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978-1-107-09365-2 - Mozart's Music of Friends: Social Interplay in the Chamber Works

Edward Klorman

Excerpt

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PART I

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Historical perspectives

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## 1 | The music of friends

From the Tagus to the Neva, our quartets are played. Not only in larger cities everywhere [but] also in smaller ones [and] even in some villages, wherever there are friends of music [*Musikfreunde*] who play string instruments, they get together to play quartets. The magic of music makes everyone equal and binds together in friendship those whom rank and conditions would otherwise have kept eternally apart . . . Those who ever drank together became friends; [but] the quartet table [*Quartettisch*] will soon replace the pub table [*Schenktisch*]. A person cannot hate anyone with whom he has ever made music in earnest. Those who throughout a winter have united on their own initiative to play quartets will remain good friends for life.

–Johann Conrad Wilhelm Petiscus, “Ueber Quartettmusik” (1810)<sup>1</sup>

The environment in which a musical genre developed is often deeply intertwined with that genre’s history and style. A study of Bach’s cantatas, for instance, is greatly enhanced by awareness of their original liturgical context in Lutheran practice, just as a full account of the history of Italian opera surely considers the ethos of the opera house, along with the singers, impresarios, and audiences who inhabited it. Scholarship on the “place” for which a work was conceived can examine not only a cultural setting and social context but also the physical performance space. For example, the layout of St. Mark’s Basilica was vital in the development of the antiphonal style of the Venetian school, just as the design of Wagner’s theater at Bayreuth was essential for the realization of his concept of music drama as *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

<sup>1</sup> [Johann Conrad Wilhelm] P[etiscus], “Ueber Quartettmusik,” *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig) 12, no. 33 (May 16, 1810): col. 514 (Web Doc. #23). Although the article is simply signed “P.,” the writer is identified as Petiscus, a Lutheran theologian, in Nancy November, “Haydn’s Vocality and the Ideal of ‘True’ Quartets” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2003), 129. Two insightful discussions of Petiscus’s essay appear in Mary Hunter, “The Most Interesting Genre of Music’: Performance, Sociability and Meaning in the Classical String Quartet, 1800–1830,” *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 9 (2012): 55–59 and *passim*; and Nancy November, *Beethoven’s Theatrical Quartets: Opp. 59, 74, and 95* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 11–13 and *passim*.

In the case of late-eighteenth-century chamber music – a designation that overtly references the music's venue – the culture of the drawing room is an integral part of the music's spirit.<sup>2</sup> Christina Bashford, in her brief account of the string quartet's social history, defines late-eighteenth-century chamber music as “music to be performed for its own sake and the enjoyment of its players, in private residences (usually in rooms of limited size), perhaps in the presence of a few listeners, perhaps not.”<sup>3</sup> In referring to musicians with the neutral word “players,” Bashford nicely avoids the more customary term “performers”; the latter locution tends to unduly (and anachronistically) suggest a more formal, public spectacle undertaken mainly for the enjoyment of an audience of strangers. Bashford's historically sensitive definition positions chamber music as a type of *Gebrauchsmusik*, serving a function by providing friends and family a way to engage together socially through music, either as players, listeners, or both. Richard Henry Walthew, the British pianist and prolific composer of chamber music, beautifully captured the tradition of *Hausmusik* in a lecture that dubbed chamber music “the music of friends.”<sup>4</sup>

The painting *Haydn Quartet* by Julius Schmid (Fig. 1.1) is an early-twentieth-century image depicting an (imagined) late-eighteenth-century domestic musical scene.<sup>5</sup> With music strewn about the floor and a violin

<sup>2</sup> I will generally use the term “chamber music” in the modern sense, to indicate duets (including sonatas for keyboard and violin), trios, quartets, etc. In the eighteenth century, such works were all designated as types of “sonata” (see discussion of sonatas in Chapter 2). In Mozart's lifetime, the term *Kammermusik* retained an older meaning, referring broadly to any instrumental music for the aristocratic chamber, as opposed to church or theater; this included concerti just as well as sonatas. See Johann Philipp Kirnberger's entry “Kammermusik” in Johann Georg Sulzer, ed., *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1771), 440–41 (Web Doc. #33); and Heinrich Christoph Koch, *Musikalisches Lexikon* (Frankfurt am Main, 1802), s.v.

