings (Mozart's K421 in D minor and Haydn's op. 76 no. 2), the

already troubled nature of the key is exacerbated by the fact that the music has once broken through into the major. Hence the uncertain atmosphere in which the next, uncertain movement begins, bearing the title 'scherzo' but in fact turning out to be a C major Andante scherzoso in fugal sonata form, a piece hanging in the air between different movement types, different means of construction. Then comes the real scherzo, though it is called a minuet, in the proper key of C minor, but moving into distant keys as Beethoven's scherzos already do, and containing a soft trio in A flat.

This use of third-related keys is again a feature of Beethoven's op. 18 even more than of Haydn's opp. 76 and 77, and it is specially prominent in the D major quartet, no. 3. Here the slow movement is an andante in the flattened submediant, B flat, and third relations are present in all the other movements. The first limb of the scherzo modulates not to the dominant but to its relative minor, F sharp minor, bringing a quite particular feeling of constraint. The finale includes an episode in F, recapitulated in B flat again, and in the first movement there is a similar phenomenon, though more prominently displayed and more powerful in its effects. Instead of settling in the dominant for a clear tune – as, Mozart-fashion, sonata movements in op. 18 generally do – this one swings on to its flattened mediant, C major, and there provides a theme. This is duly recapitulated in F, but there are still structural debts to be repaid, and in the coda, within a context of G minor, it appears again in E flat, the flattened submediant of the subdominant to balance the flattened mediant of the dominant. Once more, then, this is a coda of crucial function, by no means just a re-emphasis of the tonic and the primary material as the coda usually is in Haydn.

But the favouring of the third relation, though heightened in this D major quartet, is more a feature of the time, already more than adumbrated in quartets that Haydn and Dittersdorf had written in the preceding decade or so. It is as if the new sonata style were recapitulating the history of western music. When that style was new, in the 1750s and 1760s, the fifth was the only possible relationship between points of stability: events within a movement had to take place in the tonic or the dominant, anything else being transitory, and movements within a work had to be similarly related. Then the fourth became a new structural consonance, to be followed by the third, making possible in Beethoven's op. 18 quartets a much more varied and richly expressed exposition than in any set of Haydn or Mozart.

To some extent, though, this was also a matter of personality. Beethoven was the first quartet composer to enter the medium in the 