

"Ideally balanced, the group commands attention
by spiking poise with bursts of passion."

-The New York Times

Quatuor Mosaïques



Quatuor Mosaïques
2017-2018 Full Biography – 30th Anniversary Year
Erich Höbarth (Violin); Andrea Bischof (Violin);
Anita Mitterer (Viola); Christophe Coin (Cello)

Quatuor Mosaïques is the most prominent period-instrument quartet performing today. The ensemble has garnered praise for its atypical decision to use gut-stringed instruments which, in combination with its celebrated musicianship, has cultivated their unique sound. The quartet has toured extensively, won numerous prizes and established a substantial discography. Formed in 1987, the group is comprised of Austrians Erich Höbarth (violin), Andrea Bischof (violin) and Anita Mitterer (viola), and French cellist Christophe Coin. These four musicians met while performing with Nikolaus Harnoncourt's Concentus Musicus Wien in the 1980s and decided to perform on original instruments as a classical "caper quartet." Although the quartet performs on period instruments it embraces the European quartet tradition, constantly allowing for the evolution of its repertoire as it strives to reveal the music's psychological underpinnings.

For the first time in three years and in celebration of their 30th anniversary season, Quatuor Mosaïques embarks on a North American tour in October 2017, performing at the Princeton University Concerts series, the Celebrity Series of Boston, Duke Performances in Durham, North Carolina, Da Camera- Chamber Music and Jazz in Houston, Friends of Chamber Music in Denver, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Music Toronto, and the Union College Concert Series in Schenectady, and offering works of Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, and Mendelssohn. Of its engagement at Carnegie Hall in 2009, *The New York Times* noted that the group performed with "elegant, detailed phrasing and carefully wrought playing." During a North American tour in 2012, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* raved "the group does tap into something well beyond notes and rests. No doubt this is what people mean when they talk about music casting a spell." European engagements this season include a two-concert Haydn series in Wigmore Hall, two recitals in Amsterdam's lauded Concertgebouw, a series of three performances of late Schubert Quartets at the Kilkenny Arts Festival in Ireland, and three performances of Hadyn, Mozart, and Donizetti Quartets at Scotland's Lammermuir Festival.

Quatuor Mosaïques has appeared in Europe, the United States, Australia and Japan and regularly performs in Vienna's Konzerthaus, London's Wigmore Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and Berlin's Philharmonic Hall, among others. Quatuor Mosaïques is often featured at such prestigious European festivals as Edinburgh, Salzburg, Luzern, Bremen, Bath,

Styriarte Graz, Schubertiade Schwarzenberg and Oslo. The ensemble collaborates regularly with many international artists including pianist Sir András Schiff, clarinetist Sabine Meyer, and cellists Miklós Perényi and Raphael Pidoux. In 2006 Quatuor Mosaïques was invited to Spain to perform for King Juan Carlos I on the Monarch's personal collection of Stradivari instruments.

Quatuor Mosaïques has enhanced their worldwide renown through their extraordinarily extensive discography which includes works of Haydn, Mozart, Arriaga, Boccherini, Jadin, Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn as well as lesser-known composers. Of the group's [2010] Schubert release *The London Times* wrote "their performance of *Death and the Maiden* is music-making of a high order, felt and carried out by players animated as though by a single mind and impulse, yet each of them seeming to respond afresh at every moment." Recordings of the *Wiener Klassik* repertoire (Haydn string quartets Op. 20, 33 and 77 and the quartets of Mozart dedicated to Haydn) have been awarded numerous prizes such as the *Diapason d'or*, the *Choc du Monde de la Musique*, and a *Gramophone Award*. A new recording of Beethoven's late string quartets is slated for release on the Naïve label in September 2017.

AUGUST 2017 - PLEASE DESTROY ANY PREVIOUSLY DATED MATERIALS

**Quatuor Mosaiques
2017-2018 Individual Biographies – 30th Anniversary Year**

Erich Höbarth was born in Vienna, where he studied with Grete Biedermann and Franz Samohyl, and later at the Musikhochschulen of Vienna and Salzburg. He was a member of the Végh Quartet from 1978 to 1980, and subsequently held the position of Konzertmeister of the Wiener Symphoniker for seven years. Since 1981 Mr. Höbarth has been Konzertmeister and soloist for the Concentus Musicus Wien; he also teaches at the Musikhochschule in Vienna and has served as Konzertmeister of Sir András Schiff's chamber ensemble Cappella Andrea Barca. Mr. Höbarth plays a Joseph Guarnerius violin made in Cremona in 1705.

Andrea Bischof was born in Vorarlberg and studied in Vienna with Grete Biedermann and Thomas Christian. Since 1980 she has held the position of Konzertmeisterin and soloist of the Austrian Bach Soloists, and is also a permanent member of the Concentus Musicus Wien and Professor of Chamber Music at the Musikhochschule in Vienna. Ms. Bischof plays a violin made in France in the 18th century, maker unknown.

Anita Mitterer was born in Lienz in the Ostirrol, and studied with Jürgen Geise in Salzburg, Antonin Moravec in Prague and Thomas Christian in Vienna. She is a member of Concentus Musicus Wien, Director of the Baroque Ensemble of Salzburg and teaches violin and viola at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. Ms. Mitterer plays a Carolus le Pot viola made in Lille in 1725.

Christophe Coin was born in Caen, and studied with André Navarra in Paris, Nikolaus Harnoncourt in Vienna and Jordi Savall in Bâle. He has performed with l'Orchestre des Champs-Élysées, Concentus Musicus Wien and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, among many others. Mr. Coin teaches Baroque violin and Viola de Gamba at the National Conservatory of Music in Paris and at the Schola Cantorum in Bâle. He teaches annually at the International Academies of Granada and Innsbruck and gives master classes throughout France. Mr. Coin plays an Alessandro Gagliano cello made in Naples.

JULY 2014 - PLEASE DESTROY ANY PREVIOUSLY DATED MATERIALS

Quatuor Mosaïques

Critical Acclaim



“The Quatuor Mosaïques offers the best experience that one could hope to have at a string quartet concert. Its members have played together for more than 25 years, so they understand the medium deeply. Their programming provided a satisfying overview of one of the more expressive periods in history of quartets, and their masterful technique on period strings allowed tiny details to bubble up to the surface that might be lost in other groups’ performances. This ensemble delivered, with obvious élan, exactly what its name promised.”

San Francisco Classical Voice

“...the group does tap into something well beyond mere notes and rests. No doubt this is what people mean when they talk about music casting a spell...The concentration and subtle sense of continuity that Mosaïques brought to the piece felt like a profound secular prayer.”

The Philadelphia Inquirer

“Quatuor forced us out of our expectations by performing the most treasured gems of our classical repertoire in their natural light, unvarnished, uncontaminated, towering with restraint and wisdom, to unforgettable effect.”

Boston Musical Intelligencer

“The group...has ranked among the world’s foremost string quartets since shortly after its founding in 1985, balancing period instruments and historically informed performance practice with contemporary interpretive impulses like no other...The group’s ingratiating sound and impeccable interpretive unity gave the sense of a unit that lives and breathes together constantly.”

The New York Times

“The vividness of the Mosaïques’ playing made each composer seem young. But more: Its Mozart sounded utterly beguiling in naturalness, neither falsely delicate nor forcedly robust. Schubert’s difficult single movement set the tone for the entire evening, with the first violin Eric Höbarth’s white-gold sound a thing of beauty in itself.”

Chicago Tribune

“The Mosaïques’ readings of the slow movements in the so-called Joke and Bird Quartets are again outstanding in their grave tenderness, their sensitivity to harmonic flux and the improvisatory freedom Erich Höbarth brings to his ornamental figuration. The Bird, in particular, receives as searching a performance as I’ve ever heard: in the first movement the Mosaïques steal in almost imperceptibly, respond vividly to the music’s richness and wit, and bring a spectral pianissimo to the mysterious lull in the development. The Slavonic finale, one of several movements to benefit from the lighter, more flexible period bows, goes with terrific fire and panache.”

Gramophone Magazine

“For sheer poise, the first quartet of Haydn’s Opus 54 couldn’t have been bettered. A slow movement that was mindful of the composer’s Allegretto direction was particularly appreciated; its two pivotal climaxes, the second of which slipped into some minor intonation problems, were gripping.”

The New Zealand Herald

“The Quatuor began to interact with that ardent volatility, that almost improvisatory immediacy that always characterises the most vital string-quartet playing.”

The Independent (London)

“[The Quartet] played with finesse, dramatic intent, grace, intelligence, and beautiful sonority.”

Le Monde

“I can’t overstate the pleasure in hearing gestures so aptly and expressively shaped, tempos so poised, harmonic areas characterized with such telling shifts in timbre.”

The Globe and Mail

“Their performance of Death and the Maiden is music-making of a high order, felt and carried out by players animated as though by a single mind and impulse, yet each of them seeming to respond afresh at every moment.”

The London Times

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

October 10, 2017

String Quartets On Original Instruments? Quatuor Mosaïques Shows It Takes Guts

By Michael Levin

The challenge of playing period music on early instruments, wrote Boston Symphony Orchestra conductor Erich Leinsdorf, is that “original ears can be notoriously difficult to restore.”

And yet.

Musicians who play on original instruments are able to create a sound much more in tune, if you will, with the way the composers intended.

One of the leading exponents of this approach to music, the Austrian quartet Quatuor Mosaïques, will bring their 18th century instruments and their 21st century know-how to Boston’s Jordan Hall at the New England Conservatory of Music this Saturday night, October 14.

The performance, featuring the work of Mozart and Haydn, will take place under the auspices of the Celebrity Series of Boston.

How good are they? Le Monde wrote that they played with “finesse, dramatic intent, grace, intelligence, and beautiful sonority.”

And you know how hard the French are to please.

The sole non-Austrian (he’s French) member of the quartet, cellist Christophe Coin, took some time to explain why the group has favored 18th century instruments – and hard-to-play gut strings – for the 30 years of its existence.

Michael: Why gut-string instruments?

Christophe: Gut strings provide a richer overtones spectrum, a warmth in tone, a transparency in texture, and clarity of articulation. They were generally used at least until the time of World War I. Even when we play Bartók’s String Quartet N°1 or Debussy, we think they bring a special quality to the sound.

Michael: How do you create a sense of unity and ensemble in a string quartet when you all lead busy musical lives away from the group?

Christophe: We are not a quartet that practices together daily. But since the original 4 members have been playing together for the past 30 years, we have adopted together rules concerning harmonic intonation, phrasing, and so on.

Michael: What’s the source of those rules?

Christophe: We started with Haydn, whom most people consider the “inventor” of the string quartet. As we say in French, he is the “every day bread” for us. Playing his work offers great help in building a solid base for the group.

Michael: On your website, you say that you are not trying to create authenticity that would belong in a museum. Instead, you are trying to create something that is living and breathing for the audience. How do you accomplish that?

Christophe: It is utopic to pretend that we could have enough information



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about how performances took place two centuries ago to be able to play like they did. To read about methods of playing and to study treatises about music is not enough. Actually, those things can be useless, because we have different ears, test, culture, education, and so on. But we try to follow the narrow path that early instruments show us, to stick as much as possible to the composers' indications and, of course, to be open to our own intuition.

Michael: Tell me about the cello you perform with—what do you know about its history? When and where did you buy it? How did you choose it, and how did you know it was the right instrument for you?

Christophe: You can be attracted by many different instruments in your career, but you can notice if they are your allies only in the moment of performing.

The cello I play is an Alessandro Gagliano (Napoli around 1720), who was the founder of a long family dynasty. It has a very clear sound, but also rich basses, which makes it useful for quartet as well as solo performing. I could not afford to buy it — very few musicians own major Italian instruments. It belongs to a French foundation, and I have it for a limited time, as long as possible, I hope.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

September 28, 2017

Mosaic of Articulation, Phrasing, and Architecture

The chamber world brims with accomplished string quartets operating at the most rarefied heights. For the last three, the Austrian Quatuor Mosaïques has been counted among the more distinctive of such top-tier groups. Founded by members of the Concentus Musicus Wien, they were among the earliest to perform quartet literature on historical instruments. *BMI*nt had some questions for the group in anticipation of its Celebrity Series concert Saturday evening October 14th at Jordan Hall.

FLE: *Le Monde* remarked that you play “with finesse, dramatic intent, grace, intelligence, and beautiful sonority,” and many are especially impressed with the articulate transparency of your Haydn recordings. But one wonders why they used “intent.” How do you achieve drama in large spaces with instruments more suitable for intimate rooms?

Collective response from Quatuor Mosaïques: It has not much to do with plain volume of sound. We agree that it is more difficult to transport our intention in a big hall, but then we expect from the audience a certain readiness to adapt to this situation. What is important in a drama are character—something happens—and it contains dialogue (going back to Aristotle).

Did you start out with gut strings and evolve your style from what worked with them?

We started our quartet 30 years ago using gut strings, and of course they influenced our way of playing. Gut strings are richer in overtones, and educate the musician concerning transparency of sound and the carefully varied use of vibrato. We all have an education on modern instruments from studying with Sandor Vegh or Andre Navarra, and also experience using period instruments, with Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Jordi Savall.

Did you rely on critical accounts of early performances to help you define your style?

For every musician a certain degree of information and feedback is important. But finally, it is essential to find a personal style.

Do you know of early recordings that are trustworthy documents of playing styles that interest you?

We find the Busch, the Capet, and the Vegh quartets very inspiring. However, we never tried to imitate their style.

What do you think of the Czech Quartet’s 1928 recordings of Dvořák with the composer’s son playing second violin? The style when that recording was made featured much less vibrato than we hear today but much more



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portamento. There are overall also a delicacy, personal expressivity, and reluctance to oversell. Is it possible that Mozart, Beethoven, and Haydn expected this kind of expression?

Speaking about the Czech Quartet's recording, we agree to all you said about their playing. Portamento, however, is a very personal decision and also much dependent on fashion. We think that a singing quality including portamento is necessary, but should never be exaggerated. To know what Haydn and Mozart expected is not really possible. We have sources, autographs, letters, and statements, all of which tell us a lot, but even that is often a matter of interpretation.

We can expect astonishing perfection of ensemble and the surmounting of every technical problem from string quartets today. Is something lost from earlier eras?

