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Anton REICHA

Complete String Quartets Volume One

Op. 48, No. 1, in C major
Op. 48, No. 2, in G major



Kreutzer Quartet

FIRST RECORDINGS

INTRODUCING ANTON REICHA'S VIENNA STRING QUARTETS

by Ron Drummond

This is the first of four CDs devoted to the eight Vienna string quartets of Anton Reicha (1770–1836), themselves part of a larger project to record all of Reicha's surviving string quartets. In undertaking these recordings – world premieres, all – the Kreutzer Quartet is healing a major breach in the history of the quartet as a form. At the time of their composition in 1802–5, the Vienna quartets were startlingly original, and their contributions to the form remain as instructive as they are idiosyncratic. The extent of their influence on Beethoven and Schubert is only starting to become clear, but early signs indicate it was not inconsiderable.

A Creative Engagement

Neither the friendship nor the creative rivalry between Anton Reicha and Ludwig van Beethoven has received even a fraction of the scholarly attention it deserves. Even to begin to dig beneath the surface of their relationship – begun in the orchestra at Bonn when both were in their mid-teens and carried on intermittently for the rest of their lives – is to discover a rich intellectual and aesthetic engagement all the more astonishing for having gone so long unexamined.

Reicha's seven years in Vienna, from late 1801 to late 1808 – the heart of Beethoven's 'heroic' decade – were a crucial period in his own development. As he later recalled,

The number of works I finished in Vienna is astonishing. Once started, my verve and imagination were indefatigable. Ideas came to me so rapidly it was often difficult to set them down without losing some of them. [...] I always had a great penchant for doing the unusual in composition. When writing in an original vein, my creative faculties and spirit seemed keener than when following the precepts of my predecessors.¹

Reicha wrote at least eight of his twenty published string quartets in Vienna. On the first close examination they have enjoyed in over a century, the Vienna quartets are proving to be simultaneously amongst his most inspired and most experimental works. Though rooted in a thorough understanding of the innovations of Haydn and Mozart, Reicha's quartets were so bizarre for their time that they afford glimpses into the musical future – as if, listening at the dawn of the nineteenth century, Reicha in his string quartets

¹ *Notes sur Antoine Reicha*, 1824, transl. Gordon Hallman, in Millard Myron Laing, *Anton Reicha's Quintets for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Horn and Bassoon*, diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1952.



Photo: Leif Johansen

The Kreutzer Quartet – Peter Sheppard Skærved and Mihailo Trandafilovski (violins), Morgan Goff (viola) and Neil Heyde (cello) – has forged an enviable reputation as one of Europe's most dynamic and innovative string quartets. They are the dedicatees of numerous works, and over many years have forged creative partnerships with composers including Sir Michael Tippett, David Matthews, Michael Finnis, Judith Weir and Hafliði Hallgrímsson. They have a particularly strong relationship to a cross-section of leading American composers, having collaborated intensively with the great George Rochberg in the last few years of his life, as well as working closely with such figures as Elliott Schwartz and the prolific symphonist Gloria Coates. They are Artists in Association at York University and at Wilton's Music Hall in London. Their work in collaboration with art galleries has garnered much attention and large audiences, particularly through their annual residency at the Tate Gallery, St Ives. For Toccata Classics they have recorded two CDs (TOCC 0058 and 0059) in their cycle of the complete string quartets of David Matthews; of Volume One, containing the Quartets Nos. 4, 6 and 10 and the *Adagio* for string quartet, the American critic Robert Reilly wrote that 'The Kreutzer Quartet plays this music with staggering conviction and skill'.

INSTRUMENTARIUM

Peter Sheppard Skærved, violin: Antonio Stradivari, 1698 ('Joachim'), from the collection of the Royal Academy of Music, London

Mihailo Trandafilovski, violin: Antonio Stradivari, 1699 ('Kustendyke'), from the collection of the Royal Academy of Music, London

Morgan Goff, viola: Daniel Parker, 1715

Neil Heyde, cello: Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, 1840

Op. 48, No. 2.⁹ But Reicha's drama is very far from being liturgical or even religious. The finale, *Allegretto* [8], of the second work on this disc, mirrors the form of the Op. 48, No. 1, *Adagio*, but in a 'pastoral' context; one which evokes the last movement of Mozart's A major Violin Concerto, K219. Reicha initially presents an 'idealised pastoral' in the traditional 'compound time,' so sweet that to modern, perhaps jaded ears, it seems that it must be parody, must be ironic. This idyll is interrupted, by a fiery G minor episode *Allegro vivace* (recalling Mozart's 'Turkish' episode in the Violin Concerto), full of threat and fury, Gluck-like unisons, and a canonic 'fugato' eventually collapsing onto a Tartinian symmetrical oscillation around the note 'D' (to E flat and C sharp), and then onto a deliberately awkwardly notated D 'unison'. The upper instruments play this note as both stopped and open, resulting in a wavering, 'beating' sound. At this point, the G major pastoral returns, and one realises that that 'homeliness' of the shepherds and fields was what was longed for all along.

Of course, this quartet is only the second step along the cycle of six of Opp. 48 and 49. The next quartet picks up the pastoral mood, but transformed into the more heroic key of E flat major, evoking the hunt, and gradually drawing the listener and player into an astonishing web of drama and expressiveness the power of which is finally released with the first movement of Op. 49, No. 3, the last in this cycle of six, where all the material which has been laid out with such elegant virtuosity up to this point, is shattered and recast. But that is to come; for now this extraordinary pair of works provides a brilliant introduction to Reicha's Viennese quartets.

overheard late Beethoven and late Schubert, overheard Schumann and Brahms and Dvořák, overheard Bartók and modern jazz. Some of these experiments Reicha later expanded upon; many he did not.

