
LAWO
CLASSICS
Mozart
String Quartets
K. 499 “Hoffmeister”
Divertimenti K. 136, 137 & 138
ENGEGÅRD QUARTET

Youthful exuberance and mature mastership – Mozart's string quartets KV 136–138 and 499

The rules of human spiritual growth appear to be challenged by certain artistic prodigies. They are more commonly found in music than in literature or painting, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart serves as their paragon. Three of the quartets presented here were written when he was 15 to 16 years old. Most musicians never reach his youthful command of melody, rhythm, and harmony regardless of age. At the age of 30, facing the challenge posed by Haydn, his writing seems more thoughtful; he is twice as old when he composes his Quartet in D major KV 499. Most people today would likely consider a composer at this age to be young. When he departed from this world five years later, his artistic output was substantial enough to fill the lives of several productive composers. Perhaps it is better not to attempt to measure such gifts.

A cosmopolitan teenager in stuffy Salzburg

The archbishopric of Salzburg had around 15,000 inhabitants in 1771. A small town ruled by a princely priest, it was hardly the most inspiring place for a lively and exceptionally gifted musician. The archbishop understood Wolfgang's educational needs and permitted him – and his father – to visit much of Western Europe. The boy had already seen Rome, Paris, London, and Vienna. Famous masters provided guidance, and he learned languages and foreign customs. It seemed time to settle down. He was soon awarded the title "Konzertmeister" and added to the archbishop's payroll. Duty called.

In autumn 1771, the archbishop passed away, and it would take months before a new one was installed. This may have given Wolfgang Amadeus a little extra freedom. Among his projects at the time were the three divertimenti KV 136–138, possibly started in Milan before his return to Salzburg. They are often played by a string orchestra but are also popular as quartets. Confusingly, they are also known as the "Salzburg Symphonies." The threesome show strong similarities. They all have three movements instead of the full-fledged quartets' four and are all in major keys. The fast movements, two in each work, are mostly in really fast tempi: Allegro di molto, allegro assai, and presto. As therapy, they make adult listeners feel younger!

String Quartet in D major, KV 136

The first of these quartets, KV 136 in D major, begins triumphantly with the melody in the first violin over throbbing heartbeats in the other instruments. The cello insists on these quaver beats for most of the movement, propelling the melodies and virtuoso passages onward. As is often the case in Mozart's music, the second violin has long silvery threads of fast semiquavers. A typical episode in this allegro is the yearning minor theme sung on top of such a passage in the middle part by the first violin. This is followed by a repetition of the first part or exposition.

The Andante gives us time to breathe and close our eyes. Actually, not a slow tempo; an andante ("walking") never hurries, allowing one to take in the surroundings. Written in G major, it consists of three parts like many of Mozart's slower movements, with the last part being almost identical to the first. The middle part is only nine bars long, more like a small episode leading into the repetition of the first part.

The final Presto, meaning more or less as fast as possible, is related to the first movement in several respects. It is naturally in the same key, although in instead of . After four hushed bars with chords that make up a textbook cadenza, the main theme begins exactly like the first movement, only twice as fast. The same propelling quavers and whirlwind semiquavers occur, but the middle section introduces a new element as all voices chase each other through a fugato – serious enough to visit minor keys – before returning to the opening gesture.

String quartet in B flat major, KV 137

Surprisingly, Mozart chooses to open with an Andante this time. We expect a movement to open on its tonic, here B flat major. However, it takes eight bars before this key is revealed. A series of lightning strokes add to the drama. The melodic development is sparse; a short four-bar melody is introduced in bar 12, then repeated and left again. The middle section brings questioning gestures derived from the opening, appears to return to them after only four bars, but once again, we are deceived. This entire 20-bar-long middle section turns out to be an inflated variation of the introduction. Thereafter, the repetition starts with bar 12 of the exposition. Of all the nine movements of these early quartets, this is the most complex.

The following Allegro di molto invites us to uncork the champagne. As in KV 136, repeated quavers in the accompaniment create an atmosphere of restless joyfulness. A continuous development of the uncomplicated musical material keeps the exposition together; the middle part introduces a new sweet melody which is soon swept away. One wonders why Mozart did not use this uncomplicated movement to open the quartet. Perhaps because the Andante is so "heady"?

