

Joseph Christian Willibald
MICHL
(1745–1816)

Quartets for Bassoon and Strings

Ben Hoadley, Bassoon
The Hall String Trio



Joseph Christian Willibald Michl (1745–1816) Quartets for Bassoon and Strings (c. 1780–89)

Quartet No. 1 in F major	12:16	Quartet No. 4 in G major	13:00
1 I. Allegro non tanto	5:50	9 I. Allegro moderato	4:55
2 II. Andante moderato	3:12	10 II. Adagio	4:42
3 III. Rondo: Allegretto	3:14	11 III. Rondo: Allegro non tanto	3:23
Quartet No. 2 in C major	12:35	Quartet No. 5 in B flat major	13:33
4 I. Allegro	4:37	12 I. Allegro	5:58
5 II. Larghetto grazioso	3:44	13 II. Romanze: Largo	4:03
6 III. Tempo di menuetto	4:14	14 III. Allegro	3:32
Quartet No. 3 in E flat major	13:30	Quartet No. 6 in F major	12:17
7 I. Adagio – Allegro	8:18	15 I. Allegro	3:45
8 II. Rondo: Allegro non troppo	5:12	16 II. Andante moderato	3:35
		17 III. Rondeau: Allegro	4:57

In 1772 the English composer and music historian Dr Charles Burney passed through Munich on his travels in search of material for his planned *General History of Music*. As was his custom, he sought out as many of the prominent musical figures in the city as possible during his short stay and lost no opportunity to hear the most celebrated performers. He also took a keen interest in the works of local composers and attended both public and private performances of their works.

One of the most colourful figures Burney encountered in Munich was Signora Regina Mingotti, a singer who had achieved great fame and considerable notoriety in London in the 1750s and 1760s. Brilliant, temperamental and almost impossible to work with, she first undermined and then drove out the manager of the King's Theatre and took over the role herself in partnership with the orchestra leader, Felice Giardini, while still appearing on stage. Burney considered her the perfect mistress of her art and he thought her musical intelligence was equal to that of any composer he had known. Unsurprisingly, she turned out to be an invaluable acquaintance who even obligingly put together a concert for him featuring the best musicians she could find at short notice whom he had not heard before. In his published journal of the tour – *The Present*

State of Music in Germany, The Netherlands, and United Provinces (1775) – Burney notes:

'A quintetto was played next, that was composed by M. Michel, a young man that had been brought up at the Jesuit's music school. He has a genius, that wants only the pruning knife of time and experience to lop off the luxuriance; every performer of this piece had an opportunity of shewing the genius of his instrument, and his own powers of execution. There was, in the solo parts, the brilliant, pathetic, and graceful, by turns; and the *tutti* parts had no other imperfection, than being too learned and *recherchées* in modulation. I hardly ever heard a composition, that discovered more genius and invention, one that required more abilities in the execution, or that was better performed; it was made for a violin, a hautboy, tenor, bassoon, and violoncello.'

Praise of this order from a figure of Burney's knowledge and experience suggests that by his late-twenties, Michl was already an accomplished composer of instrumental music.

Like many 18th-century composers, Michl came from a family of musicians. His father, Johann Anton Leonhard Michl (1716–1781), was choirmaster and organist in Neumarkt, and other members of his extended family included the composers Johann Joseph Ildefons Michl and his brother Ferdinand and Ferdinand's son, the cellist and singer, Melchior Virgil Michl. Joseph was educated at the electoral Gymnasium and Lyceum in Munich and by the age of 20 he was already working professionally as a double bassist at the Jesuit church of St Michael in Munich. He undertook further studies in Freising with Placidus von Camerloher, the court Kapellmeister, whose elder brother, Johann Anton Camerloher, was a court composer in Munich. Michl's abilities were quickly recognised and by 1771 at the latest he was named as composer to the electoral chamber.

Michl achieved great success with his opera buffa *Il barone di Torre Forte* (1772) and in 1774 the elector paid for him to visit Italy to study the latest musical developments there and presumably to put the final polish on his already impressive technique. If Michl's career seemed set at this point he was to be quickly disappointed. In January 1778, the new elector, Carl Theodor, whose musical establishment at Mannheim was one of the glories of Europe, dismissed him with a modest pension which he did not receive until 1780. In July 1779 he was granted a privilege to publish music in manuscript but he seems not to have taken advantage of this opportunity beyond issuing his own works. From around 1784 to 1 September 1803 he lived with his brother-in-law, Johann Baptist Moser, a judge at the Augustinian prebendary institute at Weyarn, and wrote sacred works as well as symphonies and school dramas for the monastery. In 1786 he also taught composition at the Benedictine abbey at Tegernsee.

Although Michl achieved success as an opera composer, even composing at short notice the 1776 Carnival opera *Il trionfo di Clelia* for the Munich court (in place of an indisposed Josef Mysliveček), his contemporary reputation rested to a large extent on his sacred works, many of which have not survived. While he certainly composed works for the stage, it is possible that some of the works attributed to 'Michl' may have been composed

by yet another member of the clan, Johann Michael Michl, the musical director of F.J. Moser's theatrical troupe. Michl composed instrumental works, including symphonies, serenades, concertos, divertimentos and smaller chamber works, and they were sufficiently well known to be advertised in Breitkopf's annual thematic catalogue supplements between 1773 and 1787.