Beethoven and Reicha got together regularly during these years, often repairing to the local pub for dinner. Beethoven particularly praised Reicha's cantata *Lenore*; one can hear what he learned from it in the storm of the *Pastoral*. The influence of Reicha's *Thirty-six Fugues for Pianoforte Composed According to a New System*, Op. 36, on Beethoven's *Eroica* is patent.² Aside from a close knowledge on each man's part of the other's symphonies, it is increasingly apparent that their fiercest engagement as friends and fellow journeymen was in the string quartet. Yet it would be a mistake to characterise a very real (if mostly friendly) creative rivalry as being essentially competitive. It wasn't. The innovations of one man tended to inspire or help the other to the deeper and richer exploration of the territory he was already surveying on his own. Beethoven and Reicha, innovators *par excellence*, tended to push *away* from each other in their explorations, and it was perhaps inevitable that they would eventually lose sight of each other completely. Indeed, from the Classical era, you will not find two composers whose compositional styles and career paths diverge more widely.

One interesting point of divergence lay in their approach to musical experimentation. Beethoven's failed experiments rarely saw the light of day, tending instead to fall by the compositional wayside as he endlessly polished and refined his ideas. By contrast, Reicha wasn't afraid to have his experiments fail, or to make the failures available to others: for him, part of the value of experimentation was, having established a set of experimental procedures, to follow them to their logical conclusion, regardless of the result; only then could one learn from the full range of those results.

Reicha's first formal set of six string quartets, published in two groups of three as Opp. 48 and 49 by Breitkopf und Härtel in 1804–5, constitutes a very explicit response to Beethoven's Op. 18. Five of the quartets share key-signatures with the Beethoven. Three of those occur in the same positions in their respective sets: in both cycles, No. 2 is in G major, No. 4 is in C minor, No. 6 is in B flat major. But Reicha had no interest in besting Beethoven at Beethoven's chosen procedures. His achievement is precisely that he develops procedures that are wholly his own, as intricately and rigorously worked out as Beethoven's, and as unique.

Reicha delighted in creating thematic puzzles. In his use of sudden, unprepared modulations into remote key areas, he expanded on the work of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. By the careful deployment of rhythmic, harmonic, melodic and textural juxtapositions, he is able to imply musical effects not explicitly contained in the music; he evokes what is absent from the music by what is present. In the Classical era, only Beethoven in his final string quartets, written twenty years later, would realise the full potential of such techniques, and thereby transcend them.

² John A. Rice, 'Anton Reicha, Beethoven, and the *Sinfonia Eroica*', paper delivered at The American Musicological Society meeting in Philadelphia, 28 October 1984; also e-mail of 1 April 2013. Peter Sheppard Skærved, in an e-mail of 1 April 2013, confirms that his own 'gut feeling is that the two shared a lot of material – that much of what they wrote burst from the conversations they shared. [...] It's impossible to play Op 48 No 1 [completed the year before Beethoven's Third] without having the *Eroica* conversation'.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*

Yet it appears that Beethoven did not wait twenty years to take up the challenge. There is a very real sense in which the three quartets of Op. 59 (written in 1806) are a response to Reicha, especially the two quartets Reicha published one-to-an-opus in 1805: the Grand Quartet in C major, Op. 52, and the Quartet in A major, Op. 58.

A Journey to the Centre of European Music

He was born Antonín Rejcha in Prague on 26 February 1770. His father died ten months later. Raised by a mother and stepfather who were unable to provide for his education, he ran away from home at age ten, first to his grandfather in Klatovy and then, at twelve, at his grandfather's urging, to Wallerstein in Swabia, where he was taken in by his uncle, Josef Reicha, a composer and principal cellist in the celebrated orchestra of the Count, Kraft Ernst Oettingen-Wallerstein. Germanicising his name to Anton Reicha, the boy immersed himself in the study of flute, violin and piano. It was at Wallerstein that he heard the earliest known work written for the combination of flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon, an *Allegro* in E flat by the court composer, Antonio Rosetti.

In 1785 Josef Reicha was appointed *Kapellmeister* to the court of Maximilian Franz (brother of Joseph II) at Bonn. Young Anton joined the orchestra there, playing flute and befriending another youngster, a fifteen-year-old violist named Ludwig van Beethoven. Their friendship would last a lifetime. Anton took music-lessons from Ludwig's teacher, Christian Gottlob Neefe (who introduced him to Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*), and on his own initiative he began composing. Along with Beethoven, he enrolled at the University of Bonn and there pursued his studies in philosophy, mathematics and logic with a passion that would remain lifelong. In his memoirs he wrote that he and Beethoven 'were inseparable companions'³ during the Bonn years.

Reicha was forced by his uncle to flee the French invasion of Bonn in 1794. Settling in Hamburg, he taught music for a living and continued his academic studies. He gave up performing, and began a lifelong devotion to the philosophical and theoretical explication of music and music pedagogy, backed up with ceaseless compositional experimentation. By late 1797 he had composed at least fifteen string quartets; it is not clear whether any of them were ever published.

In 1799 Reicha moved to Paris with two completed operas in hand, seeking success in that most competitive of activities – something that would always elude him. But two new symphonies were well received, and he made numerous important friends, among them Cherubini and Méhul. Still, his repeated failure to negotiate the politics surrounding French opera and secure a commission soured him on the process. These experiences led him to develop, as he later wrote, 'a peculiar aversion to taking the steps necessary to have my works performed. I considered this a waste of time, and preferred to remain at work in my study.'⁴ (This attitude no doubt contributed to the posthumous neglect of Reicha's music.)

It also led him to quit Paris for Vienna late in 1801, where he renewed his friendship with Beethoven and

Reicha later became close to Baillot, dedicating his astonishing *Grand duo concertant* to him near the end of his life (1826). But Pierre Rode seems to have made the biggest initial impression. The slow movement [2] of Reicha's C major Quartet, Op. 48, No. 1, offers an insight into his admiration, as I explain below, and both men later dedicated quartets to each other: Reicha's three quartets, Op. 95 and Rode's two, Op. 28.