The finale is an Allegro assai that continues the celebration. Its measure gives it a pace different from its likewise fast predecessor. A typically Mozartean ritornello allows us to catch our breath at the end of each of the two parts, whereas the middle part hints at a contrast through a brief canon, falling chromaticism, and stumbling hemiolas. It is too short to be genuinely serious, though.

String Quartet in F major, KV 138

This quartet brings no great surprises – apart from its wealth of ideas. The first movement – Allegro – has a more stately feeling than the other fast movements in these early works. Starting with a fanfare of three notes, answered by a hushed descending dotted motive, then repeated to state the main key, a serene atmosphere seems to prevail in the wonderful melodies. An episode with great leaps in the first violin may resemble the craggy mountains to the south and west of Salzburg, but the rest suggests the peaceful countryside with farms and soft hills.

The following Andante in C major suggests a lullaby, with the second violin, mostly, gently rocking the tender tunes. A touch of suspense in the middle section is soon released by the repeat of the simplest of melodies flavoured by languishing dissonances.

The final Presto in is a rondo, a form often used in classical finales. An eight-bar theme presented in the beginning links a series of themes like in a chain. Here the main theme is repeated four times like a refrain, with four episodes in between. Musicologists call this structure ABACADAEA. The two middle episodes, C and D, are the most imaginative. Episode C is in D minor instead of F major and involves a little counterpoint, whereas episode D seems to tread blissfully on its toes as if to avoid waking up the boisterous main theme – though without success.

The mature master
in magnificent Vienna

Some 15 years later, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart left the small court in Salzburg and tried his luck at sustaining himself and his family as an independent artist, with some success. The "golden years" (H. Robbins Landon) between 1781 and 1791 mark a decade of groundbreaking operas, great symphonies, piano concertos, and a treasure trove of mature chamber music and piano works. Inspired by the genius of Joseph Haydn, his older friend, Mozart broadens his horizon and refines his imagination. Awed by the discovery of hitherto unknown works by Johann Sebastian Bach, the separate life of each voice within the musical texture becomes more important.

Being independent means being able to pursue one's own goals and projects, with the ten last string quartets being one of the most important. The six so-called "Haydn" quartets are followed by KV 499 and later the three "Prussian" quartets. With the recording of KV 499, the Engegård Quartet completes their cycle of Mozart's "famous 10."

String Quartet in D Major, KV 499
(Hoffmeister)

It had been a longstanding convention for chamber music to be published by the half dozen or, at the very least, in sets of three. The reason why this particular work was separately published in 1786 by Franz Anton Hoffmeister, himself a skilled composer, remains somewhat unclear. By this time, a string quartet by Mozart consistently comprised four movements, with a minuet having been added to the three movements of his KV 136–138. The movements are longer, the first movement being steeped in sonata form with contrasting themes and a longer development section instead of the short middle parts of the earlier works. Where the youthful genius merely suggested contrasts and shadows, the mature master gives them room to expand.

The very opening of the first movement highlights the difference. The theme is crafted to have its material slowly unfold. Development is the key of Mozart's thinking by this sage. The first four bars in unison, concluding with five repeated notes, provide much of the material for the whole movement. The Allegretto is mellow and deserves a patient listener. We expect a contrasting second theme to create inner tension, but in this case Mozart does not need that. A few shorter ideas merely add zest to the ubiquitous first theme's material, which is handled imaginatively by the four equivalent instruments. Development of limited material prevails through all sections, concluding with a coda bidding a final good bye.

To add dance-like momentum, the minuet follows immediately. It is again designated allegretto; however, with a trio in D minor featuring fast triplets with emphases on third beats – not easy to dance to! Even in this relaxing movement, the connoisseur is pleased by its counterpoint and inventive voice-leading.

The Adagio (¾) is in a subdued, sometimes operatic G major. The sonata form, consisting of an exposition of two, here three, contrasting themes, followed by a development section where these themes are dramatically combined, and a slightly varied recapitulation of the exposition, has found its way into this movement as well. Similar to the first allegretto, development, extension, and transformation are fundamental concepts: the music takes unforeseen turns and invents itself as it progresses. Cadenza-like passages in the first violin add operatic drama, as if pleading for reconciliation or relief. A coda is needed to restore equilibrium.

The finale – Molto allegro – is slightly reminiscent of the early quartets. In , it is playful and virtuosic. The sonata form has entered this movement too, however, it is far longer and more complex than in KV 136–138. The first theme is in fast triplets and concludes on a fermata. The second theme has a more relaxed character. The development section primarily focuses on the second theme and is relatively short, similar to the early works.

