

# TAKÁCS QUARTET

BEETHOVEN'S STRING QUARTETS

HERTZ HALL • OCTOBER 15-16, 2016 • MARCH 4-5, 2017 • APRIL 8-9, 2017



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* 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.”

In May 2014, the Takács became the first string quartet to win the Wigmore Hall Medal. The prize, inaugurated in 2007, recognizes major international artists who have a strong association with the hall. Recipients so far include András Schiff, Thomas Quasthoff, Menahem Pressler, and Dame Felicity Lott. Appointed in 2012 as the first-ever Associate Artists at Wigmore, the Takács present six concerts there every season.

The Takács received the Cal Performances Award of Distinction in 2012. Also that year, *Gramophone* announced that the ensemble was the only string quartet to be inducted into its first Hall of Fame, along with such legendary artists as Jascha Heifetz, Leonard Bernstein, and Dame Janet Baker. The quartet also won the 2011 Award for Chamber Music and Song presented by the Royal Philharmonic Society in London.

European engagements this season include Florence, Milan, Geneva, Amsterdam, and Paris. The ensemble 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. Based in Boulder at the University of Colorado, the Takács Quartet performs 90 concerts a year worldwide.

Also this season, the ensemble will perform the complete six-concert Beethoven quartet cycle here at Cal Performances, as well as in London’s Wigmore Hall, and at Princeton and the University of Michigan. In preparation for these cycles Takács first violinist Edward Dusinberre’s *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 readers inside the life of a working string quartet, combining music history and memoir as it explores the circumstances surrounding the composition of Beethoven’s quartets. (Dusinberre will discuss the book with UC Berkeley music professor Nicholas Mathew as part of Cal Performances’ *Page & Stage* Book Club at 6pm on Thursday, April 6 at The Musical Offering, 2430 Bancroft.)

Known for its innovative programming, the Takács performed Philip Roth’s *Everyman* program (conceived in close collaboration with the author) with Philip Seymour Hoffman at Carnegie Hall (2007), Meryl Streep at Princeton (2014), and at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto (2015). The group has toured 14 cities with the poet Robert Pinsky, works regularly with the Hungarian Folk group Muzsikás, and in 2010 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 the Disc of the Year and Chamber awards from *BBC Music Magazine*, a *Gramophone* Award, Album of the Year at the Brit Awards, and a Japanese Record Academy Award. Recordings of the early and middle Beethoven quartets received a Grammy, another *Gramophone* Award, a Chamber Music of America Award, and two further awards from the Japanese Recording Academy. Of the ensemble’s 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.”

In 2006 the Takács Quartet made its first recording for Hyperion Records, of Schubert’s *Rosamunde* and *Death and the Maiden* quartets. A disc featuring Brahms’ Piano Quintet with Stephen Hough was released to great acclaim in November 2007 and was subsequently nominated for a Grammy. Brahms’ Quartets Op. 51 and Op. 67 were released in the fall of

2008 and nominated for a Grammy. A disc featuring the Schumann Piano Quintet with Marc-Andre Hamelin was released in late 2009. The complete Haydn *Apponyi* Quartets, Opp. 71 and 74, were subsequently released, followed in 2012 by the Schubert Quintet CD with Ralph Kirshbaum.

The three Britten quartets were released to great acclaim in 2013, followed by the Brahms viola quintets with Lawrence Power, also nominated for a Grammy, and Shostakovich piano quintet with Hamelin. In 2015 the two Janáček quartets and Smetana's *From My Life* were released, and after that, the Debussy quartet and the Franck piano quintet, again with Marc-Andre Hamelin. Next came the Dvořák Op. 105 quartet and viola quintet (Op. 97) with Lawrence Power, and then, Dohnányi's piano quintets and Quartet No. 2.

The Takács has also made 16 recordings for the Decca label since 1988 of works by Beethoven, Bartók, Borodin, Brahms, Chausson, Dvořák, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Smetana. The ensemble's recording of the six Bartók string quartets received the 1998 *Gramophone* Award for chamber music and, in 1999, was nominated for a Grammy. In addition to the Beethoven string quartet cycle recordings, the ensemble's other Decca recordings include Dvořák's String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 51

and pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet; and Mozart's string quintets, K.515 and 516, with violist György Pauk.

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 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



and Piano Quintet in A Major, Op. 81 with pianist Andreas Haefliger; Schubert's *Trout* Quintet with Haefliger, which was nominated in 2000 for a Grammy Award; string quartets by Smetana and Borodin; Schubert's Quartet in G Major and *Notturmo* Piano Trio with Haefliger; the three Brahms string quartets and the Piano Quintet in F minor with András Schiff; Chausson's Concerto for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet with violinist Joshua Bell

tour in 1982. Violinist Edward Dusing joined the quartet in 1993 and violist Roger Tapping joined in 1995. Violist Geraldine Walther replaced 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 2011 each member of the quartet was awarded the Order of Merit Commander's Cross by the President of the Republic of Hungary.