“Kammermusik,” cols. 820–21 (Web Doc. #10). Cliff Eisen discusses the changing meaning of *Kammermusik* in “Mozart's Chamber Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Mozart*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105–17.

On the multiple authorship of Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, see *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition: Selected Writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Christoph Koch*, ed. Nancy Baker and Thomas Christensen (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 14 n. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Christina Bashford, “The String Quartet and Society,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, 3. As a precedent to the string quartet, Bashford cites the madrigal as an important genre for domestic musical recreation.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Henry Walthew, *The Development of Chamber Music* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1909), 42. This publication is based on three lectures that Walthew delivered at the South Place Institute in London in 1909. The phrase “music of friends” is probably his original coinage, but the idea is an old one (cf. the Petiscus passage quoted in the epigraph to this chapter).

<sup>5</sup> Authentic, eighteenth-century paintings depicting string quartet playing are rare (but see a c. 1785 silhouette of Wallerstein court musicians included among the Web Resources). As a much later depiction of an eighteenth-century musical gathering, Fig. 1.1 is but an evocative

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Fig. 1.1 Heliogravure by Franz Hanfstaengl, 1907, after Julius Schmid, *Haydn Quartet*, c. 1905–6 (painting now lost). Vienna City Museum.

case leaning precariously against a bench, it seems these players hope to sight-read a good deal of music at this gathering (cf. Fig. 1.3 below and the unknown painting on the cover of this book).<sup>6</sup> No scores are in sight; string

product of its creator's fantasy and should in no way be taken as direct evidence of Haydn's period. Yet *other* documentary and iconographic evidence I will examine below suggests that the scene it depicts cuts to the heart of *Hausmusik* practices that Haydn and Mozart would have recognized, namely, the notion that this music was often (if not usually) played primarily for the enjoyment of the players themselves. A variety of authentic, eighteenth-century images depicting domestic music-making are provided among the Web Resources, as are color versions of several illustrations in this chapter. An insightful analysis of nineteenth-century depictions of string quartet playing and their relation to French and German conceptions of the genre is Nancy November, "Theater Piece and *Cabinetstück*: Nineteenth-Century Visual Ideologies of the String Quartet," *Music in Art* 29, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Fall 2004): 134–50.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the dating of the unknown painting reproduced on the cover, which is preserved in a nineteenth-century lithograph: Although Ludwig Finscher considers it to be an eighteenth-century work, November is more likely correct that it dates from the nineteenth century. The central position of the bust of Mozart, the watchful eye of the master composer dominating over the music-making, reflects nineteenth-century values (cf. Josef Danhauser's *Liszt at the Piano* [1840]). Moreover, the depiction of musicians in the eighteenth-century playing underneath a bust of Mozart is likely an anachronism, since it is doubtful anyone would have owned such a bust until some years after the composer's death in 1791. See Ludwig Finscher, "Streichquartett,"

quartets were available only in parts at the time. Haydn, leaning in toward his colleagues and with raised bow, seems poised to speak. Perhaps the players stumbled during a tricky passage, requiring him to offer instructions or even to conduct.

Several other people are in attendance: a lady (one of the players' wives?) stands on the right, with a boy and his governess; a gentleman watches from behind the ensemble, perhaps to follow one of the players' parts (if he too is a dilettante musician); and in the rear, a late arrival is shown in by a domestic servant, pausing in the doorway until he can enter without disturbing the music. This is not a conventional "concert" or "performance," at least not as those words are generally used today. Rather, quartet playing is depicted as an activity undertaken by the players largely for their own enjoyment within their enclosed circle. The others, for whom no seating is provided, listen in as spectators rather than as a concert audience.

