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Beethoven: Early, Middle, Late… and For a Later Age

Scott Burnham

Beethoven. His name alone, like a monolith, conveys a sense of compressed energy and self-sufficiency, the grandeur of standing alone and apart. Why is this composer different from all other composers? Because he is more than a composer: for two centuries he has been received as one of the pre-eminent cultural heroes of the modern West. No other Western composer has been amplified to anywhere near the same degree by posterity. In fact, there are few figures in all of Western culture as perennially appealing as Beethoven. He has earned an honored place beside the likes of Homer, Michelangelo, and Shakespeare in that most exclusive pantheon of artists who continue to speak for humanity throughout the ages.

Our fascination with Beethoven is greatly enhanced by the wrenching story of his life. Among the first things anyone learns about Beethoven is what he had to overcome. His ailments—both physical and spiritual—were copiously documented, most poignantly by two letters found only after his death: the so-called "Heiligenstadt Testament," a rhetorically charged account of martyrdom for the sake of art, and an ardent letter to the woman known by no more specific name than the "Immortal

Beloved." These documents and a host of other letters and anecdotes collectively portray a deaf composer, prey to an unholy union of affliction and vocation; a toiling artisan, endlessly sketching and revising his music; and a lonely man, prone to desiring unavailable women and smothering his nephew to the brink of suicide by pressing upon him the full weight of his thwarted desire for a normative family life. Here was a creative artist who felt cut off from the simple communal joys of society, who yearned for an idealized love, and who was able to react to these privations with an outpouring of music conceived on an unprecedented scale. A more potent model of the Romantic view of the embattled artist could hardly be imagined.

And yet, if Beethoven's music possessed no particular authority, no particular hold over us, the facts of his life would no longer matter to anyone. So this begs the question: what is so extraordinary about Beethoven's music? I boldly pose this question to you, my fellow concertgoers, for you may well be in as good a position as anyone to address such a question after taking in Beethoven's sixteen string quartets, performed for us this season by the renowned Takács String Quartet.

As a collective artistic achievement, these string quartets represent the full extent of Beethoven's mature oeuvre, from the height of his first maturity at the turn of the nineteenth century to the very last year of his musical creativity. They are like his piano sonatas in this regard, another genre that spans his career and speaks to his most striking transformations as a composer. And both the string quartets and the piano sonatas have been treated as cycles that challenge performers to present them in their entirety.

We like to think of Beethoven's string quartets as dividing neatly into three different styles: early, middle, and late. The tendency

of critics and historians to divide Beethoven's music into these three style periods was already put into play during Beethoven's lifetime and has been a part of every account of his compositional output, despite occasional efforts to loosen this tripartite structure by blurring its internal boundaries or by making claims for additional style periods. The unshakable triad of early, middle and late owes its staying power not simply to Aristotle's emphasis on beginning, middle and end as the cardinal elements of a good plot, but also to the fact that Beethoven did indeed undergo distinctive stylistic transformations in the course of what author J.W.N. Sullivan called his "spiritual development." And the demarcations between these transformations are relatively easy to locate.

At times dismissed as imitative of Haydn and Mozart, Beethoven's early quartets richly exemplify the fresh turn Beethoven would bring to the Viennese style of his predecessors. His middle quartets went on to break new ground by absorbing and reflecting the enormous breadth and energy of his heroic symphonies. They were accordingly thought from early on to represent Beethoven's full mastery of the genre. Finally, the unreconciled contrasts and jarring disruptions of Beethoven's late quartets initially encouraged many listeners to think of them as products of a deranged mind. But over the next hundred years these very quartets became his most admired, and more than that—they have come to epitomize for all of Western art what we mean when we speak of artistic lateness.

He has earned an honored place in that most exclusive pantheon of artists who continue to speak for humanity.

Portrait of Beethoven in 1803 by Christian Horneman.

EARLY

Beethoven took enormous care before introducing his first set of string quartets to the world. After arriving in Vienna in 1792 as a twenty-one year old rising star, Beethoven quickly composed works in every available species of music except the string quartet and the symphony, not wishing to rush into these highly prestigious genres. Before trying his hand at the string quartet, he copied out a number of Haydn's quartets, in order to help internalize the compositional possibilities. He then took two years to write the six quartets of his own first published set, Op. 18, completing the last of them shortly before his thirtieth birthday in December 1800. It was worth the care, for these quartets represent a decisive entry into an arena already boasting many unforgettable works by Haydn and Mozart. With the six quartets of Op. 18, we can hear Beethoven quickly shedding the puppy fat of youth and transforming himself into a confident man striding into his future.

The flagship of the set, No. 1 in F Major, opens with an immediately striking motive that undergoes a range of bracing adventures. This quartet also features one of Beethoven's first truly great slow movements, earning a permanent home in our hearts by gradually accumulating the full weight of tragedy. The final quartet of the set, No. 6 in B-flat Major, begins with a gust of high spirits that burst onto the scene like a liberated champagne

cork. And who would ever guess that Beethoven could begin the finale of this sparkling quartet with a pensive slow introduction? He entitled this brooding music *La Malinconia* ("Melancholy"), because it transforms a musical turn figure into a potent sonic symbol of a somber mind turning the same thoughts over and over. Had Beethoven written no further quartets, we would surely treasure Op. 18 as a gratifying only child.

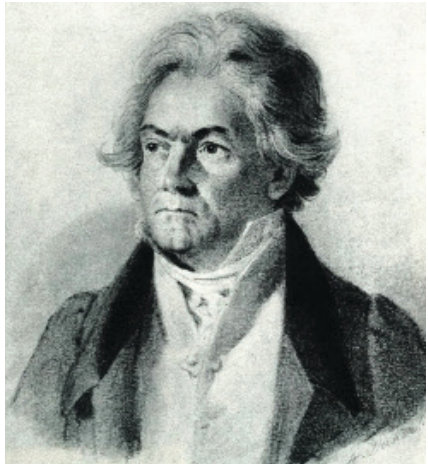
MIDDLE

Between Beethoven's first set of quartets and his next stands a work whose astonishing power and breadth changed the course of music history: the "Eroica" Symphony. In 1806, two years after the premiere of the "Eroica." Beethoven completed a set of three string quartets, Op. 59, dedicating them to one Count Razumovsky, a Russian nobleman. As a tribute to the Count, Beethoven included several Russian-sounding tunes, and as a tribute to what he had achieved with the "Eroica," he brought his newly energized symphonic vision to chamber music's most revered genre. The string quartet was never the same afterward. Joseph Kerman, author of *The Beethoven Quartets* (1966)—still one of the finest books ever written on the subject—memorably describes the experience of hearing Beethoven's middle period quartets for the first time: "Coming upon the first 'Razumovsky' Quartet after the

Portrait of Beethoven in 1815 by Joseph Willibrord Mähler

six of Op. 18 is like coming into a new artistic universe. It is like a first reading of Keats' *Chapman's Homer*, a first visit to Athens or Venice, a first kiss."

And it's true: the opening of Op. 59, No. 1 immediately propels the listener into a brave new world, one that is surely inspired by the visceral energy of Beethoven's symphonies. These three quartets break all sorts of ground, with exotic new movement types such as the Allegretto in No. 1 or the Andante con moto in No. 3, probing Adagios such as those in Nos. 1 and 2 (the latter of which allegedly occurred to Beethoven while he was contemplating starry skies), and inspired finales that are heard not just to end the work but to crown it. Beethoven then followed his Op. 59 set a few years later with two hugely assured string quartets, moving from the relaxed largesse of the 1809 "Harp" Quartet, Op. 74 to the fierce concentration of the 1810 "Serioso" Quartet, Op. 95, composed for connoisseurs.



Chalk drawing of Beethoven in 1824 by Stephan Decker.

LATE

Over ten years were to pass before Beethoven returned to the string quartet, a time characterized by searing personal problems (a drawn out battle with his widowed sister-in-law for the custody of his nephew) and an oddly fallow period compositionally. The music started flowing again in the late 1810s, and Beethoven began composing in a new and uncompromising style, as though he had turned a fateful corner.

In the early 1820s he completed two hugely visionary works, the *Missa Solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony, as well as his last compositions for piano, including three final sonatas, a number of Bagatelles, and the remarkable "Diabelli" Variations, a set of thirty-three cosmically diverse variations on an earthbound theme. After these works, it's almost all string quartets, the only time in Beethoven's life when he focused his compositional energies on one genre for an extended period of time. He began by fulfilling a commission for three quartets from yet another Russian nobleman, Prince Nikolai Galitzin. These include, in order of composition, the four-movement Op. 127, the five-movement Op. 132, and the six-movement Op. 130 (with the *Grosse Fuge* as finale); Beethoven worked on them assiduously from 1824 to early 1826. But then he kept going, composing two more quartets, the seven-movement Op. 131 and the four-movement Op. 135, which was to be the last multi-movement composition he would ever write.

These "perpetually modern" quartets (to deploy Igor Stravinky's remark about the *Grosse Fuge*) were first greeted with puzzlement and even resistance. Most disturbing were the staggering disjunctions, such as between the lyrically vulnerable Cavatina and the dissonantly invulnerable *Grosse Fuge* in Op. 130. Or between the ethereal *Heiliger Dankgesang* ("Holy Song of Thanks") in Op. 132 and the bluff march movement that succeeds it. Or between that march

The Late Quartets continue to resist easy comprehension, and they grasp the full range of the human experience.

and the sudden incursion of melodramatic operatic-style recitative that later invades it. Or between childlike simplicity and demonic fury in Op. 135. Add to these strange contrasts a novel profusion of movements, including probing fugues, profound variation movements that seem to explore the soul of a theme rather than its external appearance, scherzos both ghostly and earthy, time-stopping slow movements, and ironic finales, and one can understand the initial bewilderment. But as time passed, these enigmas began to challenge rather than repel, and when Richard Wagner in 1870 claimed for these quartets the highest mantle of Beethoven's chamber music, he was ratifying a growing sense of their importance to the modern mind. Above all, these works continue to resist easy comprehension, and this resistance has come to speak for their fearless grasp of the full range of the human experience. As the epitome of artistic lateness, Beethoven's last string quartets exemplify Edward Said's trenchant claim for late style, from his posthumously published book *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain*: "Late style…has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them."

…AND FOR A LATER AGE

In the six concerts that make up this series, the Takács Quartet presents a Beethoven for the 21st century. They will mix and match quartets from various style periods, such that we will hear six intriguingly different takes on Beethoven Early, Middle, and Late. Along the way, the Takács players will draw subtle connections between different quartets, sometimes linking them tonally (e.g. the third program begins and ends in the key of A), sometimes through similar musical procedures (e.g. the last two programs end with fugues). The entire cycle will begin by greeting the audience with the polite curtsy from the opening of Op. 18, No. 2 and

will end with the single most uncompromising piece Beethoven ever composed, the fractiously grandiose *Grosse Fuge*.

The Takács String Quartet is well positioned to present this cycle. Their ample experiences with the Beethoven quartets have been brilliantly chronicled by first violinist Edward Dusinberre in his new book *Beethoven for a Later Age: Living with the String Quartets.* This book is required reading for anyone interested in these quartets, in Beethoven's life and times, and in the life and times of modern-day chamber music performers: Dusinberre mixes warmly personal anecdotes about the Takács Quartet with an illuminating historical narrative of Beethoven's career and with striking insights about the works themselves. His book demonstrates the decisive importance of Beethoven for a later age, why we need him now more than ever.

Scott Burnham is the Scheide Emeritus Professor of Music History at Princeton University. He is the author of 'Beethoven Hero' and currently teaches at the City University of New York. He is a frequent guest lecturer and contributor at Princeton University Concerts and we are thrilled to welcome him back to Princeton University after his retirement last season.

Please hold onto this Beethoven Cycle Book

and bring it back to future concerts. Unwanted Beethoven Cycle Books may be returned unmarked to the ushers at all concerts for use by future patrons. Thank you!

Beethoven's Impact

Sebastian Currier

“The Beethoven quartets have always loomed large in my life. When I was a teenager I remember lying on the couch listening to LPs of the quartets for hours on end. Now, some 40 years later, I have them on my iPhone! They never seem to grow old. For all those years, as I've changed, as the world has changed, they've managed to always feel fresh, full of vitality, thoughtfulness, and intensity. Though written almost two centuries ago, I feel I react to them as if they were written yesterday. While some music from as recently as a few decades ago can seem dated and passé, the Beethoven quartets seem to me endlessly new. Being new is one thing. Remaining new is quite another!”

Sebastian Currier is an American composer. He was a Professor of Music at Columbia University from 1999 to 2007, and was the Composer-in-Residence at the Institute for Advanced Study between 2013 and 2015. He has composed two full-length string quartets.

Opus 131

Edward Dusinberre

In the Prologue to his new book, "Beethoven for a Later Age: Living with the String Quartets," Ed Dusinberre, Takács first violinist, considers the life and music of Beethoven, as well as the challenges and rewards of being part of a working string quartet.

No sooner do I play my opening notes in Beethoven's late string quartet, Opus 131, than a man in the first row of London's Wigmore Hall coughs ominously. A teacher once suggested to me that coughing in an audience is inspired only by a boring performance. If that is so, this particular verdict has been reached swiftly. I wonder why the man doesn't escape from his seat. Perhaps he knows that there are no breaks between the seven movements of Opus 131– if he gets up now the ushers may not allow him to reenter the hall. Hopefully both boredom and phlegm will dissipate.

There shouldn't be anything especially taxing about the opening phrase of Opus 131; as first violinist of the Takács Quartet I have been playing Beethoven's fifteenth string quartet for nearly twenty years. I play the first twelve notes on my own:

The rhythm is uncomplicated, the tempo comfortably slow, but even the simplest-looking phrase is challenging: there are so many different ways one could play it. Over the last twenty years I have received copious suggestions from my dear colleagues in the quartet. First of all, how to play the *sforzando* (*sf* in the example), an instruction to emphasise or attack a particular note?

That sounds too aggressive, could you try a more expressive version?

But now it sounds easy-going – not painful enough.

How about the tempo?

If it's so slow there's no sense of line. This is just the beginning of a long story.

But not so fluent that it seems easy-going.

Or the dynamic and type of sound?

Try playing it a bit quieter: inner grief, not explicit.

But not tentative or thin-sounding.

A Beethoven phrase can make seemingly contradictory musical demands. Dramatic yet understated. Slow but with a sense of direction. A private grief expressed in a hall to five hundred people. No wonder that this opening melody provokes debate: the choices I make affect my colleagues' options when they come to play the same phrase.