# Remaking Beethoven

Nicholas Mathew

University of California, Berkeley

Staging a complete cycle of works by a musician of Beethoven's lofty status can sometimes look like museum work of the easiest kind: all the old masters are hauled up out of storage and dusted off, ready to be stuck up there on their plinths for everyone to admire. It's easy to forget that it can't work this way—because music is something that people have to *do*. The well-known works of Beethoven, which sometimes seem as permanent and unyielding as great lumps of granite, only reach us in performance, following year after year of thought, practice, and collaboration. It goes without saying that a work by Beethoven can't simply arrive at our ears sounding as it did a couple of hundred years ago, in much the way that we can gaze upon the same tarnished old statue still standing there in a town square: music has to be remade each time we encounter it. And this means that the way we experience Beethoven's music is about more even than the performers' choices: it involves changing traditions of performance, the ways in which we have taught and learned this music, the various tools and technologies that musicians have used to create and understand Beethoven's works, and all the beliefs we carry with us about Beethoven and his music. You only need to hear those strange, wonderful, crackly recordings of yesteryear to realize that every place and time has had its own Beethoven. Every generation remakes Beethoven afresh.

So, with this cycle of string quartets, we will be fortunate to witness a new Beethoven coming into being, remade before our very ears by one of the world's leading string quartets—a Beethoven never heard precisely this way before, nor ever to be heard this way again. One of the aims of the series of public events that will happen alongside this cycle is to explore in greater detail, and with the help of the Takács Quartet and a group of leading Beethoven scholars, the many processes out of which this version of the Beethoven quartets has appeared—processes of musical experimentation and historical transformation of which these concerts are a priceless snapshot. The Beethoven quartets will no longer sit inertly on their plinths, I hope, but will come to us fizzing with all the activity that it takes to give this music life.

It surely helps that the Takács Quartet has its own compelling story of change and reinvention to tell—one of performance traditions that traversed the Iron Curtain, of changing musical personnel, of several overlapping lifetimes of rehearsal and rethinking. One constant in this tale has been the Beethoven string quartets—a body of music that has repeatedly remade the Takács even as the Takács has remade the quartets themselves. The story is told with great beauty in a new book by the ensemble's first violinist Edward Dusinberre, *Beethoven for a Later Age: Living with the String*

*Quartets.* We are lucky to have this book and its author with us as we begin to explore the quartets and how they have been made.

Since our focus will be on dynamic musical processes, several of the events will give audiences a peek into the Takács Quartet's workshop: open rehearsals, student master classes, performances with extensive commentary by the players—all of these will offer insights into the most fraught and complex musical decisions that the members of the quartet face, and how they plan and put together their performances. Beethoven manuscripts and other historical materials held in Berkeley's Hargrove Music Library will provide the basis for discussion about Beethoven's notation, how musicians choose to read it, and where the most interesting challenges and ambiguities lie. In all of these discussions of making and remaking Beethoven, we will have in mind, too, the earliest performers of this music—perhaps most prominently the quartet led by the famously rotund Viennese virtuoso Ignaz Schuppanzigh. What relationship does a present-day ensemble have to those distant figures who first made this music in the early 19th century? What does the Takács Quartet share with these ghostly forebears, who puzzled over much the same notes and endured many of the same technical challenges?

Another strand in our exploration will concern changing audiences, and the institutions and media technologies that have shaped our experience of this music over time. Even though it may seem an obvious programming decision nowadays, the very idea of performing the complete cycle of Beethoven quartets has a history of its own—as does the idea of performing *any* Beethoven string quartet up on a stage in a dimly lit hall full of respectfully silent listeners. Some people are surprised to learn that, until the very end of Beethoven's life, nobody would have even entertained the notion of heading out for the evening with a ticket to see a string quartet performance. This was about genre and function before any judgment of artistic value: a string quartet was something to be played at home among friends, intended as much for the performers as for any particular audience. Only in Beethoven's last years did something like the “professional” ensembles of

our time begin to appear—and along with them the ambitious musical gestures and arduous technical challenges in Beethoven's later quartets. Still, it would be more than a decade after Beethoven died before his quartets were performed in public as a complete cycle by the same ensemble, in London and Paris. Indeed, one could think of the public string quartet concert as a brand new “media platform” in the 19th century—an entirely new way of experiencing and disseminating this music. Along with this platform arose new forms of printed media—not least the miniature score, intended for study, reverent contemplation, and silent appreciation rather than practical performance. The Hargrove Music Library keeps the earliest published set of miniature scores of the Beethoven quartets ever produced—in London in 1840. Objects such as these can tell us a great deal about how audiences' ways of thinking about and listening to Beethoven's music have changed over time. Especially here in the Bay Area, the words “media technologies” generally make us think of smartphone apps or internet downloads. But it is worth remembering that the old media that we take for granted were once “new media.”

The series of events will conclude with a look at Beethoven's late turn to devotional and sacred music, and his apparent sympathy with the growing politics of German romantic nationalism. Music, religion, and nationalist politics: the themes don't come much more pressing than that—and the contemporary resonances in this election year are sure to be pronounced. With the performances of the Takács still ringing in our ears, I hope that we will come away from this cycle with a newfound appreciation for the immense sophistication, and also the extreme knottiness, of the musical task that these performers have undertaken—and perhaps too for our own part in the historical process of re-making Beethoven, which stretches back to early 19th-century Vienna and will continue ahead of us, far into the future.

