

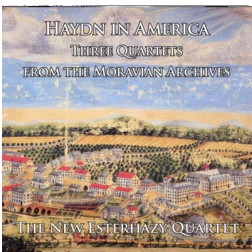


Joseph Haydn
Haydn in America: Three
Quartets from the Moravian
Archives

The New Esterházy Quartet
NEQ 03

www.newesterhazy.org

Haydn in America is an intriguing title for this disc. It refers to copies of Haydn (1732-1809) string quartet parts held in the archives of the Moravian Music Foundation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The works featured on this disc are among thousands of pieces of music—secular and sacred—preserved by the Foundation; the scores would have been used by the burgeoning music-loving Moravian community in late-18th and 19th-century America. On this recording, the New Esterházy Quartet plays from editions derived from copies that had been held by Collegia Musica in Salem and in Lititz, Pennsylvania. The liner notes clarify the reason for using these archival parts: “These copies and early editions differ in many interesting details from the various modern editions currently



available, and our attempts to distinguish legitimate variations from simple errors of the pen or engraver’s stylus led to many long and fruitful discussions.”

The quartets on this disc—Op. 2, No. 6; Op. 17, No. 4; and Op. 77, No. 2—offer a compelling historical sweep: the pre-Classical, divertimento-like Op. 2 was composed in 1760; Op. 77 was composed almost four decades later in 1799, on the cusp of the Romantic age. They are adroitly played by the New Esterházy Quartet, a group widely touted as one of America’s best period instrument string quartets, and the recording itself is clear and lively-sounding. All three quartets are performed here with tasteful restraint and beautiful, fluid phrasing: the

overall effect is engaging but also quite serene. The minuettos are stately but not staid; the slow movements—especially the gorgeous Adagio cantabile of Op. 17, No. 4, where the period instruments sound especially warm and resonant—are lyrical and tranquil; and the fast movements are tight and crisply articulated.

Although this disc features poised and elegant renderings of these quartets, there are moments—in the finales, for instance—when some listeners might wish to hear more full-throated and livelier playing. Some of the tempi are slightly sluggish—I’ve heard the fourth movement of Op. 77, No. 2, for instance, a full minute shorter than the version offered here—and at times the *galant* aesthetic of the Op. 2 quartet seems to be exerting an influence over the entire disc. The packaging of the disc is also not particularly attractive: the cover art—an 18th-century painting of an early Moravian settlement—looks amateurishly reproduced, and the liner notes are modest and look likewise a bit homemade. While Haydn’s quartets speak for themselves, as does the exceptional musicianship and interpretive acumen of the New Esterházy Quartet, I think this disc warrants and would benefit from a more inviting presentation.

Notwithstanding these small quibbles, I would recommend *Haydn in America*. The refined and stylish performance by the New Esterházy Quartet, along with the historical novelty and interest of the performance scores, make it worthwhile.

—Alexander Carpenter