

String Quartet No. 1 (1937)

John Weinzweig's String Quartet No. 1 is actually the second quartet by the composer. While a student at the University of Toronto in the mid-1930s, he composed two string quartets as part of the MusBac degree requirements. The set guidelines were as follows: "A string quartet in three movements, at least one of which shall be written in Sonata form." The first attempt, in the key of G minor, did not satisfy the examiners, so a second quartet was composed in 1937. Though rejected by the examiners, the G-minor quartet remained on lists of the young composer's works for a number of years. When Weinzweig wrote another string quartet in 1946 he withdrew the G-minor quartet, which later was either lost or destroyed. The second student quartet then became String Quartet No. 1. It was withdrawn by the composer in July 1975, but after his death it was published by Plangere Editions (Toronto, 2013) with the permission of the Weinzweig Estate.

Although sometimes referred to as String Quartet in D minor, only the first of this work's three movements is in that key. It is a thickly-textured sonata form movement in a late-Romantic tonal idiom. The slow movement is in C-sharp minor. Augustus Bridle, reviewing what was likely the local public premiere of the work in 1940 for the *Toronto Daily Star* (17 April 1940, p. 13), singled out this "expressively beautiful" movement for praise and wrote "This adagio should be recorded". The Parlow String Quartet of Toronto duly recorded the movement in 1950 for a Radio Canada International LP (RCI 12). The finale is a lively dance movement in A minor, and builds to an exciting conclusion. The first public performance of this quartet was given by the Kilbourn Quartet in Rochester, NY on 26 May 1938 while Weinzweig was a graduate student at the Eastman School of Music; the members of the Kilbourn Quartet were on faculty at Eastman. Other early documented performances were given by the Conservatory String Quartet in Toronto (1940 and 1942), the Rudin Quartet at the New York Public Library under the auspices of the US League of Composers (1942), the Ottawa String Quartet in Ottawa (1944), and a local quartet for the Calgary Women's Musical Club (1949).

Written by Robin Elliott