One after another they join me: Károly Schranz (Karcsi), the second violinist and one of two remaining original members of the quartet; Geraldine Walther, in her tenth year as our violist; and András Fejér, the quartet's cellist since its formation in Budapest in 1975. Unless there is some consistency in our approach to this melody, the audience will be confused as to the overall mood we are trying to convey. And yet Beethoven doesn't intend the four statements of the theme to sound identical. With each entrance the phrase descends in register, beginning in the middle range of the first violin, moving to the lowest string in the second violin, followed by the darker sound of the viola and finally the resounding bass tone of the cello: an intensifying of texture and emotion evolving from the first violin solo.

Even though we play the melody with the same basic dynamic shape and tempo, each person plays it slightly differently: Karcsi's *sforzando* contains the most anguish; Geri's warm sound suggests both sadness and consolation; András' version is

more understated, played with a leaner tone that brings out an introverted aspect to the melody. I can't judge what I bring to the mix: perhaps I should ask the bronchial gentleman in the front row. Although I am sorry that his concert is off to an unpromising start, a persistent cough is more distracting than a one-off event that can be easily dismissed onstage – a dropped programme or a snippet of commentary that projects more than the speaker realises: *Nice seats we have this evening.*

The combination of cooperation and individual expression that the opening of Opus 131 requires is central to the challenges and rewards of playing in a string quartet. Too many cooks may spoil the broth but in a quartet satisfying consensus can be achieved only when all four players contribute their zesty seasonings to the stew. I am fortunate for the last ten years to have shared this endeavour with Karcsi, Geri and András, always questioning and eager to find ways that we could improve our playing.

During the morning's rehearsal on the Wigmore stage, the inevitable debate about this opening melody focused on the question of tempo and how that influences the character of the music. Geri and I worried that we were playing ever more slowly, and as a result sounded 'notey,' an unflattering term in our rehearsal vocabulary to describe the sense that each individual note is too significant – like A SENTENCE WHERE EVERY WORD IS SPOKEN WITH EQUAL EMPHASIS for no apparent reason. We were concerned about losing the audience's attention so early in the piece. But for András the worse crime was to play too fluently, to sound lightweight or impatient: Beethoven often begins a piece with a short slow introduction, but his daring choice to extend this idea into a whole movement should be embraced fully.

Karcsi stayed out of the fray, offering instead to listen from out in the hall. Escaping from the stage allowed him to judge our playing from the audience's perspective. We played a slower and faster version, trying to make each as convincing as we could. Karcsi would not be able to compare the options fairly if, during the slower version that András favoured, I played like a child being dragged along on a mandatory family excursion.

The prior discussion had already influenced our playing. Now Geri and I were keen to show that we could combine a faster tempo with enough gravitas, while András concentrated on moving as smoothly as possible from one note to the next, demonstrating that thinking in two beats per bar could still be accomplished at a slow pace.

"There's not much difference," Karcsi reported. "It's good if our bow speeds stay the same. If one person suddenly uses more bow we sound too restless." In this case reminding each other of the different demands of this opening music had served to unify our approach.

When we return to a Beethoven quartet, continuing to argue over such basic questions of tempo and character, we can seem like a group discovering this music for the first time. A friend and board member of the Corcoran Gallery's chamber music series in Washington DC once invited us to rehearse in his living room. Having only ever heard us play in a concert, he looked stunned at the end of our rehearsal: "Sometimes you guys sound like you have no idea what you're doing." But even when we engage in a nerve-racking re-examination on the day of a concert, I relish a process that helps to maintain a sense of immediacy in music we have been performing for many years. A concert may benefit from many hours of preparation but the most exciting communication occurs when both audience and performers can suspend disbelief and discover the music afresh.

The appearance of the ghost at the beginning of *Hamlet* would be less effective if, in a whispered aside, the actor reassured the audience that the confrontation had already been played out during an earlier matinee performance.

Our performance this evening of the first movement of Opus 131 benefits from the morning discussion. Geri enjoys drawing attention to a particular viola note; now András moves forward with more urgency than in our rehearsal. Knowing that the vibrant acoustics of the Wigmore Hall will project the smallest change of timbre or texture to the back of the hall, Karcsi experiments with a more transparent sound – I try to match him. In the first row the poor man continues his sporadic spluttering, less appreciative of the hall's acoustic properties.

Performing Opus 131 is always an adventure. Over the course of seven movements, played without a break, Beethoven covers an extreme range of emotions, shifting from one to the other with the minimum of preparation. However much we rehearse, I wonder how it will feel to play the fleeting, frenetic scherzo movement after an ethereal slow movement, or whether we will manage to create a big enough sound in the ferocious final movement. Commenting to a friend on the startling originality of his late quartets, Beethoven explained, "Art demands of us that we do not stand still." Beethoven composed his sixteen string quartets – seventeen if one counts the *Grosse Fuge*, which began its life as the last movement of Opus 130 but was later published separately as Opus 133 – at different stages of his life. They represent the most diverse body of work written in the genre by a single composer: the need we feel to revisit our interpretations is inspired in part by the spirit of exploration that runs through the quartets themselves.

Beethoven completed his first six quartets in October 1800, at the age of twenty-nine, and nearly eight years after he had moved from his birthplace of Bonn to Vienna. These first quartets, Opus 18, draw on the tradition of Haydn and Mozart's quartets but move in startling new directions. Between 1804 and 1806 he composed his next three string quartets, Opus 59, nicknamed the "Razumovsky" quartets after the Russian count who commissioned them The formal innovations and extraordinary range of expression of these later works shocked the first players and audiences who encountered them. Faced with trenchant criticism Beethoven retorted that they were music 'for a later age'. Two more quartets followed, Opp. 74 and 95, in 1809 and 1810 respectively Much later, in the three years before his death in 1827, Beethoven turned his attention predominantly to the string quartet, challenging the basic form of a quartet composition, reinventing the way in which the four parts relate to each other, and creating five masterpieces that daringly juxtapose the most sophisticated and sublime passages with music of childlike simplicity. No one has ever written a group of works that pose so many questions about the form and emotional content of a string quartet, and come up with so many different answers. In 1812 Beethoven described the fascination and curse of his vocation: "The true artist has no pride. He sees unfortunately that art has no limits. He has a vague awareness of how far he is from reaching his goal."

Tackling the Beethoven quartets is a rite of passage that has shaped the Takács Quartet's work together for over forty years. From the earliest days these challenging pieces have been bound up with our evolution. The quartet was founded in Hungary in 1975 when Gábor Takács-Nagy, Károly Schranz, Gábor Ormai and András Fejér were students at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest. In 1979 they travelled

to the first Portsmouth String Quartet Competition, which they won with a performance of Beethoven's Opus 59, No. 2, bringing them international attention. Four years later they were invited to the United States to study Beethoven's quartets with Dénes Koromzay, the original violist of the famous Hungarian String Quartet, who following his retirement from quartet playing taught at the University of Colorado. This visit began a life-changing association with the University of Colorado: in 1986 all four members of the Takács Quartet and their families defected from Hungary and settled in Boulder.

In the summer of 1993 I became the first non-Hungarian player in the ensemble, following the departure of its extraordinary founding first violinist, Gábor Takács-Nagy– an exciting and versatile musician, who now has a varied career as a conductor, violinist and teacher. During my audition for the quartet in 1993 I played the final movement from one of Beethoven's middle quartets, Opus 59, No. 3.

My arrival was the first of several changes. English violist Roger Tapping replaced original violist Gábor Ormai, who died of cancer in 1995. The last piece of music we played with Gábor was the slow movement of Opus 59, No. 2 – the same piece that the Takács had performed in the finals of the Portsmouth competition, when the nineteen-year-old Roger Tapping was in the audience. With Roger we first played all the Beethoven quartets in six concerts at Middlebury College, Vermont, before further immersing ourselves in the music during further cycles in London, Paris and Sydney. We recorded the complete Beethoven quartets for the Decca label between 2001 and 2004, performing additional cycles during that period in New York, Aspen, Napa and Berkeley.

After Roger left the quartet to play and teach in Boston and

spend more time with his family,* American-born violist, Geraldine Walther, for twenty nine years principal violist of the San Francisco Symphony, joined us in 2005. She had first encountered the Beethoven quartets as a seventeen-year-old student at the Marlboro Music School and festival in Vermont, where each student ensemble was assigned an experienced chamber musician who both taught them and played in the group. Geri played her first late Beethoven quartet in the intimidating company of Sándor Végh – founding first violinist of the Hungarian and later of the Végh Quartet. In our new formation we reworked our interpretations of the Beethoven quartets, performing another Beethoven cycle at the South Bank Centre in London in 2009 –10. In spring 2014 we turned our attention to Beethoven's transcendent Opus 132, completed after the composer's recovery from a life-threatening illness, performing it in several places including the Aspen Music Festival and the Edinburgh Festival.

As Beethoven predicted, his sixteen string quartets have come to be appreciated in a later age and can now offer a reassuring presence to those chamber music subscribers worried by lesser-known or more contemporary offerings. But I imagine Beethoven responding with amusement to a concert presenter who came backstage recently to complain about the sprightly march in one of the late quartets that rudely shatters the celestial mood of the previous slow movement: 'Why did he have to write that awful little piece? It ruins everything!' Her reaction connects the experience of listeners today with those first players and audiences who struggled with the quartets, reasserting the power of familiar music to disturb us even now.

*The quartet bug is hard to throw and after an eight-year break Roger is now the violist of the Juilliard Quartet.

During my first years as a quartet player I could easily understand the bemusement of those players and audiences who first encountered these quartets Now I wonder if an attitude of shock and puzzlement, far from being merely the easily scorned reaction of a novice, is in fact integral to appreciating the spirit of the music. Absorbing myself in the circumstances that surrounded the composition of the Beethoven quartets, learning about the reactions and motivations of the patrons who commissioned this music and the audiences that heard them, has been a way for me to prevent the music ever becoming too comfortably familiar, to ensure that the spirit of challenge of these quartets is sustained every time we perform them.

The man in the front row has stopped coughing and I risk a grateful glance in his direction. I shouldn't allow myself to be distracted but the stage is small and the first row of seats is directly beneath it. As soon as the stage manager opens the door we seem to be walking out directly into the audience. Many people here tonight have been listening to the Takács Quartet since the group's emergence in the early 1980s: friends, relatives, and supporters who have in their different ways helped the quartet over the years and care as much about our welfare as they do about how we play. During the first minutes of any Wigmore concert I fight the worry that I might disappoint them in some way. In the Green Room after the concert when we appreciate their enthusiastic responses, we know that they will also hold back any strong criticisms for a later date, unlike one unfamiliar audience member who came into my dressing room several years ago in Aspen, Colorado: *You're a little loud for the second violinist when he has the second melody in the first movement, the scherzo seemed too fast, and in general the phrasing could breathe a bit more; the Beethoven wasn't your strongest piece tonight but I loved the concert – come back*

soon! When I commented on not being accustomed to quite such frankness and attention to detail backstage, her face lit up. *I'm so glad you don't mind: most performers get quite upset with me.*

Although our next visit to Aspen found me testing the lock to my dressing room door, the goal of any performer should be to inspire such engaged listening. For while it is always our responsibility to capture and retain a listener's attention, the quality of listening in a hall can in turn profoundly influence a performance: we are more likely to linger over a beautiful change of harmony or the last wisps of sound at the end of a slow movement if the hall is silent than if a man is placing a sweater into a rustling plastic bag or – as occurred during another of our concerts – a woman sitting in the front row has just taken off her left shoe and is examining it intently under the stage lighting.

As we approach the end of the first movement of Opus 131 the others in the quartet seem fully absorbed by the music in front of them. Geri looks up at Karcsi, playing with exactly the same speed of bow to match her sound with his; András sways a little to his right as he takes over the melody from Karcsi. Fortunately we have reached a favourite moment of mine. The last two notes of this opening movement are the same pitch but an octave apart. The pause sign over the second note gives us the licence to hold on to it as long as we feel appropriate. Beethoven now repeats the same octave interval but up a semitone and forming the beginning of a tender, fleeting melody: with the minimum of preparation the character of the music is transformed.

Should the last note of the previous movement die away so that the first notes of the new tune enter with a new timbre of sound – a surprising change of direction? Or should we sustain our sound on the last slow note to make the join as smooth and continuous as possible, beginning

the new melody with the same sound with which we finished the previous movement? Combining seemingly contradictory thoughts would be ideal: we want to convey the surprise of sudden change but maintain a sense of logical continuation.

During the morning rehearsal we talked mainly about playing the new melody with a livelier sound and tempo from the outset. But this evening, due in part to the attentive silence in the hall, we hold the preceding note longer than usual, drawing out our *diminuendo*. The next melody emerges with the same fragile sound, taking a few notes fully to establish the new faster tempo – this evening the change of character between the end of the first movement and the beginning of the second is less sudden than it sometimes is.

Balancing unity and contrast in our interpretation is again an issue in the fourth movement of Opus 131. This slow movement begins with a simple, serene melody supported by basic chords, allowing the maximum possibilities for development. In the following variations Beethoven transforms the theme, creating such a dizzying variety of rhythms, moods and textures that sometimes the story is as hard to follow as the boldest jazz improvisation. The most striking innovation comes toward the end of the movement. After each instrument is left on its own to play short, exploratory cadenzas, the music recedes almost to nothing before finding its way back to the opening theme, played now in the second violin and viola parts but surrounded by a radically different accompaniment: the first violin and cello imitate a piccolo flute and drum from a marching band, challenging the ethereal atmosphere that has pervaded much of the previous music – folk musicians interrupting a solemn gathering. How should the melody react to its irreverent accompaniment? This evening I like the way Karcsi and Geri's melody resists András' and my

accompaniment, a nostalgic memory evoked despite the forward march of the cello rhythm, change and continuity existing side by side.

The ferocity of the seventh and final movement of Opus 131 bears no relation to anything that has preceded it. After so much delicate playing in the earlier movements, this finale with its driving rhythms and belligerent *fortissimi* now demands the power of a full string orchestra. Will we be able to summon up sufficient energy to help bring this massive piece to a stirring conclusion? Tonight I find the challenge extremity exhilarating: finally I can throw myself fully into the drama, unconcerned by anything happening in the audience or the cluster of broken bow hairs that tickle my forehead – until one of them becomes trapped in my left hand and briefly pulls my bow off the string. Even this mishap adds a sense of intoxicating danger to this searing final transformation that seems to threaten the structure of the piece and the health of the performers. The risk of losing control lies at the heart of any vivid encounter with one of the later Beethoven quartets: music that at times consoles but also has the capacity to destabilise listeners and players alike.

Opus 131 ends in a surprising way. The first violin and viola play a descending melody, an exhausted answer to my opening gesture of the whole piece, while the second violin and cello's faster rhythm continues to agitate beneath the tune. The pleading melody seems to succeed in pacifying the underlying rhythm until from the bottom of the group András suddenly reintroduces the faster opening tempo and rhythm, leaping upwards through a C sharp major arpeggio. We all join in, ending the piece with three *fortissimo* major chords – a precipitous resolution.