*Nicholas Mathew is an associate professor of music at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of the book Political Beethoven (2013) and co-editor of the volume The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini (2013).*

# Takács Quartet Residency

## Beethoven's String Quartets

### **In Rehearsal with the Takács Quartet:**

#### *Making and Remaking Beethoven*

Fri, Oct 14, Noon, Hertz Hall

Members of the ensemble perform and discuss passages of Beethoven's string quartets.

*Free and open to the public.*

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#### **Master Class**

Fri, Oct 14, 2pm, Morrison Hall

Members of the quartet coach UC Berkeley students rehearsing selected Beethoven string quartets.

*Free and open to observers.*

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#### **Music Studies Colloquium**

##### **Investigation Forum**

Fri, Oct 14, 3:30pm, Morrison Hall

Students and Takács members explore the Department of Music's collection of Beethoven and related artifacts.

*Private; not open to the public.*

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#### **Discussion**

Fri, Oct 14, 7pm, Hertz Hall

First violinist and author Edward Dusinberre (*Beethoven For a Later Age: Living with the String Quartets*) with Nicholas Mathew, associate professor of music history, UC Berkeley.

*Free and open to the public.*

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#### **Pre-Concert Talks**

Sat, Oct 15, 7pm, Hertz Hall

Sun, Oct 16, 2pm, Hertz Hall

With Nicholas Mathew.

*Free to ticket holders.*

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### **In Rehearsal with the Takács Quartet:**

#### *When Old Media Were New Media*

Fri, Mar 3, Noon, Hertz Hall

*Free and open to the public.*

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#### **Music Studies Colloquium**

##### **Inquiry Forum**

Fri, Mar 3, 4:30pm, Morrison Hall

Exchange between quartet members and visiting scholars Mark Ferraguto and Mary Hunter.

*Private; not open to the public.*

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### **Round Table Discussion**

Fri, Mar 3, 7pm, Geballe Room (Stephens Hall)

Nicholas Mathew, Edward Dusinberre, and visiting scholars Mark Ferraguto (Pennsylvania State University) and Mary Hunter (Bowdoin University) explore how shifts in 19th-century technology profoundly affected how Beethoven's work was received and performed.

*Free and open to the public.*

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#### **Pre-Concert Talks**

Sat, Mar 4, 7pm, Hertz Hall

Sun, Mar 5, 2pm, Hertz Hall

Details to be announced.

*Free to ticket holders.*

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#### **Page & Stage Book Club**

Thu, Apr 6, 6pm,

The Musical Offering (2430 Bancroft)

First violinist and author Edward Dusinberre and UC Berkeley professor of music Nicholas Mathew discuss Dusinberre's *Beethoven For a Later Age: Living With the String Quartets*.

*Living With the String Quartets.*

*\$5; pre-registration requested*

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### **In Rehearsal with the Takács Quartet:**

#### *Beethoven: Politics and Religion*

Fri, Apr 7, Noon, Hertz Hall

*Free and open to the public.*

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#### **Master Classes**

Fri, Apr 7, 2pm

Members of the quartet coach UC Berkeley students rehearsing selected Beethoven string quartets.

*Details and venues to be announced.*

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#### **Music Studies Colloquium**

##### **Informal Forum**

Fri, Apr 7, 4:30 pm, Morrison Hall

Intimate chat with the Takács Quartet and students who have participated in the residency.

*Private; not open to the public.*

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#### **Pre-Concert Talks**

Sat, Apr 8, 7pm, Hertz Hall

Sun, Apr 9, 2pm, Hertz Hall

Details to be announced.

*Free to ticket holders.*

For more information, please visit [calperformances.org](http://calperformances.org).



Tom Bachell

# Opus 131

Edward Dusinberre

*In the Prologue to his new book, Beethoven for a Later Age: Living with the String Quartets, Takács first violinist Edward Dusinberre 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, Op. 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 Op. 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 Op. 131; as first violinist of the Takács Quartet I have been playing Beethoven's fifteenth string quartet for nearly 20 years. I play the first 12 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 20 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 above), an instruction to emphasize 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.*

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

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 500 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

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 program or a snippet of commentary that projects more than the speaker realizes: *Nice seats we have this evening.*

The combination of cooperation and individual expression that the opening of Op. 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 10 years to have shared this endeavor 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

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 re-

# Beethoven

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 favored, 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

hearsal: "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 Op. 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 Op. 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 16 string quartets—17 if one counts the *Grosse Fuge*, which began its life as the last movement of Op. 130 but was later published separately as Op. 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 29, and nearly eight years after he had moved from his birthplace of Bonn to Vienna. These first quartets, Op. 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, Op. 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 40 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 Op. 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, Op. 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 Op. 59, No. 2—the same piece that the Takács had performed in the finals of the Portsmouth competition, when the 19-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 29 years principal violist of the San Fran-

cisco Symphony, joined us in 2005. She had first encountered the Beethoven quartets as a 17-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 Op. 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 16 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

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

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, re-asserting the power of familiar music to disturb us even now.

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

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 re-



the music ever becoming too comfortably familiar, to ensure that the spirit of challenge of these quartets is sustained every time we perform them.

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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

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 Op. 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 favorite 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.

ties 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.



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 Op. 131. This slow movement begins with a simple, serene melody supported by basic chords, allowing the maximum possibili-

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The ferocity of the seventh and final movement of Op. 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 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 destabilize listeners and players alike.

Op. 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 Op. 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, Op. 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 Op. 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.