The key, melodic, and decorative material and the lyricism of the Op. 48, No. 1, *Adagio* captures the mood of Pierre Rode's G major *Air Varié*, Op. 10, first heard in Paris in the early 1790s; it was published in 1794 for violin and string trio. With this work, Rode set a new 'vocal' style for sung instrumental virtuosity that would be a benchmark for composers writing for string instruments, voice and piano for the next three decades.

The opening of Reicha's slow movement evokes the elegant virtuosity and the sense of rapt attention to line which are hallmarks of Rode's work. Interestingly, a decade later, Beethoven himself would be writing his last piano-and-violin sonata (in G major, Op. 96) for Rode to play with the Archduke Rudolf; he began with almost the same gesture, in the same key, another affectionate doffing of the hat to the master-violinist.

Yet this movement, although offering ever more elaborate violin figurations and fighting for supremacy above an almost orchestral mass beneath, is not an 'air with variations' but a *romanza* or *notturno*, a lyrical, ternary-form movement with a dramatic central section. Beethoven's two *Romanzen*, Opp. 40 and 50, for violin and orchestra, both written in the autumn of 1802, are the best-known examples of this type (and may well have been written for Rode or Baillot). But the power of the central outburst in Reicha's *Adagio* is without precedent. Viola and second violin provide an infernal machine of interlocking *staccati*, semiquavers and demisemiquavers, while the cello and first violin hurl 'Handelian' thunderbolts at each other across the stage. There is something of the fury of stage machinery; playing it feels like operating the rumbling and rattling levers, wheels and canvas that were the stuff of a theatrical storm at the beginning of the 1800s. I suspect that Emmanuel Schickaneder would have loved it.

But it is clear that another storm had influenced Reicha as it had Beethoven: aspects of Joseph Haydn's *Die sieben letzten Worte unseres Erlösers am Kreuze* can be detected all the way through these quartets. It is abundantly clear that Haydn's evocation of Matthew 27:51 ('And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent'), the *Terremoto*, influenced not only the storm in Reicha's *Adagio* but also the demonic flashes of thunder in the *Menuetto* [7] of Op. 48, No. 2. The version that would have been best known to Reicha and his colleagues was published as Haydn's String Quartet, Op. 51, in 1787. I am sure that they had played it. Indeed, the exquisitely delicate violin-writing at the end of Reicha's slow movement [6] is strikingly similar to the writing at the end of Haydn's quartet version, the fragile transmigration of the soul at the end of 'Into thy hands I commit my spirit'.

Mihailo Trandafilovski points out that Reicha is always thinking cyclically, especially when balancing the respective tenors of *Menuetti* within a set of works: 'The range of expression expands from the light and characterful *Menuetto* of Op. 48, No. 1, to the highly charged, energetic opening of the *Menuetto* in

³ *Notes sur Antoine Reicha, op. cit.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

on the left of the stage – with the second violin *leading* and the leader, the *primarius*, silenced. This device is an inversion of the start of the Beethoven Op. 29 Quintet (Beethoven's most 'Reicha-esque' chamber work from this period, though it appears to have been written before his reunion with Reicha in Vienna in late 1801, and thus before Reicha began composing Opp. 48 and 49), which begins with the 'stage-right trio' led from the first violin. Reicha's inversion – or subversion – is double-edged. It must be remembered that all chamber music until the middle of the nineteenth century was written primarily *for the players*. The jokes in the orchestral works of the period are writ large, for the audience. String-quartet writing is full of internal witticisms and needling, which mirror the whiplash humour of a good rehearsal. And so it is with Reicha, playing a dangerous game with 'second-violin authority' (the reason for the helter-skelter chromatic virtuosity in Op. 48, No. 1). Come the recapitulation, Reicha wickedly undermines the stage-left *coup d'état*. Trandafilovski notes that

unusual corners seem to be characteristic of Reicha. One of my favourites is in the first movement of Op. 48, No. 2, where the development brings us back to G major – after which we find the opening theme in the 2nd violin in E minor! – then taken on by the first violin in G major.⁷

Of course, what happens in rehearsal is that everyone calls out: 'He's playing it in the wrong key!'; and then the first violin returns benevolently to guide the ensemble back to harmonic equilibrium. (This joke prefigures Beethoven's early-horn-entry jest in the *Eroica* by more than a year.) Reicha had just spent two years (1799–1801) in the fervour of post-revolutionary war-time Paris, trying to establish himself as an operatic composer. I see such moments, however much they are for the players, as being political commentary – I am reminded of a Parisian musical cartoon from the period: soldier, cleric, peasant, vainly trying to harmonise serpent, violin, and oboe, with the title 'Bon, nous voilà d'accord...' (literally, 'in tune'). The quartet, democratic? For once, I'm with Keller.

In the finale [4] of the C major Quartet the internal teasing goes a little further: the first violinist quietly chastises the second for getting a fugue theme wrong. Mihailo Trandafilovski notes: 'A particularly captivating element for me, as a composer, is the quirkiness of the music (I mean that in the best possible sense).'⁸

Working on Reicha's 'Viennese' quartets clarifies how important he was in bringing the concerns, techniques, and sonorities of the post-1795 Parisian musical world to Vienna. However unsuccessful his sojourn had been, he had immersed himself in the new soundworlds and technical innovations which were driving the musicians of the French capital. None of these was more important than the 'troika' of violinists, disciples of Viotti all, who were revolutionising string-playing: Pierre Baillot, Rodolphe Kreutzer, and Pierre Rode.

One grand illusion [...] has to be destroyed at the outset of any sound-conscious investigation of the string quartet [...]: that in the string quartet there are 'four equal parts'. [...] on the contrary, there isn't a single leaderless juncture or stage – an all-important, clearly audible fact, this, from the playing point of view.