However much force we apply to the chords, they cannot fully resolve this immense piece and are greeted tonight, as so often,

by a short, stunned silence. The way in which audiences react to this ending is different from the way they respond to Beethoven's middle works, such as the Fifth Symphony, where the repetition of final chords is so emphatic as to leave one in absolutely no doubt that the ending is upon us. The only question there is which of the many chords will prove to be the very final one – a feature parodied in Dudley Moore's magnificent Beethovenian presentation of the "Colonel Bogey March." But we are unlikely at the end of Opus 131 to hear an audience member exclaiming in delighted tones – as someone did immediately after the last note of another piece we played at the Wigmore – *That's it!* To create convincing finality in a piece so varied and which has moved continuously through its seven movements is perhaps an impossibility. Except for the small practical matter of physical exhaustion, the last three chords leave me wanting to go back right to my opening notes and start the journey again.

Of all the Beethoven quartets, Opus 131 is the most ambitious: how seven such contrasting movements manage to complement each other and be so convincingly bound together is a miracle no amount of musical analysis can explain. And yet my judgement of the piece as a satisfying unity is based on many years of experience living with the music; when I first encountered Opus 131 the extremity of its contrasts seemed daunting and irreconcilable. But through happy and despairing times the Beethoven quartets have accompanied the Takács Quartet. No wonder that music which itself grapples with the balance between unity and contrast, continuity and transformation, has been such a stalwart partner, helping us both to celebrate and to withstand change. Twenty-five years ago, when I was a student at the Juilliard School in New York, I had no idea of the ways in which these works could bind the lives of players and listeners together, music that itself emerged from a complex web of

interactions between Beethoven, his patrons and the string players who first rehearsed these works.

We bow at the end of our performance and I have just enough time to put my violin in its case before we hear a knock at our Green Room door.

READ ON...

Edward Dusinberre's book *Beethoven for a Later Age: Living with the String Quartets* and Scott Burnham's book *Beethoven Hero* will be on sale in the lobby at select concerts.

Thank you to Labyrinth Books for making this possible.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
CONCERTS

Beethoven's Impact

Adam Sliwinski

It might seem on the surface like Beethoven would have had very little influence on a modern percussion quartet. But Beethoven was a master of two important musical elements: rhythm and the idea of four parts. In his string quartets, an efficient sense of rhythmic invention keeps motives bouncing among the four voices, making them feel almost equal. The percussion quartet genre is animated by this same spirit of dialogue among equals. John Cage, the greatest early percussion composer, was fond of saying "BEETHOVEN WAS WRONG" - about what, he wasn't entirely clear - but his early percussion quartets bear the unmistakable balance and rhythmic curiosity that Beethoven made possible. When the members of SO Percussion were graduate students together at Yale, we would attend concerts by the Tokyo String Quartet and marvel at the intimacy and communication that such a group could have with this kind of music. We aspired to see if a motley assortment of random sounds on a table could achieve anything like what a great string quartet could, and that's a huge part of our ethos today.

Adam Sliwinski is a member of SO Percussion, Princeton University's Edward T. Cone Performers-in-Residence.

Ignaz Schuppanzigh, Beethoven, and the Inception of Listening to String Quartets

John M. Gingerich

The violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh (1776-1830) was Beethoven's closest collaborator in the composition of all of his string quartets, from Op. 18 right through Op. 135. They first became acquainted shortly after Beethoven's arrival in Vienna, when both assisted at the Friday morning quartet concerts of one of Beethoven's principal patrons, Prince Karl Lichnowsky. These concerts introduced Beethoven to Vienna's leading string players, and included performances of Haydn quartets under the old master's personal supervision. (At Schuppanzigh's suggestion, Lichnowsky made a gift to Beethoven of a complete set of old Italian string instruments, long attributed to Guarneri, Ruggieri, and Amati.) Five or six years later, when Beethoven himself started composing quartets, Schuppanzigh and the young virtuosi he led stood at Beethoven's disposal. When in 1808 Count Andrey Razumovsky asked Schuppanzigh to form a quartet and installed them with salaries and pensions as his "Kapelle," they also became Beethoven's personal quartet, available not only should the

composer feel the need to hear a draft of a passage, but once he had finished, as his personally rehearsed representatives before his patrons and their guests. A contemporary observer has left us a vivid description of the quartet's relationship with Beethoven during the years with Razumovsky (1808 until 1816): "Beethoven was, as it were, the cock of the walk in the princely establishment; everything that he composed was rehearsed hot from the griddle and performed to the nicety of a hair, according to his ideas, just as he wanted it and not otherwise, with affectionate interest, obedience and devotion such as could spring only from such ardent admirers of his lofty genius, and with a penetration into the most secret intentions of the composer and the most perfect comprehension of his intellectual tendencies." For the late Beethoven quartets we have a detailed record of the aid provided by members of the quartet, since Beethoven's nearly total deafness required his interlocutors to write down their side of the conversation: proofing, editing, the clarification of phrasing, dynamics, articulation, and other performance indications, the writing out of parts and scores in order to enable the task of proofing, as well as in preparation for the work of professional copyists who penned clean copies for Prince Galitzin and several different publishers—the participation of Schuppanzigh and other members of the quartet proved vital to all of these tasks.

Schuppanzigh introduced several innovations that fundamentally changed the string quartet, innovations upon which Beethoven capitalized in his late quartets, and which continue to shape how we experience and think about string quartets. During the winter of 1804-1805 Schuppanzigh pioneered public string quartet concerts; he continued with public subscription concerts during his tenure with Count Razumovsky, and again from the time of his return from

Russia in 1823 until his death. Another innovation, for which Schuppanzigh shares the credit with Count Razumovsky, was a stable membership of the ensemble. Together these two innovations initiated a profound transformation of the string quartet from the leading Viennese genre of home entertainment, functioning primarily for the edification of its participant performers, to what it became after 1823, the leading genre of public instrumental music for connoisseurs, a new listener-centered role. At home players tended to read through as many quartets as possible, and included everyone present by rotating roles. The fixed membership of Schuppanzigh's ensembles after 1808 enabled them to perform with a precision and finesse that revealed unsuspected nuances, depths, and powers of works that listeners thought they already knew from playing through them at home.

Yet a third innovation, Schuppanzigh's programming, augmented the effects of the first two in creating an audience of connoisseurs. From the start in the winter of 1804-05 his core repertory had consisted of works by "the greatest masters," as he put it in one of his advertisements – of quartets by Haydn, and quartets and quintets by Mozart and Beethoven. This core canon was augmented occasionally with quartets by Anton Eberl and Andreas Romberg in the early years, and in later years with works by Louis Spohr (especially his double quartets), Georges Onslow (especially his cello quintets), and even more occasionally with works by Franz Weiss, the violist of the quartet, and Franz Schubert. Schuppanzigh's programming was designed to let Beethoven shine against the backdrop of his forebears Haydn and Mozart, while everyone else auditioned for inclusion in the canon of great masters.

By the time Schuppanzigh began his last run of subscription concerts in 1823

his programming represented a much greater departure from Viennese norms than had his earlier concerts. In the home, the male string quartet (since string instruments were not considered suitable for women) was beginning to be crowded out by music for the pianoforte, the specialty of young ladies. The decade of Rossini (starting in Vienna in 1816), of the waltz orchestras of Johann Strauss Sr. and Joseph Lanner (starting in 1823), and of the first full flowering of virtuosity, rendered all the old four-movement instrumental genres born of aristocratic patronage deeply unfashionable; the sonata became a rare visitor in the parlor, as did the symphony on the public stage. Public concerts in the 1820s mixed instrumental with vocal numbers, and the vast majority of instrumental offerings comprised virtuoso vehicles (divertissements, potpourris, and variations); even new quartets were predominantly *quatuors brillants*. By default Schuppanzigh's concerts became the preeminent venue for hearing instrumental music in a pedigreed genre, and thus by default his concerts were also the preeminent venue for hearing instrumental music by Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven. At a time when the old instrumental genres Beethoven had inherited and made his own were fading away as old music had always faded away, when Beethoven himself had become a living legend but had also begun to appear irrelevant to the future course of music, Schuppanzigh did more than anyone else to keep one of those genres audible

Portrait of Ignaz Schuppanzigh by Josef Danhauser.

and fresh and in mind and in memory, and only Schuppanzigh provided polished performances to make the case that the richness of *this* music had not been exhausted or even plumbed by decades of exposure, that here was music that transcended fashion.

The first reviews of Schuppanzigh's 1823 series repeatedly stressed its function as a "school of artistic taste," and praised it as an "institution for the conservation of the higher sense for music," that is, music that transcends mere "ear-tickling." The reviewers took pains to convince readers that the public string quartet represented the peak experience and most refined challenge available to connoisseurs of music, and as such was drawing Vienna's most select music public. And they celebrated Schuppanzigh's concerts by describing them with the term "classical"— as one reviewer put it, "[Schuppanzigh is] a mighty dam against the flood of modern tinsel music, dedicating his virtuosity solely to the acknowledgment and rise of truly classical creations." But this "classical" also had class connotations; the venerable "classical" works had aristocratic cachet while the modern tinsel music was bourgeois. Unlike any other public venue in 1823, but perhaps not too dissimilar from the experience Lichnowsky and Razumovsky had once been able to offer their guests, Schuppanzigh's concerts forced listeners to concentrate on purely musical processes through the uninterrupted course of three string quartets, without the aid or distraction of text, and without granting the performer a greater claim on their attentions than the music. Over the course of several seasons his subscribers encountered the historic panorama of the string quartet from its beginnings with Haydn right through the first public hearing of a Schubert quartet. Schuppanzigh was training his audience, preparing them as well as possible for the promised encounter with the new quartets Beethoven was working on.

After finishing the Op. 95 quartet in 1810 Beethoven had stopped writing string quartets, and some of his reasons can be surmised from a letter he wrote to his agent in England: "N.B. The Quartett [Op. 95] is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public. Should you wish for some Quartetts for public performance I would compose them to this purpose occasionally." Schuppanzigh's return to Vienna from Russia hard on the heels of Prince Galitzin's commission for three new string quartets, along with the new series of public quartet concerts Schuppanzigh started evidently persuaded Beethoven that he could now successfully market quartets for connoisseurs. Publishers embraced the implications of the new classicizing tendencies. As one put it, "I won't collect the interest for twenty years; but with Beethoven I have capital in my hands.—But not everyone can play it yet." Publishers also issued Beethoven's late quartets in score simultaneously with their initial publication in parts – a first for chamber music. A quartet score assisted study, but had previously been issued primarily in posthumous complete works editions, as "monuments." Issuing Beethoven's late quartets as "monuments" right away was a logical concomitant to treating their purchase as a long term capital investment.

Beethoven and Schuppanzigh transformed the string quartet from music best experienced by the adept performer to the most rewarding music for the most diligent listener.

Schuppanzigh probably premiered all of Beethoven's string quartets, but while accounts of the early public

concerts do not mention precise programs, we know when and where the five late quartets were first performed in public. The long-awaited premiere of Op. 127, the first of the late quartets, was a fiasco. Beethoven did not have the parts ready until less than a month before the performance, the ensemble was ragged, and at a crucial juncture Schuppanzigh broke a string and had no back-up violin available. Unsympathetic observers blamed Schuppanzigh's corpulence (Beethoven usually called him "Falstafferl") for the poor performance and "incomprehensibility" of the new quartet. Schuppanzigh's humiliation was compounded when Beethoven gave the quartet in turn to two rival violinists who did much better, having much more time to prepare. The fiasco of the premiere and the ensuing violin competition heightened public interest in the new quartets, and publishers vied to buy them from Beethoven for unprecedentedly high prices. But while Beethoven realized serendipitous rewards from the disastrous premiere of Op. 127, Schuppanzigh's subscription concerts never quite recovered.

Unlike Schubert, Beethoven never dedicated a quartet to Schuppanzigh, and seems to have regarded their enduring friendship and collaboration as sufficient tribute. But we should recognize that it was not Beethoven alone, but Beethoven in concert with Schuppanzigh who transformed the string quartet from music best experienced by the adept performer to the most rewarding music for the diligent listener, and thereby made of it a cornerstone of the building we know as classical music.

Musicologist John M. Gingerich is currently working on a book on Schuppanzigh. Before beginning his musicological work he was a cellist, and played for several years with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 15, 2016

Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 8pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET
Edward Dusinberre, *Violin*
Károly Schranz, *Violin*
Geraldine Walther, *Viola*
András Fejér, *Cello*

PROGRAM 1

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2
Allegro
Adagio cantabile - Allegro - Tempo I
Scherzo. Allegro
Allegro molto, quasi Presto

String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95 "Serioso"
Allegro con brio
Allegretto ma non troppo - attaca:
Allegro assai vivace ma serioso
Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato

—INTERMISSION—

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130
Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro
Presto
Andante con moto, ma non troppo
Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai
Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo
Finale. Allegro

Please join Professor Scott Burnham and the members of the Takács String Quartet for a post-concert discussion immediately following the concert.

By Peter Laki, ©2016

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2 (1799-1800)

When the young Beethoven left his native Bonn for Vienna in 1792, his patron, Count Waldstein, sent him on his way with these words: "With the help of assiduous labor you shall receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands." What the Count meant was that even though Mozart had died the previous year, Beethoven could still study with Haydn, the other great Viennese composer. Things didn't quite work out that way, though, for Haydn and Beethoven didn't get along very well and the composition lessons never really got off the ground. Still, Waldstein's words were prophetic on another level, as they implied that Beethoven could some day inherit the mantle of the two older masters. And in fact, once installed in Vienna, Beethoven lost no time in claiming his place as *im Bunde der Dritte* ("the third in the alliance," to quote a famous phrase from Beethoven's favorite poet, Friedrich Schiller). Having absorbed the style of Haydn and Mozart early on, he now began to put on his own personal stamp on that style. With his first twenty opus numbers, written between 1795 and 1800, he thoroughly assimilated *and* carried on the genres of concerto, piano sonata and chamber music; by 1799-1800, he was ready to write his first symphony.

In Beethoven's six string quartets published as Op. 18, the influence of Haydn and Mozart cannot be denied. What is more, scholars have shown that some ideas in these quartets even predate the move to Vienna, and originate in compositional essays from the Bonn period. Yet at the same time, Beethoven's unique voice is already manifest on every page.

The quartets were written for and dedicated to Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, one of Beethoven's most

important aristocratic patrons. Simultaneously with Beethoven, the 67-year-old Haydn was also working on a set of quartets for Lobkowitz. Yet Haydn eventually withdrew from the project, not wanting to compete with his rebellious former student. He finished only two quartets, out of six that had been planned. These two, eventually published as Haydn's Op. 77, give some indication that the influence between the two composers ran both ways, and the older man was responding to a challenge from the unruly young genius he referred to, with a mixture of admiration and jealousy, as the "Grand Mogul."