Today's demand for perfection can take away some of the necessary spontaneity and readiness to take risks. To quote Harnoncourt: "Perfection is often achieved at the expense of beauty".

Is it pleasurable to practice 40 hours a week to maintain such a level of execution?

Rehearsing is a very private matter. Anyway, every musician has a lot of responsibility toward the composer.

The best quartets convey different qualities of sound for every period they play. One I recently presented began with Purcell Fantasias and ended with the Beethoven Cavatina. Do you agree that the composers are well-differentiated? Did the Purcell sound as if it was being played on

gut strings? Was the Beethoven strange-sounding, or inevitable? Naturally the journey from Purcell to Beethoven is longer than the one you are taking in Boston from Haydn to Mozart. Nevertheless, can you tell readers what differences to listen for in sound and style?

From Purcell to Beethoven there is a big musical development: to follow the content and character of the music leads us to our personal view of the piece.

We ask for your understanding that we don't give any comments concerning other interpretations.

Haydn quartets are often more accessible regarding character and purpose (joy, humor, sorrow, anger ...). Mozart's quartets are much tighter in texture. To quote Mozart in his dedication to Haydn: these six quartets were composed as "the fruit of long and laborious endeavor". The audience will have to make an effort to get into this.

Should attendees pay to sit close and hear four individuals, or farther back, where a more blended sound obtains?

The way we found our name: In the Basilica San Marco in Venice there are fantastic mosaics on the floor. If you look at them from a close distance, you can see all the fine details like the beauty of the stone itself. From the first gallery, one experiences more of the shapes, and even further up you get the whole picture of the story within the architecture. In the same way we can perceive music from different distances physically and mentally, thinking about articulation, phrasing, and overall architecture. So it will be up to every listener (from every place in the hall) to adjust the distance for himself.

QUATUOR MOSAIQUES

VANCOUVER
CLASSICAL
MUSIC

November 5, 2014

**THREE DECADES OF SUPREME MUSIC-
MAKING FROM THE QUATUOR MOSAIQUES**



Ask any lover of chamber music which recordings in their collection are their most prized, and I am sure that those by the Quatuor Mosaïques will always get mentioned in their short list. Starting from their award-winning Haydn Op. 20 quartets (1990) -- that really gave the world a signal to the importance of these works -- all the way to the last Op. 76, 77 compositions, a standard was set not only for period performance of Haydn quartets but for all performance of these quartets. Each recording was truly a jewel, combining scholarship, exquisite

phrasing and dynamics, and remarkable depth, beauty and insight. And what we think of these recordings now is not diminished from what we thought then. But the exalted sequence of recordings did not stop there. Their Mozart 'Haydn Quartets' were equally compelling. And anyone who has heard their Schubert 'Death and the Maiden' either live or in recording knows how riveting, true and complete that experience is. Later, we moved to the Beethoven, Op. 18 quartets, and for all we thought we had heard it all, the Mosaïques finds a



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revealing beauty and space that make us live them all over again. There are two interesting things about all these recordings. First, the ensemble's interpretative strength and sensitivity made the performances compelling whether or not they were played on period instruments. Second, the variety of unique timbres produced and the absolute clarity in the way that individual voices interact did actually provide a clinic on what period performance -- and gut string articulation in particular -- could achieve.

It is one thing for an ensemble to be modest and self-effacing, but the fact of the matter is that, formed in 1985, Quatuor Mosaiques are now approaching their 30th Anniversary. They continue performing throughout the world, often at the most distinguished venues and festivals. I cannot think of a period-style chamber ensemble that has had more longevity, and they are now entering the range of the truly long-lived quartets overall. In my opinion, there are few string quartets of the past half-century who could be regarded as more pioneering and influential than the Mosaiques. Of course, both violinist Erich Hobarth and cellist Christophe Coin have held many different posts at the same time. Both have conducted and, at one point, made some headway into the Haydn trios, recording with pianist Patrick Cohen.

The purpose of this interview is to simply catch up with this great ensemble as they approach three decades of artistic commitment and see what their perspectives are on their own past and future, and the development of historically-informed performance. The ensemble had just given a delightful Vancouver concert featuring the Haydn, Op. 103, Mozart, K. 421 and Schumann's third quartet, followed by Christophe Coin's own charming transcription of pieces from the latter's Kinderszenen as an encore. I was very fortunate to be

able to sit down briefly with all members of the ensemble; Erich Hobarth and Christophe Coin acted as spokesmen.

1. THREE OF YOUR QUARTET'S MEMBERS ARE VIENNESE AND OF ALL OF YOU MET WHILE PLAYING FOR NIKOLAUS HARNONCOURT'S CONCENTUS MUSICUS IN VIENNA. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK THAT YOUR INTERPRETATIVE STYLE STILL REFLECTS THIS CITY'S TRADITION OF MUSIC MAKING?

Erich Hobarth: I don't think we were influenced that much by our surroundings or, say, the string playing in the Philharmonic in particular. My main influence was that of my teacher, Sandor Vegh, a violinist with a very unique style and a marvelous personality. He taught and encouraged a whole generation of musicians and I was very fortunate to be a member of the Vegh Quartet for the last three years of its existence.

Christophe Coin: We certainly inherited the great tradition of European string quartet playing and its focus. But I think from our original idea of a Mosaiques Ensemble, we were seeking something very specific artistically. In a mosaic, every detail is seen to have been brilliantly thought out, yet the eye is also capable of apprehending the picture as a whole. It is the same with music: you have to work on the details, you have to create the best possible listening conditions, and then get the distance just right so that the listener can see all the individual elements and the whole work of art at the same time. We believed that playing with gut strings might get us closer to realizing this goal.

2. JUST HOW MUCH OF THE STRING QUARTET REPERTOIRE DID YOU INTEND TO COVER?

EH: We always aimed to be at the center of the string quartet repertory: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. Everything rotates around

those four composers. But we eventually recognized that the quartet repertory of this time period is so large that we were in danger of ignoring a great deal of good music that is not played any more. So we have also concentrated on discovering 'unknown' composers up to the early romantic period, such as Arriaga, Werner, Jadin, Gross, and Boëly. We have also played many romantic composers, Mendelssohn and Schumann, for example. We did not really want to move past the time when gut strings were not common anymore.

3. HAVE YOU EVER DONE WORKS BEYOND THAT -- TRULY MODERN WORKS?

EH: Yes, we have actually performed Bartok's first two string quartets, the Debussy quartet, and a short piece by Webern.

4. AS A FOUNDING ENSEMBLE OF HISTORICALLY-INFORMED STRING QUARTET PERFORMANCE, YOU WILL ADMIT THAT THERE IS STILL SOME AMBIGUITY OVER WHAT 'AUTHENTIC' REALLY MEANS. IS IT SIMPLY THAT YOU USE GUT STRINGS, OR IS IT THAT YOU ARE TRYING TO RECREATE THE TYPE OF PERFORMANCE THAT MIGHT HAVE ACTUALLY OCCURRED IN A COMPOSER'S LIFETIME? FOR EXAMPLE, YOU PLAYED A SCHUMANN QUARTET TODAY. IS THIS THE WAY IT MIGHT HAVE SOUNDED IN THE 1840'S?

CC: For all the research one might do, it is still very difficult to find out how musicians played at that time. The techniques of the 19th C. virtuosos were more extreme than in the previous century, so you would likely find several schools (one being that of Viotti) going in very different directions. There would therefore be very different interpretations coexisting in Schumann's Leipzig, much like one finds in current times. Nonetheless, I would think many ensembles might share the deep, dark sound that has been the

tradition of Leipzig orchestras to the present day.

5. WOULD THE SAME THING HOLD FOR INSTRUMENTAL TECHNIQUES?

CC: I have also done a little study of cello techniques from that period – and one would find the same differences. Each cellist would have special fingerings, techniques, and habits of their own, so it is impossible to say that any one technical style was 'the' style of that time.

6. PERHAPS 'AUTHENTIC' IS ALSO ABOUT FEELING?

EH: Yes, a lot of it comes from the heart. What does the music truly say? How should you express that? From this perspective, it is quite possible for a young modern ensemble to play a Haydn quartet 'authentically' in the sense that they faithfully express all the natural feelings in the work. To be fair, there have been many very fine quartet performances from ensembles that make no pretense to being historically-informed. They are different from ours but as worthy as ours. We cannot say absolutely "we know how it goes."

7. HAVING PARTICIPATED IN HISTORICALLY-INFORMED QUARTET PLAYING SINCE ITS INCEPTION, HOW DO YOU THINK THE TRADITION HAS DEVELOPED?

EH: Well, there are some new quartets now, but still not that many. Just after we started, there was the Salomon Quartet; the Quartet of the Library of Congress also employed a very old style. But, really, not many followed and few are very visible. What we take pride in is that our way of playing did influence the interpretations of many younger quartets, even those that were not committed to period performance. For example, we can see this in the way that many ensembles now play the minuet of a Haydn quartet.

8. DO YOU THINK YOUR INTERPRETATION OF CORE WORKS HAS CHANGED MUCH OVER TIME?

EH: I don't think it is the same – definitely not. But the degree to which things have changed is hard to describe by ourselves. Everyone develops over time: there is no stand-still in life. I am not the same person I was ten years ago, and neither are the others. So, our reactions to each other in performance have probably altered in subtle ways. But it is you, the audience that can probably judge the end result better than we can.

9. WOULD YOU LIKE TO RE-RECORD ANY OF THE WORKS YOU HAVE DONE BEFORE?

CC: No, I don't think any of us have the time or the luxury to re-record. We live in a different age now and it is simply not possible to have a recording programme like we used to have. The market is not healthy enough and not that many people would likely be interested in a new integral set of Haydn quartets, for example.

10. SO, WHAT ARE THE BIG THINGS FOR THE FUTURE?

EH: We will be happy recording more Beethoven. We have only put down the Op. 18 quartets so far. It is the late quartets that we really want to concentrate on now. And we want to keep on discovering new composers that no one plays. Have you ever heard of the string quartet of Charles Gounod?

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

San Diego Early Music Society

March 12, 2009

by Laurent Planchon

Introducing the Mosaïques, part I



The last concert of our 2008-2009 season is the Quatuor Mosaïques, and this is one I am especially looking forward to for lots of different reasons. Firstly, I am very fond of Nikolaus Harnoncourt's *Concentus Musicus Wien*, and being able to present this extraordinary string quartet composed of members (or ex-members in the case of cellist Christophe Coin) of this marvelous ensemble is quite a privilege. But reducing this string quartet to their relationship to the *Concentus Musicus* is not very fair either, as they have succeeded on their own in becoming the first (maybe with the exception of the *Festetics*) string quartet playing on period instruments to play at the level of the legendary string quartets (on modern instruments) of the past and of today.

Over the next few entries to this blog, I shall try to present the other members of the Mosaïques, but let me start with first violin Erich Höbarth. Mr Höbarth is probably most famous for having succeeded Alice Harnoncourt as concertmaster and soloist of the *Concentus Musicus Wien* in the 80s (and as such can be heard in numerous recordings of the ensemble), but -also very impressively- he became a member of the famous *Végh-Quartet* at only 21, and first concertmaster of the *Vienna Symphony* at only 24. He was also a member of the *Vienna String Sextet*, appears as a soloist with countless ensembles such as the *Vienna Chamber Orchestra* and *Chapelle Royale* of Paris and is Artistic Director of the *Camerata Bern*. Needless to say he is a master of both the modern and baroque violin and plays on a violin by *Guarnerius filius Andreae*, Cremona 1705.

With the exception of French cellist Christophe Coin (who I guess came up with the French name for this string quartet and whom I shall present next), all the members of *Quatuor Mosaïques* are Viennese and are also part of the very special Viennese baroque movement (there have been a lot of arguments about how different the *Concentus Musicus* sounds compared to other ensembles from Amsterdam and elsewhere and how different their baroque technique can be) and being able to hear this fine ensemble in a purely Viennese program (Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert) is quite a rare opportunity that I invite you not to miss.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

San Diego Early Music Society

March 24, 2009

by Laurent Planchon

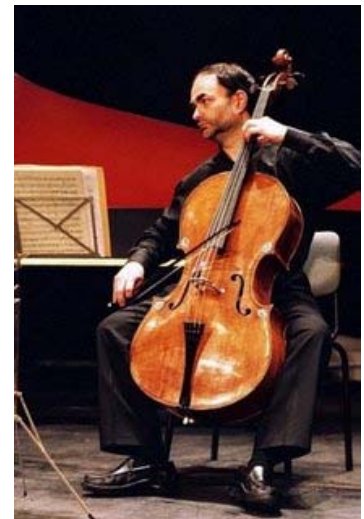
Introducing the Mosaïques, part II



When I got a call last year from New York asking whether the San Diego Early Music Society would be interested in presenting the Quatuor Mosaïques, I did not hesitate very long. Such a rare opportunity was too hard to pass up, even if it meant that the concert had to be on a weekday evening. It turns out that San Diego will be the last leg of an impressive US tour: Carnegie Hall New York, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Library of Congress, University of Chicago, Cal Performances in Berkeley, and in Vancouver, a co-presentation by the Friends of Chamber Music and Early Music Vancouver. I must say it feels rather good to be in such a distinguished company of presenters. Not to mention the quartet's usually -sold out- venues in Europe such as the Musikverein and Konzerthaus in Vienna, Wigmore Hall in London and Theatre de la Ville in Paris.

Sell-outs in Vienna and Paris are no surprise, since three members of the

quartet are Austrian (Erich Höbarth, violin Andrea Bischof, violin and Anita Mitterer, alto) and one, the cellist Christophe Coin, is French. But why a French name? It appears that the idea originated with Christophe Coin, who in 1984 founded the Ensemble Mosaïques, a chamber orchestra which he dissolved one year later, keeping the name for the string quartet he then founded with the section leaders of the defunct orchestra. Christophe Coin has had quite an impressive career. He studied cello first with Andre Navarra in Paris, then moved to Vienna where he worked with Nikolaus Harnoncourt and performed in the Concentus Musicus Vienna. He also studied viola da gamba with Jordi Savall in Basle and performed in Hesperion



XX.

Coin was also a member and soloist



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in the Academy of Ancient Music, and he also -more recently- recorded Vivaldi's cello concertos with Il Giardino Armonico.