One of the more unusual facets of Michl's output is the number of works he composed with *obbligato* bassoon parts. These include not only the six quartets featured on this recording, but also a concerto, a quartet for two violins, bassoon *obbligato* and cello and six sonatas (trios) for fortepiano, violin and bassoon. It is interesting that the quintet Burney heard also included a bassoon part. This was played by Rheiner, a bassoonist who had visited England in recent years although had been too ill to perform there. On finally hearing him play in the concert organised by Signora Mingotti, Burney reported that 'His tone is sweet, and execution neat, and he must be allowed by every competent and impartial judge, to be a very able and pleasing performer.' Perhaps Michl's bassoon works owe their existence to his acquaintance with Rheiner.

Burney's criticism that the *tutti* parts were too learned and *recherchées* in modulation does not apply in the case of the bassoon quartets. These works are the epitome of urbane sophistication; elegant in construction, mellifluous and with a clarity of texture that allows the bassoon to shine. While he occasionally exploits the extreme upper and lower range of the instrument, Michl confines most of the bassoon writing to the tenor register where the instrument's natural warmth and tone can be heard to advantage. As is the case in writing melodically for the cello in combination with strings, the composer needs to take particular care to prevent the line being masked by the violins which generally, although not invariably, play above it. Michl's adept handling of such technical matters immediately mark him out as a composer of considerable skill and imagination. The musical texture, although simple, rarely lacks rhythmic animation and the various melodic instrumental pairings with the bassoon create a pleasing variety of tone colour. The thematic materials upon which the individual movements are based are also

ideally suited to presentation and expansion by the bassoon. Such is the domination of the bassoon in these quartets that they resemble at times miniature concertos. Although there are points of similarity with the Parisian *quatuor concertant*, Michl's quartets differ significantly from them in restricting soloistic writing for the other instruments. However, their three-movement structure and fondness for rondo finales certainly aligns them far more closely with the Parisian and South German traditions than, for example, that of Vienna.

These quartets are intended to be diverting and they are unquestionably fashionable in style, but they contain some startling surprises. If the *Adagio* opening of *Quartet No. 3 in E flat* is completely unexpected, its return at the end of

the movement is even more unexpected and once again highlights Michl's skill and imagination as a composer. Nonetheless, it is their fluency and compositional elegance that brings them closest to Leopold Mozart's view that:

'The small thing is great, when it is written in a naturally fluent and light style and when it is efficiently put in a composition. To compose in this way is more difficult than to write all the artificial and incomprehensible harmonic progressions and hardly performable melodies ... This distinguishes the master from the bungler.'

Allan Badley



Ben Hoadley

Ben Hoadley is one of Australasia's finest bassoonists, performing on modern and historical instruments. He is also an award-winning composer whose works are performed and recorded internationally. Hoadley lectures at The University of Auckland, the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and the University of Waikato. He has presented masterclasses at institutions throughout New Zealand and abroad, including a residency at the University of Louisville in 2017. Hoadley has appeared frequently as guest principal with many of the professional orchestras in both Australia and New Zealand, and as a recital and concerto soloist and chamber musician. His special interest in music by New Zealand composers has led to many collaborations in the creation of new music for bassoon. Hoadley is a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the New England Conservatory of Music and the University of Waikato. He has received fellowships from the Tanglewood Music Center, Australian National Academy of Music and the Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall.

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The Hall String Trio

Lara, Amalia and Callum Hall are siblings from Auckland, New Zealand who have performed together extensively since childhood, primarily as a string quartet with their brother Elroy. Continued performances together have included duos, trios and collaborations with non-family members. Since 2006, New Zealand violinist Dr Lara Hall has been a faculty member of the University of Waikato Conservatorium of Music and a core member of the New Zealand Chamber Soloists, with whom she has performed and taught across four continents and recorded a range of genres. Currently concertmaster of Opus Orchestra, she has also led numerous other orchestras. Concertmaster of Orchestra Wellington and violinist of the NZTrio, Amalia Hall's career extends internationally, including winning First Prize at a number of international competitions. Amalia Hall is a regular soloist with orchestras in New Zealand, gives concerts internationally as a soloist, recitalist and chamber musician, and has recorded chamber music for Bridge Records and Atoll Records. Callum Hall is a cellist with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and Auckland Chamber Orchestra, and also a teacher and chamber musician. His extensive orchestral experience includes principal positions in a number of orchestras. He has performed in numerous chamber groups and at festivals.



Upon hearing a chamber piece by Joseph Michl in Munich in 1772 the English composer and music historian Charles Burney wrote, 'I hardly ever heard a composition that discovered more genius and invention.' Even though Michl achieved success writing for the operatic stage and his contemporary reputation rested on his sacred works, the *Bassoon Quartets* present the epitome of urbane sophistication – elegantly constructed and full of imaginative detail – and at times resembling miniature concertos.

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9–11	Quartet No. 4 in G major	13:00
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15–17	Quartet No. 6 in F major	12:17

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet

Ben Hoadley, Bassoon
The Hall String Trio
Lara Hall, Violin I • Amalia Hall, Violin II • Callum Hall, Cello

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

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