Beethoven's G-Major quartet is a gentle work, full of charm and humor but filled with the same adventurous spirit as the rest of the set. The first movement's graceful opening melody appears in some fairly distant keys later on. A rather unheard-of event occurs in the second movement, as the initial "Adagio cantabile" is interrupted by a fast-paced Allegro whose theme derives from the closing motive of the Adagio. The varied recapitulation of the Adagio and especially its melancholy coda, with chords borrowed from the minor mode, are also noteworthy novelties.

In the third-movement Scherzo, a sharply profiled rhythmic motif becomes the starting point for many subtle and exquisite tonal games. Dance-like and virtuosic, the Trio section shares the carefree mood of the scherzo proper. The finale opens with a simple yet irresistible melody in dance rhythm; as it is developed, the rhythmic motion will sometimes slow down, repeating single harmonies pensively or playfully as the case may be, before another appearance of the opening melody (in ever-changing keys) propels the movement into new and unexpected directions.

String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95 "Serioso" (1810)

The F-Minor quartet (or "Quartetto serioso," as Beethoven himself called it) was written at the end of Beethoven's extremely prolific second, or "heroic," period. It was his last string quartet before the magnificent set of late works written in the last years of his life. In extremely concise form, the quartet sums up most of the qualities of the "heroic" period: robust force, melodic poignancy, formal concentration, abrupt interruptions, bold key changes and an irresistible rhythmic drive.

All four movements are built of melodic gestures of an astonishing simplicity—one might almost call it bluntness. The unison figure that opens the piece—repeated, in typical Beethovenian fashion, a half-step higher—is only one of many examples. That dramatic gesture sets the stage for a first movement of uncommon emotional intensity.

The second movement is in D Major, a key very distant from the original F Minor. Beethoven never chose a more remote key relationship between movements than he did here. Starting with a mysterious, unaccompanied scale, the movement continues with a lyrical melody followed by a fugue, and has an open ending leading directly into the scherzo. The latter is based on a single motif consisting of a scale, heard both in descending and ascending form. The slow movement's D Major is revisited in the quiet and expressive Trio, which moves in equal long notes with accompanying flourishes in the first violin.

The finale proceeds from an introductory "Larghetto espressivo" through a passionate "Allegretto agitato" to the extremely fast coda, in which the tonality suddenly changes from F Minor to F Major and the "serioso" character gives way to cheerfulness, even humor, for the few remaining moments. (The sequence of events in this last movement runs remarkably parallel to Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture, written in the same year 1810, and also consisting of a slow introduction and passionate Allegro in F Minor, followed by an exultant coda in F Major.)

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130 (1825-26)

Beethoven's late string quartets are famously "difficult" pieces of music. They represent the final stage in the evolution of one of the greatest geniuses that ever lived, but for a long time it was thought that the genius left us simple mortals far behind in

his ascent to the highest peaks of musical expression. The harmonic language, musical form and in some cases even the traditional order of movements are completely at variance with classical expectations. Many of Beethoven's contemporaries thought that at the end of his life, the master had taken leave of his senses, or at least that his deafness, now total, had caused him to lose all contact with, and consideration for, the outside world. (Their point seemed only to be reinforced by Beethoven's famous words to violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, when the composer reportedly exclaimed: "What do I care about your miserable fiddle when the Spirit is talking to me!") The late quartets could only begin to be understood when listeners were able to take them on their own terms and stopped measuring them against any other music, including Beethoven's own earlier compositions.

Once that leap is completed, one is ready to hear the message of the late quartets, because they are far from shutting out the world, Beethoven was never more eager, even desperate, to reach out. In fact, it was precisely his intense desire to communicate that compelled him to throw all conventions overboard. And while the sequence of the movements and the harmonic language are often startlingly new, in other respects (especially melody) Beethoven's language actually became simpler, as can be seen, for instance, in the second and fourth movements of Op. 130.

Of the five string quartets Beethoven wrote between 1822 and 1826, Op. 130 in B-flat Major is the longest and most complex. Together with Op. 127 (E-flat Major) and Op. 132 (A Minor), it was dedicated to Prince Galitzin, a Russian aristocrat and accomplished amateur cellist. In this work, as Joseph Kerman wrote in his classic book on the Beethoven quartets, "suspiciously normal features jostle with abnormal ones." And

how right Kerman was to talk about *suspiciously* normal features! The musicologist elucidated that expression by discussing the opening of the quartet, a slow introduction that looks conventional enough, but doesn't quite lead into the subsequent Allegro as slow introductions usually do. Instead, the music seems to vacillate between the slow and the fast tempos, with the Adagio and the Allegro interlocking and interrupting one another, until the Allegro finally wins out and the principal section of the movement begins. But the Adagio returns for short moments several more times, both in the middle and at the end of the movement. The other irregularities, harmonic and thematic, are too numerous to list, but it is clear that a unique musical story is being told in a highly dramatic form through the unpredictable alternations of agitated and calmly lyrical passages.

The second movement is a brief scherzo in duple meter with an almost blatantly simple theme. It is in the minor mode, followed by a foot-stomping "trio" section in the major. As a whole, this movement is in the greatest imaginable contrast with the opening of the work.

A slow (but not *too* slow) movement is next, bearing the marking "Andante con moto, ma non troppo—poco scherzoso" ("Moving along, but not too much, and just a little bit jocular," in Michael Steinberg's apt translation). It is a nostalgic look at the serenade music of the bygone days of Mozart and early Beethoven; the rather simple melodic material is ornamented with extremely elaborate inner voices.

This movement in D-flat Major is followed by one in G; these two keys are at the greatest possible distance from one another in the classical tonal system. The sound of G Major, considered to be cheerful and innocent, was important enough for Beethoven in this *danza tedesca* ("German

dance") to make the highly unusual tonal leap between the two movements. The dance itself, like the preceding Andante, has a touch of nostalgia in it as it revisits the Austrian *Ländler* that has inspired so many minuets. It is a more or less classical ABA form with a central trio section, but at the very end a surprising thing happens: the theme is broken up into small fragments and repeated with the fragments in reverse order, played by one instrument at a time.

The heartpiece of the quartet is the heavenly Cavatina. The name comes from the world of opera and indeed, the movement is an extended aria with the first violin as the soloist. Yet while an operatic hero or heroine sings *out* on the stage in a performance that invites stormy applause at the end, this Cavatina is directed entirely inward and reaches depths of expression unique even for Beethoven. Karl Holz, who played second violin in Schuppanzigh's quartet and who was close to the composer in the latter's final years, recalled Beethoven telling him "that the Cavatina was composed in the very tears of misery, and never had one of his own pieces moved him so deeply, and merely to relive it in his feelings always cost him a tear." The most extraordinary moment comes when, after a sudden change of keys, the volume (not loud to begin with) drops to pianissimo and the first violin begins a new melody constantly interrupted by rests, indeed as if choking back tears. The performance instruction, *beklemmt,* which occurs nowhere else in Beethoven, means something like "oppressed, suffocated, straitened, anxious" (Michael Steinberg's suggestions).

Movements 1-5 have already stretched the string-quartet genre almost beyond recognition. But Beethoven's finale is extraordinary even after one has learned to let go of all expectations based on the past. The "Great Fugue" is much more than a movement: it can be regarded as an entire composition by itself, and

it is easy to see the point of Beethoven's friends and publishers when they persuaded him to remove it from Op. 130 and publish it separately. Beethoven did just that and, in the fall of 1826, composed a new finale that became the last music he ever wrote.

The new rondo finale is of course on a much smaller scale than the *Grosse Fuge*, but it is not exactly a lightweight work (although it has seemed to so many commentators). Its merry contradance melody starts with the same note "G" with which the Cavatina ended, forming a "bridge" of sorts. As a result, the music begins in what turns out to be the "wrong" key, and the home tonality of B-flat Major is not reached until the end of the phrase. The finale has its own share of contrapuntal development, and completes a tonal journey that is far from simple. During the central portion and just before the end, Beethoven achieves an intensity of expression that matches that of the previous five movements.

In the concert practice of our time, Op. 130 is regularly performed in both versions, with either the "Great Fugue" or the new finale as its last movement (at the final concert in our series, the Takács Quartet will perform Op. 130 again, this time with the fugue). The overall effect of the piece is quite different in each case, but of course both forms are equally valid, and there is no reason to pronounce one "better" or more "authentic" than the other.

Kristin Van Beethoven

PROGRAM

2

NOVEMBER 17, 2016

Thursday, November 17, 2016, 8pm
Pre-concert Talk by Scott Burnham at 7pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET
Edward Dusinberre, *Violin*
Károly Schranz, *Violin*
Geraldine Walther, *Viola*
András Fejér, *Cello*

PROGRAM 2

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1
Allegro con brio
Adagio affetuoso ed appassionato
Scherzo. Allegro molto
Allegro

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp"
Poco adagio – Allegro
Adagio ma non troppo
Presto - attacca:
Allegretto con variazioni

—INTERMISSION—

String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131
Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo - attacca:
Allegro molto vivace - attacca:
Allegro moderato - attacca:
Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile - attacca:
Presto - Molto poco adagio - attacca:
Adagio quasi un poco andante - attacca:
Allegro

By Peter Laki, ©2016

String Quartet Op. 18, No. 1
(1799-1800)

The F-Major work which opens Beethoven's first published set of quartets was actually the second to be written (after the D-Major work now known as No. 3). It exists in two versions; having radically reworked the piece during the summer of 1800, Beethoven wrote to his friend Karl Amenda: "I have just learned how to write quartets, as you will see when you receive them."

Beethoven had indeed developed a new way to write quartets. The pithy opening motif of the first movement undergoes much more extensive transformations than anything seen in the works of Haydn and Mozart, revealing many exciting new tonal possibilities; the range of keys visited is also wider than had been customary before. These procedures, collectively known as "motivic development," are no longer restricted to the central part of the movement (the so-called *development* section) but pervade the entire movement, including the surprising coda at the end.

As Beethoven disclosed to Amenda, he had been thinking of the tomb scene from *Romeo and Juliet* when he composed the second movement—a rare case of programmatic inspiration in the Classical era. The music bears the unusually effusive tempo marking "Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato" ("filled with emotions and passion"); its intensely lyrical violin melody turns into high drama during the brief development section. The violent interruptions of the melody at the end of the movement might relate to Juliet's suicide, at least according to the interpretation of American musicologist Owen Jander, who made an in-depth study of this Shakespearean connection.

The third-movement Scherzo lives up to its name, with its playful

tone and many unexpected harmonic turns. Its middle section (trio) takes up a rhythmic motif from the Scherzo proper and develops it in new ways, with many virtuosic runs in the first violin. The trio remains "open-ended:" it doesn't come to a full close but rather leads directly to the reprise of the Scherzo.

The finale continues in the light-hearted vein of the Scherzo. Its main theme is made up of fast figurations and a short rhythmic tag—a two-bar idea similar in its brevity to the opening theme of the first movement. Beethoven uses imitation and counterpoint, along with some more bold key changes, to create a sparkling ending to a masterwork that he was proud to place at the head of his first set of quartets.

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp" (1809)

On account of the special *pizzicato* (plucked) notes in the first movement, this work received the nickname "Harp Quartet" soon after it was written—and the evocation of that romantic instrument is in keeping with the entire quartet, which is one of the most emotional Beethoven ever composed. The work dates from the summer and fall of 1809, when Beethoven was madly in love with Therese Malfatti, to whom he would soon propose marriage, only to be turned down. Haydn had died earlier that year, a few weeks after Napoleon's troops invaded Vienna. These were turbulent times indeed, even if Beethoven had just entered a lucrative agreement with the Archduke Rudolph and the Princes Kinsky and Lobkowitz, in terms of which he would receive from them an annual sum that would guarantee him a comfortable life for the next few years. The quartet

was dedicated in gratitude to Lobkowitz, who had received the dedication of the Op. 18 quartets a decade earlier.

The Poco Adagio introduction to the "Harp Quartet" sounds like a fervent plea. The subsequent Allegro, which contains the harp imitations, is an intensely personal statement in which the dynamic initial impulses are constantly deflected into a dreamy romantic realm. The second movement, Adagio ma non troppo, was described by an anonymous early critic, writing in 1811, as a "somber nocturne" (*dunkles Nachtstück*); a more recent commentator describes it as "tender, yet elegiac." A beautiful *cantabile* melody in the major mode alternates with minor-key episodes. The opening melody returns twice, each time more lavishly embellished than before; the movement ends with some heart-rending *espressivo morendo* ("expressive, dying away") chords.

The fiercely dramatic C-Minor Presto (Beethoven avoided calling it a "scherzo") sounds like a return to life. Its middle section, or trio—in C Major—is even faster, reaching *quasi prestissimo* speed. This passage seems to have originated in a piano improvisation by Beethoven. According to a story told by Beethoven's student Carl Czerny, the composer was present at Prince Lobkowitz's palace when a new string quartet by Ignaz Pleyel was performed. Later that evening, Beethoven improvised on the piano, using a motif from Pleyel's work which German musicologist Hartmut Krones sees reflected in this *prestissimo*. As in many scherzos from Beethoven's middle period, this Trio appears twice and the scherzo itself three times, resulting in a S-T-S-T-S scheme. Without a break, a mysterious transition leads to the final movement, a set of variations on a theme that suggests a love song. At least, the outline of the theme appears in one of Beethoven's sketches for a

love song (which was, however, not completed in that form). In the course of the variations, the melody is surrounded by virtuoso figurations and subjected to a series of ingenious transformations. The movement culminates in an exuberant, but quite brief, coda in a faster tempo.

The "Harp" was the first Beethoven quartet to be published by itself, with an opus number that did not contain six works as in Op. 18, or even three as in Op. 59. This remained the norm for all later quartets, each of which received an individual opus number.

String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131 (1825-26)

In the fall of 1825, Beethoven completed the commission for three string quartets he had received from Prince Galitzin of Russia. (The "Galitzin" quartets are, in order of composition, Op. 127, 132, and 130.) Work on these magnificent compositions resulted in a proliferation of ideas for string quartets that compelled Beethoven to continue writing in this medium, and in the following year he proceeded to compose two more quartets, the present masterpiece in C-sharp Minor and his final work in the genre, the F-Major quartet, Op. 135. (His very last completed composition, then, was the substitute finale for Op. 130, one of the "Galitzin" quartets, which originally ended with the "Great Fugue.")