Since 1991 he has been the director of the Limoges Baroque Ensemble, which he brought to international recognition with a series of recordings of Bach cantatas. He also heads the baroque cello and viola da gamba classes at the Paris Conservatory. Needless to say, he is widely regarded as one of the leading cellists and musicians of the baroque movement.

I already introduced Erich Höbarth in the previous post, and the two other members of this extraordinary quartet are also well known in the baroque movement. Andrea Bischof and Anita Mitterer are both permanent members of the Concentus Musicus but have also very impressive achievements elsewhere. Andrea Mitterer has held the position of Konzertmeisterin and soloist of the Austrian Bach Soloists, and is Professor of Chamber Music at the Musikhochschule in Vienna. Anita Mitterer -who plays the violin in the CMV- is also Director of the Baroque Ensemble of Salzburg and teaches violin and viola at the Mozarteum in Salzburg.

This concert will be the last of their US tour, and it will also be the last of our 2008-2009 International Series. This was an early music journey that started in the 14th century with Machaut and Diabolus in Musica, took us through the Renaissance with ALSQ, and let us wander in the baroque era with Bach and Vivaldi. I could not think of a better ending than looking forward to Haydn and Mozart with such extraordinary musicians.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

NEWCITYMusic

April 14, 2009

by Dennis Polkow

Preview: Quatuor Mosaïques/University of Chicago Presents



It was back in the late 1950s that Nikolaus Harnoncourt formed the Concentus Musicus Wien, originally a group of players from the Vienna Symphony that began the period instrument movement revival of seeking to restore instruments of the type used by composers of the eighteenth century. The goal was to recreate, as far as was possible, the timbres, textures and performing techniques of early music in contrast to the performance practices of the nineteenth century (large, wide vibrato, large string sections, slow

tempos) that well into the twentieth century were still being read back into performances of music from earlier eras. Harnoncourt and company began a series of revolutionary concerts in Vienna and their many recordings made us completely rethink the sonorities of music we once thought that we knew; so much so that period instrument performances are now the standard by which other performances of eighteenth-century music are measured. It wasn't until 1985, however, that a string quartet

was formed out of the group. The Quatuor Mosaïques—violinists Erich Hobarth and Andrea Bischof, violist Anita Mitterer and cellist Christophe Coin—initially made its sterling reputation based on recordings of Haydn, who had perfected the symmetrical sonata form that would become the very musical building block of the “classical” era, as well as the practical means of musical expression for both private (the string quartet, the piano sonata, the trio) and public (the symphony, opera, the oratorio) performance. The Opus 77 Quartets are particularly associated with the Quatuor Mosaïques, being the first works that the group recorded, and the Opus 77 Quartet No. 2 in F Major (Hob. III:82) will be the centerpiece

of this rare Chicago appearance by the ensemble, which is being sponsored by the Austrian Consulate General. Mozart, whose quartets expanded Haydn’s pioneering quartets with his uncanny genius for melody, will be represented by his “Dissonance” Quartet in C Major, K. 465, and the concert will open with Schubert’s “Quartettsatz” in c minor, D. 703. A pre-concert discussion will take place at 6:30pm, free to ticket-holders.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

October 15, 2017

Viennese Classicism Mosaïqued

By Leon Golub

In its first appearance with Celebrity Series Boston, the Quatuor Mosaïques gave us two Mozart quartets that represent the zenith of the Viennese classical style, as well as a landmark early Haydn quartet that broke decisive ground in developing that style. Performing on historical instruments with gut strings, they created a rich, complex sound, demanding sustained quiet and attentiveness from Saturday's audience.

Not only did Quatuor Mosaïques perform on period instruments, but they also boldly performed according to a period aesthetic, refusing merely to "grab" us and seduce us. They brought a sincerity, maturity and elegance that have become all but alien to us moderns. We are the outlaw children of Lord Byron, intoxicated by excess, the children of IMAX and swift cars racing in the night, of electric cities and thunder. We expect to be thrilled, wowed. We like our Vermeers brilliantly illuminated with artificial light in stunning museums. Quatuor Mosaïques (Erich Höbarth, Andrea Bischof, violins; Anita Mitterer, viola; and Christophe Coin, cello) forced us out of our expectations by performing the most treasured gems of our classical repertoire in their natural light, unvarnished, uncontaminated, towering with restraint and wisdom, to unforgettable effect.

As a case in point, consider the opening measures of Mozart's "Hunt" Quartet, K. 458 in B-flat Major, with which the concert began, "the fruit," as Mozart said to Haydn, "of a long and laborious labor." Usually, these opening measures are given a jaunty, "catchy tune" quality.

Immediately noticeable at the outset, a slight pause after the opening upbeat preceded a saliently strong downbeat led by Bischof's second violin, followed by a rich blending of the individual voices, coming together at moments into a single glow of sound. This alternation between separation and unity became the most striking characteristic difference felt by our modern ears.

Similarly in the second movement minuet, a transparent *ma non troppo* allowed the mood to wander and express a genuine feeling of summer idleness bordering on the idyllic. An elegiac mood obtained in the adagio through the cantabile sweetness of Höbarth's tender and profound first violin, which approached operatic theatricality without indulging in it, engaging in a duet with Coin's cello, as though embracing suffering through music lifted it into dignity and detachment. The final Allegro assai felt whimsical and free, allowing direct and immediate shifts of mood and conveying the notion that wit is a form of wisdom, protecting our fragile hearts.

As our hearing became more attuned to the subtlety of Quatuor Mosaïques' interpretation, we were treated next to Mozart's Quartet in D Minor K. 421, the second of the "Haydn quartets", and the only one in a minor key. Here, at the very outset, the pathos of the opening measures brought forth a jaggedness that forced us out of any potential complacency. The individual voices clearly defined, Mitterer's viola conveyed an air of poignant, exploratory unpredictability to the development. They took the Andante at an almost adagio pace, with strong changes in



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dynamics, especially in the Trio section. The da capo, soft and delicate, seemed to convey an understanding that the point is not to express “raw” emotion but to transform emotion, through restraint, into something distinctly elegant and human. Similarly, the Menuetto had an elegant and lyrical quality, with the sweetness of the violin taming the chromaticism and transforming it into a miracle of playfulness tinged with adult detachment. The final Allegro ma non troppo, often performed with an impish wit, conveyed an august, dignified feel, bordering on the haughty, simultaneously light and serious. We felt time slipping through our fingers, sadly joyful, weighed down and reflective, the return of the theme suddenly clearly defined and anxious, the final measures (simultaneously in D major and minor) resolving definitively on the final chord. Although inspiration for Mozart’s six “Haydn quartets” is usually cited as Haydn’s Op. 33 quartets, it is certainly true that Haydn’s Op. 20 set of “*divertimenti a quattro*” constituted a major step forward in Haydn’s development of the form. Op. 20, no. 2, in C major, actually the third in order of composition, is the most modern-sounding of the six. The systematic working out of the final movement fugues in no. 5 (Fuga a due Soggetti), no. 6 (Fuga a tre Soggetti) and then no. 2 with its Fuga a 4 Soggetti, is clear and the bold step of freeing the cello from its traditional accompanying role is evident in the opening notes of the first movement. It is a stunningly free, original work, full of surprises, with unexpected twists and turns.

In many respects the Haydn was the highlight of the evening, confounding our expectations. The Moderato first movement sounded clear and crisp, joyful, played with judiciously employed light vibrato, the development featuring a wonderful confrontation between first violin and cello. Haydn’s second movement Capriccio, perhaps the most startling to modern ears, alternated a strong unison declamation, firm and dramatic, with a lyrical, dreamy response, as though foreshadowing Beethoven’s own inventiveness in the slow movement of the fourth piano concerto. At the end, Höbarth’s first violin floated gracefully above it all, leading without pause into the Minuetto *musette*, imbued here with a tinge of nostalgic sentimentality, interrupted by the return of the dark mood of the adagio, reminding us that we live, play and dance on the edge of a very tall cliff.

Most striking in the finale, where we have come to expect a display of virtuosity, we heard a marvelously gentle approach which gave it a magnificent elegance. By interpreting the intellectual climax of the piece with such restraint, Quatuor Mosaiques successfully forced us to concede that Haydn’s gift to us is to achieve a deeply emotional reflective detachment instead of merely thrilling us for a moment.

The audience responded with a heartfelt ovation. Recognizing that we had understood their special aesthetic, the quartet reiterated Haydn’s gift to us with a moving and profound reading of the Andante of his Op. 33, No. 6 quartet.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

Boston
CLASSICAL REVIEW



October 15, 2017

Quatuor Mosaïques celebrates Haydn and Mozart in a congenial program

By Aaron Keebaugh

Visiting string quartets frequently offer Haydn's music as a tune-up for the weighty romantic works to come. Quatuor Mosaïques, from Austria, turned the menu around at Jordan Hall, with a dynamic performance of Haydn's Quartet, Op. 20, No. 2 as the centerpiece, and Mozart as accompaniment.

Renowned for its proficiency with classical masters, the quartet, welcomed to Boston's Celebrity Series on Saturday, was formed thirty years ago, when its musicians met while playing in Concentus Musicus Wien, an ensemble that pioneered the use of period instruments. Once formed, Quatuor Mosaïques followed suit and opted for gut strings.

Their sound, as a result, is unique. Gut creates more overtones than wire, and the sound has a soft edge. The ensemble also blends more easily into a plush fabric of sound.

What also distinguishes Quatuor Mosaïques is the musicians' interpretations. The players spin phrases in long arcs, and their tasteful rubato shading breathed additional life into the Haydn and Mozart works they performed.

Though cast in C major, Haydn's Op. 20, No. 2 Quartet is rife with storm and stress. The opening movement flowed from a singing cello melody, played radiantly by Christophe Coin, to passages of turbulence. In the Adagio, the stark unison phrase tilted the music toward darkness. The Minuet glided smoothly. But in the final movement, the musicians dug into their instruments

for a grainy, agitated conclusion. This was a Haydn of drama and depth.

Their performance of Mozart's Quartet in D minor, K. 421 was similarly stirring in its intensity. The first movement ran the gamut from shade to light and back again, the players shaping the phrases with a wide range of dynamics. In the second movement they mined the songlike grace from the music's stormy exterior. Some of Mozart's Minuets foreshadow the Scherzos to come in Beethoven's music, and here the quartet played with a slight edge to the sound — a colorful contrast from the folk-flavored Trio. The theme of the second movement returns in the finale as the basis for a set of variations, and there the music danced.

Mozart's Quartet in B-flat major, K. 458 provided a lyrical opening to the concert. Nicknamed "The Hunt" for its horn-like motives and the galloping figures in the first movement, it is one of the more familiar of Mozart's Haydn Quartets — works he dedicated to the elder composer.

In the hands of Quatuor Mosaïques, the piece resonated with warm, singing lines. The Minuet had a smooth flow, more song than dance. And the Adagio glowed with a rosy timbre. Phrasing, here too, was sensitive, and Erich Höbarth's long violin line passed gracefully to Coin's cello. The outer movements moved with gentle rubato and finesse. Tone colors shifted like light through a prism for effects that were both bright and shimmering. It was, as Haydn himself put it, a true conversation among friends.



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QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

theStrad
VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

September 2016

MOSAÏQUES QUARTET,
ROBERT LEVIN (FORTEPIANO)
WIGMORE HALL 7 MAY 2016

With an absorbing account of Haydn's op.76 no.1, this veteran quartet showed that it remains among the composer's most adventurous interpreters. Rough breathing (rhetorical, not vocal) of the opening chords met smooth legato for the main business of the first movement, enlivened the second time around by a Viennese lift to the dotted rhythm and discreet ornamentation from leader Erich Höbarth. He cut an authoritative figure, physically (and musically)



Viennese elegance from
the Mosaïques Quartet

dominant if hardly infallible, over-exposed by Haydn's descant for the second-movement hymn but leading the line with a relaxed authority that paid off at points such as the dancing-master trio.

He and his colleagues are not physically demonstrative – just a quick eyes-up was enough to get the finale under way with surprising aggression – and it was Robert Levin doing most of the looking and leaning when he joined them for the Piano Quartet that Beethoven arranged from his Quintet for piano and winds. More happens in the eventful, theme-packed first movement than in many of his later symphonies, and without fear of being drowned by a grander keyboard the Mosaïques peeled back not only the 20-something tyro's obvious debts to Mozart but his own neon-signposted turns to the minor key and chatty counterpoint. Levin was on scintillating form.

After the interval, the Mosaïques brought no less elegance to the more fligree fingerwork of Mozart's Piano Concerto no.14 in E flat major K449 (conceived by the composer for both chamber and orchestral accompaniment), slightly compromised by a malfunctioning fortepiano. A man with a spanner appeared in due course, but the magic was lost.

PETER QUANTRILL

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

The Herald

February 14, 2016

Music review: Quatuor Mosaïques

By Michael Tumelty

What an extraordinary weekend's music-making in Perth Concert Hall. "I have never heard string quartet-playing of that quality," said an elderly gentleman whom I do not know. "And nor have I, sir", was the only response I could come up with. The group was Eric Hobarth's Quatuor Mosaïques, which is the finest period-instrument string quartet in the world. They were light years ahead of the pack when they made their contribution to the Edinburgh Festival's Haydn series in St Cuthbert's Church many years ago. They are now, in terms of their playing, in a different solar system. How do they communicate? It's invisible. I tried to catch, on Friday and Saturday nights, the nod of a head, the uplift of a bow, a telling glance, the flick or a wrist or even the raising of an eyebrow. I caught nothing: their timing, co-ordination, scrupulous balance, incredible texturing that lets the light stream through, and seamless integration are beyond scientific explanation. They are magicians of unquantifiable skill and experience, and what they do beguiles the eye, the ear and the mind.

What they did at the weekend was spell-binding. Mozart wrote six string quartets in honour of his great mentor and chum, Joseph Haydn. Each is a masterpiece on which Mozart laboured and lavished genius and inspiration. Hobarth's magical Mosaïques played them all in dust-free, high-fibre, low-calorie interpretations that raised issues for other such performers: how do you play warmly, with rich expressivity, a big

sound and real dramatic power on gut strings and with almost no vibrato? Nobody really knows but the group. But the clouds dispersed and the light streamed through textures, illuminating a very good, self-pilfering, multi-contrapuntal element from the finale of the Jupiter Symphony in the G major Quartet, a shockingly-prophetic glimpse of Mahler from the third movement of the E flat Quartet, and myriad revelations piling up by the page.