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# Hurling a Lance Into the Future

## Beethoven and the String Quartet

Misha Donat

“Art demands of us that we shall not stand still.”  
—Ludwig van Beethoven

At the time Beethoven composed his first string quartets, the 18th century was giving way to the 19th. That series of quartets, Op. 18, was commissioned by Prince Lobkowitz, who was to become one of the composer’s most generous patrons: it was for his private orchestra that the *Eroica* Symphony was composed; while the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies were dedicated jointly to Lobkowitz and to Count Razumovsky, whose name has become immortalized through Beethoven’s next set of string quartets, Op. 59. Following the three *Razumovsky* quartets, the *Harp* Quartet (Op. 74) was once again dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz.

At the same time that he invited Beethoven to compose his first string quartets, Prince Lobkowitz commissioned a similar series of pieces from Haydn—almost as though he was intent on establishing a rivalry between the two leading composers in Vienna. As things turned out, Haydn, who was in his late sixties and had recently expended much of his remaining energy on the composition of his oratorio *The Seasons*, could muster the strength to complete only the first two out of his projected set of six quartets. (They were issued as his Op. 77. A further torso of a quartet, published some five years later, marked what was to all intents and purposes the end of Haydn’s career: he spent the last years in a sad physical and mental decline, suffering from what we might today describe as Alzheimer’s disease. When he died, in 1809, Beethoven had already completed his *Emperor*

Concerto, and was about to start work on the *Harp* Quartet.)

Haydn’s two string quartets of 1799 include a minuet in “presto” tempo that is actually more akin to a scherzo, and it is tempting to think that in adopting this dynamic new style the venerable composer might actually have taken a leaf out of Beethoven’s book: two of Beethoven’s three Op. 1 piano trios, published in 1795, had already contained a thoroughly characteristic scherzo. But Haydn’s failure to carry Prince Lobkowitz’s commission through to completion can hardly be put down to a fear of being unable to live up to the example of his erstwhile pupil—indeed, the two Op. 77 quartets are as original and forward-looking as any of his works of the kind, and for all the impressive qualities of Beethoven’s Op. 18 series, they have a maturity and profundity that the younger composer could not hope to match at this stage of his career.

Commentators on Beethoven’s 16 string quartets (17, if we count the *Grosse Fuge* originally designed as the finale of the Quartet Op. 130, but eventually reissued as an independent piece when the composer supplied an alternative last movement) invariably divide them into three groups consisting of “early,” “middle,” and “late” works, respectively. The majority of the concerts in this series by the Takács Quartet contain a work from each period, and listeners will not fail to be struck by the astonishing range of Beethoven’s stylistic development. But while the division into groups may be convenient, the label of “early” applied to Op. 18 is rather misleading. Beethoven was

in his 30th year when he completed the six pieces, and he already had an impressive tally of works to his name. They included more than a third of his total output of piano sonatas, two cello sonatas, three violin sonatas, three piano trios, and no fewer than five string trios. Beethoven's hesitation in approaching the medium of the string quartet reflects his awareness of the rich legacy of Haydn and Mozart. His string trios were his means of dipping a toe into quartet waters without invoking direct comparison with his great predecessors: while between them they had produced around 50 quartet masterpieces, Mozart's profound Divertimento K. 563 stood as a lone—and unsurpassable—string trio. As Beethoven will have discovered in composing his own Op. 3 trio—a piece patently modelled on Mozart's—as well as the Op. 9 triptych of similar works, the string trio is a more exacting medium than the quartet: with only three voices at his disposal, the composer cannot afford a single superfluous note, and is forced to think as much in horizontal terms as vertical.

Beethoven's six Op. 18 quartets were completed in 1800, and were followed six years later by the three rapidly composed *Razumovsky* Quartets (Op. 59). After those came two lone works: the *Harp* Quartet, of 1809, and the *Serioso* (Op. 95), of 1810–11. Not for more than

a decade did Beethoven return to the medium of the string quartet. When he did so, in the mid-1820s, he produced five works that were to all intents and purposes his sole creative preoccupation during the last four years of his life. They followed on from a period during which he had composed a series of works on a monumental scale: the Ninth Symphony, the *Missa solemnis*, and the *Diabelli* Variations for piano. To Beethoven it must have come as a relief after the effort of those pieces to return to the intimate and personal world of the string quartet. These works of his final years, sometimes composed between bouts of debilitating illness, find him hurling a lance far into the future, but at the same time casting a nostalgic glance back to the world of his youth, and beyond that to Mozart and Bach.

*Misha Donat was a senior music producer at BBC Radio 3 for more than 25 years. He now works as a freelance writer, lecturer, and producer. He provides program notes on a regular basis for Wigmore Hall, the Edinburgh Festival, and other venues. In the US, he has taught at UCLA and as a visiting lecturer at Vassar College. Donat is currently working on a new critical edition of the Beethoven piano sonatas being published by Bärenreiter.*

# Berkeley RADICAL

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These performances by the **Takács Quartet** are part of the 2016/17 Berkeley RADICAL *Immersion* strand, a selection of concerts and related activities that dive deeply into a single genre or follow the trajectory of an artist's work, allowing fresh, new perspectives to emerge. Cal Performances' next *Immersion* programs feature the launch of an ongoing choral festival, beginning with three esteemed international choirs—Georgia's **Ensemble Basiani** (Oct 21), the **Vienna Boys Choir** (Nov 26), and the **Choir of Trinity Wall Street** (Dec 10)—and a performance with mezzo-soprano **Joyce DiDonato** (Dec 4, with *Il Pomo d'Oro*), which begins the season's Celebration of the Human Voice. For complete details of all performances and related activities, please visit [calperformances.org](http://calperformances.org).