Free from any considerations a commission might have imposed, Beethoven moved even further away from the conventions of quartet-writing than he had done in the "Galitzin" quartets. An external sign of this is the layout in seven movements, played without a break—certainly a major departure from the norms that leaves the listener totally unable to predict the course the work will take at the next turn. But form in Beethoven is always

inseparable from content, and the revolutionary structure of this quartet was made necessary by the exceptional emotional range of what Beethoven had to say. Beethoven had ended his previous quartet, Op. 130, with the "Great Fugue." Op. 131 begins with a fugue, though a very different one: whereas the "Great Fugue" contains many interruptions and tempo changes (to the point where it almost resembles a multi-movement composition), the opening movement of the C-sharp Minor Quartet is characterized by a textural unity reminiscent of the fugues of Bach. The theme, whose accented notes outline the harsh interval of an augmented second, is developed according to the traditional rules of counterpoint, but a series of chromatic modulations carry it to tonal regions that would have been beyond any other composer's imagination. Yet in Beethoven, it all seems to evolve naturally, just as the acceleration of the motion (from quarter-notes to eighths) happens in a totally seamless fashion. The tone remains serious and tension-laden as the contrapuntal development culminates in a restatement of the theme (which the cello plays in an augmented form, that is, at half the original speed).

The long tonal voyage having ended on the C-sharp Minor on which it began, Beethoven simply moves it up a half-step to D Major, the key of the second-movement Allegro molto vivace. Here is music of great vitality and classical grace; some commentators have even detected the influence of folk music. And yet there are a few moments of hesitation and introspection even here. Also, it ends in a surprisingly understated manner, breaking into a short instrumental quasi-recitative that, with a cadenza-like flourish for first violin, makes up movement 3, which lasts less than a minute. It leads, however, to the longest of the quartet's movements, a 14-minute set of variations that occupies the central position,

not only literally (being No. 4 in the seven-movement structure) but also in terms of its musical significance.

Like many of Beethoven's late variation sets (such as the "Diabelli" Variations or the last movement of the final piano sonata, Op. 111), a theme of extreme simplicity becomes the vehicle for a "brilliant chain of revelations," to borrow a felicitous expression from William Kinderman's book on Beethoven. The melody is shared by the two violins in its first presentation, followed by an ornamented repeat as first variation, with no change in tempo or meter. Variation 2, however, begins to speed up the tempo in a gentle and playful way; the melody is carried by the first violin and the cello as the two middle voices provide a soft chordal accompaniment. Variation 3 contains an unmistakable allusion to the first movement of the A-Minor quartet (Op. 132); only here the same dotted theme is heard in the major mode, marked *dolce* ("sweet") and *lusinghiero* ("alluring"). The voices follow the strict contrapuntal rules of a canon; the first half of the theme is developed in two parts (cello-viola), the second half in four. In Variation 4, the tempo slows down to Adagio; the ornamentation is lush and the polyphonic relationships of the instrument extremely complex.

By contrast, in Variation 5 the theme is "deconstructed" to its bare essentials; little more than a harmonic skeleton remains, enlivened by a faster tempo ("Allegretto") and the syncopated entries of the instruments. The climax of the movement is the hymn-like Variation 6 ("Adagio ma non troppo e semplice"), which begins *sotto voce* ("in a subdued voice"); eventually, an unassuming little rhythmic figure appears in the cello that, in Kinderman's words, "threatens to disrupt the discourse of the other instruments" and eventually

(continued on page 54)

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Beethoven’s 16 string quartets were written over a 27-year span of his life, and they range from the wide-eyed energy and variety of his first six quartets to the enigmatic and existential worlds of his final five quartets. It is impossible to think of a more compelling window onto Beethoven, onto the genre of the string quartet, or even onto the entire mutifarious pageant of chamber music in the modern West.

—SCOTT BURNHAM

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Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95 “Serioso”
Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130 with Finale

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Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 7pm

Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1
Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 “Harp”
Quartet 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2017, 8PM
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Quartet A Major, Op. 18, No. 5
Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4
Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132

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Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3
Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2
Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2017, 8PM
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Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6
Quartet in F Major, Op. 135
Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2017, 8PM
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Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1
Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130,
with Op. 133 “Grosse Fuge”

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invades the other parts as well. The variation culminates, to quote Kinderman one more time, in "an elaborate cadenza-like passage for each of the four soloists in turn (reminiscent of the vocal cadenzas for four soloists in the Credo of the *Missa Solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony)." A short recall of the theme in its original form leads into a final variation, in which the theme, played by the second violin and the viola, is surrounded by constant trills in the first violin. (The trill is a particularly important expressive device in many of Beethoven's works.) However, this variation breaks off before the entire theme has been heard, and most unexpectedly, a new movement begins.

This movement (No. 5), a jocular presto in E Major, is a total contrast to the preceding slow movement in every respect. Another distinguished writer on Beethoven, Martin Cooper, qualifies its theme as "simple to the point of grotesque" and notes that it is "treated comically" in the course of its development. In fact, the sudden halts and abrupt changes in instrumental technique (connected *legato* notes one moment, brief and playful staccatos the next) unmistakably designate this movement as a scherzo, although Beethoven did not choose to use that name. One of the most extraordinary effects is the *sul ponticello* (playing close to the bridge) appearing towards the end of the movement; it is a technique that doesn't occur anywhere else in the classical quartet repertoire. Although the movement lacks a distinct "trio" section, it does introduce an element of contrast by juxtaposing a *staccato* and a *legato* theme that are rhythmically similar but quite different in their musical personality.

A short Adagio movement (No. 6), a lament that alludes to the fugue theme of the first movement, serves as a bridge to the tempestuous finale (No. 7),

which opens with a characteristic "riding theme." A little later, the same fugue theme is transformed into a passionate dramatic utterance. The finale has its own contrapuntal episodes, but rapid passagework and variations on the "riding theme" predominate. After a more contemplative passage containing many ritenutos (where the tempo momentarily slows down), the momentum rises again, and the agitated motion continues to the end, despite a brief moment of last-minute hesitation just a few seconds before the final chords.

Beethoven's Impact

Lowell Liebermann

The Beethoven String Quartets are, to a composer, both an inspiration and an intimidation. They are the yardstick to which all other quartets are invariably compared, and to which most others fall short. It was as a 17-year-old composer that I was first introduced to them by my composition teacher David Diamond, a composer of 10 string quartets in his own right. The "mighty 17" have remained an active presence in my compositional life and thought ever since, a pinnacle of perfection achieved, miraculously, in the adolescence of the medium; a goal to be striven for and probably never reached.

My personal favorite amongst the Beethoven Quartets, from the moment I first heard it, has always been Opus 131. In it Beethoven seems to speak with an intimacy and directness that is almost occult in its communicative power. Coincidentally, the latest composition I finished was my Opus 131. It was an unsettling feeling, writing that number on the title page of my manuscript: it seemed as if it should have been retired long ago in deference to Beethoven's accomplishment.

Lowell Liebermann is one of America's most frequently performed and recorded living composers. He has composed five string quartets...so far.

"Tones sound, and roar and storm about me
until I have set them down in notes." —Ludwig van Beethoven

(or share with others #BeethovenCycle)

Ludwig Van

Beethoven

PROGRAM

3

JANUARY 18, 2017

Wednesday, January 18, 2017, 8pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET
Edward Dusinberre, *Violin*
Károly Schranz, *Violin*
Geraldine Walther, *Viola*
András Fejér, *Cello*

PROGRAM 3

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

String Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5
Allegro
Menuetto - Trio
Andante cantabile con variazioni
Allegro

String Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4
Allegro ma non tanto
Scherzo. Andante scherzoso, quasi Allegretto
Menuetto. Allegretto
Allegro - Prestissimo

—INTERMISSION—

String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132
Assai sostenuto – Allegro
Allegro ma non tanto
Molto adagio
Alla marcia, assai vivace - Piu allegro - attacca:
Allegro appassionato

Please join Professor Scott Burnham and the members of the Takács String Quartet for a post-concert discussion immediately following the concert.

By Peter Laki, ©2016

String Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5 (1798-1800)

Commentators on Beethoven's A-Major quartet never fail to point out the young composer's debt to Mozart, in particular the quartet in the same key (K. 464) that Mozart included in a set of six works dedicated to Haydn. No one will dispute this claim, which is based on the external structuring of the work: like Mozart, Beethoven placed his minuet in second place, and included a set of slow variations in the key of D Major. The more important question, however, is whether this quartet *sounds* anything like Mozart. And there, the answer has to be a definite no. From the very first measures we hear the sudden offbeat accents so typical of Beethoven, a certain dance rhythm rarely used by Mozart, and myriad other fingerprints that unmistakably belong to Beethoven and no one else.

The general feeling of the opening movement is rather cheerful and lighthearted, but that feeling seems to be constantly contradicted by the frequent incursions into the minor mode and the sudden rests interrupting the musical flow. As a result, we are kept on the edge of our seats, never knowing what is going to happen in the next minute.

Experts have called the second-movement minuet "simple," mainly because it is an old-fashioned minuet rather than the more novel scherzo. Yet it is a sophisticated simplicity; even when the texture is down to the two violins as it is at the beginning, the phrases don't always go where they are expected to, nor are they necessarily over after the standard length of eight bars. The sudden outburst in a minor key in the middle of the minuet, followed by a general rest, is certainly a surprise, as is the varied recapitulation involving some contrapuntal imitation. The trio would be "simple" indeed, and even

"Schubertian" as has been claimed, were it not for those persistent and disquieting offbeat accents.

With its theme all made up of scales, going first down and then up, the third movement again looks like a model of simplicity. It is one of many variation themes by Beethoven that are kept purposely "bare-bones" in order to allow for some spectacular development in the variations. But the latter turn out to be much more than the figurative embellishments of traditional variation writing. The very first one introduces counterpoint. The second variation may be more conventional, but the third is a breathtaking essay in musical color, the fourth a stunning chromatic chorale, and the fifth a grandiose statement of almost symphonic breadth. One would expect a sixth variation, but instead—after a sudden leap into a remote key—Beethoven appends a coda (conclusion) which is really a free meditation on the opening portion of the theme.

The finale is brilliant and virtuosic, with a swiftly running first theme and a second one that moves quite a bit more slowly. Both themes are manipulated with great ingenuity and are finally combined in the witty coda.

String Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4 (1798-1800)

The key of C Minor had a special significance for classical composers. Mozart endowed this key with deeply tragic connotations in works such as the C-Minor fantasy, sonata and concerto (all for piano). Beethoven built upon this legacy in such works as the "Pathétique" sonata, the Fifth Symphony and the last piano sonata (Op. 111). In the string quartet (as so often in Beethoven's other C-Minor works), dramatic excitement is expressed by frequent offbeat

accents, harsh chordal sonorities and other surprising gestures. Yet there are also playful moments, as in the second theme of the first movement which, as it has often been pointed out, shares its melodic outline with one of Beethoven's most cheerful works, the "Duet for two obbligato eyeglasses" for viola and cello.

In many of his works, Beethoven replaced the Mozartian minuet with a scherzo. In the C-Minor quartet (as in a handful of his other works) he included *both* scherzo and minuet, eliminating the slow movement instead. It is true, though, that the scherzo has the *form*, if not the tempo, of a slow movement; with its fugal beginning, it would appear to be a close cousin of the Andante from the First Symphony. Scored in a bright and sunny C Major, it also has the wit and ingenuity of many a Beethovenian scherzo.

With the Minuet, we are back in C Minor and, accordingly, it is a serious and brooding piece, whose atmosphere is only temporarily relieved by a more light-hearted trio in A-flat Major. The way the conclusion of Trio is left open to prepare for the return of the minuet is a thoroughly modern touch.

The last movement is a spirited Rondo, but the dark C-Minor tonality is preserved all the way through (except for one brief episode). The Mozartian models from the C-Minor piano concerto (K. 491) and the C-Minor Serenade (K. 388) are very much in evidence, yet only Beethoven could have written the Prestissimo coda with its entirely unexpected ending.

String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132 (1825)

With its "Holy Song of Thanksgiving of a Convalescent to the Deity in the Lydian Mode," the A-Minor quartet is in a category all by itself, not only among Beethoven's quartets but in the entire music literature as well. Nowhere else did Beethoven

take such a bold step outside the style that Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven himself, had done so much to develop. The same claim may of course be made of the "Great Fugue" (originally the finale of the string quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, later published separately), but while in that work Beethoven expanded an existing framework almost beyond recognition, in the "Holy Song" he did the opposite: he reduced his means and retreated into a newly-invented archaic world that no one knew existed.

The patient who gives thanks for his recovery is, of course, Beethoven himself. In April 1825—when he was in the middle of writing the A-Minor quartet—the composer became gravely ill with an inflammation of the bowels. His physician, Dr. Anton Braunhofer, prescribed a strict diet, and wrote in one of the deaf composer's conversation books: "No wine, no coffee; no spices of any kind. I'll arrange matters with the cook." Beethoven's condition improved; soon he was able to return to work and finished the quartet in July 1825. But with a slow movement that had obviously not been planned from the start, this was no longer the same work that Beethoven had begun before his illness.

If there is one word that occurs more often than any other in discussions of this quartet, it is *contrast*—contrast both *within* movements and *between* movements. The contrasts begin immediately at the beginning, where a mysterious slow introduction is suddenly interrupted by an Allegro flourish in first violin. "The conflict revealed here casts a shadow not only over the first movement but over the quartet as a whole," William Kinderman writes in his insightful monograph on Beethoven. In fact, the anguished half-steps of the introduction and the agitated rhythms of

(continued on page 66)

Beethoven's Impact

Shulamit Ran

Something about the notion that there is a clear divide between two types of music – "pure," "abstract" music on the one hand, and music with a "theme" or "storyline" that exists outside of the music on the other – has always left me ambivalent. I am convinced that all great music including, for example, a Mozart opera, a Schubert or Mahler song cycle, or a Stravinsky ballet, may be experienced and appreciated as "pure music." Regardless of genre and category it is, first and above all, a construct of sound and time in musical space – parallel to, yet separate from, addressing a "topic." Of course, penetrating the "extra musical" in those cases will enhance, illuminate, and add richness to our total experience. But the music comes first.

Equally, I believe that in much of the music we consider to be at the zenith of art at its purest and loftiest, the "human" is ever-present too, in its most wondrous nuance. Nowhere is this truer than in the massive achievement that are the string quartets by Beethoven. When I listen to every one of them, I am acutely aware that BEETHOVEN equals not only one of the greatest giants in all of art, but also a breathing person whose every phrase "spoke" – in a manner intermittently vivid and exuberant, pained and transcendent, heroic and

fragile – of what it means to be alive.

No Beethoven quartet is like another. This holds true for all of Beethoven, of course. One is aware that with each and every composition Beethoven engages in a new experiment. Listen with fresh ears, and you will be startled anew, surprised time and again.

By definition, a composer takes command of a listener's most precious and irreplaceable commodity – their time – a profound responsibility. Inspired by Beethoven, I, too, aim to make every note matter. I, too, want my music to feel urgent, necessary, organic at the smallest and largest levels. The magnificent balance where the music is never predictable yet feels "right" at all times is a Beethovenian marvel that inspires me every day.