But Wolfgang Amadeus didn't have the weekend entirely to himself. In between two of Mozart's quartets on Friday, old Joe Haydn stole onto the stage, bringing with him pianist Susan Tomes and a dazzling performance of Haydn's E minor Piano Trio whose sparkling wit in the racing finale with its outrageously-comic conclusion suggested that Haydn, a master of humour, would have appreciated mightily the madcap antics of Tom and Jerry. And then on Saturday afternoon, Tomes had the stage to herself in a recital which explored a Haydn/Mozart connection, gave us a set of Haydn's Variations and an achingly-beautiful Mozart Rondo.

Even on Saturday night, as the astonishing Mosaïques turned out effortlessly-brilliant accounts of Mozart's E flat and B flat quartets, that Haydn man seemed to nudge his younger chum in the ribs, as though to say: "Shove over, Wolfie and cop this lot for originality," while the group played Haydn's G minor opus 20 Quartet with its wildly-inventive finale. A great weekend, though thinly-attended.



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QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES



February 14, 2016

Classical review: Quatuor Mosaïques

By Ken Walton

The Quatuor Mosaïques – famous for their use of gut strings and nurturing of an “authentic” Classical Viennese sound – framed Friday’s opening concert (****) with two of Mozart’s most rounded quartets: K387 in G major and the subtly enigmatic K421 in D minor.

These were beguiling performances, and an object lesson to any budding string quartets that the secret lies in genuinely shared thoughts, actions and interactions. It all looked so easy, the quartet’s seemingly casual demeanour exuding a comforting warmth, within which the tonal balance tilted and swayed to reveal the naturally-flowing complexity of Mozart’s genius.

Where the G major quartet had a calibrated, refined joyousness, there was questioning and delicate shades of darkness in the D minor, magically evoked through the spellbinding consistency of the ensemble’s tone, from the woody sonority of Christophe Coin’s cello to the soothing blend of the upper strings.

Haydn’s Piano Trio in E minor was a perfect diversion from the Mozart. Here, Coin and violinist Erich Höbarth were joined by Tomes, whose crisp and delicate pianism matched the period ideals of the string players and introduced, through Haydn’s crystalline writing, an added sparkle.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

PERTSHIRE ADVERTISER

February 19, 2016



The concerts given by the Quatuor Mosaïques and Susan Tomes must mark the greatest series in the ten years of Perth Concert Hall. Edinburgh-born pianist Susan Tomes contribution and her solo recital follow in a second review (see page 32)... writes Iain Stuart-Hunter.

This world class Quartet played all six of the Mozart Quartets dedicated to Joseph Haydn and one of Haydn's own quartets over three concerts.

The Quatuor Mosaïques is known as players of period instruments, but it is their intelligent musicianship which is their primary quality: they get you closer to experiencing the real Mozart because of what they know and what they do.

In Köchel order, they started with the G Major K387. From the first notes the joy in communication of this quartet came over. This work sprang to life with poise and warmth. The Minuet was a coiled spring, dramatic in its outer sections, with pathos in the Trio. Their lyrical Andante was proof that their application and study make everything appear flawless and easy. Even the dense contrapuntal work out of the Finale was given wretched in smiles.

The d minor Quartet K421 ended the first concert. The only minor key quartet had befittingly greater seriousness and was played with finely imagined sonorities.

The Andante had sadness, the depth of feeling evoked with economy, not distortion. Their Minuet was stern, with the first violin of Erich Hörbarth bringing smiling humour to the skying, double stopping, even harmonics of the Trio.

The Variations of the finale started fateful and desperate, going through a kaleidoscope of moods.

Perhaps Mozart's most pleasing quartets formed the second concert. The glorious sweep and mellifluous sound of the E Flat K428, ending with Mosaïques' playing of the Allegro vivace as a witty tale cleverly told.

Finally, the unbuttonedly joyous "Hunt" Quartet in B Flat. Between them seriousness and tension in Haydn: Quartet in g Op.20 No.3, the Finale taken at a furious pace.

Incredible changes of mood came out in the Quartet in A Major K464, Mozart's limitless invention shown to its best by this superb ensemble. Finally the Dissonance Quartet with Musician is keeping his uncle's memory alive

Quatuor Mosaïque

Its darkly mysterious introduction bursting into the daylight of the Allegro. Serene warmth, sprightliness and a truly joyous Allegro molto brought this most satisfying and amazing series to a conclusion. And rightly appreciated as such, recalling the artists to the platform even once the house lights were on.

March 2015

MOSAÏQUES QUARTET

FRICK MUSEUM 9 NOVEMBER 2014

The lovely acoustics and ambience of the Frick Collection's concert space only accentuated the well-balanced, beautifully controlled playing of the Mosaïques Quartet. Haydn's C major Quartet op.20 no.2 was performed with impressive articulation and beautiful phrasing. Most outstanding were the exquisite cello solos in the second movement and the power of the quartet's sound in the finale.

Schubert's Quartet no.10 in E flat major followed, and the only disappointment here was the lack of a programme note on this lesser-known work (composed when Schubert was just 16). Beethoven's Quartet in E major op.18 no.2 boasted great energy and balance among the voices, and it was pleasing to see the musicians smiling at each other so often during the performance. They truly embodied the joyful character the music presented, and communicated this easily to the audience.

The quartet displayed tremendous energy throughout the performance and the clarity and precision of their articulation were worthy of much praise and admiration.

LEAH SWANN HOLLINGSWORTH

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

SAN FRANCISCO
CLASSICAL VOICE

The Go-To Place for Classical Music
in the Bay Area

April 15, 2012

Quatuor Mosaïques Nuanced Approach

By Jonathan Rhodes Lee



The Austria-based Quatuor Mosaïques derived its name from the mosaics that adorn the Basilica di San Marco in Venice. Seen from up close, these works of stone-art offer myriad details for the viewer to appreciate. From a distance, larger images emerge, the detailed work culminating in one cohesive whole. The members of the ensemble saw something similar in the string quartet: the study and nuanced approaches of the individual musicians must somehow congeal, to make an understandable whole for the audience. This period-instrument ensemble accomplished this aim — and more — with great aplomb in its concert for Cal Performances Sunday night in Berkeley's First Congregational Church.

For this set, the ensemble chose to perform quartets with nicknames. The concert opened with a work by the father of the string quartet, Joseph Haydn, the so-called "Sunrise" Quartet in B-flat major (Op. 76, No. 4); the work's moniker comes from the arch-shaped phrases with which it opens. They followed this with Mendelssohn's

Opus 13, "Ist es Wahr," which takes its name from the song that Mendelssohn wove throughout the quartet. The group closed with the "Rosamunde" Quartet by Schubert (Op. 29, No. 1), so named because, like Mendelssohn, Schubert quoted one of his own tunes in this work's second movement.

To choose "named" quartets was more than mere cleverness in programming. The string quartet is one of the most intimate chamber music genres. Denied the flamboyant tools of the symphony orchestra, singers, or even a solo keyboard, a quartet demands a certain discipline and clarity of thought from composers. It's hardly a surprise that, by the time Beethoven was writing his late string quartets, that composer was obsessive about their reception. Nor is it surprising that audiences routinely apply little sobriquets (and legendary stories) to these works, in an effort to bind them forever to their composers — and to themselves.

Modern quartets can't quite achieve

the fleetness and transparency that

the Quatuor Mosaïques managed in

these passages.

The "Sunrise" Quartet is "Papa" Haydn at the peak of his jovial, flexible powers, written when he was 65. He uses a dazzling array of compositional techniques in this work, ranging from



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clear thematic form in the first movement to peasant-inspired writing in the third. Quatuor Mosaiques clearly relished this rustic minuet, emphasizing its weirdest qualities to great effect. This movement's trio asks the lower instruments to create a drone while the fiddles meander expressively, before all the instruments join in bizarre parallel octaves that punctuate not only pleasing homophony but also denser imitative writing. The following finale is Haydn at his wittiest. Supposedly based on a folk song that Haydn brought home with him from London (one of those countless "quartet legends"), this two-part movement contrasts sturm und drang intensity in B-flat minor with sparkling variations on the theme in B-flat major. The ensemble's response to the effervescent finale was breathlessly exciting, played at breakneck speed and tossed off with wry nonchalance.

Equally satisfying was the group's approach to Mendelssohn's "Ist es Wahr." If the Haydn selection was the work of a seasoned master, Mendelssohn's was the product of unquestionable youthful genius. The composer was just 18 when he composed this quartet. Surely his youth has more to do with the legend that has been attached to the work than anything inherent; Mendelssohn was inspired, the story goes, to write a song on the poem "Ist es Wahr" by a fleeting love affair the year before composing the quartet. So few details about this purported inspiration have come down to posterity that I have always tended to regard the story as apocryphal, but it shows, once again, how desperately we want to connect this music to the composers' inner lives.

The Quatuor Mosaiques offers the best experience that one could hope to have at a string quartet concert.

Fine — there is, indeed, something inexplicably personal and intimate about this work. But we may as well marvel at Mendelssohn's youthful mastery of his models as wallow in his tragically short, passionate life. The quartet is distinctly Beethovenian in conception, with a cyclic use of the original song theme. It's quoted not only at the beginning of the quartet, but also, most recognizably, in the heart-wrenching Adagio second movement. This movement opens with the quoted material before launching into a severe central fugue, reminding us that Mendelssohn was one of Bach's champions in the 19th century.

It was in this contrapuntal play that the Quatuor Mosaiques' use of period strings had its greatest effect. Mendelssohn may not be chiefly known as a contrapuntist, but the clarity with which this ensemble was able to shape these independent parts, and somehow wrest the tortured chromaticisms of this fugue into a cohesive whole, was admirable. Their use of gut strings and lighter bows was also effective in the work's third movement (marked "intermezzo"), in which Mendelssohn composed the type of featherweight "fairy music" that is one of his hallmarks. Modern quartets can't quite achieve the fleetness and transparency that the Quatuor Mosaiques managed in these passages.

The concert ended with Schubert's "Rosamunde" quartet, which uses a melody from Schubert's incidental music to a failed play by Wilhelmine von Chezy. The play may have flopped, yet the music is sublime; written just a year before the composer's untimely death, when he was mired in poverty, this work is Schubert at his most profound. The performers masterfully rendered the massive work, which comprised the entire second half of their program. They effectively responded to its rapid changes of mood, and pushed their instruments to their very limits —

another effect that sometimes gets lost on beefier modern incarnations of the violin family.

The Quatuor Mosaiques offers the best experience that one could hope to have at a string quartet concert. Its members have played together for more than 25 years, so they understand the medium deeply. Their programming provided a

satisfying overview of one of the more expressive periods in history of quartets, and their masterful technique on period strings allowed tiny details to bubble up to the surface that might be lost in other groups' performances. This ensemble delivered, with obvious élan, exactly what its name promised.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

The New York Times

April 22, 2012

Vigorous Interpretations of Sounds Both Old and New

By Steve Smith

“In a mosaic each detail appears splendidly conceived,” the cellist Christophe Coin wrote in the booklet notes for a recording of string quartets by Beethoven as performed by the Quatuor Mosaïques, the sterling Austrian ensemble of which Mr. Coin is a member. “But it is the overall picture that one takes in at a single glance,” he continued, explaining that a similar process is brought to bear when a quartet weighs all the various factors that go into forming an interpretation.

The group — Mr. Coin, the violinists Erich Höbarth and Andrea Bischof, and the violist Anita Mitterer — has ranked among the world’s foremost string quartets since shortly after its founding in 1985, balancing period instruments and historically informed performance practice with contemporary interpretive impulses like no other. Yet apart from a Zankel Hall appearance in 2009, its concerts at the 92nd Street Y during the last two weeks were part of its first United States tour in more than a decade, mostly because of its members’ busy schedules as individuals.

Still, when the Quatuor Mosaïques presented its second program at the Y on Thursday evening, the group’s ingratiating sound and impeccable interpretive unity gave the sense of a unit that lives and breathes together constantly. You could hear it in the way

the players deftly negotiated the asymmetrical theme, shifts between major and minor, and rash asides in the Allegro con spirito of Haydn’s Quartet in G minor (Op. 20, No. 3), which opened the concert. They avidly embraced the jerky oddness of the Menuet; Mr. Coin sounded especially soulful in the tender Poco adagio.

With works like this, Haydn transformed the string quartet from a medium of genteel diversion to one of innovation and rigorous discourse. In Mozart’s Quartet in B flat (K. 458, “Hunt”), you heard Haydn’s advances allied to a fervid young imagination, as well as a penchant for singing lines to which Mr. Höbarth’s lithe touch and lilting tone proved ideally suited.

From a start in Haydn’s fundamentals Beethoven proceeded to erect mountains, wrestle demons and gaze on eternity within the sublime sprawl of his late quartets. In his final Quartet No. 16 in F (Op. 135), he returned to Classical form with flinty concision. The Quatuor Mosaïques made the most of this mercurial work, with a ravishing Lento assai that was tantamount to secular hymnody.

Recalled for an encore, the group complied with a similarly rapt account of the Cavatina from Beethoven’s Quartet No. 13 in B flat (Op. 130).

QUATUOR MOSAIQUES

The Philadelphia Inquirer

April 12, 2012

Quatuor Mosaïques presents depth, quietly

By David Patrick Stearns

Some of the more reckless philosophers I've known claim that music is not sound. What? The idea is that sound is just the vehicle of some greater experiential entity that we call music.

Such notions were put a casual test by the 27-year-old European ensemble Quatuor Mosaïques in a sold-out Philadelphia Chamber Music Society concert on Tuesday. Even in the good Perelman Theater acoustics, Mosaïques' period instrument sound was demure compared to such vigorous groups as the Emerson Quartet. Attacks were less aggressive. Peaks were lower, valleys higher in a generally narrower sound picture. Yet less sound hardly translated into less music, suggesting that the group does tap into something well beyond mere notes and rests. No doubt this is what people mean when they talk about music casting a spell.