⁷ *Loc. cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

became a devoted friend to the aged Joseph Haydn. From a compositional standpoint Reicha's seven years in Vienna were quite probably the most important years of his life. The fifty-odd works written during this time are without question his most stylistically diverse and radically experimental. They include the 36 Fugues, Op. 36, written 'according to a new method' that left its traces in Beethoven's *Eroica* and late fugues; *L'art de varier*, Op. 57, an encyclopedic set of piano variations; ten string quartets; ten string quintets; and numerous other chamber works, symphonies and choral works, including a Requiem.

In late 1808 Reicha settled permanently in Paris where, as in Vienna, he supported himself teaching privately and continued to compose. Around 1812, at the behest of the professors of flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon at the Paris Conservatoire, he began the series of 25 wind quintets that would make him famous. Over the next decade he systematically explored the possible permutations of wind-quintet sonority, and simultaneously perfected large-scale sonata-structures that could accommodate as many as five principal themes.

In 1814 he published the first of the musical treatises that would secure his posthumous fame, *Traité de mélodie*. Together with the *Cours de composition musicale*, published in 1816, it led to his appointment as Professor of Counterpoint and Fugue at the Paris Conservatoire in 1818. These and other works were widely translated (by Carl Czerny among others) and became standard teaching tools through most of the nineteenth century. In his most controversial work, *Traité de haute composition musicale* (1824–26), he advocated the development of quarter-tone notation, proposed speaking choruses and formulated a 200-piece orchestra. The final volume of this work, containing Reicha's speculations on the future of music, was published the month Berlioz signed up for Reicha's class at the Conservatoire. Berlioz, who would later base his treatment of the viola theme in *Herold en Italie* on Reichen procedures (and whose theme clearly echoes the theme from the variation movement of Reicha's G major string quartet, Op. 48, No. 2 [6]), went on to fulfil several of Reicha's predictions.

Reicha married Virginie Enaust in 1818; they had two daughters, Antoinette Virginie (born in 1819) and Mathilde Sophie (born in 1824).

Though he continued to experiment compositionally (most notably in the *Études de piano*, Op. 102), in general the music of Reicha's Paris years was relatively conservative. In this as in so much else, his path was the opposite of Beethoven's: Beethoven's experiments grew bolder with time, became more self-assured even as they staked out increasingly rarefied musical territory. Reicha, on the other hand, was at his most radical early on (indeed, one could argue that no other composer in history was as insistently experimental). Out of the many new structural and expressive possibilities he explored during the Vienna years, he chose those few that he found to be the most promising, and spent the rest of his life refining them. (Even the wind quintets, which came later, had their antecedents in the quintets for viola and wind quartet that Reicha wrote in Vienna.) During the Paris years, then, Reicha, with increasing self-assurance, explored with meticulous care and dedication (and, more often than not, genuine inspiration) the narrower musical path he had so carefully chosen. Understanding that choice of direction is crucial to understanding Reicha's development as a composer. Further, developing a full appreciation

of his compositional *œuvre* is predicated on understanding that it contains everything from the pedestrian to the profound, from the driest of pedagogical works to the juiciest of musical inventions.

He continued to write opera, and even occasionally managed to get them staged; none was successful. Nevertheless, he considered *Sapho* (1822) to be amongst his greatest achievements.

The fame that the wind quintets and treatises brought him meant that Reicha was able to find publishers not only for his new music but for many older works as well. Unfortunately, the fact that both old and new works received high opus numbers has made it difficult to establish an accurate chronology for them.

Though Reicha outlived Beethoven by nine years, he ceased writing large-scale musical compositions after 1826. Instead, he concentrated on finishing his last great treatise, *L'Art du compositeur dramatique*, published in 1833. He was granted French citizenship in 1829 and received the Legion of Honour in 1831. Amongst his many students, Reicha counted Liszt, Berlioz, Gounod, Franck, Adam, Onslow, Farrenc and Arriaga. Indeed, his influence on the Romantic generation of composers was so extensive and so varied, his posthumous fame so incommensurate, that one might reasonably describe him as the secret pivot-point of the Romantic era. He died on 28 May 1836.

A Brief Overview of the String Quartets

It is not yet known precisely how many string quartets Reicha wrote. Barring fragments, isolated movements and pedagogical works, it appears that at least 37 complete quartets have survived. Twenty were published during his lifetime; between his death in 1836 and 2004, not one was reprinted.

Of the unpublished autograph quartets, the three programmatic works – the *Quatuor Scientifique*, *La Pantomime* and the *Ouverture générale pour les séances des quatuors* – are of particular interest. As recently as 2000, the Swedish Reicha scholar Henrik Löwenmark discovered fourteen previously unknown autograph string quartets in the Reicha collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, together with the autographs of two published quartets, Op. 48, No. 2, and Op. 95, No. 2. The German scholar Ludwig Finscher notes⁵ the existence of a letter in the Wiener Stadtbibliothek dated 1 October 1797 from Reicha to the music publisher Artaria, in which he offered for publication, among many other works, fifteen string quartets in five sets of three; Artaria declined them all.

It may well be that some or all of the fifteen quartets mentioned in Reicha's letter are to be found among the sixteen Löwenmark discovered at the Bibliothèque Nationale. If so, as products of Reicha's Hamburg years (or even earlier), it is conceivable that Reicha wrote some of them for the use of his old Bonn friends, the string-playing cousins Bernard and Andreas Romberg, who like Reicha had fled to Hamburg in 1794 to escape Napoleon's army.

Dating the later quartets is problematical. The autograph scores of the three programmatic works carry

⁵ Ludwig Finscher, 'Reicha, Anton', in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Barenreiter Metzler, Kassel, 1994–2008.

undaunted by the destruction of the instrument. So I would like to offer, just as an idea, that a vital element of Reicha's quartet-writing was a long-term 'conversation' with Beethoven about their mutual admiration for Mozart quartets (and it is clear that his quartets, as well as Haydn's Op. 20, made a big impression on them both). It seems to me that the organisation of their respective six-quartet cycles reflects these conversations.