It has been a special privilege to hear some of today's great quartets performing some of my string quartet music. Inevitably, on such occasions my music often finds itself alongside Beethoven, Haydn, Mendelssohn. My heart sometimes flutters excitedly in the awareness that this truly is "playing with the big boys." And from an early age Beethoven was Mount Olympus for me. At the very least it is my hope that to the listener transitioning from a string quartet by Beethoven to one by Shulamit Ran it will be apparent that, as I compose my music, I am always looking to the mountain-top, in awe and in hope.

Shulamit Ran is an Israeli-American composer. She is the Andrew MacLeish Distinguished Service Professor of Music at the University of Chicago. She has written 3 string quartets, and many other chamber works with a string quartet at its core.

the Allegro determine much of what follows, along with the lyrical second idea played by the second violin. The first two elements are contrapuntally combined in the development section and further elaborated in the subsequent sections of the movement. In a significant departure from conventional sonata form, Beethoven wrote not just one recapitulation but two. The first of these resembles the exposition more closely but is set in a key other than A Minor, the home key, while the second treats the material with much more freedom but re-establishes A Minor in the movement's vibrantly dramatic coda.

To say that the second movement is a minuet with trio is both true and untrue. The 3/4 time and ABA form are certainly present, and the drone effects of the trio have a long ancestry in movements of this type. Yet the movement doesn't *sound* like a minuet. Commentator Michael Steinberg described it as "an always surprising mixture of the gentle and the acid," with harmonies that are "a bit tart." The frequent half-steps are audibly related to those from the slow introduction of the first movement. Of the trio section, Steinberg wrote: "A country dance tune, with bagpipe drone and all, becomes transfigured at a great height into something distant, mysterious, free of the pull of gravity." This ethereal dance is, however, suddenly interrupted by a unison passage where even the meter changes briefly from triple to duple. Thus, even this lyrical intermezzo is not spared from the dramatic contrasts that fill the entire work.

Beethoven took pains to specify that the "Holy Song of Thanksgiving" was in the Lydian mode, which is one of the old church modes upon which Gregorian chant and much early polyphonic music was based. The name itself is even older, going back to ancient Greece. We know that Beethoven studied some examples of Renaissance music and also theoretical

writings from the period, and thus he was well aware that Lydian was associated with healing in some ancient writings. According to theory books, the Lydian scale consists of the white keys of the piano starting with the note F; in other words, it is an F-Major scale with a B natural instead of a B flat. This poses a grave problem, however, in that the interval F-B is an augmented fourth or "tritone" that was called the "devil's interval" in medieval times and studiously avoided. All chant melodies notated in Lydian were actually sung with a B flat, an alteration that was routinely applied to the music. In Op. 132, however, Beethoven used B natural, and it is very likely that his use of the "Lydian mode" is the first in history not to correct the offending interval. Thus, while seemingly reviving an old musical element, Beethoven actually created something quite new. (The Lydian mode with B natural does exist in Eastern European folk music.) The entire "Song of Thanksgiving" is harmonized with only white keys, which—in conjunction with the extremely slow tempo—makes the sound eerily transparent. In addition to ancient sources, Beethoven also drew on the Protestant chorale tradition in this movement—a tradition he was familiar with in spite of his Catholic background. The uniform rhythms and clear-cut cadences (line endings) turn the "Holy Song" into a chorale of sorts, though this chorale has five lines instead of the usual four.

At the end of the fifth line, the second violin plays the first altered note (a C sharp) in the movement, giving the signal for the next section, marked *Neue Kraft fühlend* ("Feeling new strength"). As a total contrast to the preceding Lydian music, this section is in a bright and confident D Major. In Steinberg's words: "The staccatos, the wide leaps, the exuberant upbeats in scurrying thirty-second notes, the jubilant violin trill that rides across the top of the music,

the breathless excitement in the accompaniment, all contribute to the joyful atmosphere."

The hymn returns with some fascinating changes in the texture. The static, almost frozen chords of the first appearance are softened by a more complex rhythmic interplay among the voices, giving the music a more flowing character. Then the second section returns, lavishly ornamented. With the third and final return of the Lydian chorale, we understand the form as A-B-A-B-A (as in the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony), but this final "A" is more intimate and transcendent than any of its previous incarnations. It is also much longer. At first, only one instrument at a time adds ornaments to the melody, the others play the long notes from the beginning. As a result, each player comes forward an individual singing his own personal hymn of thanksgiving. Then, the four instruments join forces again to play the otherworldly harmonies of the movement's final measures.

The brief march that follows confirms the convalescent's return to life. Beethoven wanted a more simple and lighthearted movement after the "Holy Song," and according to his sketches, he first intended a *ländler*-type dance at this point. He later decided otherwise, and the *ländler* found its home as the *Alla danza tedesca* movement of Op. 130.

We might think that when we hear the march in Op. 132, the trials and tribulations are finally over. Not so. A dramatic recitative interrupts the happy music, leading into the "Allegro appassionato" finale. Despite the waltz-like lilt of the main theme, there is significant tension under the surface. The rondo theme is quite close to the agitated melody of the first movement. The first episode provides momentary relief; the second even intensifies the "storm and stress." But eventually, the tonality shifts

from A Minor to A Major; the tempo increases to Presto and a new lyrical melody helps to give this monumental work a happy ending.

The A-Minor Quartet was first performed by the Schuppanzigh Quartet at a Viennese tavern named *zum wilden Mann* ("The Wild Man"), on September 9 and 11, 1825. The concert hall premiere followed two months later, in November of the same year.

Please hold onto this Beethoven Cycle Book

and bring it back to future concerts. Unwanted Beethoven Cycle Books may be returned unmarked to the ushers at all concerts for use by future patrons.

Thank you!

PROGRAM

4

JANUARY 19, 2017

Thursday, January 19, 2016, 8pm
Pre-concert Talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 7pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET
Edward Dusinberre, *Violin*
Károly Schranz, *Violin*
Geraldine Walther, *Viola*
András Fejér, *Cello*

PROGRAM 4

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3
Allegro
Andante con moto
Allegro
Presto

String Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2 "Razumovsky"
Allegro
Molto adagio
Allegretto. Si tratta questo pezzo con molto di sentimento
Finale. Presto

—INTERMISSION—

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127
Maestoso – Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Scherzo: Vivace - Presto
Finale

Please join us following the concert for the Annual Late Night Chamber Jam when amateur string players from our audience will join the Takács Quartet on stage to sight read Beethoven Quartet Op. 18, No. 4.

By Peter Laki, ©2016

String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3 (1798)

In spite of the obvious Haydn and Mozart influences, this quartet, the very first that Beethoven ever composed, is a work of surprising originality. Its opening, with its unaccompanied leap of a minor seventh, is like nothing we could find in the older composers' work, and everything that follows is equally unprecedented. Beethoven's ability to develop entire movements from tiny motivic ideas is already in evidence here, as that minor seventh (or its rhythm of even, long-drawn-out whole notes) pervades almost the whole allegro. The number of keys visited is also greater than usual: tonalities not closely related to the central D Major are used freely, resulting in an exciting and utterly unpredictable harmonic plan.

Similar observations can be made of the other movements as well. The second movement is based on a gentle theme proceeding in equal eighth-notes; yet it can become quite dramatic in the course of its development. The choice of key (B-flat Major, a significant distance from D Major) foretells more harmonic adventures, which do not fail to occur. The third movement is marked neither minuet nor scherzo but simply allegro. It is closer to a scherzo character since it is not particularly dance-like and abounds in offbeat accents that appear in so many of Beethoven's scherzos. Its first phrase oscillates between major and minor in a most unusual fashion. The tonality eventually settles in D Major, only to be displaced by an agitated trio (middle section) in D Minor. In an unusual move, Beethoven wrote out the return of the scherzo in full, with large portions placed an octave higher than the first time. The vivacious finale again unfolds from a single rhythmic idea (that of a swift eighth-note motion in 6/8 time) with occasional interruptions

and other surprises. The ending is probably the only point where Beethoven clearly follows Haydn's lead. The way he turns the first three notes of the theme into a *pianissimo* ending is an obvious bow to the older master.

String Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2 (1806)

Count Andrey Razumovsky, the Russian Ambassador in Vienna, and the Princes Lichnowsky and Lobkowitz, two Viennese aristocrats to whom he was related by marriage, together received the dedications of more than a dozen major works by Beethoven. One might almost say that their "clan" underwrote a great part of what later became known as Beethoven's "heroic" or middle period.

The three quartets of Op. 59, known as the "Razumovsky" quartets, were written shortly after the Third Symphony ("Eroica") and the F-Minor Piano Sonata ("Appassionata"). In those works, Beethoven made a bold leap into the future: music had never expressed such intense emotions before, nor had the formal conventions of music been changed so radically in such a short time. With Op. 59, Beethoven extended his musical revolution to the quartet medium, producing three masterworks after which the genre was never the same again.

One of the most striking features of Beethoven's "heroic" style is a reduction of the thematic material to a small number of motifs and an expansion of the techniques that serve to develop those motifs. The most extreme example is probably the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, with its famous four-note theme, but the opening of the E-Minor quartet is equally striking. Beethoven begins suspensefully with a pair of chords, followed by a short phrase, which is punctuated by rests and repeated a half-step higher, immediately calling the E-Minor tonality into question.

Eventually, continuity is restored, but the form remains rather fragmented, reflecting an agitated state of mind. We hear many insistent syncopated rhythms and rapid passages in unison or parallel motion, in dramatic contrast with the occasional gentler moments. In associating minor mode with emotional turbulence, Beethoven followed the tradition of Haydn and Mozart, though his radically new way of writing gave this Allegro a very special edge.

It was not for nothing that Beethoven inscribed the second-movement Molto Adagio with the words *Si tratta questo pezzo con molto di sentimento* ("This piece must be treated with much feeling"). Here is one of his great hymn-like slow movements, with the quiet majesty of the later "Emperor" Concerto and Ninth Symphony—yet entirely within the intimate world of chamber music. The melody is enriched by chromatic harmonies and surrounded by complex figurations. Then, at the end of the movement, all embellishments are stripped away and the melody is stated by the four instruments in bold *fortissimo* chords, with harsh harmonies and strong accents—before the gentle closing measures end the movement in an idyllic mood.

Beethoven refrained from calling the third movement a scherzo, and surely the first section of the movement is too serious to qualify as a "joke." Yet its syncopated motion and sudden dynamic and harmonic changes are definitely scherzo-like features. The high point of the movement, however, is the second section (which elsewhere would be called trio). In honor of his dedicatee, Beethoven inserted a Russian theme here (marked *thème russe* in the score). The source of the theme was the important folk-song collection published by Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach in 1790. (This melody, "To the Red Sun, Glory!" was famously used again by Mussorgsky in the coronation scene of *Boris*

Godunov.) Beethoven had the four instruments take turns repeating this melody identically over and over again, against a fast-moving counterpoint that also makes its rounds among the four players. As in several other Beethoven works, the usual A-B-A scheme of the scherzo is expanded to A-B-A-B-A, with the *thème russe* section appearing twice and the opening section three times.

The finale is a galloping sonata rondo where Beethoven constantly plays games with our (possibly subconscious) tonal expectations. Seemingly reluctant to establish the home key of E Minor, he keeps the first few measures in C Major before making a sudden shift just before the end of the phrase. (The last movement of the Fourth Piano Concerto, Op. 58, written around the same time, uses a similar strategy.) The rhythmic momentum never flags, though the galloping pulse is temporarily replaced by quieter motion in the lyrical second theme. Yet the main theme never stays away for very long; and as if the initial presto tempo weren't fast enough, Beethoven demands *Più presto* ("faster") for the final measures.

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127 (1825)

In the fall of 1822, Beethoven received a letter from a Russian aristocrat and amateur cello player, Prince Nikolai Galitzin. The Prince commissioned Beethoven to write three string quartets and urged him to name his own price. Beethoven accepted the proposal and promised to deliver the first quartet within a month. However, more than two years passed before the Quartet in E-flat Major, the first one in the set, reached the Prince, even though it seems that Beethoven had begun to make sketches for a new string quartet even before receiving Galitzin's letter. (He had not written a quartet since the F-Minor work, Op. 95, of 1810.)

Let us for a moment imagine the Prince and his three companions in St. Petersburg as they put the parts of Op. 127 on their music stands. They start playing the opening Maestoso, thinking it is a slow introduction; yet after only six measures, they see with surprise that the introduction is cut short and an Allegro theme begins in a new meter. After a few minutes (during which time two distinct musical ideas appear, more or less like in a classical sonata exposition), the opening Maestoso returns in a startlingly distant key. It is brushed aside once more by the Allegro music, now taking on the distinct features of a development section (frequent modulations, fragmentation of motives). Another set of slow measures—shorter than the previous ones—again propels the music in unexpected harmonic directions, with the home key in E-flat Major eventually returning and bringing the music to a soft and somewhat inconclusive conclusion.

After this enigmatic opening, the players encounter a slow theme-and-variation movement of unprecedented complexity (they must have been exceptional players indeed if they could make it to the end!). A lyrical melody of otherworldly beauty is followed by five variations: the first largely ornamental; the second playful; the third, suddenly moving to a distant new key, extremely slow and intense; the fourth seemingly returning to the style of the first yet introducing many fascinating surprises; and the last one developing a "free fantasia" on the theme.

At one point, the harmony seemed so confusing that the Prince had to ask Beethoven in a letter whether he meant a certain note in the viola part to be a C or a D flat. Beethoven explained at great length why it had to be a D flat, and added: "If I had written C, the melody would have been destroyed." There is no record, however, to tell us whether Galitzin and his partners felt, as many modern commentators

have, that Beethoven contemplated the starry heavens in the central E-Major variation.

The remaining two movements are no less extraordinary than the first two. The Scherzo Vivace uses an extremely simple rhythmic pattern to generate uncommon dramatic energy. That pattern is developed and transformed in ways that recall the scherzo of the Ninth Symphony. The trio, or middle section, is a breathless presto in the minor mode, later switching to the major and suddenly interrupted by a general rest and the return of the Scherzo. At the end of the movement, the trio section is briefly recalled; another general rest separates this reminiscence from the abrupt ending, again similarly to what happens in the Ninth Symphony.

In the finale, Beethoven let go of all the dramatic tensions that had weighed so heavily on the first three movements. Musicologist Joseph Kerman described this finale (which bears no tempo marking) as a "medley of folk-like phrases… square and ingenuous, jogging along in all-but-continuous quarter-notes." The contrast with the rest of the quartet could not be greater. Yet Beethoven reserved a final surprise to those players and listeners who thought he was simply writing a folk-dance finale in homage to his one-time teacher Haydn. He added a mysterious coda in a new meter (6/8 replacing cut time) in which the harmonic adventures of earlier movements suddenly reappear. The tempo designation is Allegro comodo ("a comfortably fast motion), not con moto ("with motion") as some editions suggest. Kerman found the harmonic progressions to be "sheer dream"—a dream that is followed by an awakening, a consolidation of the home key, and a sudden yet resolute ending.