That also explains why a city like Philadelphia — not known for much of a historically informed performance community — has a strong Quatuor Mosaïques following. Pared-back vibrato, the less-imposing sound of gut strings, plus a meticulous ear for overall blend created an inviting warmth that's vaguely comparable to the Guarneri Quartet at its peak. Whether or not you noticed the period-instrument difference in the opening Haydn String Quartet Op. 20 No. 3, you felt it. Sometimes with earlier Haydn works you hear form more than expressive content. This performance drew you so

far below the surface, you heard only content.

Surface charm is part of the content in Mozart's durable Quartet in B Flat K. 458 ("Hunt"), and it's here that the Mosaïques showed its unerring taste in phrasing details. Part of the Mosaïques' distinctive chemistry is the Viennese sensibility projected by first violinist Erich Hobarth, whose incidental solos have a lilting hesitation (like a singer catching a breath) that accentuate the music's contours. Cellist Christophe Coin anchors that elasticity with a solidly even approach toward tempo as well as the consistently vibrant presence of his sound. Everything was handled with such care, right down to small accompaniment figures.

Beethoven's dense, enigmatic String Quartet Op. 135 occupied the concert's second half — with a curious effect. Never a great melodist, Beethoven seemed to be daring himself to go with the barest semblance of thematic material so as not to distract one's ears from the music's structure; sensuous listening wasn't in the cards in music so uncompromising and obsessive. One can feel a bit left out of the first two movements, though not amid the sweep of the Mosaïques performance. The main reason to hear Op. 135, though, is the slow movement: The concentration and subtle sense of continuity that Mosaïques brought to the piece felt like a profound secular prayer.



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QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

THE VANCOUVER SUN

April 19, 2012

A Quiet Revolution

By David Gordon Duke

The phrase “Quiet Revolution” has, of course, specific meaning in this country, yet the term could be just as apt for last Tuesday’s Friends of Chamber Music/Early Music Vancouver co-presentation of the Quator Mosaïques at the Playhouse. For several decades the Quator Mosaïques has been essaying work from the Classical through early Romantic eras with period performance practices; for more than sixty years the FOC has been bringing the world’s great string quartets to Vancouver.

While every string quartet has its own personality, the re-thinking of string sound and performance style that hearing the Quator Mosaïques invites is, in every sense, a revolution in taste. I can understand those who aren’t yet fond of what we’ll call period strings, yet there remains the inconvenient truth that masters like Haydn, Schubert, and Mendelssohn would not have expected to hear their work performed as it was through most of the 20th century, any more than JS Bach would have recognized the sound of the modern concert grand or Mozart the saxophone. What makes Quator Mosaïques so different? The sound of gut rather than wound metal strings is the starting point; bows are different, and thus so is articulation; a whole vocabulary of late 19th century virtuoso tricks in fingering, tone production, and phrasing, so much the stock in trade of many contemporary

ensembles, is avoided fairly scrupulously. The Quator Mosaïques players do vibrate—quite a lot, as it happens—but not in the continuous, over-rich way of “traditional” string players brought up in the post-Brahms era.

Tuesday’s program began with well-known Haydn, the *Quartet* in B-flat major, Op. 76, #4 and ended with Schubert’s *Quartet* D. 804, both played with precision and style. For me it was the 1827 A minor *Quartet* of the 18-year-old Felix Mendelssohn that provoked the most remarkable re-think of the evening.

Very much in the thrall of the late Beethoven quartet style, Mendelssohn’s quartet often comes across as an exercise in musical dress-up: a young composer adopting, not entirely convincingly, the style of an older master. Not this time: the playing was fresh and tender, and brought out a strain of vulnerability that one rarely hears in the work when essayed by mainstream groups.

I don’t know how many converts to cause of authentic instruments/period performance practice the group made, but I sense that the ideas and ideals they so eloquently espouse are finding more and more favour with discerning listeners. Old, it would seem, is the new New.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

The New York Times

April 21, 2009

by Vivien Schweitzer

Thankful And Soulful On the Road To Recovery

One of the most emotionally intense passages in the chamber music repertory is the heart-breaking slow movement of Beethoven's Opus 132 String Quartet,

MUSIC REVIEW

VIVIEN
SCHWEITZER

severe illness in 1825.

When the Austrian period-instrument group Quatuor Mosaïques played the movement on Thursday at Zankel Hall, its interpretation was notable for its soulful intimacy. The earthy, warm timbre of the instruments' gut strings gave the four voices in the chorale an unusual resonance. The quartet's powerful performance of Opus 132 as a whole, the highlight of the evening, was remarkably expressive and nuanced.

The ensemble's members — Erich Höbarth and Andrea Bischof, violinists; Anita Mitterer, violist; and Christophe Coin, cellist — met while playing in Nikolaus Harnoncourt's period ensemble Concentus Musicus Wien and formed the Quatuor Mosaïques in 1985.

titled "Holy Song of Thanks From a Convalescent to the Divinity, in the Lydian Mode." Beethoven wrote it after recovering from a



JOE KOHEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Quatuor Mosaïques Members of this Austrian period-instrument ensemble in a concert at Zankel Hall.

There are few period groups among the innumerable fine quartets that appear regularly in New York. The Mosaïques players use less vibrato than their modern-instrument counterparts but more than many other period performers. In contrast to the bright, powerful sound of modern instruments, the ensemble brought a refined introspection to Schubert's "Quartettsatz" in C minor, which opened the program. Schubert wrote this enigmatic movement in 1820, and it foreshadowed the masterly quartets he would write in his brief maturity.

Like Beethoven, Schubert tested the boundaries of the established Classical quartet style, using shifting chromaticism in the development section of the "Quartettsatz." The musicians imbued the gentle melodic lines with a richly hued grace, aptly contrasted with the more turbulent sections.

The program also included Mozart's "Dissonance" Quartet (K. 465), nicknamed for harmonies in the opening Adagio that were considered daring at the time. One 18th-century critic called them barbarous. With elegant, detailed phrasing and carefully wrought playing, the ensemble illuminated the work's shifting moods and brought free-spirited zest to the good-natured concluding Allegro Molto.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

The Philadelphia Inquirer

April 18, 2009

by David Patrick Stearns

Early-music quartet at the Kimmel

Though the early-music movement in this country is still considered in some circles to be academically quixotic and technically inferior, the Philadelphia debut of Quatuor Mosaïques at the Kimmel Center's Perelman Theater on Wednesday had such musical intelligence and sensual allure that returning to more conventionally hard-edged groups, from the Juilliard to the Emerson Quartet, is no longer an attractive prospect.

The Quatuor Mosaïques members arose from Concentus Musicus at a time (1985) when that group seemed more preoccupied with mastering period instruments than with projecting the music. Nobody gets away with that now, and from Quatuor Mosaïques' many recordings of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, you could expect high-level playing. However, the group hasn't often been heard in the United States; the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, which presented the concert, negotiated for years.

Initially, the in-person Mosaïques represents nothing radical relative to the historically informed revolution in baroque-period music. With further listening, its low-fat, less-

aggressive blends of sound simultaneously projected a solid

sense of the music's totality while revealing the inner workings. That doesn't happen so often. The blend also gave a particular glow to pieces that ask for surface gloss, like Mozart's *String Quartet in C ("Dissonant") K. 485*, the minuet from Mozart's *Quartet in D minor (K. 421)*, and Schubert's *Quartettsatz (D. 703)*.

Extra credit for that glow goes to cellist Christophe Coin, who needed none of the usual physical vigor to make rhythmic points, but created his own kind of momentum with pulsating effects that stayed well inside the quartet's overall sound envelope.

Sharp attacks that usually call an audience to attention were mostly eschewed by first violinist Erich Hobarth - they weren't needed. Vibrato-less phrasing can sound woozy to modern ears, though Hobarth was particularly adept at creating a seesaw effect that forcefully propelled one's ears to the next musical paragraph. With its less-imposing sound, the group also made better sense of the starting and stopping in Haydn's *String Quartet in F Major (Op. 77, no. 2)*. Haydn knew what he was doing; not until now did I know what he was up to.



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QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

The Washington Post



April 20, 2009

by Robert Battey

Quatuor Mosaïques at the Library of Congress

Austria's renowned Quatuor Mosaïques brought its specialized music-making to the Library of Congress Saturday evening, garnering an enthusiastic standing ovation. The group's calling card has always been its probing, visionary interpretations of the early Haydn quartets, and indeed the G minor quartet, Op. 20 No.3, which opened the concert, was amazing. The Mosaïques found the emotional core of the work in the Minuet, of all places — a brooding, restless journey of uncertainty. Here, the delicate and slightly balky gut strings on their period instruments perfectly caught the psychological tension; the ensuing Poco adagio became a veritable opera scena, as the upper strings created a rich, varied tapestry of sound for a soulful cello solo.

When it comes to later works, however, the group's narrow focus

becomes something of a liability. In Beethoven, and even late Haydn, they are up against all of the great modern string quartets. The refulgent sound of their instruments permits dynamic distinctions at the softer end of the scale that elude other groups, but Beethoven's thunderous accents and lyrical outpourings get short shrift. When a group stands on the principle that vibrato is an optional ornament, its players can then justify any inconsistencies as matters of taste. Which they are, of course; but music creates its own logic, and when a singing melody is delivered with catch-as-catch-can vibrato (usually stopping after a shift), questions arise. Still, the Mosaïques's cultured interpretations deepen our understanding of and appreciation for this repertoire.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

Chicago Tribune

April 20, 2009

by Alan G. Artner

CLASSICAL REVIEW

Satisfying debut for The Mosaïques

Some of the finest performers in classical music today play in a historically informed style on period instruments. As proof, I submit the Chicago debut of the Quatuor Mosaïques at Mandel Hall on Friday.

Other ensembles using gut strings, including the Festetics and Salomon quartets, gave brilliant accounts of music between the Baroque and Romantic periods. But for much of its 24-year history, the Vienna-based Mosaïques set new standards not only for proficiency but also probity and poetry.

Friday's performances made up the most satisfying exploration of Viennese classicism I heard in nearly half a century.

The program was built on first and last things: Franz Schubert's first mature quartet, the C-minor "Quartettsatz"; the last of the six quartets young Wolfgang Mozart dedicated to Joseph Haydn, the C-major "Dissonant"; and Haydn's last completed instrumental piece, the F-major Quartet, Op. 77, No. 2.

The Mosaïques recorded all but the Schubert decades ago. Friday their

tone was even more refined, colorful and expressive, with a complete absence of acidity. Transparency had allied with the texture of suede. Limited vibrato enhanced expression that was warm, occasionally fervent, never over the top.

With the bicentennial of Haydn's death a month away, the Op. 77, No. 2 held special interest. The ensemble tellingly communicated both the work's playfulness and gentle melancholy. The third movement march that begins as a duet between violin and cello, with the second violin and viola stealing in, was especially fanciful. The finale, energetic but unforced, danced farewell.

Haydn was 70 when he wrote his quartet, Mozart, 25. The vividness of the Mosaïques' playing made each composer seem young. But more: Its Mozart sounded utterly beguiling in naturalness, neither falsely delicate nor forcedly robust. Schubert's difficult single movement set the tone for the entire evening, with first violin Erich Höbarth's white-gold sound a thing of beauty in itself.



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QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
THE GLOBE AND MAIL

April 23, 2009

Pleasures of dissonance illuminated by logic of voice

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

At Vancouver Playhouse
in Vancouver on Tuesday

BY ELISSA POOLE

It is possible to play the famous introduction to Mozart's "Dissonance" Quartet – the String Quartet C major, K. 465 – so that it sounds like the product of 20th century modernism. Indeed, most string quartets do play it that way, oozing their way in the dark through a swamp of unsettled, shape-shifting, unharmonious chords one muddy, disoriented step at a time until they reach, as if by chance, the dry land of C major, when the sun slides up over the horizon and we discover we've been in the 18th century all along.

It's also possible to play the introduction a little faster, leave out the vibrato that distorts the identity of the chords, and move those chord progressions to their destinations in such a way that the logic of the voice leading illuminates the harmonic confusion without hindering our pleasure in the dissonance.

This is how the period-instrument string quartet Quatuor Mosaïques presented it on Tuesday night in Vancouver – the first appearance in Canada of this veteran European ensemble – and the wonder is that any quartet plays it any other way.

Interpreted like this, the introduction is no less a marvel. The resolution of each dissonance overlaps with the creation, in another voice, of a new one and we still don't feel we're on solid ground until the end of it. But we follow the succession of harmonies in the same way as we might look at a film of time-lapse photography: We know where we've



been; we see where we're going; we witness the miraculous fluidity of change.

Quatuor Mosaïques, formed in 1985, is one of only a handful of period-instrument string quartets (they use 18th-century bows and gut strings), and the group has probably convinced more audiences than any other ensemble that playing the great string quartet repertoire from the Viennese Classical period on early instruments is more plus than minus.

In Tuesday's program, jointly sponsored by Friends of Chamber Music and Early Music Vancouver, the ensemble pushed into the early Romantic period, playing Schubert – the *Quartettsatz in C minor, D. 703* and the *String Quartet in D minor, D. 810* ("Death and the Maiden") – as eloquently as it does earlier repertoire.

Friends of Chamber Music generally holds its concerts at the Vancouver Playhouse. It is not an ideal hall; there simply

isn't a venue in the city that is both intimate enough for chamber music and large enough to seat those who want to hear it.

But what a shame that is: Most of the concerts I've heard there, no matter how exquisite the playing, suffer from the lack of physical, sensuous immediacy and warmth that a resonant acoustic provides. One hears the music quite clearly; but one tends to listen more analytically. It's harder to be swept away.

That's even more of an obstacle for period string instruments. Quatuor Mosaïques produced one exquisite colour after another at softer volumes. Louder passages, where putting greater pressure on the strings for more volume made for a thicker texture and occasional intonation problems, weren't as successful.

The cello, played by the excellent Christophe Coin, sometimes overbalanced the ensemble. We also lost the lustre of the upper violin. First violinist Erich Höbart, who is a wonderfully nuanced, articulate player, spent much of the longer Schubert work ("Death and the Maiden") at the top of his instrument; in this hall, the sound was chilly and curt, its bloom cut off.

The listener accommodates, however. I can't overstate the pleasure in hearing gestures so aptly and expressively shaped, tempos so poised, harmonic areas characterized with such telling shifts in timbre (when vibrato is an expressive option rather than a constant, we have twice the dynamic range, twice the colour).