Reicha's six quartets, Opp. 48 and 49, offer a simple change, and one which can be seen mirrored in Beethoven's later (1806) three-quartet set, Op. 59. The distinguishing feature of Reicha's set is their length: each quartet is well over half an hour long. Quite apart from the musical implications, this development had important ramifications for publishing. Put simply, it was no longer economically viable for publishers to sell groups of chamber works in bundles of six, when a set of three would already seem 'value for money'; the publisher could then make a profit from two published sets, not only one. Indeed, that may have been Reicha's strategy all along, as the letter from Carl van Beethoven, quoted in the previous essay, seems to suggest.

But Reicha's most immediately audible innovation is also one of what might be called 'instrumental scale'. The beginning of the C major Quartet [1] with which he opens the group unveils a rich sonority: a cello playing an octave pedal over the 'open' C string, evoking something much 'bigger' than a string quartet. By playing both notes, the illusion of both eight- and sixteen-foot instruments is given, and Reicha invites the players and listeners to revel in the sheer sensation of a roaring C major chord. From the player's perspective, it's Brahmsian, perhaps, stretching the 'rules' as to what was seen as acceptable within a string quartet. But a paradigm has been established, with players and listeners put 'on notice' that sound itself is an ideal in Reicha's mind's ear. Mihailo Trandafilovski, my violinist colleague in the Kreutzer Quartet, points out that this new paradigm enables the 'ease with which the material gradually unfolds'⁵ in this movement. The gesture that kept coming to mind, as we returned to perform and rehearse this piece over five years, was the dramatic C major cello arpeggio, from the bottom of the instrument, which opens Mozart's C major Quintet, K515. I also sense that Reicha chose to bring the expansiveness of string-quintet writing – clearly audible in Beethoven's 1801 Quintet, Op. 29 (also in C major) – to a place where it had not previously 'belonged' in the previously rarefied climes of the quartet.

This first movement of Reicha's Op. 48, No. 1, flags up another point (all too often ignored by modern-instrument quartets): that the two violins *must* sit opposite each other. Motifs are called out 'across the valley' of the centre of the quartet, and the second-violin riposte to the first outburst of preening *concertante* playing from my first-violin chair, is a display of chromatic virtuosity, hurled across the quartet, which the first violin simply cannot match.

The first movement [5] of the Second Quartet makes even more explicit play with the questionably democratic nature of the string quartet. Hans Keller wrote eloquently against the flawed notion of the egalitarian string quartet.⁶ I wonder how he would have felt about this work, which begins, as it were, with the string trio

⁵ Letter to the author, dated 22 March 2013.

⁶ In, for example, *The Great Haydn Quartets: Their Interpretation*, J. M. Dent, London, 1986, p. 6, Keller writes:

name). The ideal to which they refer, as does so much of music history, is Vitruvius' 'six principles' of architecture, laid out in *De architectura libri decem* between 33 and 14 BC. This ideal underpins the notion of groups of six works that can be seen in the 'Brandenburg' Concerti of J. S. Bach, where each concerto, although based on shared material, can be 'read' as an exemplar of one of the 'virtues' of the dedicatee ('Martial Valour', 'Skill in the Hunt', etc.). By the end of his life, Mozart was using the interplay of the established qualities and colours ascribed to certain keys to build cycles which, although not always celebrating the qualities of their dedicatees, proffered a finely calibrated equilibrium of 'dramatic unities', both in the broad shaping of key structures, and the resulting onion-layers of internal balances within each work, and further within each movement and so on, to higher and higher 'structural magnifications'.²

Mozart's cycle of six quartets dedicated to Haydn (published in 1785), follow the trajectory of G major, D minor, B flat major, E flat major, A major, C major. Tellingly, there is only one minor-key work: the second quartet in the cycle, in D minor, three of the movements of which are in the home key. There are no other minor movements in the remainder of the cycle. Reicha and Beethoven were clearly familiar with these works, and, when they came to model their respective cycles of six quartets (Reicha's Opp. 48 and 49, written in 1802–4 and published in 1804–5, and Beethoven's Op. 18, written in 1798–1800 and published in 1801), they provided, wittingly or not, a response to Mozart's set, which they clearly had played; Mozart's dedicatee, too, was very important to them. One can 'read' their quartets, in one way, as a series of conversations they had about Mozart's set, just as Haydn's Op. 64 quartets can be read as part of his dialogue with Mozart. Barry Cooper writes compellingly of how Beethoven would 'flex his muscles' while preparing to write his Op. 18 by copying out Mozart's 'Haydn' quartets.³ It is fair to assume that Reicha used this technique as well in view of his explicit 'riffing' on Mozart's thematic material, both in the quartets and the 36 Fugues, Op. 36, for piano. The clearest pointers to this 'conversation' are the fourth quartets in all three cycles.

Although only one of Mozart's six 'Haydn' quartets is in the minor, the 'writhing' theme with which Mozart begins the E flat Quartet, K428 (the fourth in his set), is as *minore* in effect as is possible, although it is in fact *maggiore*. Beethoven and Reicha both wrote the fourth of their respective sets in C minor (the 'relative minor' of E flat major), and each composed in the most overtly Mozartian manner (even though Beethoven impishly ends his quartet with an explicit reference to Haydn's *Terremoto* – of which, more below). Reicha begins his C minor Quartet by quoting Mozart's C minor Piano Concerto, a favourite of Beethoven's: he turned pages for Beethoven's disastrous performance. Reicha reported⁴ that as Beethoven got ever more excited, Reicha was kept busy pulling broken strings out of the piano, even trying to adjust broken hammer mechanisms, as his friend forged ahead,

² Beethoven returned to the older, simplistic notion of qualities with his Three Sonatas, Op. 30, dedicated to the parricide Tsar Aleksandr I.

³ *The Beethoven Compendium*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1996, p. 233.