Ludwig Van Beethoven

PROGRAM 5

MARCH 15, 2017

Wednesday, March 15, 2017, 8pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET
Edward Dusinberre, *Violin*
Károly Schranz, *Violin*
Geraldine Walther, *Viola*
András Fejér, *Cello*

PROGRAM 5

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6
Allegro con brio
Adagio, ma non troppo
Scherzo. Allegro
La Malinconia. Adagio - Allegretto quasi Allegro

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135
Allegretto
Vivace
Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo
Grave, ma non troppo tratto –Allegro

—INTERMISSION—

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3 "Razumovsky"
Introduzione. Andante con moto – Allegro vivace
Andante con moto quasi Allegretto
Menuetto. Grazioso - Trio
Allegro molto

Please join Professor Scott Burnham and the members of the Takács String Quartet for a post-concert discussion immediately following the concert.

By Peter Laki, ©2016

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6 (1798-1800)

Beethoven's appropriation of the musical style of Haydn and Mozart could be compared to someone moving into an old house and immediately starting to remodel it from top to bottom. He had learned a great deal from his elders—above all, an incredibly varied quartet texture in which the four instruments could blend together as equals, or take turns as leaders. Yet his first set of quartets, published as Op. 18, is nothing less than revolutionary, and the present work, with its mysterious section marked *La Malinconia* ("melancholy"), is one of the most innovative of all.

The quartet opens with a spirited melody spanning more than two octaves and played by the first violin and the cello in alternation. It sets a cheerful tone that prevails throughout the movement despite brief moments of tension. The second movement, Adagio ma non troppo, combines subtle lyricism with a rhythmic pulsation that recalls Haydn, though the modulations to which the melody is later subjected and the surrounding figurations are entirely original. So are the rhythmic ambiguities of the third-movement Scherzo which again brings a Haydnesque idea to new levels of complexity. The greatest marvel of the work, however, is the aforementioned *La Malinconia*, an adagio that, according to Beethoven's performance instructions, has to be treated "with utmost delicacy." As one recent commentator has put it, "its emotional force is enormous… and its labyrinthine harmonic scheme is extraordinary." As a total contrast, the finale opens with a carefree tune in the style of a *Ländler* (an Austrian folk dance that inspired countless symphonic and chamber works from Haydn to Mahler). Twice, the somber world of *La Malinconia* intrudes

upon the dancers but it cannot permanently alter the happy mood of the music.

String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135 (1826)

Beethoven had much on his mind during the summer and fall of 1826, at the time he wrote what was to remain his final string quartet. Already plagued by severe illness, the 55-year-old master, suffered the heaviest blow of his life when his nephew Karl attempted suicide and was subsequently hospitalized for two months. For years, Beethoven had fought his sister-in-law in court for custody of the boy, who was at this time the only human being he really cared about; but he exerted a tyrannical control over Karl that drove the young man to utter despair. It was during this traumatic period that Beethoven began work on the F-Major quartet. The work was completed after the boy, just released from the hospital, accompanied his uncle to Gneixendorf, a two-day trip from Vienna up the Danube, where his other uncle, Johann van Beethoven, owned an estate.

The last movement of Op. 135 is preceded by an enigmatic line of musical notation by Beethoven, containing the themes of the "Grave" introduction and the "Allegro" section, with the question and answer *Muss es sein? – Es muss sein!* ("Must it be? – It must be!") underlaid. Above the line appear the words *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss* ("The Difficult Decision"). There have been numerous attempts to explain what Beethoven was referring to. There is a humorous canon Beethoven wrote in the spring of 1826 using the words *Es muss sein* with almost the same music as in the quartet; the occasion for the canon was that a certain Ignaz Dembscher had failed to pay for the parts of Beethoven's quartet Op. 130 that he had ordered. In a letter to the publisher Moritz Schlesinger, Beethoven wrote:

> "Here, my dear friend, is my last quartet. It will be the last;

> and indeed it has given me much trouble. For I could not bring myself to compose the last movement. But as your letters were reminding me of it, in the end I decided to compose it. And that is the reason why I have written the motto..."

Surely, however, there is more to this "decision" than these two rather mundane stories suggest. We can tell from the complex ways the characteristic descending fourth of the *Es muss sein* motif is woven into the fabric of the whole piece, starting from the very opening of the first movement. This innocent-looking Allegretto has often, but somewhat misleadingly, been described as a nostalgic look back on the bygone days of Mozart and Haydn. The simple harmonies that evoke the memory of the older Viennese Classics are combined with some extremely intricate textures. The melodic material is passed back and forth among the four instruments with great sophistication, and the sudden changes between motion in quarter-notes and sixteenth-triplets (the latter going six times as fast as the former) are extremely striking. There is a hidden, mysterious tension behind the Haydnian façade, waiting to explode.

The explosion comes in the second-movement scherzo, whose rough humor, once again, derives its power from the simplicity of the means employed. The first violin's theme goes down and up, outlining a three-note scale fragment, somewhat like *Three Blind Mice.* The second violin plays a drone, the viola alternates between only two notes, and the cello intones a motif that, like that of the first violin, outlines a circular (rising and falling) motion. Then the note E-flat, foreign to the key of F Major, appears, seemingly out of nowhere, is repeated several times as the whole harmonic direction of the movement becomes uncertain before the previous motivic material re-establishes itself and, slightly

developed, completes the scherzo proper. The middle section is a wild romp where the first violin's ascending scales and wide leaps are offset by a pulsating quarter note accompaniment in the other instruments. The ascent in keys (from F to G to A) is highly unusual and adds considerably to the excitement. The scherzo proper then returns after a retransition section in which the first violin's "Blind Mice" motif is mysteriously repeated by the four instruments in unison.

The sublime third movement brings us one of Beethoven's most heartfelt, hymn-like melodies. On closer look, however, it turns out that its descending and ascending scale figures are almost identical to those in the scherzo, only in slow motion! Its middle section is even slower; the melody of the violin, accompanied by the other instruments in identical rhythm, seems to be choking back tears. Afterwards, the hymn-like melody returns with, embellished by ornamental figures that, although marked *semplice*, actually verge on the ecstatic.

It is after three movements of such contrasting characters (that nevertheless share a great deal of motivic material) that we arrive at the "Difficult Decision." The brief "Grave" introduction, which asks the question *Muss es sein*? functions as a recitative to the Allegro section's aria, in which the affirmation of *Es muss sein* is followed by a positively playful and humorous second theme, as if all doubts had been laid to rest once and for all. Yet that is not quite the case just yet: the question, in the minor mode, is restated as the "Grave" tempo returns. The repeat of the positive answer is interrupted before the end when the *Es muss sein* motif itself is turned into a question. Played at a slower tempo and its straightforward perfect fourth distorted into an anguished diminished interval,

(continued on page 86)

Beethoven's Impact

Steven Mackey

I started my musical life as a blues guitar player forever in search of the right wrong notes – digging, bending, and scratching in search of the note that hurt so good. It wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to say that my life was changed by one note – the most outrageous blue note I'd ever heard – written by a dead German guy surprisingly. From that moment on I wanted to be a composer.

The note in question is the E-flat in bar 16 of the vivace in Beethoven's last String Quartet Op. 135, which I first heard when I was 19 years old. This is an exalted clinker, at once comical and terrifying. It is preceded by a repeated 8-bar theme and it takes longer than that, 9-10 bars, for the music to get back on its feet.

The impact is in part due to the vividness of the contrast that the E-flat delineates. The first 16 bars have a naive, nursery rhyme quality. The 4 instruments interlock cooperatively and then ... bang! The E-flat changes everything. Gone is the sing-song. The triadic harmony collapses into eerie octave and unisons. The wheels fall off the happily ticking triple meter and the

music stutters in a disoriented rhythm and claws its way through E natural to get back to something like the beginning … although you can never trust the beginning again because the E-flat casts a shadow over everything. The bright A natural, major third of the nursery rhyme is colored by a sinister tritone.

Sure you could give the E-flat a name and call it a flattened 7th of the scale and be done with it, but that explains nothing. It doesn't go down like a flattened 7th should, it goes up to a normal 7th. It is as if the music was aiming to just take a step down but slipped past the mark and now has to struggle to climb back aboard. It's a wrong note made right by the gesture. The gestalt of that note delineates an extraordinary character. In short, I am more satisfied with a description of how the note feels than I am with giving it a functional label and that sensation has been informing my sensibility ever since.

Steven Mackey is a composer and Professor of Music at Princeton. University He has been the Chair of the Department of Music at Princeton. He has written 9 string quartets.

this momentary poco adagio provides a last-minute suspense. The dilemma is definitively resolved when the second theme appears *pizzicato* ("with plucked strings"), leading into a final confirmation on all four instrumens: *Es muss sein, es muss sein*! Thus, Beethoven's last quartet ends on a positive and highly confident note. (It was almost his last completed composition, as it was followed only by the new, and even more exuberant, Allegro for the String Quartet in B-flat Major that replaced the "Great Fugue" when that quartet was published as Op. 130.)

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3 (1806)

The third "Razumovsky" quartet is a lively and dynamic work that is definitely "heroic" in the boldness of its themes. The first movement begins with a slow introduction consisting of a mysterious sequence of chords that do not define any particular tonality and do not arrive at the home key of C Major until the very end. (It was evidently influenced by the famous opening of Mozart's "Dissonant" quartet [K. 465], also in C Major.) Even the "Allegro vivace" gets off to a somewhat tentative start, with an unaccompanied flourish for the first violin, punctuated by brief chords in the other instruments. Despite the obvious allusions to Mozart, there is a fierce intensity here that we never find in earlier music. The principal generating idea of the movement is to make amorphous material gradually more organized. By the development section, the loose textures of the exposition are solidified into a strict canon based on a two-note pattern. The violin flourish that serves as the movement's first theme is lavishly ornamented when it returns to announce the recapitulation.

The second movement, Andante con moto quasi Allegretto, has "an aura of remote, almost mythical melancholy and remoteness," in the words

of musicologist William Kinderman. Unlike the first two "Razumovsky" quartets, the C-Major does not contain an original Russian melody, identified as such in the score. Yet, in a 2014 study, Mark Ferraguto traced the theme of this Andante to a Russian song published in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung,* which Beethoven read regularly. But Beethoven did not quote the tune in its original form and only used a characteristic melodic turn from it, making the melody even more exotic by adding an augmented second that was not present in the original. This mysterious first theme is followed by a second idea, which evokes a graceful dance. A haunting new melody is heard at the end of the movement, in a coda that seems to vanish in a Romantic mist.

The graceful third-movement minuet is a nostalgic evocation of the past. The choice of a minuet is significant, for by 1806 Beethoven was much more likely to write fast-paced, surprise-filled scherzos in both chamber and symphonic music. In the trio section Beethoven strikes a more modern note, with some characteristic offbeat accents (a device he was particularly fond of) and an unusually high first violin part. The recapitulation of the minuet is followed by an extensive coda, introducing a sad, minor-key variation of the minuet theme that leads directly into the last movement—a perpetual motion that begins as a fugue, its lengthy subject introduced by the viola. By the time all four instruments have entered, fugal counterpoint gives way to chordal writing; the two kinds of texture alternate throughout the movement. The extremely fast tempo generates a high level of excitement that culminates in the surprise rest just before the end, after which the mad rush continues with even more fire than before.

Kristin Van Beethoven

PROGRAM

6

MARCH 16, 2017

Thursday, March 16, 2017, 8pm
Pre-concert Talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 7pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET
Edward Dusinberre, *Violin*
Károly Schranz, *Violin*
Geraldine Walther, *Viola*
András Fejér, *Cello*

PROGRAM 6

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1 "Razumovsky"
Allegro
Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando
Adagio molto e mesto
Thème russe. Allegro

—INTERMISSION—

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130 & Op. 133
Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro
Presto
Andante con moto ma non troppo
Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai
Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo - attacca:
Grosse Fugue, Op. 133

Please join the artists following the concert for a reception to celebrate the completion of the Beethoven String Quartet Cycle downstairs in the Richardson Lounge.

By Peter Laki, ©2016

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1 (1806)

One of the most striking features of Beethoven's "heroic" style is a reduction of the thematic material to a small number of motifs and an expansion of the techniques which serve to develop those motifs. The most extreme example is probably the first movement of the Fifth Symphony, but the opening of the Quartet in F Major shows the same tendency. The main melody, introduced by the cello, is rather simple in its outline; it only takes its full meaning as Beethoven makes it rise through the higher and higher registers of the first violin. It is a gently singing, lyrical theme, but the pulsating accompaniment of the second violin and the viola, which sometimes clashes with the melody at unusual intervals, gives it a certain edge that foreshadows some more dramatic moments to appear very soon. Beethoven subjected his theme to more far-reaching transformations than he had ever done before, especially in the development section which unites such textural extremes as a long solo line for first violin and a densely woven four-part *fugato* passage. The range of modulations also far exceeds Beethoven's earlier practice. As often in his middle period, Beethoven appended a coda in which the theme, consistently accented on the "wrong" part of the beat (on the second and fourth quarter-notes instead of the first and the third), shows yet another of its many sides. Then the theme is taken up in canon by the viola and the cello. The texture finally stretches out into a second space spanning a full five octaves from the lowest note of the cello to the highest of the violin.

The second movement is sometimes referred to as a scherzo, yet Beethoven's title, Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando, is more precise: scherzo is a musical form, but

scherzando is a general character. In fact, Beethoven aimed for something more ambitious here than the usually playful and fast movement with a contrasting trio section in the middle. Instead, he composed a complex movement that doesn't quite fit any of the standard classical schemes such as sonata or rondo. The opening is as playful as any scherzo: the dance rhythm of the cello, consisting of a single pitch, the unaccompanied melody of the second violin, and a repeat of this whole exchange a step lower, thrusting the music into an unexpected new tonality. Two more dance melodies are added in due course, one reminiscent of an Austrian *Ländler*, the other, perhaps, of a melancholy Polish mazurka in the minor mode. (Or could Beethoven have intended an allusion to Russia at this point? In the finale, of course, he would honor the dedicatee of the quartet with an authentic *thème russe*.) With boundless imagination, Beethoven sends these three themes on a journey full of surprising turns and fantastic adventures. It is musical humor at its most sublime, where the wit of a genius gives us access to something transcendent.