Sforzando accents pinged like tennis balls rebounding off a wall, simple phrases revealed their rhetorical weight. And most of all, basic tonal harmony, here so clear and so in tune, reassumed its once-Olympian significance in our jaded ears, its influence felt in every choice.

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QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

SAN FRANCISCO
CLASSICAL VOICE

*The Go-To Place for Classical Music
in the Bay Area*

April 22, 2009

by Michelle Dulak Thomson

Gesture Into Sound



It's a strange sensation, finally hearing in the flesh an ensemble you've wanted to hear in concert for a couple of decades. Judging by the friends I met and talked to at the Quatuor Mosaïques' Bay Area debut Wednesday at Berkeley's First Congregational Church, I'm not alone in having followed the quartet for decades without having had an opportunity to hear them live. The Vienna-based ensemble has come to North America before, but only, so far as I know, to the American East Coast and parts of Canada. Thanks to Cal Performances for finally bringing them here.

The Mosaïques players (Erich Höbarth and Andrea Bischof, violins; Anita Mitterer, viola; and Christophe Coin, cello) met as members of Nikolaus Harnoncourt's Concentus Musicus Wien in the 1980s. Since then they've recorded a considerable swath of the 18th- and early-19th-century quartet literature, including the mature Mozart quartets, several dozen Haydn quartets, and Beethoven's Op. 18. Early Mendelssohn is as far as they've ventured on disc, but recent performances (not here, alas) have included music as late as Bartók and Webern.

The quartet's sound is not what people have come to expect of historical instruments. Partly that's a consequence of a way of talking about historical performance that emphasizes the brisk and the brusque. "Early musicians" are always, journalistically speaking, scouring the grime off old masterpieces, forcing audiences to sit up in their seats, making all new and fresh and startling. When they take the liberty to be free, languid, or luxurious, it doesn't make such good copy. (This is why, for example, many people think "period instrument" performances are always faster than "modern" ones, which is far from true.)

But partly it's a real question of emphasis. Gut-strung instruments and "modern" ones vary greatly in terms of sound and response. A gut violin "E" string is (in my own playing experience) a cantankerous thing — harder to make sound, more perilous to strike quickly, and altogether more dangerous to play on than the steel "E" strings that have been standard equipment for violinists these last 70 years or so.

Such a string doesn't sound so glassy and metallic as a steel "E," but it takes a kind of effort to make it speak that you don't have to expend with a steel string. And that sense of effort, of physicality, is something that's become a part of period-instrument string playing. When you hear a fine "period" string section, a good part of the pleasure in it is just the "chiff" in the bowing — the little catch as the bow changes direction, the sense of the physical contact of bow and string that's one of the things good "modern" string teachers try early to erase from their students' playing.

Yet there's another side to gut strings. Nothing is as silkily smooth as a gut-strung instrument subtly played. And there's a way of coaxing sound out of a string, rather than (as it were) extruding it, that seems to be the province mostly of historical-instrument players. Take that idea and multiply by four, and set it to work on the major string quartet literature, and you have a good first impression of the *Quatuor Mosaïques*.

Sweet Signature Sound

It's not that they don't ever dig in (they do); it's not that there aren't, so to speak, guts in their gut (there are). Still, their signature sound is plaintive, airy, ineffably sweet. There's little of the gritty zing of strings here. They are in some ways a remarkably physical quartet — I don't know of any other so adept at translating gesture into sound — but the gruffer end of the "period" sound-spectrum they barely touch at all.

In the Schubert majority of the program, that made for sometimes disquieting results. The *C-Minor Quartettsatz* has a main theme in doubled 16th notes, and the universal modern way to play it is with extreme incisiveness, everyone together to a hairbreadth and everything as clear and crisp as possible. The *Mosaïques* players made it ghostly and indistinct, almost as though it were a sort of slowish tremolo.

Once I got used to the idea of that material played that way, it worked well. And the other material in the piece — the lyrical second theme, the strange closing theme with its

unnerving harmonic descent — was played with the Quartet's usual breathtaking suavity.

"Death and the Maiden" is a yet harder piece to take with its rough edges smoothed, and there were a few points in Wednesday's performance where I wanted to scream in frustration. (In the slow movement's last variation, there's a place where the cello moves up into the tenor register, a place that practically every quartet makes the climax of the movement. The Mosaïques players chose just that spot to pull back dynamically; it wasn't only Coin but all four, and it felt as though someone had maliciously pulled the plug.) The gritty places didn't conspicuously lack grit, yet I felt a reluctance to err on the side of overplaying that's unusual in period-instrument circles. Where the music was quiet and lyrical, it was exquisitely played. I doubt that many ensembles could match the Mosaïques' rendering of the opening of the slow movement, or its very close. The Trio section of the Scherzo had a remote, contained manner that's difficult to sustain. Few quartets can resist the invitation to gush there; the Mosaïques managed it, and the simple serenity was breathtaking.

And the body of the Scherzo itself had that kind of attention to inflection that has been this quartet's hallmark since it was founded. It's difficult to describe, if easy to hear: The theme starts with a syncopation, and two bars later it's repeated, as part of a rhythmic figure that has a catchy profile of its own. The usual thing is to take the whole phrase as one item, with maybe a little zing on the start of that figure in the second bar, though the syncopation it echoes

from the very beginning comes later on.

Zing Went the Strings

What the Mosaïques did was to save the zing for the syncopation itself, and the extra juice they gave that note enlivened the entire movement. There was a sort of swing in it, a tension between the barline and the syncopation, that I had never heard before.

The finale is music that (as with the *Quartettsatz*) we've gotten accustomed to hearing treated as an exercise in ensemble virtuosity — fast, tight, unified. By those standards the opening of the Mosaïques performance (a shade under the usual tempo, and not *quite* together) was underwhelming. But as the movement went on and there was more scope for the ensemble's strengths (detail of inflection, clarity of inner voices), the performance grew on me. And there's one thing to be said for a slowish opening tempo: Once you hit the coda, you can produce the impression of truly exhilarating speed. The rush to the finish was terrific.

Stuck between the Schubert works, Mozart's "Dissonant" Quartet (K. 465) might have seemed like a placeholder, the bread of a sandwich turned oddly inside-out. In the event, it got the finest performance of the evening. Here the Mosaïques' singular virtues were everywhere.

We heard the characteristic ensemble sound: strong, rich, and yet internally alive, with the inner parts individual and full of volition. Everything had the character of a gesture; nothing was filler, nothing mere harmony. At the same time, we felt all the corporate sense of the music that we could want. It's a

commonplace that a string quartet ought to sound like four people and also like one, but it's remarkably

difficult to bring that effect off in practice. It happened here.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES



ionarts Music, Art, Literature—the good stuff

April 21, 2009

by Charles T. Downey

Quatuor Mosaïques Worth the Wait

Ionarts has been recommending the recordings of the Haydn quartets by the Quatuor Mosaïques for years, but we had the first chance to review them live on Saturday night in an exceptional concert at the Library of Congress. The group was formed in the 1980s by cellist Christophe Coin and other members of Nikolaus Harnoncourt's historically informed performance (HIP) ensemble Concentus Musicus. Over two decades, their recordings of Classical string quartets, performed on historical instruments with gut strings, have changed the way we hear Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Two Haydn quartets on the first half had all the superlative qualities expected from the group's recordings: rhythmic clarity, impeccable balance among parts, and clean intonation partially due to a sparing use of vibrato. The G minor quartet (op. 20, no. 3) had a crisp first movement, a wistful yearning treatment of the second movement

(with a more dance-like trio), Venetian glass-like layering of sound in the third movement, and an active, energetic finale (albeit with a few squeaks here and there in the first violin).

Even more pleasing was the last published of Haydn's complete string quartets, the F major (op. 77, no. 2), in which the clever handling of the formal outlines of each movement was noteworthy, like the transition from development to recapitulation in the first movement. The jokingly clumsy return from the trio to the minuetto, like a sputtering engine trying to get started (in a coda that haltingly gets us back from D-flat major to the home key), played right into the hemiola games of duple versus triple that unsettle the second movement. In general, second violinist Andrea Bischof seemed a little too retiring and could have brought out her occasional solos with more flair, while the perceptive and

sonorous playing of cellist Christophe Coin marked him as the group's leader.

Beethoven's C minor quartet (op. 18, no. 4) was of the same approximate vintage as the later Haydn example, Beethoven's op. 18 set having been commissioned by Prince Lobkowitz at the same time as Haydn's (unfinished) op. 77 set. The comparison of the two quartets side by side highlighted the basic qualities of the young Beethoven's compositional style: the restless character of the first movement's main theme, the hammered tonic and dominant chords (as in the rewrite of the bridge of the first movement), the fugal writing of the second movement, and all of those sforzandi on third beats in the

menuetto. Gut-stringed 18th-century instruments cannot produce the same violence of sound as later ones, but there is such a thing as way too much sound in a Beethoven string quartet, and what is gained in the soft end of the spectrum makes the overall range of dynamics still very broad, just more subtle. The nature of the instruments also makes it much less easy for the first violin to dominate the texture, making the triplet accompaniment figure of the third-movement trio more transparent, for example. The Quatuor Mosaïques played with remarkable physical energy in the final movement, cranking up the wattage with each return of the rondo theme and then exploding in the Prestissimo coda.

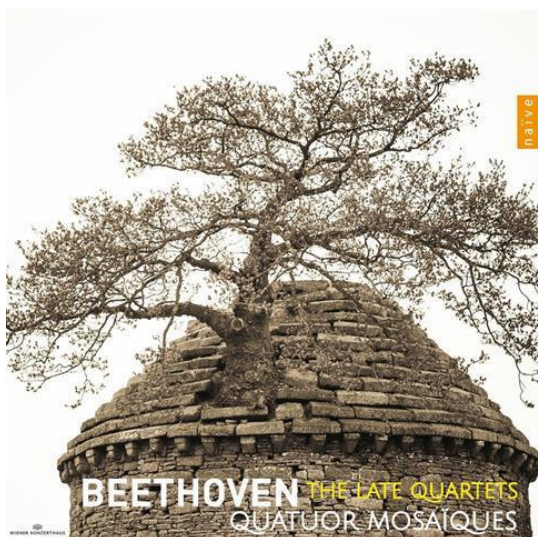
QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

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VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

February 2018

THE STRAD RECOMMENDS
**Quatuor Mosaïques:
Beethoven – The Late Quartets**

By Julian Haylock



For all their profound sophistication and spiritual intensity, the startling originality of Beethoven's late quartets inevitably emerges somewhat muted when sonically cushioned by modern steel-wound strings and playing styles derived from the Romantic cantabile tradition. By comparison, the uncluttered focus of the period-instrument Quatuor Mosaïques is evident from the opening bars of op.127, in which the chordal writing sounds closer in timbre to a Jacobean viol consort than a modern quartet, and the melody that subsequently unfolds possesses an ingenuous simplicity free of cloying espressivo. The desire to

remove layers of stultifying interpretative accretion is experienced most potently in opp.131 and 132, throughout which furrowed-brow contemplation and agonised soul-searching are replaced by a purity of line and gentle vibrato. These suggest a noble contrapuntal impulse arising naturally out of the past, rather than feeling premonitory of Bartók's groundbreaking work nearly a century later.

The famous Cavatina of op.130 possesses an open-air clarity of phrasing that places it closer to a Mendelssohnian intermezzo in feel, making the shock of the mighty 'Grosse Fuge' feel all the more imposing – the Mosaïques omits Beethoven's second finale altogether on the basis of it representing a forced artistic compromise in the face of contemporary incredulity. Fascinatingly, in the neo-Classical terrain of op.135, where modern set-ups tend naturally towards interpretative reining-in, the Mosaïques inflects the music with myriad deft touches that reveal this miraculous score as a new way forward – which in the event was left tragically unexplored. It brings to a close one of the most revelatory and thought-provoking sets of these timeless classics in decades.



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Forbes

December 13, 2017

The 10 Best Classical Recordings Of 2017

By Jens F. Laurson

#3: Ludwig van Beethoven, *Late String Quartets*, Quatuor Mosaïques, naïve

When the Quatuor Mosaïques burst on the scene in the 1990s – in a way as the chamber-music offshoot of Nikolaus Harnoncourt's *Concentus Musicus* – they re-defined Historically Informed Performance (HIP) standards in music-making for string quartets (and beyond). Before their Haydn (see also *ionarts*: “Best of 2013, Part 3”) and Mozart recordings, it was pretty much a choice between high standards of technical execution (as quartets like the Alban Berg-, the Emerson-, and the Hagen Quartet inched towards perfection) and the raw excitement and presumed authenticity of HIP performances. The latter were decidedly not for those ears who had grown to know and love a standard set by, say, the Amadeus- or Tokyo Quartets. Intonation was iffy and the rough was pretty darn rough and altogether the price for the excitement was a little steep for ears spoiled on ever-increasing precision. In a way, these may have been the most authentic HIP times of the age of sound-recordings, since the bands that played the works back in the composers' days – even the best and most famous – were bound to have had standards massively below those of today.

But we don't stop taking penicillin in order to inch closer to authenticity when trying to appreciate how Bach or Haydn or Beethoven might have sounded in their time. And neither need we sacrifice the technical standards for the sake of early music performing traditions and methods. That's what the Quatuor Mosaïques has taught us and I remember how many ears, hitherto not inured to the HIP movement, I turned on to their Haydn while working at Tower Records – and how they all came back red-eared, asking for more. They were the first HIP quartet – perhaps even the first HIP recording artists – that transcended the HIP/conventional divide.

When they finally tackled Beethoven with the opus 18 quartets, the excitement among their fans was considerable. The success of these recordings wasn't as overwhelming as with the preceding releases; perhaps because the ideal of a sound had been more deeply ingrained on listeners in Beethoven than in Mozart and Haydn. Perhaps the difference between the Mosaïques' Beethoven and, say, the *Quartetto Italiano*, was a bit much at first. In any case, the recordings still



achieved cult status with a few listeners but didn't seem to fly off the shelves. After two releases Naïve didn't follow up with any more Beethoven – and a few years later the whole company struggled and teetered toward bankruptcy. The idea of a continuation of the Quatuor Mosaïques' Beethoven cycle had become less and less likely – certainly on Naïve. Things may have dimmed on that front, but their cycle in the chamber music line-up of the Vienna Konzerthaus showed no signs of slackening. Attending a few concerts of theirs in 2013 and 2014 in the Konzerthaus' fabulous Mozart Saal, I was reminded vividly of just how much I had missed their performances. They hadn't slowed a bit. (See also: Ionarts-at-Large: Dancing Boots with Quatuor Mosaïques) Then, in 2016, Naïve was taken over by Believe Digital... and now the waiting is over: the label, rejuvenated by the buyout, is producing new recordings again – and they've picked up the pieces of that Quatuor Mosaïques Beethoven cycle and recorded the complete late quartets at the Vienna Konzerthaus and issued them in a 3 CD Box. Just in time for ensemble's 30th anniversary.