Saturday, October 15, 2016, 8pm  
Hertz Hall

## The Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre, *violin*  
Károly Schranz, *violin*  
Geraldine Walther, *viola*  
András Fejér, *cello*

### PROGRAM

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 – attacca:  
Allegro assai vivace ma serio  
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

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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.*

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**String Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2**

In June 1799, Beethoven sent the first of his Op. 18 string quartets to one of his closest friends, the theologian Karl Amenda, who was a keen violinist. But two years later he asked Amenda not to pass the quartet on to any one else. "I have greatly changed it," Beethoven told him, "in that I have only now understood how to write quartets properly, as you will see when you receive it." The same letter of July 1, 1801 contains one of the earliest confessions of Beethoven's tragic ailment: "O how happy I would be now if I possessed my full hearing, then I would hurry to you; but now I must withdraw from everything, my finest years will fly away without [my] being able to fulfil everything that my talent and strength should have bid me to do—sad resignation in which I must seek refuge. Of course I am resolved to place myself above all this, but how will it be possible?"

The Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1 was not the only work in the series to undergo thorough revision: a similar process was applied to the G-Major second quartet, and from the original plates we can see that Beethoven was still making minor changes to all six quartets even as the parts were already being engraved. Although Beethoven's original version of the Quartet Op. 18, No. 2 has not survived, we do know that one of the most far-reaching changes he made to it was to tighten the structure of its slow movement, from a five-part form with two contrasting episodes, to a simple ternary design. Significantly, he also altered the nature of the central section, to provide a miniature scherzo within the ornate surrounding material. The resulting fusion of serene slow movement and lively scherzo was an idea Beethoven had already carried out in his Serenade Op. 8 for string trio, and the hybrid design was one that was taken over on occasion by both Mendelssohn and Brahms. Beethoven's scherzo episode takes its point of departure from the unassuming phrase with which the slow opening section comes to a close.

The key of G Major was one Beethoven chose for some of his wittiest pieces, and the Quartet Op. 18, No. 2 is no exception. Even the inclusion of the scherzo-like episode in its sec-

ond movement did not prevent Beethoven from following it with an actual scherzo, rather than a more relaxed minuet, or from casting the finale in the character of a high-spirited "Allegro molto."

As for the first movement, it opens with the witticism of a theme that sounds as though it is an ending, rather than a beginning—so much so that Beethoven is able to use the same eight-bar subject to round the piece off, in a conclusion of deliberate understatement. The piece is notable, too, for the manner in which the contrapuntal development section leads to a climax over an insistent and unstable pedal-note on the fifth degree of the scale that continues through the start of the recapitulation. Beethoven was to press a similar idea into service, though to more intensely dramatic effect, in the first movement of his *Appassionata* piano sonata. The quartet's recapitulation continues to develop the material, and incorporates a *pianissimo* interpolation of the main subject in a distant key between its two stages.

The scherzo is remarkable for the transition that joins the end of its trio seamlessly to the start of the *da capo*. Such links are rare in Haydn and Mozart, though examples are to be found in Mozart's *Kegelstatt* Trio (K.498) for clarinet, viola, and piano, and in Haydn's last completed quartet (Op. 77, No. 2). In the Mozart, the passage in question is based on the trio's material; but Beethoven, like Haydn, startlingly offers a pre-echo of the scherzo's material, beginning in the trio's key.

The finale opens in strikingly original fashion, by alternating the phrases of its main theme between the solo cello and the full quartet. At the end of the movement's first stage the expected repeat is subverted by a startling switch of key, with the sudden change in harmonic direction casting its shadow over the entire first half of the central development section. When the principal subject returns, it does so in a bright C Major and in a more conventional quartet layout, before Beethoven—as though anxious to announce that he is in the wrong key after all—makes exaggeratedly emphatic preparations for the actual recapitulation. At the crucial moment, however, the

music takes a side-step into another distant key, before the genuine recapitulation is at last allowed to set in.

### String Quartet in F minor, Op. 95, *Serioso*

Beethoven's own bilingual title for this, the tersest and most austere of his string quartets, was "Quartett serio." Paradoxically enough, the word "serioso" as a movement-heading is reserved for the work's scherzo. Perhaps it was the music's bleakness and intensity that led Beethoven to withhold the piece from publication for no fewer than six years. At any rate, of all his quartets, it was this one that he curiously declared was written for a small circle of connoisseurs, and was never to be performed in public. Its key of F minor was one he once described to the Scottish philanthropist and folk song enthusiast George Thompson as "barbaresco." He chose it not only for his very first piano sonata (Op. 2, No. 1), but also for two much more unruly works: the *Appassionata* Sonata Op. 57, and the *Egmont* Overture. The Op. 95 quartet has features in common with both those works. As in the *Appassionata*, the brusque opening theme immediately moves up a semitone, onto G-flat Major; and in the quartet, this striking harmonic shift is recalled at the start of the scherzo's trio. Moreover, the scherzo itself is joined to the preceding slow movement by the same dramatic discord that links the slow movement and finale of the *Appassionata*. The main body of Op. 95's finale is a dark and agitated Allegretto; but, as in the *Egmont* overture, there is also a coda in which the music turns to the major, for a fleeting and airy Allegro.

