

Welcome to the concert!

Our last concert here in Forsyth Chapel was devoted entirely to the works of Franz Joseph Haydn. Today we revisit one of those works but, with the help of excerpts from the composer's original manuscript, we hope to give a more "hands-on" feeling for a few aspects of his work that we merely referred to in the last concert. The printout before you includes three sections of Haydn's manuscript for his quartet in E-flat, op. 64 No. 6 and one section from Leopold Mozart's book, *The Art of Violin Playing*. We will take a moment to examine some of the details of what is on those pages and elaborate briefly on the puzzles and responsibilities that are implied by them. But first, let us introduce the rest of the program in these notes.

Western art music— "Classical" music — evolved along such a different path than music in most of the world. Scientific measurement met with the audacious ambition for individual insight to reach into the "other-worldly" truths. Adding further the process of charting (composing) pleasurable sonic sensations, a chain of musical achievements has given us the incredible resource of music scores we have today. This resource is not only fantastically potent but so extensive as to be effectively inexhaustible.

The European system of musical notation evolved to be precise and flexible in recording both pitch and rhythm. The nature of this system has for a long time meant that there was no limit to the complexity of what could be envisioned by a composer. In this precisely notated environment, something that has come to be called "counterpoint" could flourish. In successful counterpoint two, three, four, even five lines of independent music are interwoven in such a way that the parts "talk" to each other. Imagine designing a conversation and, by precisely notating the timing and placement of each word, being able to hear four individuals talking at the same time AND keep track of what each of them is separately saying. This is what successful counterpoint achieves. Thinking allegorically, counterpoint gives us a musical image that correlates to the fantastically complex intersection of different processes that surrounds each of us in our daily lives.

If you will forgive the image, Bach experienced intense instances of the real life counterpoint in the interactions of his huge and active family. But whatever may have been his inspirations there is no composer who achieved a higher level of artistic expression through the use of counterpoint. We open the concert with a piece that had special significance for Bach. He created a work of awe-inspiring scope in the four volumes of the *Klavier-Ubung* (Keyboard practice): Volume one was the six keyboard partitas. Volume two was the Italian Concerto and the French Overture. The fourth volume was the Goldberg Variations. Volume three was for organ, and began with the "St. Anne" Prelude and ended with the "St. Anne" Fugue. In between were a series of organ works that concerned every part of the mass and the catechism as well as duets for playing during communion. All this was summed up in the "St. Anne" Fugue with its noble theme so like the "St. Anne" hymn and its vigorous progression of three sections. Each of the three sections has a different rhythmic profile and they build in intensity to make the work ever

more grand. The notable division in three reflects the significance of “three” in Christian theology. There is, of course, the Holy Trinity, but in this case there is also the theme of “three” as it is woven into the art surrounding St. Anne. St. Anne was the mother of Mary and paintings and sculptures often depicted a large St. Anne holding a smaller Mary who was in turn lifting up the infant Jesus - another interesting manifestation of “three.” Bach did not elaborate on his own logic and we don’t know what he may have been thinking of, but it feels safe to say that ideas like this added to the elaborate inner structure with which he gave even his largest compositions a palpable sense of symmetry and cohesion.

Bach did not write string quartet music in the tradition with which we are familiar, but I grew up hearing these organ works played by my father. So, in order to bring the vigor of dialogue that is possible in a string quartet to the potent counterpoint of the “St. Anne” Fugue, I created this arrangement for string quartet.

Well, without the importance of counterpoint in the imagination of composers and their efforts to add to the tradition, there would have been little basis for a string quartet tradition to develop. The string quartet can give direct voicing to the four part textures that evolved as a way to create fullness in the sound, and it can allow the spiraling off and recombination of various groups of instruments with unlimited speed. Haydn saw all of the potential in this; it fed his imagination and led to his creation of some 80 string quartets. Ironically, in his work at Esterhazy he was not particularly encouraged in his writing of string quartets. His job there was more related to operas and material that could be played by members of the household. His string quartets were written more for his relationship with a set of enthusiasts in Vienna.

Beethoven introduced his efforts for string quartet to this same set of enthusiasts. He did a lot of preparation for the moment when he felt he could let a string quartet be born, writing numerous string trios as he built up his technique and sensibility for the string instruments. The confidence Beethoven found becomes obvious when one hears Op. 18 No. 2. This music is so full of sweetness and playfulness, and moves through its material with a tireless sense of invention. The first movement with its gracious opening, the serene Adagio interrupted in its middle by the joking Allegro; the chasing playfulness of the scherzo, and the romping fun of the last movement:

In all these it is easy to see how the humor and vivaciousness of this music is a direct continuation of what Haydn had been bringing to the string quartet.

Bach gave a place of great importance to his St. Anne Fugue. Beethoven did the same for the Grosse Fugue, placing it first at the end of the String quartet Op. 130 but then eventually, separating it out and giving it its own Opus number: Op. 133. Sometimes I hear people discuss the anger of the Grosse Fugue. I have to admit that I have never heard that anger in the character of the music. For me it seems more thrilling. I hear the energy of Beethoven taking the most fabulous musical machine on a joyride, like a jet pilot spinning the plane while doing a giant

loop-the-loop through an archway in a canyon. I am kidding a little bit but actually in the first section of the Grosse Fugue Beethoven does something very similar to our imaginary pilot. The whole group plays the entire 4 minutes at their loudest dynamic, but Beethoven arranges the rhythms and the rests so that during each beat one instrument has the subdivision 2, one 3 and one 4. Combined with precise silences written as rests, the parts are interwoven so that each speaks out in a different part of the beat, allowing all the parts not to collide with each other even at the maximum volume. The second part of the Grosse Fugue offers the huge contrast. All voices play as soft as possible and the theme of the fugue is heard as if frozen in time. The third section is like a gear box, the same motif doing its “spin” in different parts at different speeds simultaneously, causing the main theme to accelerate from a drawn out first tone to a spinning finish. This whole section is again played at full volume. A glorious forte reprise of the material that had been static and soft in the second section ushers in the fourth and last section, which always feels to me something like a victory lap joyous combining of all the previous ideas in a rolling six rhythm with wide- ranging dynamics that rise to a thunderous close. Beethoven showed a lot of pride in this creation and truly it is a work that is in its own category. Thinking of the myth of Icarus who flies too close to the sun and melts the wax that holds together his wings, I feel Beethoven has in the Grosse Fugue come back with fireproof wings, and the fugue is his fearless joy-ride next to the sun.

So today we bring you to a meeting place of counterpoint and playfulness, and celebrate how music can bring joy and good spirit to even constructions of the greatest complexity.

-Nicholas Kitchen, May, 2010