Hallelujah! Because Erich Höbarth, Andrea Bischof (violins), Anita Mitterer (viola), and Christophe Coin (cello) do not disappoint in the least. They still have got the marriage of execution, wit, liveliness, enchanting tone, and transparency down to a pat. Not only do these performances not need to have any slack cut for being HIP, they are

technically more accomplished than all but the very best conventional readings. The unforgivingly complex passages in the late quartets that sounded “incomprehensible, like Chinese” to contemporaries of Beethoven's and which still sound like a jumbled mess on surprisingly many recordings (even favorite recordings of mine), are executed with the absolute precision they demand. The Quatuor Mosaïques even adds touches of playful lightness where one usually only perceives effort. That alone is reason enough to embrace these recordings.

While the astonishing transparency of the quartet allows for hearing through all the notes, the lower tuning of their instruments allows for a more relaxed timbre, with stridence at a minimum and an overtone-rich warmth governing the sound. The naturalness of the result somehow belies the fact that these are, for some of the works, the first HIP recordings of late Beethoven Quartets. Some listeners will miss the conventional finale of op. 130 that Beethoven substituted for the too-demanding “Grosse Fugue”... but the Quatuor Mosaïques goes the uncompromising path along with Beethoven... and make Ludwig's point in doing so. Along with the Takács Quartet (see “Best Classical Recordings of 2017, Re-Issues”) and a select few other groups in individual quartets, these now easily rank among my favorite takes on the late quartets.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES



May 16, 2016

The 50 greatest Mozart recordings



String Quartets Nos 20-22

Quatuor Mosaïques

(Naive)

The Mosaïques' recording of the 10 mature Mozart Quartets is completed by this release, so it's time to salute an outstanding achievement. Apart from the clear, rich sound of the period instruments and the precise, beautiful tuning, what impresses about this Mozart playing is the care for detail, the way each phrase is shaped so as to fit perfectly into context while having its own expressive nuances brought out clearly. This often leads the quartet to use more rubato, to make more noticeable breathing spaces between sentences than many other groups do.

In the first movements of both these quartets, for instance, the Mosaïques adopt a very similar tempo and tone to the Quartetto Italiano, but the Italians aren't so rhythmically flexible; though the music is beautifully shaped, we move continually onwards at a steady pace, drawing attention to the overall effect. But with the Mosaïques we're made to listen to and appreciate the significance of each detail as it unfolds. With this approach there might be a danger of sounding contrived, but even when adopting a mannered style, as in the Minuet of K499, the Mosaïques retain a strong physical connection with the music's natural pulse – by comparison the Quartetto Italiano here seem a trifle heavy and humourless. The slow movements of both quartets are taken at a flowing pace, making possible an unusual degree of expressive flexibility, achieved without any sense of hurry. All repeats are made, including those on the Minuet's da capo in K499. This means that the expansive K499 lasts more than 36 minutes. The longer the better, as far as I'm concerned. **Duncan Druce** (October 2001)



KIRSHBAUM
ASSOCIATES INC.

QUATUOR MOSAIQUES



May/June 2013

WOELFL: *Quartets opp 4+10*
Quatuor Mosaiques
Paladino 23—74 minutes

A quick heads-up first thing: this composer's name is usually spelled "Woelfl", so if you don't turn up the spelling found here, try the other one. Very few recordings exist of Joseph Woelfl's (1773-1812) music. The two recordings of his quartets that have been reviewed in *ARG* are fairly recent (M/A & N/D 2009).

This recording, besides being something of a rarity for the music, is also unique because of the instruments it is performed on. In fact, the title on the booklet is *Franz Geissenhofs Instrumente*. Franz Geissenhof was the Stradivari of Vienna—the most influential Viennese violin maker of his time. The notes contain a fascinating essay on Geissenhof and his instruments, looking at how they differ from other famous violins and outlining the developments in both the sound and appearance of violins at the turn of the 19th century.

Woelfl is one of those composers who were much more famous in their own time than in ours. He was a student of such famous teachers as Leopold Mozart and Michael Haydn, and he was acquainted with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The works here include just three string quartets: Op. 4:3 and Op. 10: 1 and 4. Obviously, these are somewhat substantial works since the three of them take up 74 minutes. There are some novelties, though—the beginning notes of the Opus 4 Quartet leave one wondering if the work is early romantic, though much of the rest sounds firmly classical. Woelfl fell into the crack between the classical and the romantic.

I found this release a delight to listen to and the history compelling—a true collector's item.

CRAWFORD

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

IONARTS

SOMETHING OTHER THAN POLITICS
IN WASHINGTON, D.C.



July 13, 2010

Quatuor Mosaïques Continues with Schubert

By Charles T. Downey

We have attested to the fine Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven -- both live and on disc -- played by Quatuor Mosaïques. The group, formed in the 1980s by cellist Christophe Coin and other members of Nikolaus Harnoncourt's historically informed performance (HIP) ensemble *Concentus Musicus*, plays on 18th-century instruments (the Joseph Guarnerius in the hands of first violinist Erich Höbarth is slightly older, dating from 1683) with gut strings. As noted of the group's recent work on a disc of music by Boëly, this is not a performance for listeners who do not enjoy the typical aspects of HIP sound. The leaner, warmer sound does produce some remarkable effects in these Schubert pieces, however, especially in the variations on Schubert's song *Der Tod und das Mädchen* in D. 810, which gives that quartet its nickname. The four instruments create a halo of amber sound in this hushed movement that seems like Death's welcoming embrace - - that is, not the terrifying apparition of the "wilder Knochenmann" the maiden perceives (poem by Matthias Claudius), but the friend come to offer rest rather than punishment. Even as some of the

more active figuration percolates through the movement, the gentle tread of Death's feet always shines through the ensemble, a sense of comfort that reaches its apogee in the G major *ppp* conclusion of the movement.

The HIP sound also plays very well in the third and fourth movements, where the greater soft side of the spectrum creates other unexpected textures. As always, one misses some of the heft of the modern strings at more forceful movements (all those *fz* markings, for example), especially in the first movement of D. 810, for which the really fine recent recording by the Jerusalem Quartet is better by comparison. While the quartet audibly knows D. 810 very well -- a career-long obsession for some of the players, a matter touched on in the liner essay -- D. 173 seems less familiar, judging by some minor ensemble disagreements (made worse by a sound capture that is at times too close, making possible the hushed wonder of D. 810's slow movement but also revealing all the flaws in D. 173). The slender D. 173 is a nice piece but nowhere near the achievement of D. 810. The combination of a late quartet

with an early one -- if such a distinction makes any sense for a composer who died so young -- follows the formula of the quartet's "first volume" of Schubert, released over a decade ago and now not

so easy to find. If a complete Schubert quartet set is a goal, it could be competitive and at the very least an interesting choice.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

The Daily Telegraph

June 1, 2010

★★★★

Schubert's Death and the Maiden quartet is so often played it's in danger of becoming hackneyed, but the Quatuor Mosaïques have restored its freshness. The CD box reproduces Marianne Stokes' painting in which Death comes to the Maiden as a gentle figure, rather than a grimacing skeleton. The performance is similarly unexpected – chastely serious rather than despairing, but dramatic when it needs to be. **Ivan Hewett**



KIRSHBAUM
ASSOCIATES INC.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

THE  TIMES

May 23, 2010

SCHUBERT: String Quartets in G minor, D173, and D minor, D810 (Death and the Maiden) Quatuor Mosaïques

By David Cairns

Schubert's teenage quartets don't rank high, but the period-instrument Quatuor Mosaïques show that the G minor is worth hearing, not least the incisive opening movement's brief but striking development section, whose ghostly sonorities the group bring out vividly. Their performance of Death and the Maiden is music-making of a high order, felt and carried out by players animated as though by a single mind and impulse, yet each of them seeming to respond afresh at every moment. If they don't generate quite the headlong impetus of the Takacs's recent recording, their colours and phrasing, and the subtlety of their playing, are a marvel. At a slightly slower tempo, the presto finale's strange harmonies and eerie silences are all the more frightening.

Laborie LC06, Four Stars

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

THE  TIMES

May 15, 2010

Quatuor Mosaïques: Der Tod und das Mädchen

By Geoff Brown



The Mosaïques' gut strings bring a dark and husky colouring to the quartet in which Schubert stares death in the face, D 810 (Death and the Maiden). The Takacs Quartet's exemplary rendering for Hyperion in general packs the mightier punch, but the Mosaïques still shine in the slow movement's lyricism. Also featured is an earlier, tauter Schubert quartet (D 173), with two disquieted outer movements framing a nimble scherzo and an andantino of much courtly charm, dispatched here with unforced beauty.

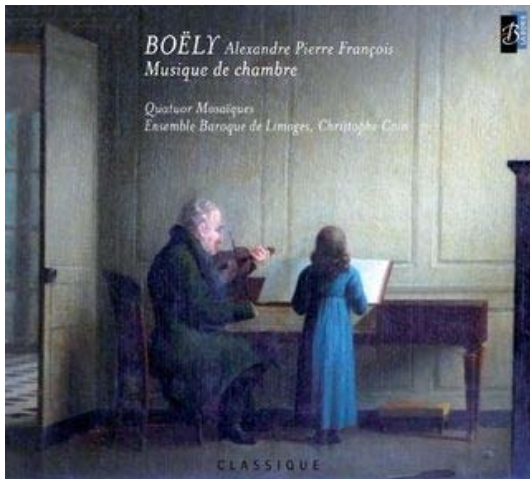
QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

TORONTO STAR

April 20, 2010

CD Review: The chamber music of Alexandre Boëly elegantly brought to life by Quatuor Mosaïques

*** (out of 4)



If you love the chamber music of Haydn and Beethoven, this album is worth hunting down.

Being born in Versailles to a court singer and teacher would normally be a great start for any future musician. Except that Alexandre Pierre François Boëly was born in 1785 and King Louis XVI had his head cut off in 1793.

Boëly grew up to be an organist-composer-violist at a time when, slogans of liberty and fraternity aside, the state had become the official religion.

Boëly was deeply conservative, championing the likes of J.S. Bach and

Frescobaldi. Worse yet, Hector Berlioz was born in 1803. So, guess who died nearly penniless and overlooked in 1858?

Organists continue to play Boëly's nicely crafted compositions. But he wrote a lot of chamber music, too. An all-French effort led by Quatuor Mosaïques has gathered up some highlights on a new disc.

(The album comes with minimal printed notes -- in French, only. You can download a pdf of comprehensive background information here, but it, too, is in French only.)

Two of three substantial pieces on this generous disc were composed in 1827, the *String Quartet No. 1*, in A minor, and a D Major *Sextet*. The third is a *String Trio* from 1808. These works are separated by each of three recently found *Mélodies* for cello and swell organ ("orgue expressif"), played by Olivier Latry.

The larger works sound a lot like late Haydn or early Beethoven, with carefully laid-out themes and counterpoints. There is a lot to listen to here, and the various musicians involved in the recording have done a polished job.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

THE  TIMES

July 4, 2009

Quatuor Mosaïques: Alexandre Pierre François

By Geoff Brown



Boëly, who's that? Known in France as a 19th-century organist, he's revealed in this CD as the composer of chamber works intriguingly pitched between 18th-century reserve and 19th-century romanticism. Outer movements sparkle brightly; slow movements are deliciously wistful, especially as played by the superb Mosaïques and their period instrument friends. For full documentation (in French only), listeners are directed to a website; not ideal, though the music speaks clearly by itself.

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES



June 2005

RECORDING OF THE MONTH



Ludwig Van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet in F major, Op. 18, No.1

Lobkowitz (1799) [30:44]

String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No.4

Lobkowitz (1800) [24:42]

● Quatuor Mosaïques (Erich Hobarth (violin);
Andrea Bischof (violin); Anita Mitterer (viola);
Christophe Coin (cello))

Recorded in September 2004, in Grafenegg
Schloss Alte Reitschule, Austria. DDD

● **NAÏVE E8899** [55:30]

This is a most welcome release. This is the Quatuor Mosaïques second volume of this early set of six Beethoven Quartets. Its release has been eagerly anticipated since the acclaimed first volume containing Op. 18, Nos 5 and 6, recorded back in 1994, on Naïve E8541 [not reviewed].

Mosaïques have carved out an outstanding reputation in the quartet repertoire of the late 18th century and they are without doubt the greatest quartet ensemble of our time performing on authentic instruments. They are celebrated the world over for their period-style interpretations, which at the same time never lose sight of the precious European quartet tradition. Following their many benchmark recordings of Haydn, Mendelssohn and the great Mozart quartets, all on the

Naïve label, it is clear that this quartet are in perfect phase to interpret the new world explored by the young Beethoven in these Op. 18 quartets.

The set saw the twenty-eight year old Beethoven, now deep into his first creative period, exploring what was new compositional territory. Beethoven had at the time already written a wide range of chamber music, including string trios, piano trios, cello sonatas, violin sonatas *et al.* Previously Beethoven had kept a respectful distance from the genre of the classical string quartet, that had reached the peak of its development, so profoundly marked by Haydn and Mozart.

The impetus for launching out on this challenging compositional terrain finally came in late 1798 in response to a commission for a package of six string quartets from Prince Lobkowitz, who

was a native of Bohemia and a leading patron of the arts in Vienna. Though thoroughly grounded in the classical tradition of Haydn and Mozart, these quartets continually demonstrate new attitudes, techniques and nuances of expression. For the time, in these quartets, the remarkable innovation and incredible experimentation evinced by Beethoven's later quartets are subservient to an exuberance and tranquil grace that belong to an older order.