The unusual compression of this work is achieved largely through a ruthless process of elision. That process begins immediately after the main theme has been hurled out in the opening bars. The theme itself contains two contrasting elements: a concise idea given out by all four players in octaves; and, following a dramatic silence, a jagged, leaping figure. Beethoven makes as though to go through the entire procedure again, a semitone higher; but no sooner has the cello launched on the rapid opening motif than the music takes an entirely new direction, with a much broader idea on the

violin, punctuated by restless rising arpeggios from the cello. Only once this has run its course does the opening motif return in its original form. But now the initial flurry of activity in bare octaves is heard both on F and on G-flat—all within the space of a single bar, as though to compress into a brief moment what might have transpired on a broader scale during the work's opening bars.

That the creation of a sense of time hurtling by is of crucial importance to the opening movement is shown by the fact that despite the exposition's unusually brief time-span, Beethoven does not ask for a repeat to be made. (He does, however, carefully prepare the ground for such a repeat, before pulling the rug from beneath the listener's feet.) As for the start of the recapitulation, it manages to condense into two bars what in the exposition had occupied 19: the opening bar and its dramatic silence are followed without further ado by the compressed version of events in which the initial motif is heard both on F and on G-flat. As if this were too disorientating to absorb, Beethoven proceeds thereafter to mirror the exposition's course of events exactly, even to the extent of having the lyrical second subject played at first in the same key as before. The coda is fully as long as the central development section. Its intensity is unrelieved, until at the end the music fades, as though exhausted, into silence.

The second movement, in D Major, is based on two alternating ideas: a serene main theme that follows a four-bar introduction for the cello alone; and a fugato whose chromaticism is anticipated by the conflict between the major and minor forms of the sixth degree of the scale (B natural and B-flat) that runs through the first stage of the piece. At the end, the detached notes of the cello's opening bars are taken over in chromatic form by the first violin and viola, and the music sinks towards an uneasy close before coming to rest on a quiet, long-sustained discord that forms the bridge to the start of the "serious" scherzo.

With the scherzo, Beethoven makes a return to the dramatic, forceful style of the opening movement; and any sense of calm afforded by the two appearances of the quasi-trio section is

brutally swept aside by the hammering intensity of a coda in which the already fast tempo accelerates still further.

Beethoven's sketches show that he contemplated following the abrupt ending of the scherzo with a mysterious introduction to the finale beginning on the all-important note G-flat. But this was rejected, in favor of a more plangent opening that prepares the ground for the agitation of the main body of the piece. Once again there is a coda in a faster tempo, though this time the contrast it affords with the remainder of the movement is overwhelming. It is as though the final curtain of *Hamlet* had suddenly been raised, to give way to a performance of *The Comedy of Errors*. But Beethoven's coda is far from being down to earth: its delicate sonority ensures that it sounds at once disembodied and ethereal. The effect is not dissimilar to that of the start of the "Victory Symphony" that concludes the *Egmont* overture, symbolizing *Egmont's* spirit soaring free following his death. Not by chance, the overture and the quartet were both composed in the same year of 1810.

### String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130

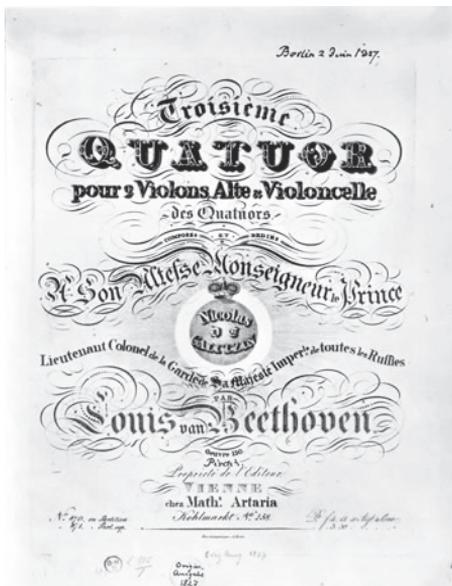
The Op. 95 Quartet marked the end of Beethoven's activity as a composer of string quartets for more than a decade. His renewed interest in the medium was prompted by a letter from Prince Nikolas Galitzin—a leading artistic patron in St Petersburg, and a passionate admirer of his music. In November 1822, Galitzin wrote

to Beethoven, asking him to compose "one, two, or three new quartets," and offering whatever fee he thought appropriate. At the same time, Galitzin informed Beethoven that he was himself an amateur cellist. Beethoven, who happened to have offered a new quartet to the publishing firm of Peters some five months earlier (though without apparently having formulated any ideas for it), accepted Galitzin's proposal, and assured him that he would take care to give him satisfaction with regard to the instrument he played. He promised, more-

over, to have the first quartet ready by the following March, at the latest. But he had reckoned without the amount of work he still had to do on his *Missa solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony, and in any event he did not turn his attention to Galitzin's series of quartets until the second half of 1824. Perhaps he was prompted to do so by the fact that it was Galitzin who organized the first complete performance of the *Missa solemnis*, which took place in St Peters-

burg on April 18 of that year. The three quartets Beethoven composed for Galitzin (they were published, out of numerical sequence, as his Opp. 127, 132, and 130) occupied him until the early weeks of 1826.