This sense of chamber music playing being directed inward, emphasizing intercourse *among* the players, is borne out in several earlier images and artifacts datable to Mozart's lifetime or shortly thereafter. The late-eighteenth-century quartet table (*Quartettisch*) in Fig. 1.2 is designed such that musicians could play to one another within their circle. The images in Figs. 1.3 and 1.4 show chamber music with keyboard instruments, with small music stands placed on their lids to support the string players' music. This arrangement, commonly seen in such depictions, would seem to foster an intimately circumscribed locus of musical activity.<sup>7</sup> The watercolor *Interior with a Musical Gathering* (Fig. 1.5) depicts a private concert in a salon, possibly a performance of a concerto or chamber piece featuring the lady at the keyboard, accompanied by the male string and wind players seated around the adjacent table, led by the first violinist conducting.<sup>8</sup> Although

in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Ludwig Finscher, vol. 8 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998), col. 1936; and November, "Haydn's Vocality," 15.

<sup>7</sup> The complete Artaria title page from which Fig. 1.3 is extracted is provided among the Web Resources. For an account of Susan Burney sight-reading this piece, see below, 94. On the likely attribution of Fig. 1.4 to Gabriel Jacques de Saint-Aubin (rather than his brother Augustin, to whom it was formerly attributed), see Phyllis Hattis, *Four Centuries of French Drawings in the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1977), 156, catalog item #119.

<sup>8</sup> My suggestion that the keyboard player seems to play a concerto or other keyboard-centric chamber piece is based on the premise that an avocational lady pianist is unlikely to be realizing a continuo part in a symphony or concerto grosso, especially considering the distance between her and the cellist. However, the focus of the composition on the musicians around the table, rather than on the keyboard player, may speak against this interpretation. The drawing is undated, but Aartman's working dates are often given as 1723–60. Robert-Jan te Rijdt, curator of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century drawings at the Rijksmuseum, speculates that the artist may

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Fig. 1.2 String quartet table (*Quartettisch*), late eighteenth century. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

the keyboard player would be featured in such an ensemble, neither she nor any other individual figure is the center of visual interest. Rather, the composition makes a focal point of the musicians as a group and draws attention to the drawing room as a site for both *social* music-making and *musical* socializing. Instead of directing their playing outward, the musicians seem to draw the surrounding company into their circle. The listeners appear to be engaged with the music but are not strictly silent; note the

have been active later, since a drawing exists dated 1779 that may be by Aartman (personal communication). The drawing in question is signed "A: 1779" (similarly to *Interior with a Musical Gathering*) but was sold with attribution to Aert Schouman (Sotheby's, Amsterdam, November 21, 1989, lot 183).





Fig. 1.3 Detail from title page of Haydn, Piano Trio, Hob. XV:10. Vienna: Artaria, 1798.



Fig. 1.4 Gabriel Jacques de Saint-Aubin, *The Musical Duo*, c. 1772. Watercolor, gouache, brown and black ink, and graphite. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

chatting figures in the rear right and foreground left. Such depictions and artifacts of domestic music-making in Figs. 1.2–1.5 contrast sharply with the formal performances heard in today's public concert halls.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Finscher ("Streichquartett," 8: col. 1936) emphasizes the contrast between the circular quartet formation, characteristic of private settings and mirroring salon conversation, with the semi-circular formations associated with public performance, which he states emerged only around the 1870s. At John Ella's Musical Union concerts (established in London in 1845),





Fig. 1.5 Nicolaes Aartman, *Interior with a Musical Gathering*, c. 1723–60. Graphite and watercolor. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