⁴ *Notes sur Antoine Reicha*, op. cit.

relatively precise dates. Through the careful application of Alan Tyson's findings in the area of paper studies,⁶ it should be possible to date the other surviving autographs. But if, as appears likely, the autograph scores for most of the published quartets did not survive, it may never be possible to establish their order of composition with certainty, especially the twelve published during Reicha's Paris years, which appear to be a mix of old and new works. In the box overleaf the twenty published quartets are listed in their order of publication, with, for the first eight, my parenthetical suppositions as to their dates of composition. The fourteen-year gap falling between the publication of the eight quartets of 1804–5 and the twelve of 1819–24 offers a sharp contrast between the startling growth in Reicha's worldly success and fame during the intervening years on the one hand and, on the other, the pronounced diminishment in both musical quality and bibliographical usefulness (for parsing compositional order) of the later sets of quartets compared with the earlier sets. Moreover, the first eight quartets were only published once, whereas the latter twelve were published two or three times and thus achieved much wider circulation, in spite of the fact that the Vienna quartets as a group are distinctly superior in quality to the Paris ones.

Three String Quartets, Op. 48

On 22 January 1803 Carl van Beethoven, acting as his older brother's secretary, wrote to Gottfried Christoph Härtel of the Leipzig music-publishers Breitkopf und Härtel, enclosing, along with several of Beethoven's works, a number of works by Reicha for Herr Härtel to consider. (Such advocacy by Beethoven or his proxies on behalf of another composer's work is all but unheard of.) Among these was a set of three string quartets – almost certainly the three quartets of Op. 48 that Breitkopf und Härtel published the following year:

I can give you [the quartets] for a fairly reasonable price: three Quartets for 2 violins, viola and violoncello at 50 ducats. [...] [These] compositions are very skilfully constructed.⁷

If it is indeed the Op. 48 quartets to which he refers (and given publishing lead-times it would almost have to be), this letter sets an outside date of 22 January 1803 for their completion. Given that Reicha arrived in Vienna in late 1801, the letter places the composition of Op. 48 much closer to the publication of Beethoven's Op. 18, the latter half of which appeared in the autumn of 1801. It makes sense that, in the heat of his renewed friendship with Beethoven, who was quickly becoming world-famous, Reicha would hunker down and get to work on a set of quartets as radical in its own way as Beethoven's.

⁶ Alan Tyson (1926–2000) was a British musicologist whose study of the paper in the manuscripts of composers such as Beethoven and Mozart (in, for example, *Mozart: Studies of the Autograph Scores*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1987, and the co-written *The Beethoven Sketchbooks: History, Reconstruction and Inventory*, Clarendon Press, Oxford/University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985) produced important revisions to the chronology of both composers.

⁷ Published in Theodore Albrecht (ed.), *Letters to Beethoven and Other Correspondence*, Vol. 1, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1996, pp. 90–91.

THE REICHA STRING QUARTETS

Published String Quartets

Three String Quartets, Op. 48: in C major, G major, E flat major (Vienna, late 1801–January 1803);

Breitkopf und Härtel, plate 215, Leipzig, 1804

Three String Quartets, Op. 49: in C minor, D major, B flat major (Vienna, 1802–4); Breitkopf und Härtel, plate 257, Leipzig, 1804–5

Grand Quartet in C major, Op. 52 (Vienna, 1803–5); Breitkopf und Härtel, plate 246, Leipzig, 1804–5

String Quartet in A major, Op. 58 (Vienna, 1803–5); Breitkopf und Härtel, plate 254, Leipzig, 1805

Six String Quartets, Op. 90: in E flat major, G major, C major, E minor, F major, D major; Ph. Petit, Paris, 1819; Simrock, Bonn & Köln, c. 1821; Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1821

Three String Quartets, Op. 94: in A major, E flat major, F minor; Paccini, Paris, 1824; Hynard, Bordeaux, 1824?

Three String Quartets, Op. 95: in E major, D major, C major; Paccini, Paris, 1824; Hynard, Bordeaux, 1824?

Unpublished String Quartets

Of the unpublished quartets, three are of particular interest:

Quatuor Scientifique, Vienna, 1806, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Ms 12020 – this massive quartet is in twelve movements, eight of which are fugues

La Pantomime, Fantasia for String Quartet, Vienna, 24 April 1806, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms 12020

Ouverture générale pour les séances des quatuors ou vérification de l'accord des instruments à cordes ('General Overture for String Quartet Sessions, or Verification of the Accord of String Instruments'), Paris, 1816, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms 12035.

In addition to these, and the fourteen Hamburg quartets mentioned above, the remaining manuscript quartets include:

a fragment in E flat, c. 1799, BN Ms 12107.

five fugues, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms L.19670: two fugues with slow introductions in score, undated

(*Fugue sur un Thème de Cherubini* in E major and a fugue in E minor); and three fugues in parts dated 1809, in C major, C minor, and E flat major

Armonia al revescio (Library of Congress, ML 96.D44.29), written (or completed) on 11 June 1834 and thus quite possibly Reicha's final musical composition.

Finally, there are five fugues, a variation set, a *Harmonie rétrograde à 4*, and a funeral march for quartet included as extended musical examples in Reicha's *Traité de haute composition musicale* (1824–26).