Nearly three decades earlier, Beethoven had completed the first of the half-dozen string trios that were his stepping-stones on the way to becoming a string quartet composer. That first trio, Op. 3, was a six-movement work modelled, as we have seen, on Mozart's great string trio *Divertimento* K.563. Now, at the end of his life,



Cover sheet of Beethoven's Op. 130 string quartet as published in Berlin on June 2, 1827.

Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

Beethoven made a return to the multi-movement divertimento form where we would least have expected him to do so: in his late string quartets—perhaps the most spiritual music he ever composed.

In its familiar shape, the first of the late quartets, Op. 127, is conventionally laid out in four movements, but Beethoven had at one time contemplated adding a further two movements. The second of Prince Galitzin's quartets to be composed, Op. 132, also originally had six movements, but at a late stage Beethoven removed one of them, transposed it from A Major into G Major, and incorporated it into the six-movement Quartet Op. 130, where it forms the "Alla danza tedesca" fourth movement. As for Op. 131, Beethoven seems to have considered adding a valedictory postlude to the work as we know it, which would have increased the tally of its movements to no fewer than eight. The discarded sketch became the slow movement of the Quartet Op. 135.

The decision to transfer the "Alla danza tedesca" movement to Op. 130 was by no means the only significant change Beethoven made to the work. Although the scherzo second movement and the "Alla danza tedesca" were enored at the work's premiere, the immensely demanding fugal finale not surprisingly proved a real stumbling-block to players and audience alike. It was the work's publisher, Matthias Artaria, together with Beethoven's violinist friend Karl Holz (a recent recruit to the famous Schuppanzigh Quartet who gave the premieres of most of Beethoven's quartets from the *Razumovsky* series onwards), who eventually persuaded the composer to supply a less demanding piece in its place. Although the quartet was initially published with its original

finale, subsequent editions incorporated the replacement, and the fugue was issued independently as the composer's Op. 133.

Much ink has been spilled on the subject of Beethoven's acquiescence in providing a substitute for the fugue. Certainly, the new finale—the last piece of music Beethoven completed—is as different as could be imagined from the piece it replaced: while the fugue is granite-like and orchestral in sonority, the new finale is delicate and transparent (though Beethoven manages nevertheless to incorporate an extended passage of fugal writing in its central development section). What the two have in common is the fact that they both begin away from the home key, on the note G—the upper note of the sustained chord with which the preceding "Cavatina" comes to a close.

Op. 130 is alone among Beethoven's late string quartets in failing to include a large-scale slow movement in variation form. The reason for the lack of such a piece is that Beethoven's original design for the work deliberately placed its center of gravity on the fugal finale, and instead of supplying a genuine slow movement at its center, he wrote a delicately scored Andante whose opening carries the marking of "poco scherzando." The emotional high-point of the work as a whole is, in fact, reserved for the comparatively brief "Cavatina" fifth movement. According to Karl Holz, this deeply felt piece brought tears to Beethoven's eyes while he was composing it, and he confessed that nothing he had ever written had so moved him. Towards the end, the first violin has a passage in broken snatches of recitative that carries the direction "beklemmt" (choked)—as though Beethoven's tears were indeed welling up.

—© Misha Donat

Sunday, October 16, 2016, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

## The Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre, *violin*  
Károly Schranz, *violin*  
Geraldine Walther, *viola*  
András Fejér, *cello*

### PROGRAM

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 –  
Andante moderato e lusinghiero –  
Adagio – Allegretto  
Adagio, ma non troppo e semplice –  
Allegretto – attacca:  
Presto – attacca:  
Adagio quasi un poco andante – attacca:  
Allegro

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by Patron Sponsors Nadine Tang and Bruce Smith, and Charles and Helene Linker.*

**String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1**

In the form in which we know it, this work must have been among the last of the Op. 18 series to be completed. But, as we have seen, Beethoven had sent a preliminary version of it to his friend Karl Amenda in the summer of 1799. That version was preserved by Amenda's descendants, and it came to light in the early years of the 20th century. From it, we can see that the revisions Beethoven carried out were particularly far-reaching in the case of the quartet's opening movement. One telling change affected the manner in which the recapitulation, at roughly the movement's mid-point, was approached. Beethoven had originally written a series of rushing *fortissimo* scales here; but his final version creates a more subtle atmosphere of subdued excitement, reserving the crescendo for the last possible moment before the reprise of the main theme. Also new was a dramatic passage near the end of the piece, with all four instruments striding upwards in long notes. On top of these specific changes, Beethoven generally rendered the music's texture more transparent, and reduced the number of appearances of the opening turn-like motif during the course of the piece. All the same, that motif—the very first thing we hear—makes itself felt throughout the movement even in its familiar form.