The turn of the century was an extremely significant period for Beethoven, as at the time of, or shortly after, completing this Op. 18 set he was to astound the music world with masterworks such as the Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat major, Symphony No. 1 in C major, Violin Sonata No. 5 in F major "Spring", Piano Sonata in C sharp minor "Moonlight", Symphony No. 2 in D major and the Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor. All this in a period when Beethoven had confided to close friends that his hearing was rapidly deteriorating.

String Quartet in F major, Op. 18, No.1

The F major String quartet was the second of the set of six Lobkowitz Quartets to be composed in 1799. The score, to which Beethoven undertook some drastic alterations, is particularly impressive for the highly contrasting character of its four movements. An unusual feature is the obsessive way a simple two-bar motif is subjected to extensive elaboration. In fact, this motif appears, in various guises, over a hundred times in the movement, passing from instrument to instrument, constantly changing its personality.

The distinguished Mosaïques in this *F major Quartet* are authoritative, communicative and intense. I especially enjoyed the yearning and longing quality of their performance in the tragic

Adagio. In the bright and cheerful *Finale* their dynamic playing is vibrant in momentum and bursting with wit.

String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No.4

The fourth work in the set of six Lobkowitz Quartets, the C minor String quartet was composed in 1800 and is the only one to be set in a minor key. Another unexpected and curious structural feature of the four movement score is the lack of a slow movement, instead utilising both a *Minuet* and a *Scherzo*. It is also striking that in both the opening movement and the *Finale* the role of the first violin is treated in a markedly *concertante* and virtuoso fashion.

In the C minor Quartet Mosaïques offer unalloyed pleasure in a broad and expansive interpretation and their sentient playing is of sterling quality. Dramatic playing in the opening movement offers unsettling and contrasting moods that vary from dark and brooding one minute to exciting intensity the next. The second movement, which is a *Scherzo*, is especially memorable as Mosaïques play with humour and playfulness, yet maintaining a suitable sense of restraint. For the Naïve label Mosaïques on period instruments are peerless in these works and in any case have few similarly equipped competitors. Using modern instruments my preferred version of the Op. 18 six is from the Italian Quartet, recorded in Switzerland during 1972 -75 and presented in a three disc boxed set on Philips 464 071-2. Also worthy of consideration are the accounts from the Talich on Calliope. They were the first to accommodate all six works on two discs, available on two volumes; CAL 9633 (Nos. 1-3) and CAL 9634 (Nos. 4-6). Both these analogue sets from the Italian and the Talich have been digitally remastered, repackaged and re-released at bargain price. A third modern instrument version that I would not

wish to be without is the digital account from the Alban Berg Quartet. They offer fine live performances recorded in Vienna in 1989 over two discs presented on the bargain priced "Great Artists of the Century" series, on EMI Classics 5627782.

There would have to be a third volume should Mosaïques decide to record the last two works in Beethoven's Op. 18 set. I realise that performances on period instruments are a niche market but this strategy hardly represents good

value considering the very modest cost of the available sets from the competition. The sound quality from the Naïve engineers is cool and reasonably clear and the performers are very closely recorded. Interesting and reasonably informative liner notes are provided.

Quatuor Mosaïques are an astonishing ensemble who deserve the utmost praise for these magnificently performed scores.

Michael Cookson

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES

IONARTS

SOMETHING OTHER THAN POLITICS
IN WASHINGTON, D.C.



September 27, 2004

Dip Your Ears, No. 11

Haydn is the father of the string quartet, and his output in that field is impressive equally for its quantity and quality. Spirited playing of those masterpieces can be found with the Kodaly Quartet (on Naxos) and the Lindseys (on ASV)—to mention only two recent groups that excelled in capturing Haydn's quartets on record. If you like performances on period instruments, or simply Haydn, you must listen to the Quatour Mosaïques's take on the op. 77 works (or any of their other Haydn recordings, for that matter). Easily as spirited as the Lindseys and technically more accurate, they create a joy that is palpable, recorded as well as live. Not seemingly held back by their old instruments or historically informed performance practice, they are to Haydn right now what the Takacs Quartet is to Beethoven. Gramophone recommends for a reason. Smile!

QUATUOR MOSAÏQUES



August 2002



Franz Joseph HAYDN (1732-1809)

String Quartet Op.64, No.6

(hob.iii.64) in E flat major [18:02]

String Quartet Op.64, No.3

(hob.iii.67) in B flat major [20:09]

String Quartet Op.64, No.1

(hob.iii.65) in C major [22:00]

● Quatuor Mosaïques: Erich Höbarth (vn 1); Andrea Bischof (vn 2); Anita Mitterer (vla); Christophe Coin (cello).

Rec. La Borie Studio (France), June 2003. ADD

● **ASTRÉE E8886** [60:11]

This recording of the Op.64 Haydn quartets ought to be dedicated to anyone who has ever doubted the quality and integrity of period instruments. Going on the evidence presented in this delicate Astrée package there is little wonder that Quatuor Mosaïques have achieved unanimous critical acclaim and numerous awards. And this stands as a compliment of the highest order from someone who was brought up on and swears by the Amadeus and Griller quartet interpretations of the Classical period repertoire.

Haydn's mature Op.64 set of six string quartets was composed in 1790, the same year that saw the release of the composer from his Kapellmeister duties

when Hungarian patron Prince Esterházy died. Dedicated to the violinist and businessman Johann Tost, three out of the six quartets (Nos.1, 5 and 6) were première in London at impresario Johann Peter Salomon's concert season; but not before the composer had made a few alterations to accommodate a more theatrical British palate! It is this dramatic strain that proves such a strength in the quartet No. 6. Here we find bold unison statements, graceful melodies, violin acrobatics and cerebral contrapuntal passages. These are the building blocks of the expressive opening *Allegro*. The range and depth of this music could not have been better communicated than by Quatuor Mosaïques who at all times articulate

with clarity and character. Particularly satisfying passages are the fugal entries [2:18] and the imitative dialogue; each in perfect proportion.

The *Andante* is just as strong for its impeccable control and sense of wisdom. With the cello entry, a sobering resonance meditates through the texture; the musical warmth and solidarity across the ensemble is brilliant. Within this tranquil framework an independently-minded first violin breaks into song over a broken chord accompaniment. The shift of scene is superbly handled by a sensitive collaboration of musicians.

A stately *Menuetto* is flamboyantly contrasted by the microscopically-detailed *Presto* finale. However the intricacies of the latter are handled with the same decorum that graces the former. This meticulous attention carves out any deviations with concrete definition; notice the pauses [2:38; 3:09; 3:12; 3:17] that stand out with potent feeling and significance.

Quartet No. 3 adopts an altogether different tone. Less concentrated than No.6, the relatively light-hearted opening *Adagio* is nevertheless elegantly propositioned. At one point [3:44] a dark corner of impetuous scalic imitation threatens to subvert the tranquillity but loses out to its calm exterior. The shifting portraits are handled with impeccable ease and

unrelenting energy so that the musicians often compel the listener to buy into an almost visual conception of the music.

Two minuets stand at the centre of this courtly quartet. The second, *Menuetto allegretto*, leads with a dashing first violin tune that carries its obedient colleagues down a path of humorous and fragmented phrases. The Quator Mosaïques relish a nicely contrasted middle section that indulges in smoother lines and motivating syncopations. With the same professionalism the ever-punctilious instrumentalists narrate an exceptionally well-crafted fast *Finale* that is punctuated by pillars of surprising harmonic manipulations (0:42;1:52; 2:43; 3:47).

The final piece, Quartet No.1, is the simplest of them all and begins with a portly, low-pitched *Allegro Moderato*. Quator Mosaïques capture the composure with dignified gestures and faultless technique. Concluding with the tightly packed *Presto* finale dense in both sound and texture consolidates a sequence of performances that sustain a remarkable collaboration of musicianship and technical agility.

The remaining quartets of Op. 64 (Nos. 2, 4 and 5) have been issued separately on Astrée E8875.

Aline Nassif

QUATUOR MOSAIQUES



October 2001

Quatuor Mosaïques complete their late Mozart quartet cycle in characteristically eloquent style Mozart

String Quartets - No 20 in D, 'Hofhneister', 1(499; No 22 in B flat, 'Prussian',
K589 Quatuor MosaIqucs

Astrée Naive 4) E8834 (63 minutes: ODD) An impeccable end to an outstanding
series: precision and instinct perfectly matched

Selected ewizpcainoa:

Qtoorteei,, ltcilioiioo, (8/9R) (PHIL) 462 262-2PB

The MosaIques' recording of the 10 mature Mozart Quartets is completed by this release, so it's time to salute an outstanding achievement. Apart from the clear, rich sound of the period instruments and the precise, beautiful tuning, what impresses about this Mozart playing is the care for detail, the way each phrase is shaped so as to fit perfectly into context while having its own expressive nuances brought out clearly. This often leads the quartet to use more rubato, to make more noticeable breathing spaces between sentences than many other groups do. In the first movements of both these quartets, for instance, the MosaIques adopt a very similar tempo and tone to the Quartetto Italmano, but the Italians aren't so rhythmically flexible; though the music is beautifully shaped, we move continually onwards at a steady pace, drawing attention to the overall effect. But with the MosaIques we're made to listen to and appreciate the significance of each detail as it unfolds. With this approach there might be a danger of sounding contrived, but even when adopting a mannered style, as in the Minuet of K499, the MosaIques retain a strong physical connection with the music's natural pulse - by comparison the Quartetto Italiano here seem a trifle heavy and humourless. The slow movements of both quartets are taken at a flowing pace, making possible an unusual degree of expressive flexibility, achieved without any sense of hurry. All repeats are made, including those on the Minuet's double repeat in K499. This means that the expansive 1(499 lasts more than 36 minutes. The longer the better, as far as I'm concerned.

Duncan Druce



KIRSHBAUM
ASSOCIATES INC.

Quatuor Mosaiques Discography

PALADINO

pmr 0023: **Woelfl**: String Quartet in c minor op 4/3; String Quartet in G Major op 10/4; String Quartet in C Major op 10/1 (2012)

NAÏVE

- V 5445 **Beethoven**: The Late Quartets
- E 8541 **Beethoven**: Quartet Op. 18, No. 5 in A Major; Quartet Op. 18, No. 6 in B Flat Major (1994)
- E 8899 **Beethoven**: Quartet Op. 18, No. 1 in F Major; Quartet Op. 18, No. 4 in C minor (2005)
- E 8902 **Beethoven**: Quartet Op. 18, No. 2 in G Major; String Quartet Op. 18, No. 3 in D Major (2007)
- E 8721 **Boccherini**: Piano Quintet in B Flat Major Op. 57, No. 2; Piano Quintet in D minor Op. 57, No. 4; Piano Quintet in C major, Op. 57, No. 6 (Patrick Cohen, piano; 1993)
- E8721 **Boccherini**: Piano Quintet in E minor Op. 56, No. 1; Piano Quintet in F Major Op. 56, No. 2; Piano Quintet in D Major Op. 56, No. 5 (Patrick Cohen, piano; 1994)
- E 8785 **Haydn**: String Quartet in E Flat Major Op. 20, No. 1; String Quartet in C major Op. 20, No. 2 (1992)
- E 8742 **Haydn**: "Die letzten Worte Unseres Erlösers am Kreuze" (Seven Last Words of Our Savior on the Cross) (1992)
- E 8800 **Haydn**: String Quartet in G Major Op. 77, No. 66; String Quartet in F Major Op. 77, No. 67; String Quartet in D minor Op. 77, No. 68 (2000)
- E 8665 **Haydn**: String Quartet in G Major Op. 76, No. 1; String Quartet in D minor Op. 76, No. 2; String Quartet in C Major Op. 76, No. 3; String Quartet in B Flat Major Op. 76, No. 4; String Quartet in D Major Op. 76, No. 5; String Quartet in E Flat Major Op. 76, No. 6 (2000)
- E 8569 **Haydn**: String Quartet in B minor Op. 33, No. 1; String Quartet in E Flat Major Op. 33, No. 2; String Quartet in C Major Op. 33, No. 3; String Quartet in B Flat Major Op. 33, No. 4; String Quartet in G Major Op. 33, No. 5; String Quartet in D major Op. 33, No. 6 (2002)
- E 8886 **Haydn**: String Quartet in C Major Op. 64, No. 1; String Quartet in B Flat Major Op. 64, No. 3; String Quartet in E Flat Major Op. 64, No. 6 (2003)
- V 4903 **Jadin, Hyacinthe**: Quartet in C Major Op. 3, No. 1; Quartet in E Flat Major Op. 2, No. 1
Jadin, Louis-Emmanuel: Quartet No. 2 in F major (2001). Recorded on instruments by Nicholas Lambert, 18th Century

- E 8559 **Mozart:** String Quartet in D Major No. 21, K.575; String Quartet in B Flat Major No.22, K.589; String Quartet in F Major No. 23, K.590; String Quartet in D Major No. 20, K.499 “Hoffmeister” (2001)
- E 8746 **Mozart:** String Quartet in G Major No. 14, K.387 “Spring”; String Quartet in D minor No. 15, K.421; String Quartet in E Flat Major No. 16, K.428; String Quartet in B Flat Major No. 17, K.458 “Hunt”; String Quartet in A Major No. 18, K.464; String Quartet in C Major No. 19, K.465 ‘Dissonance’ (2001)
- E 8736 **Mozart:** Quintet with Clarinet and Strings K.581, Trio in E Flat Major K.498 (Patrick Cohen, piano; Wolfgang Meyer, clarinet, 2006)
- E 8580 **Schubert:** String Quartet in E Major Op. 125, No. 1; String Quartet in A minor Op. 29, No. 13 “Rosamunde” (1996)

LABORIE

- LC05 **Boely:** Trio in C Major, Op. 5, No. 2; Quartet No.1 in A minor, Op. 27; Movement for Quartet in B Major; Sextet in D Major, arranged from symphony; Three Melodies for Cello with Organ Accompaniment (2008)
- LC06 **Schubert:** String Quartet No. 9 in G minor, D. 173; String Quartet No. 14 in D minor (“Death and the Maiden”), D. 810

L'OISEAU LYRE

Arriaga: String Quartet No. 1 in D minor; String Quartet No. 2 in A Major; String Quartet No. 3 in E Flat Major (2007). Recorded on Stradivarius instruments on loan from the Spanish Royalty.