Morten Carlsen
Norwegian Academy of Music

(Edited by Philip Dutton)

Engegård Quartet

Arvid Engegård & Sara Chen – Violins
Juliet Jopling – Viola
Jan Clemens Carlsen – Cello

Formed under the midnight sun in Lofoten in 2005, the Engegård Quartet has rapidly become one of Norway's most sought-after ensembles. Their bold, fresh interpretations of the classical repertoire combined with a deep attachment to their Scandinavian roots has attracted international acclaim and inspired some innovative partnerships and programming.

The quartet's debut CD was praised as 'breathtaking' in The Strad, while their second release won Pizzicato magazine's 'Supersonic Award'. Their CD of works by Grieg, Sibelius, and Olav Anton Thommessen was praised by Tully Potter in Music Web International as 'what Grieg lovers have been waiting for'.

The Engegård Quartet has a busy concert schedule throughout Scandinavia and further afield. They have performed in some of Europe's finest venues including the Mozarteum in Salzburg and Prague's Rudolfinum, as well as several tours to South America. The Engegård Quartet have been delighted to appear in international festivals such as Delft Chamber Music Festival, SoNoRo Festival in Bucharest, and Heidelberg's Streichquartettfest.

Deeply committed to today's composers and to keeping the string quartet repertoire alive and developing, the Engegård Quartet has commissioned several works throughout their career. They have focused first and foremost on Norwegian composers including Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje, Olav Anton Thommessen, Therese Birkelund Ulvo and Cecilie Ore. International commissions have included Olli Mustonen, Philip Dutton and Julian Anderson.

The Engegård Quartet's acclaimed collaborations with the jazz violinist Ola Kvernberg and hardanger fiddler Nils Økland and have led to commissions including the Telemark Quintet from Nils Anders Mortensen, and Hypnagogia and The Flight from Ola Kvernberg. Several of these commissions have been recorded by the Engegård Quartet.

On the classical front, the Engegård Quartet has had the honor to work with (among others) Sir András Schiff, Leif Ove Andsnes, Christian Ihle Hadland, Paul Lewis, Dènes Várion, Nabuko Imai, Kim Kashkashian and Emma Johnson MBE.

The Engegård Quartet's concert and recording programs reflect their passion for the core quartet repertoire and their desire to discover and share new musical worlds. They have recorded the complete string quartets by Robert Schumann, Catharinus Elling and Johan Kvandal, and are recording the complete string quartets by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. You will find the Engegård Quartet's recordings on 2L, BIS, Simax and LAWO Classics.

From psalms to polkas, Norway's folk music tradition has been part of the Engegård Quartet's repertoire from the start. They have recently released several folk music videos, many in their own arrangements for string quartet.

Members of the quartet are deeply involved in bringing superb chamber music to Norway



PHOTO: **KAI CHEN**

– Arvid Engegård as Co-Founder and Artistic Director of the Lofoten International Chamber Music Festival, and several quartet members are deeply involved in the Oslo Quartet Series. The Engegård Quartet's own '1-2–3 Festival' focuses on one composer over a long weekend and has proved immensely popular ever since its inaugural year of 2016. Every November, in Nynorskens hus, right in the center of Oslo, this classical mini festival provides a feast of chamber music, song, piano works, and lectures. Read more on 123festival.no.

Arvid Engegård plays a Jean Baptiste Vuillaume violin (1858), on loan from Dextra. Sara Chen plays an Oddone violin on loan from Dextra. Juliet Jopling plays a Giuseppe Guadagnini viola (1770) and Jan Clemens Carlsen plays a Giacomo Zanoli cello (1737) on loan from Dextra.

The Engegård Quartet is supported by the Norwegian Arts Council.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-91)

Divertimento in D major, K. 136/125a
1___Allegro__03:55
2___Andante__05:16
3___Presto__02:31

Divertimento in B-flat major, K. 137/125b
4___Allegro di molto__02:21
5___Andante__05:34
6___Allegro assai__01:57

Divertimento in F major, K. 138/125c
7___Allegro__03:35
8___Andante__03:45
9___Presto__01:57

String Quartet No. 20 in D major, K. 499
10___Allegretto__08:59
11___Menuetto and Trio. Allegretto__02:50
12___Adagio__07:30
13___Allegro__06:48

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