### Mozart as chamber musician

It is a challenge to piece together a detailed historical record of late-eighteenth-century *Hausmusik* practices.<sup>10</sup> Bashford notes that “the essentially private nature of quartet-playing renders documentation scanty, suggesting a less extensive activity than was almost certainly the case; but occasional accounts in diaries, letters and the like enable some glimpses to be caught.”<sup>11</sup> Although such terse “glimpses” cannot illustrate the extent of

performers were positioned in the center of the hall, with the audience seated in the round, in order to simulate the private quartet concerts Ella had attended in Vienna at the palace of Prince Czartoryski. John Ella, *Musical Sketches: Abroad and at Home*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. John Belcher (London, 1878), 349. See also a related picture of a string quartet performance at Ella’s Musical Union, reproduced in Tully Potter, “From Chamber to Concert Hall,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, 43. I will return to adaptations of chamber music for semi-public and public performance in Chapter 3.

<sup>10</sup> A historical sketch of string quartet performance during this period in Vienna appears in Horst Walter, “Zum Wiener Streichquartett der Jahre 1780 bis 1800,” *Haydn-Studien* 7, nos. 3–4 (February 1998): 289–314. See also Mary Sue Morrow, *Concert Life in Haydn’s Vienna: Aspects of a Developing Musical and Social Institution* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1989), esp. 1–33 on private concerts and musical activities.

<sup>11</sup> Bashford, “The String Quartet and Society,” 4. To Bashford’s list of text-based sources, I would add iconographic evidence as well. See, for example, Richard Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology, and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), which focuses on domestic music in general, not the string

domestic musical activity during this period, they nevertheless provide an enticing picture of its character.

Two of the most vivid accounts of Mozart's domestic music-making come from the memoirs of Michael Kelly, the Irish tenor who sang in the first production of *Le nozze di Figaro*:

I went one evening to a concert of the celebrated [Leopold] Kozeluch's, a great composer for the piano-forte, as well as a fine performer on that instrument. I saw there the composers Vanhall [*sic*] and Baron Dittersdorf; and, what was to me one of the greatest gratifications of my musical life was there introduced to that prodigy of genius – Mozart. He favoured the company by performing fantasias and capriccios on the piano-forte. His feeling, the rapidity of his fingers, the great execution and strength of his left hand particularly, and the apparent inspiration of his modulations astounded me. After his splendid performance we sat down to supper and I had the pleasure to be placed at the table between him and his wife, Madame Constance Weber, a German lady, of whom he was passionately fond, and by whom he had three children. He conversed with me a good deal about Thomas Linley, the first Mrs. [Elizabeth Ann] Sheridan's brother, with whom he was intimate at Florence, and spoke of him with great affection. He said that Linley was a true genius; and he felt that, had he lived, he would have been one of the greatest ornaments of the musical world. After supper the young branches of our host had a dance, and Mozart joined them. Madame Mozart told me, that great as his genius was, he was an enthusiast in dancing, and often said that his taste lay in that art, rather than in music.

He was a remarkably small man, very thin and pale, with a profusion of fine fair hair, of which he was rather vain. He gave me a cordial invitation to his house, of which I availed myself, and passed a great part of my time there. He always received me with kindness and hospitality. – He was remarkably fond of punch, of which beverage I have seen him take copious draughts. He was also fond of billiards, and had an excellent billiard table in his house. Many and many a game have I played with him, but always came off second best. He gave Sunday concerts, at which I never was missing. He was kind-hearted, and always ready to oblige; but so very particular, when he played, that if the slightest noise were made, he instantly left off.<sup>12</sup>

quartet in particular. Leppert's remarks (pp. 3–8 and *passim*) about iconography as evidence of an ideology, and not necessarily of actual practices, are especially illuminating.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly, of the King's Theatre, and Theatre Royal Drury Lane* (London, 1826), 1:225–26. These memoirs were prepared for publication by Theodore Edward Hook based on materials furnished by Kelly. Kelly's (or Hook's) penchant for name-dropping and for dramatic rhetorical effects make for highly engaging prose, but readers should beware of some probable exaggerations within his memoir.