THE REICHA QUARTETS FROM WHERE WE SIT

by Peter Sheppard Skærved

Mid-way through recording this first disc in the Kreutzer Quartet's traversal of Anton Reicha's quartets, Morgan Goff, our violist, said to me:

You know, we spend all of our time playing music which is new to us, but this is the very first time I have experienced something quite like this. To study, perform, and record *great* music, great music which is two centuries old, but without the sense of negotiating with a performing tradition, with the memory of recordings and performances heard from childhood onwards – that is an extraordinary privilege, and utterly liberating.¹

He was right. Our engagement with the core of the quartet canon, with Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, is the very heart of our work. But the impact of Reicha's quartets is being felt in our rehearsals of these composers as we are forced to re-evaluate, well, everything, in the light of Reicha's extraordinary music. A recent rehearsal of Beethoven's G major quartet, Op. 18, No. 2, a work which we have all known and played since childhood, was transfigured by our engagement with Reicha's motivic integrity and playfulness. From the moment that we began working on his quartets, the clarity and humour with which he uses the interrelationship between the four players as illumination for his expressive and architectural concerns shed a new light on similar, but certainly not identical, processes in Beethoven's first ten quartets. Reicha's long-term creative engagement with Beethoven – they were friends from the age of fifteen or so – has received scant attention, resulting in his belittlement as a dogmatic theorist or, as Mendelssohn put it, one of the 'dried-up chrysalises' that he found on his second visit to Paris in 1826. But that's not the reason to play Reicha's works, which offer so much more than a window into a clearer understanding of his friend from the Bonn years onwards. It's not even enough to say that Reicha's quartets shine light onto the great quartets of Cherubini, Arriaga and Mendelssohn – although they do. No, these are masterworks in their own rights, offering crisp models of what the medium can do, taking wing from Haydn's clarity, and clearing a new road. Although almost unknown, they are central to the canon, and perhaps will soon be recognised as such.

Although the works on the first three CDs in this survey, Reicha's Opp. 48 and 49, were published in two sets of three, they are in fact a single set of six. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the tradition of publishing chamber works in groups of six (familiar to modern audiences from Haydn's and Mozart's quartets, and Beethoven's Op. 18) was halved, and Reicha's quartets offer a good example of why. There was a degree of conceptual idealism in composing and publishing sonatas in multiples of six (string quartets are 'sonatas' in all but

¹ Conversation with Morgan Goff, Aldbury, 27 February 2013.

naïveté’, as ‘clearly something Bohemian, and not only rustic in general. The same character is to be found in works by Dussek and Vofíšek.¹² The ternary form nods to the congenial *Adagio cantabile* of Beethoven’s G major quartet. But in Reicha’s juxtaposition of elaborate major- and minor-mode episodes, with their contrasts of emotional light and dark, I hear an inversion of Beethoven’s *La Malinconia* from the B flat quartet, Op. 18, No. 6, Reicha swapping a slow, day-bright country walk for Beethoven’s sorrowful dissipation, and a passionate embrace of stormy dusk for a forcibly frenzied good cheer. It is hard to hear the Beethoven as anything but parodic affectation; whereas Reicha’s willing innocence leads him through a thoroughly honest darkness – and back again.

Tonic

I began collecting microfilm and photocopies of the then not-quite 200-year-old printed parts of Reicha’s published but centuries-out-of-print string quartets in autumn 1997, and by the summer of 1998 the first informal readings of his quartets, including the G major featured on this recording, were happening in one or another Seattle living-room with various local, mostly professional players, usually with an audience of one, who was – I confess – bowled over by much of what he heard.¹³ In the fifteen years since then, my efforts have led directly or indirectly to modern concert premieres in Seattle, Cambridge (UK), London, Paris, San Francisco and Fort McMurray, Alberta, involving groups ranging from the short-lived Vranitzky Quartet (which formed around Seattle violist Thane Lewis, who organised many of those early readings), to the Coull Quartet, Vertavo Quartet, Zemlinsky Quartet, New Esterhazy Quartet and the Kreutzer Quartet, among others. Other scholars and enthusiasts have taken Reicha studies and advocacy farther than I ever could have, among them Peter Sheppard Skærved, Henrik Löwenmark, Kitty and Theo Wyatt, and Martin Anderson. The present CD represents the culmination of a long-held dream for many of us. I am grateful to Peter Sheppard Skærved and the members of the Kreutzer Quartet for their superb musicianship and scholarship; I can only imagine that Reicha would be delighted to know that his quartets were at last in the hands of such extraordinary advocates.

¹² *Loc. cit.*

¹³ Ron Drummond, ‘The String Quartets of Anton Reicha’ (1998–2000), at <http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/articles/reicha/quartets/>.

String Quartet in C major, Op. 48, No. 1

- | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|
| I | <i>Allegro non troppo</i> |
| II | <i>Adagio</i> |
| III | <i>Menuetto: Allegro and Trio</i> |
| IV | <i>Finale: Presto</i> |

The sequence of works in Reicha’s set of six quartets Opp. 48–49 deliberately echoes that of Beethoven’s Op. 18, so as to put in high relief the differences in their compositional procedures and the extent of Reicha’s creative engagement with and critique of Beethoven’s cycle. Playing off Beethoven’s already established sequence, Reicha devised his own sequence so that each man’s set would commence with a quartet the key-signature of which is not shared by any of the quartets in the other man’s set, followed by five quartets that do share key-signatures with five in the other set, with three of those in the same respective positions and two with their respective positions reversed. (Reicha’s active passion for mathematics *per se* was one thing that Beethoven, who once added up ten halves and came up with the sum of nine and a half, did *not* share with him.)

The quartet opens [1] in an almost Mozartian vein, limpid and sunny-shady, but the music soon shifts gears in un-Mozartian ways, not once but repeatedly, slowly forming a complex mosaic of themes. Reicha takes time to come clear – by which I don’t mean he *takes* his time to come clear (though that’s often enough the case) – but that it takes repeated listenings for his structures and the music that fills them to settle into their proper proportions in one’s ears and memory. More often than not, it’s worth the effort. Henrik Löwenmark finds⁸ one peculiarly Reichen procedure in the extended passages of two-part writing in this movement, where the first violin and viola play in octaves on one part and the second violin and cello in octaves on the second part, creating a vivid sense of open space. Surprisingly, no antecedent use of this procedure can be found in the quartets of Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven.

