

While many details of Rosetti's early life remain obscure, it seems likely that he was born in 1750 in Litoměřice (Leitmeritz / Northern Bohemia). Originally destined for the priesthood, he seemed to have received his musical training from the Jesuits. Recent discoveries establish that during the early 1770s he spent some time in the service of one Russian "Count Orlov".

In September 1773 he probably joined the service of Prince Kraft Ernst zu Oettingen-Wallerstein. In July 1774 he was listed as double bass player. By the late 1770s he had already made a name for himself as a composer, whose works were regularly performed in the Parisian "Concert spirituel". At the end of October 1781 the Prince financed a journey to the French metropolis which lasted several months and enabled Rosetti to study concert and opera culture as well as establish contacts with music publishers. In 1785 he became musical director of the Wallerstein court orchestra. From 1786 on, his symphonies also featured regularly on the programmes of the great London concert series.

His international reputation notwithstanding, all his life Rosetti was plagued with financial difficulties. In July 1789 he left Wallerstein for the far better remunerated position of Kapellmeister to Duke Friedrich Franz I von Mecklenburg-Schwerin in Ludwigslust. In December 1791 his Requiem in E flat major (RWV H15) was performed at the memorial service for Mozart in Prague. In early March 1792, the oratorio *Jesus in Gethsemane* (RWV G2) and the *Hallelujah cantata* (RWV G7) were performed at the Berlin castle at the request of King Friedrich Wilhelm II, who invited Rosetti to attend. By this time Rosetti, who had always suffered from poor health, culminating in a "malignant cough", was fatally ill. He died at Ludwigslust on June 30, 1792.

For the two noble houses he served, Rosetti created a steady stream of symphonies, concertos, wind partitas, chamber and vocal music – a total of over 400 compositions. More than half of them were published during his lifetime. Charles Burney ranked him among the most important composers of his time and mentioned him in the same breath as Haydn and Mozart. His mature works reveal a clear taste for contrapuntal work, and are distinguished by imaginative orchestration and a rich harmonic and tonal palette, which at times even prefigures Romanticism.

Rosetti's string quartet output is rather sparse when compared to his prominent contemporaries. Apart from three early works, whose writing is hardly quartet-like, there are nine examples of the genre; they were published as sets of parts in cyclic form as Opus 2 by Sieber in Paris in 1781/82 (RWV D6-D8; BP 1180) and as Opus 6 by Artaria in Vienna in 1787 (RWV D9–D14). His "*Sei Quartetti per Due Violini, Viola, e Violoncello*" Opus 6, in particular are valuable contributions to the classical string quartet repertoire. Paris immediately recognized their importance: Seiber secured exclusive rights from the composer as soon

as 1788, and published the Viennese quartets under the sales-boosting title "*Six Quatuors concertants*" as Opus 7. A further edition in two volumes followed that same year from Hummel (Berlin and Amsterdam). This rapid succession of different editions certainly shows how admired these quartets were, beside those of Haydn and Mozart. Handwritten sources are few, and manuscripts entirely absent. Sets of parts in unknown hands of the quartets RWV D10–D13 are held in a private collection in Zurich; copies of RWV D12 and D14 are kept in Leipzig's Bach Archives (D12) and Prague's National Museum (D14). As all these sources most probably date from after the printed editions, we have ignored them for editorial purposes. The present edition is based mainly on the Viennese first print of 1787. For clarification in controversial cases (articulations, etc.) we also consulted the Hummel print.

The six quartets date from around 1786. The lack of autographs makes exact dating impossible. Oskar Kaul saw in them a reflection of Haydn's new quartet style, from op. 33, as they "*evidently strive to realise the new principle of thematic elaboration, albeit without Haydn's spiritual depth [...] While the freedom of the cyclic lay-out harks back to the ancient Suite spirit, all six works are in the modern quartet style*". Unlike Haydn or Mozart, the cycle concentrates on the possibilities of three-movement form. The first quartet (RWV D9) is the only one in four movements, with Menuet and slow movement as inner movements. The other five quartets feature just one inner movement, with the composer following the "Variatio" principle. Although the Menuet is central to No. 2 (D10) and No. 4 (D12), both quartets also feature a slow movement. In No. 4 it appears at the beginning, not as a slow introduction but as a free-standing, pathos-laden *Adagio*. In No. 2 it even forms the Finale, with a c minor *Allegro* middle section. The other quartets contain either Menuet or slow movement. Each of the Op. 6 quartets has a different formal arrangement; an important characteristic of these pieces is their experimental, free handling of form.

In each quartet, Rosetti's picks one movement in distinctive sonata form as his main movement, wherein, in both writing and breadth, he competes with the first movements of the great Haydn and Mozart quartets. The terse brevity of the other movements suggests a colourful, almost Suite-like unity – as if meant to work only as a whole, not on account of their own formal profile. Everywhere we perceive Rosetti's cyclical considerations, his enjoyment in probing the relative tensions within the quartets. The six quartets' thematic invention clearly reflects the tropes of Haydn and Mozart's »classical style«. All these characteristics, as well as the subtleties of part-writing and motivic work, establish Rosetti's Opus 6 as a remarkable and very individual contribution to the classical quartet canon.

GÜNTHER GRÜNSTEUDEL