MEET THE COMPOSER: JOSEPH HAYDN WITH THE BENYOUINES QUARTET

Joseph Haydn was born in 1732 in Austria and is considered the father of the string quartet. When he was working for an aristocrat near Vienna there was a group of four musicians: two violinists, a violist, and a cellist. They asked Haydn to write some music for them. The music and the combination of instruments was such a success that he went on to write over sixty quartets and also to inspire many other composers to write for string quartet.

These notes will help you to explore some of Haydn’s String Quartets before or after you come to the “Meet The Composer” concert at the Crucible Theatre. You will find performances of ALL of them on YouTube – just search for the title.

STRING QUARTET OP.54 NO.1, FIRST MOVEMENT
Haydn was a very kind, good-humoured, and popular man. His music has a lot of positive spirit.
▪ Listen for the character of this piece: is it happy, sad, lively, sleepy, calm, scary, jolly?
▪ Imagine the curtains in the theatre opening to this music. Write a short description of what you imagine to be happening on stage.

STRING QUARTET OP.33 NO.2 “THE JOKE”, FOURTH MOVEMENT
Haydn had a good sense of humour and loved surprises.
▪ Listen to the ending of this movement. Does he pull a trick on the audience?
Also listen to the trio of the second movement. The sliding violin sounds like they have the hiccups!

STRING QUARTET OP.33 NO.1, FIRST MOVEMENT
Haydn first wrote a string quartet when a group of four friends asked him to write some music for them. Unlike anything written before, Haydn wrote music that sounded like a conversation between friends.
▪ Listen for the four lines in the quartet and how they respond to and comment on each other? Are they always playing at the same time? Do they play the same or different things to each other?

>> Further listening: Haydn String Quartet op.76 no.1 1st movement

STRING QUARTET OP.77 NO.1, FIRST MOVEMENT
Haydn worked for a prince who loved music and had an incredible palace in which he threw many parties. Haydn composed music to entertain the prince and his aristocratic friends.
▪ Listen to how the music is refined and elegant. Imagine some of the outfits with frilly sleeves and fancy wigs that that the aristocrats may have worn.
STRING QUARTET OP.77 NO.1, FOURTH MOVEMENT
However, Haydn also really enjoyed writing music for the peasants as well as the aristocrats. He was influenced by the folk music and dances of Hungary and Croatia.
• Listen to the rhythmic, rustic feel of this music. How would you dance to it?

STRING QUARTET OP.64 NO.5 “THE LARK”, FIRST MOVEMENT
Haydn loved to depict scenes from nature in his music.
• Listen to the first violin as it enters. Can you guess which animal Haydn might have been thinking of as he wrote this music?
>>> Further listening: Finale (‘Earthquake’) from Haydn’s Seven Last Words of Christ

String Quartet op.64 no.5

STRING QUARTET OP.76 NO.4 “SUNRISE”, FIRST MOVEMENT
As you listen to the opening minute of this piece, imagine a dark night sky transforming as the sun rises to glowing colours of pink and gold, and the birds and animals waking up. This could make a nice art project, painting in response to the opening minute of music.

STRING QUARTET OP.76 NO.3, SECOND MOVEMENT
Haydn visited London and had a fantastic time. He heard our national anthem and was so impressed he wanted to write something similar.
• Do you recognise this music?
• Do you know which country now uses it for their national anthem?

STRING QUARTET OP.20 NO.3, THIRD MOVEMENT
Haydn was a very religious man and dedicated many compositions to God. His music is often prayerful and spiritual.
• Close your eyes as you listen to this music and think of all the things in life you are thankful for.

Benyounes String Quartet
www.benyounesquartet.com

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