

String Quartet No.1 in D minor

J. C. Arriaga (1806-1826)

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio con espressione
- III. Menuetto - Trio
- IV. Adagio - Allegretto

It would be safe to conjecture that Arriaga would have achieved a much higher level of immortality had he lived for another 20 years. His death before his 20th birthday was solely responsible for his meager amount of survived compositions. Born in Bilbao on the same birthday as Mozart, Arriaga has been called the "Spanish Mozart" for his astonishing gift as a child prodigy. He wrote his first piece at the age of 11, and composed an opera at the age of 13, of which only fragments survive. He entered the Paris Conservatory in 1821 to study violin, counterpoint and harmony, and won prized in the latter discipline. In 1824, he was appointed a teaching assistant in counterpoint and harmony. In the same year, he wrote and published a set of three string quartets which provide a most complete picture of his incomplete and unfulfilled genius. The first quartet in D minor is the more immediately appealing work in the set.

The first movement, written in a perfect sonata form, is full of drama and soulful melodies, and yet classical in style following the tradition of Mozart and Beethoven. The second movement is an expressive Adagio that features a duet between the first violin and cello, with the second violin and viola playing a supporting role. The Menuetto is more energetic than elegant as the tempo is closer to that of a scherzo rather than a slow triple dance. The Trio section features a solo melody hovering above an accompaniment played by pizzicato. The Finale is cast in a sonata-rondo form with a slow introduction. The main rondo theme is written in 6/8 time with a prominent long-short rhythmic pattern. After the middle section, the second theme reappears in the major mode. The rondo theme then returns for the last time in the minor mode and leads the whole movement to a quiet finish.