Beethoven told his friend Karl Amenda that the first slow movement of his Op. 18 evoked the tomb scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, and so it may well be that Reicha in the corresponding movement [2] of his Op. 48 evokes *The Tempest* – certainly the middle section is nothing if not a musical tempest, full of stormy dissonances and flurries and a powerfully rhythmic core that slowly emerges from the heart of the storm, reaching out fingers of melody ultimately to calm the wind and waters. For all the yearning unease of the section preceding this storm, the calm that succeeds it is deeper and more profound, achieving by the end of the movement a condition of pure rhapsodic flow that reminds me, however distantly, of a work that would not be written for another 23 years – the *Heiliger Dankgesang* of Beethoven’s late A minor quartet, Op. 132. Henrik Löwenmark, who notes⁹ several instances in the Vienna quartets where Reicha dwells at length on a single chord, cites as exemplary the end of

⁸ Private communication with the author, January 2006.

⁹ *Ibid.*

the slow movement of the C major quartet, where the four instruments continuously play through the tones of a G major triad, often moving in opposite directions from one another, always in motion and always changing yet at the same time harmonically frozen and therefore never changing, a happenstance that evokes for me nothing so much as Ariel's long-suffering condition of simultaneous freedom and enthrallment.

In the *Practische Beispiele*, an unpublished treatise completed the same year as Op. 48 (1803), Reicha includes a work that dwells obsessively (in diverse figurations spread across the entire compass of the piano, over a continuous pedal) on an E major triad – for over four minutes! He comments that when everything one normally expects from a musical piece – that is, melody, a sequence of chords, modulations, etc. – is removed, all that is left are dynamics, different timbres and registers, textural gradations. ‘Thus circumscribed,’ Reicha writes, ‘the Spirit [*der Geist*] seeks other alternatives, and finds what it otherwise might not have discovered – and thus reaches its goal.’¹⁰ In this Reicha clearly foreshadows Wagner, who based the first part of the Prelude to *Das Rheingold* on an E flat major triad that is kept in motion for some minutes through figuration, crescendos and orchestration before introducing additional tones in the E flat scale.

After a rather *staccato*, running-on-tiptoes *Menuetto* and Trio [3], Reicha dances his way through the *Presto* finale [4], constantly shifting tempi, his sonorities and themes opening from bud to bloom and closing again, often lingering at intermediate steps and mixing in roundabout ways.

String Quartet in G major, Op. 48, No. 2

- I *Allegro*
- II *Adagio un poco Andante*
- III *Menuetto: Allegro and Trio*
- IV *Finale: Allegretto – Allegro vivace – Allegretto*

Reicha's G major string quartet occupies the same position in the set of six quartets Opp. 48–49 as Beethoven's G major does in Op. 18. Listening to the two works back to back, I am struck by how thoroughly conversational Reicha's response to Beethoven is, minutely answering Beethoven's argument, disagreeing with him, concurring, offering his own (in many ways quite different) argument, and perhaps most importantly synthesising something new out of what both men bring to the conversation – a thorough understanding of the greatest of Haydn's and Mozart's quartets as shared heritage, and a wide range of innovative ideas uniquely Reicha's own and uniquely Beethoven's own. I can no longer imagine the Beethoven quartet without the Reicha; each work is greater in the presence of the other. And, it is now clear, Beethoven, in the three quartets of Op. 59, would respond to Reicha in kind.

The opening movements of the two quartets are similarly wide-ranging, intensely engaging; where

Beethoven's motivic and thematic digressions and developments closely reference their points of departure, Reicha's are simultaneously more puzzle-like, less obviously interconnected, and with a transformational ease and naturalness that belies the abruptness of some of the changes in mood and key. Both are brilliant. I would even venture to guess, based on ear alone, that Reicha's movement [5] is the more wide-ranging harmonically and thematically; if I'm wrong, it's not by much.

The modern premiere of Op. 48, No. 2, was given by the Coull String Quartet at the Cambridge (UK) Music Festival on 23 November 2003. Reviewing the performance in the *Chamber Music Journal* of the Cobbett Association,¹¹ I wrote,

Reicha's G major quartet is elegant and witty, full of such exuberantly effortless invention that it sounds simultaneously familiar and brand new, familiar because memorably tuneful, new because frequently surprising. Whereas on first hearing it six years ago at an informal quartet reading in Seattle I had found the slow variation movement boring, this time, hearing it played with professional polish by a well-rehearsed group, I was fascinated by the way its theme serves as *cantus firmus* while everything else is varied, a technique that influenced Berlioz's treatment of the unchanging viola theme in *Harold en Italie*. Indeed, after the concert, cellist Nick Roberts pointed out that the Berlioz theme itself bears a clear resemblance to Reicha's theme, written the year before Berlioz was born.

Berlioz would have found this movement [6] in Reicha's *Treatise on Higher Musical Composition* (1824–26), where it appears as an example of unorthodox variation technique. Between the intense energy and musical diversity of the first and third movements, this stately *Adagio un poco Andante* might seem almost barren by comparison. In terms of its shape and profile, the melody that is supposedly the subject of Reicha's variations remains almost entirely unchanged from beginning to end, and an ear trained to western norms, with their almost obsessive focus on melody, is forced to look elsewhere for sustenance. Reicha provides it, rather abundantly, in the form of textural, timbral and accompanimental variation, thus – especially as juxtaposed against the movements on either side – further instructing the listener's ear, broadening its versatility and liberating it, however temporarily, from convention.

The *Menuetto* [7] is astonishingly fine, leaping joyfully into action, fully worthy of its superb models in Haydn and Mozart and their equal in originality, and quite possibly their superior in the sheer bizarrerie of some of its more arcane moments; Beethoven is in good company on all counts. The Trio prances in sprightly rhythmic unison, twice bowing sepulchral to the depths of the range of the quartet, before returning to the minuet in a way that reveals it as progeny and source.

Henrik Löwenmark writes of the opening and closing G major sections of the finale [8], with their 'pastoral

¹⁰ Anton Reicha, *Practische Beispiele*, manuscript treatise, c. 1803, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, MS 2510.

¹¹ Ron Drummond, 'A Milestone Reicha Premiere in Cambridge', *Chamber Music Journal*, Summer 2004, Vol. XV, No. 2, p. 9; available online at <http://www.chambermusicjournal.org/past-issues.htm>.