We move into even more transcendent realms with the Adagio molto e mesto in F Minor. Its noble and elegiac melody, played by the first violin and repeated by the cello, becomes more agitated when the higher registers are reached. The melody is developed amidst dramatic outbursts, lavish embellishments, occasional imitation among the voices, and moments of major-mode sunshine. The movement ends with a brilliant cadenza for the first violin than leads without pause into the finale, based on a Russian melody Beethoven had found in the collection of folk melodies published by Nikolai Lvov and Ivan Prach. This melody begins in F Major and ends in D Minor, and Beethoven made the most of this peculiarity not often found in Western European themes of the Classical era. He used

the tonal ambivalence to build a spirited sonata movement that nevertheless has its wistful moments. As the theme already has a double character (and in order not to slight his *thème russe*), Beethoven did not introduce a second theme, only a short and harmonically very simple closing idea in a lively dotted rhythm. After an unusually active development section, which turns the previously presented motifs upside down and inside out, a modified recapitulation reveals yet other potentials in those motifs. One of Beethoven's favorite closing devices, the sudden slowdown before the end, makes the Presto ending all the more irresistible.

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130 (1825-26)
with the *Grosse Fuge,* Op. 133

Of the five string quartets Beethoven wrote between 1822 and 1826, Op. 130 in B-flat Major is the longest and most complex. Together with Op. 127 (E-flat Major) and Op. 132 (A Minor), the B-flat Major work was dedicated to Prince Galitzin, a Russian aristocrat and accomplished amateur cellist. In this work, as Joseph Kerman writes in his classic book on the Beethoven quartets, "suspiciously normal features jostle with abnormal ones." And how right Kerman is to talk about suspiciously normal features! He elucidates that expression by discussing the opening of the quartet, a slow introduction that looks conventional enough, but it doesn't quite lead into the subsequent Allegro as slow introductions usually do. Instead, the music seems to vacillate between the slow and the fast tempos, with the Adagio and the Allegro interlocking and interrupting one another, until the Allegro finally wins out and the principal section of the movement begins. But the Adagio returns for short moments several more times, both in the middle and at the end of the movement. The other

irregularities, harmonic and thematic, are too numerous to list, but it is clear that a unique musical story is being told in a highly dramatic form through the unpredictable alternations of agitated and calmly lyrical passages.

The second movement is a brief scherzo in duple meter with an almost blatantly simple theme. It is in the minor mode, followed by a foot-stomping "trio" section in the major. As a whole, this movement is in the greatest imaginable contrast with the opening of the work.

A slow (but not *too* slow) movement is next, bearing the marking Andante con moto, ma non troppo – poco scherzoso ("Moving along, but not too much, and just a little bit jocular," in Michael Steinberg's apt translation). It is a nostalgic look at the serenade music of the bygone days of Mozart and early Beethoven; the rather simple melodic material is ornamented with extremely elaborate inner voices.

This movement in D-flat Major is followed by one in G; these two keys are at the greatest possible distance from one another in the classical tonal system. The sound of G Major, considered to be cheerful and innocent, was important enough for Beethoven in this *danza tedesca* ("German dance") to make the highly unusual tonal leap between the two movements. The dance itself, like the preceding Andante, has a touch of nostalgia in it as it revisits the Austrian *Ländler* that has inspired so many classical minuets. It is a more or less classical ABA form with a central trio section, but at the very end a surprising thing happens: the theme is broken up into small fragments and repeated with the fragments in reverse order, played by one instrument at a time.

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Beethoven's Impact

Augusta Read Thomas

Beethoven's six late quartets have had a profound impact on my life and work and the *Grosse Fuge* (Opus 133) expanded and amplified my perspective when, at about age ten, I first heard its impossible-for-me-to-describe intense humanity.

Images instantly start flashing through my mind and ear when I recall the music of his great double fugue: ...motivated blocks, colorful braids, spontaneous streams, radiant sparkling stars, vast spaces, dramatic unfoldings, punchy rhythmic cells, virtuosic calisthenics, a mammoth arch with extensive development of musical material, themes, and motifs, remarkable textures, teamwork, colorful modulation through many keys, loaded silences, lyric outpourings... all woven together by Beethoven who reached beyond the Classical and Romantic eras into a ever-new, ever-fresh music which feels eternal.

Beethoven said, "Music is the mediator between the spiritual and the sensual life." The *Grosse Fuge* cuts right to the depths of the soul and exemplifies the fact

that the history of civilization is written in art, whose creation and appreciation is universal across continents, cultures, and languages and, at the same time, is intensely personal. Beethoven's individual vision allowed him to further music's flexible, diverse capacity, and innate power. The energy and inner force that he gave to and in his music remains vivid.

Augusta Read Thomas is an American composer. She was the Mead Composer-in-Residence for Pierre Boulez and Daniel Barenboim at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1997 through 2006, and is currently Professor of Composition at the University of Chicago. She has written 3 string quartets.

The heartpiece of the quartet is the heavenly Cavatina. The name comes from the world of opera and indeed, the movement is an extended aria with the first violin as the soloist. Yet while an operatic hero or heroine sings *out* on the stage in a performance that invites stormy applause at the end, this Cavatina is directed entirely inward and reaches depths of expression unique even for Beethoven. Karl Holz, who played second violin in Schuppanzigh's famous quartet and who was close to the composer in his last years, recalled Beethoven telling him "that the Cavatina was composed in the very tears of misery, and never had one of his own pieces moved him so deeply, and merely to relive it in his feelings always cost him a tear." The most extraordinary moment comes when, after a sudden change of keys, the volume (not loud to begin with) drops to pianissimo and the first violin begins a new melody constantly interrupted by rests, indeed as if choking back tears. The performance instruction, *beklemmt*, which occurs nowhere else in Beethoven, means something like "oppressed, suffocated, straitened, anxious" (Michael Steinberg's suggestions).

Movements 1-5 have already stretched the string-quartet genre almost beyond recognition. Beethoven's finale is extraordinary even after one has learned to let go of all expectations based on the past. The "Great Fugue" is much more than a movement: it can be regarded as an entire composition by itself, and it is easy to see the point of Beethoven's friends and publishers when they persuaded him to remove it from Op. 130 and publish it separately. Beethoven did just that and, in the fall of 1826, composed a new finale that became the last music he ever wrote. In our time, the quartet is performed sometimes with the "Great Fugue" and sometimes with the new finale. In their complete Beethoven cycle, the Takács Quartet has presented the work in both versions.

Like the last movement of the Ninth Symphony, the "Great Fugue" fuses fast, slow, and scherzo-like characters. But whereas the symphony movement uses the variation principle to organize those different characters into a coherent whole, this time everything results from different contrapuntal elaborations of a single fugue theme. The theme—a chromatic idea with a distinguished Baroque ancestry—is presented at the beginning and treated, in the first section of the piece, with a great deal of rhythmic energy. *Tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée*, as Beethoven described his fugue on the title page ("in part free, in part studied"), this section traverses many keys before it stops on a fermata (long-held note) introducing a change in tempo. In the new section, the fugue theme is presented legato (with connected notes rather than separated ones as before); the music assumes a calm and gentle flow. The following section, though still strictly contrapuntal, is like a scherzo or a dance, with the fugue theme ornamented by scintillating trills. The earlier sections are briefly evoked, causing momentary interruptions, but on the whole, the dance character prevails all the way through the work's startling conclusion.

Musicologist and Program Annotator Peter Laki is a Visiting Associate Professor of Music at Bard College. He frequently writes program notes for Princeton University Concerts, as well as other institutions.

Artist Tom Bachtell illustrates for The New Yorker.
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The Takács Quartet, now entering its forty-second season, is renowned for the vitality of its interpretations. *The New York Times* recently lauded the ensemble for "revealing the familiar as unfamiliar, making the most traditional of works feel radical once more," and the *Financial Times* (London) described a recent concert at the Wigmore Hall: "Even in the most fiendish repertoire these players show no fear, injecting the music with a heady sense of freedom. At the same time, though, there is an uncompromising attention to detail: neither a note nor a bow-hair is out of place."

The Takács became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal in May, 2014. The Medal,

inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the Hall. Appointed in 2012 as the first-ever Associate Artists at London's Wigmore, the Takács present six concerts every season there. Other European engagements in 2016-17 include Florence, Milan, Geneva, Amsterdam, and Paris. They will present concerts in Singapore, Japan and Hong Kong and will also tour New Zealand and Australia. A recent tour to South America included concerts in Chile and Brazil.

In 2012, *Gramophone* announced that the Takács was the only string quartet to be inducted into its first Hall of Fame. The ensemble also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London. Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Takács Quartet performs ninety concerts a year worldwide.

In addition to Princeton, during the 2016-2017 season, the ensemble will perform complete 6-concert Beethoven quartet cycles in Wigmore Hall, the University of Michigan, and at UC Berkeley. In preparation for these cycles Takács first violinist Edward Dusinberre's book, *Beethoven for a Later Age: Living with the String Quartets*, was published in the UK by Faber and Faber and in North America by the University of Chicago Press. The book takes the reader inside the life of a string quartet, melding music history and memoir as it explores the circumstances surrounding the composition of Beethoven's quartets.

The Takács Quartet performed Philip Roth's *Everyman* program with actress Meryl Streep at Princeton in 2014, and again with her at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto in 2015. The program was conceived in close collaboration with author Philip Roth. The Quartet is known for such innovative programming.

They first performed *Everyman* at Carnegie Hall in 2007 with the late Philip Seymour Hoffman. They have toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, collaborate regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikas, and in 2010 they collaborated with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival and David Lawrence Morse on a drama project that explored the composition of Beethoven's last quartets.

The Quartet's award-winning recordings include the complete Beethoven Cycle on the Decca label. In 2005 the Late Beethoven Quartets won Disc of the Year and Chamber Award from *BBC Music Magazine*, a *Gramophone* Award, Album of the Year at the Brit Awards and a Japanese Record Academy Award. Their recordings of the early and middle Beethoven quartets collected a Grammy, another *Gramophone* Award, a Chamber Music of America Award and two further awards from the Japanese Recording Academy. Of their performances and recordings of the Late Quartets, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* wrote "The Takács might play this repertoire better than any quartet of the past or present."

The members of the Takács Quartet are Christoffersen Faculty Fellows at the University of Colorado Boulder and play on instruments generously loaned to them by the Shwayder Foundation. The Quartet has helped to develop a string program with a special emphasis on chamber music, where students work in a nurturing environment designed to help them develop their artistry. The Quartet's commitment to teaching is enhanced by summer residencies at the Aspen Festival and at the Music Academy of the West, Santa Barbara. The Takács is a Visiting Quartet at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London.

The Takács Quartet was formed in 1975 at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest by Gabor Takács-Nagy, Károly Schranz,

Gabor Ormai and András Fejér, while all four were students. It first received international attention in 1977, winning First Prize and the Critics' Prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France. The Quartet also won the Gold Medal at the 1978 Portsmouth (UK) and Bordeaux Competitions and First Prizes at the Budapest International String Quartet Competition in 1978 and the Bratislava Competition in 1981. The Quartet made its North American debut tour in 1982. Violinist Edward Dusinberre joined the Quartet in 1993 and violist Roger Tapping in 1995. Violist Geraldine Walther replaced Mr. Tapping in 2005. In 2001 the Takács Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit of the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Hungary, and in March of 2011 each member of the Quartet was awarded the Order of Merit Commander's Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary.

The Takács Quartet's relationship with Princeton University Concerts began in 1995. Since then, they have appeared on the series 12 times, including a performance with actress Meryl Streep, as well as the complete Bartók String Quartet cycle. We are tremendously grateful to the Quartet for choosing Princeton as one of three places in North America to present the Beethoven Cycle - their last performances of the quartets as a complete cycle. The complete Beethoven String Quartet cycle was last performed on our series in 2000 by the Lindsay String Quartet.

The Takács Quartet appears by arrangement with Seldy Cramer Artists, and records for Hyperion and Decca/London Records.

The Takács Quartet is Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado in Boulder and are Associate Artists at Wigmore Hall, London

www.takacsquartet.com

Beethoven Invents the Species Again, by C. K. Williams

FOR RICHARD GOODE

1.

As is the case every day though we don't always know it
here we are waiting for Beethoven
to kick-start the species again get us going on being wholly
human again we're anxious about it
as usual existence as usual driving us to distraction we
muttering hatchlings fragmented

just as we were when we were half-beings before music
found us it took long for music to find us
remember? back when we'd taught ourselves only to chip
carve hammer spear points or blades
while our psyches stricken with longing kept burbling up
blurred intimations of *more* we mixtures

condemned to inhabit recalcitrant realms where tree was tree
hill hill earth soil lake etcetera
all *thing* – things entrenched in stony obstinate factness though
we kept wanting more than fact
more even than what we could brain-glue together
centaur minotaur harpy please more more

we cried always in pieces hoping for what we still couldn't
speak as again we hoisted our hatchets
but wait someone said wait Beethoven still says again always
what of sound world-sound or wind
wolf-sound or water might the way be in listening rather
than making or thinking even or praying?

2.

Not only Beethoven still says Mozart also and Bach
and Schubert Chopin Ella and Woody and Miles
and the rest we can trace all of them back because somewhere
in us we still hear that first hollow pipe
in a cave then Hermes devising the lyre and Orpheus tuning it up
and before you know it harp fiddle

and piano! bravo! finally Beethoven's piano listen again how
the notes knit together then the chords
how the melodies climb the beckoning rows of their scales and
we're lifted once more to coherence
we and that ravenous void in us brought together for this
shining time as music again fashions

the hallowed place where our doubts and frailties are lathed
like dross from our ancient confusions
and where as we attend we're no longer half-things we once-collages
we're whole who couldn't tell
if we were hawks humans horses we're complete now not
hanging out of the scabbard of matter

but caught by contained and spun from the music that
embodies those ever unlikely connections
while in our rapture at being transformed again into musical
selves a note a chord at a time we exist
as we knew all along thank you Beethoven thank you the rest
we should have and now once again do

'Beethoven Invents the Species Again' was commissioned by Princeton University Concerts on the occasion of the collaboration between pianist Richard Goode and the late poet C.K. Williams in a concert that took place on Sunday, March 9, 2014 in Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall. The poem also appears in 'C.K. Williams Selected Later Poems' published in 2015 by Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Suggested Reading

Beethoven Hero
Scott Burnham
The Changing Image of Beethoven: A Study in Mythmaking
Alessandra Comini
Beethoven for a Later Age: Living with the String Quartets
Edward Dusinberre
The Beethoven Quartets
Joseph Kerman
Beethoven: The Music and the Life
Lewis Lockwood
Beethoven: The Universal Composer
Edmund Morris
Beethoven
Maynard Solomon
Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph
Jan Swafford
Beethoven: The Man Revealed
John Suchet
The Beethoven Quartet Companion
Edited by Robert Martin and Robert Winter