If Beethoven chose to place this work at the head of his Op. 18 set, it may well have been in view of its deeply felt slow movement. The Adagio is, indeed, one of the great tragic utterances among the composer's earlier music—the string quartet counterpart to the somber “Largo e mesto” in the same key of D minor from the Op. 10, No. 3 piano sonata. According to Karl Amenda, Beethoven wrote the string quartet piece while thinking of the scene in the burial-vault from *Romeo and Juliet*. Amenda's claim is substantiated by remarks found among Beethoven's sketches for the coda: *il prend le tombeau; désespoir; il se tue; les derniers soupirs*. (“He descends into the tomb; despair; he kills himself; the last sighs.”) The piece begins with the throbbing sound of an accompaniment played by the three lower instruments, before the first violin enters with the quiet main theme. That theme later assumes a more dramatic

guise, with the aid of a new rushing figure that appears superimposed above it; and during the final stages of the movement the rushing figure itself reaches a peak of anguish, before the music sinks to an exhausted close.

Beethoven's tempo marking for the slow movement in the revised version of the work includes not only the word “affetuoso,” but also “appassionato.” The latter is a rare indication in his music, and one that is conspicuously lacking in the so-called *Appassionata* piano sonata. (Two of the remaining occurrences are to be found in slow movements, too—the “Largo appassionato” of the A-major Piano Sonata, Op. 2, No. 2, and the Adagio of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, whose subtitle directs the player to treat the piece “Appassionato e con molto sentimento”—but there are also the “Allegro con brio ed appassionato” of the Op. 111 sonata, and the final “Allegro appassionato” of the Op. 132 string quartet.) Beethoven's revision also increased the urgency of the last two movements: the third movement, originally a straightforward “Allegro” became “Allegro molto” in order to ensure that the piece would be played in genuine scherzo style; and the finale was transformed from a gentle “Allegretto” into a brilliant “Allegro.” The last movement is, indeed, a dazzling piece, with a fugue as its centerpiece, and a closing page that brings the curtain down with unashamed symphonic grandeur.

**String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74, Harp**

The year 1809 was one of crisis for the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On April 9th, faced once again with the threat of Napoleon's territorial ambitions, Austria declared war on France. Less than a month later, as French troops stood poised to enter Vienna for the second time in less than five years, the Empress Maria Theresa withdrew from the city, together with other members of the Imperial family. Among them was Beethoven's staunchest patron, Archduke Rudolph, the Emperor's youngest brother. When the bombardment of Vienna began, on the night of 11th May, Beethoven took refuge in the cellar of his brother's house, with his head covered with pillows in order to protect his fragile hearing from the noise of cannon fire.

It was at this time that Beethoven composed the opening movement of his *Les Adieux* piano sonata, marking Archduke Rudolph's departure from the city. The sonata is one of three large-scale works Beethoven composed during 1809, all of them in the key of E-flat Major. Its companions are the Op. 73 piano concerto (the so-called *Emperor*) and the *Harp* String Quartet, Op. 74; and in addition, Beethoven had written another work in the same key the previous year—the Piano Trio Op. 70, No. 2 (the companion-piece to the famous *Ghost* Trio). The four E-flat-Major works are strikingly different in both outward form and character, but for all their opposed expressive worlds they have one or two important features in common. In all but one of them the last two movements are mysteriously linked, with the music seeming momentarily to hold its breath before the onset of the finale. The exception is the piano trio—which, however, shares with the string quartet a peculiarity that will not readily be found elsewhere in Beethoven's works having four movements: neither of the two middle movements is in the home tonality. In each case the keys chosen instead are C Major or minor, and A-flat Major.

Almost as though in compensation for the inspirational extravagances of the three *Razumovsky* quartets (Op. 59) that had preceded it, the Op. 74 quartet is very much classically conceived. There is, however, no mistaking the bold individuality of its slow opening page ("It would have made an excellent introduction to the following Allegro," commented the influential Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in an otherwise favorable review of the quartet in 1811, "if it had not lost its way towards the end in an unnecessary jumble of harsh dissonances"); and if the remainder of the first movement is amiable enough, it is by no means bereft of surprises—not least, the forceful violin cadenza which erupts in the coda, transforming the movement's prominent pizzicato idea into something altogether darker and more menacing. The coda's expansiveness compensates for an exposition that is remarkable for its concision. It is the pizzicatos of the principal subject, and especially the manner in which they are

used in the approach to the recapitulation at the center of the movement, that have earned the quartet the nickname of the *Harp*. As the arpeggios of this moment accelerate to a point where they have to be bowed rather than plucked, a sudden crescendo allows the start of the recapitulation to emerge with force.

The slow movement presents a fusion of variation and rondo forms. In a typically Beethovenian paradox, as the variations themselves become progressively more ornate, so they impart an increasing atmosphere of serenity. Of the intervening episodes, the first presents a plangent new melody in the minor, while the second unfolds a broad theme shared between first violin and cello against the background of a rustling accompaniment from the viola.

The scherzo is a cousin of the parallel movement in the Fifth Symphony, whose "fate" rhythm—albeit vastly accelerated—it shares. The gruffly contrapuntal "running" trio in the major also recalls the symphony. It occurs twice, between three statements of the scherzo itself—an enlarged design characteristic of Beethoven's middle-period music. The final reprise of the scherzo begins forcefully, but the quasi-repeat of its brief opening section is now played softly (again, we may think of the Fifth Symphony's mysterious *da capo*), and thereafter the music's dynamic level does not change—except to become even quieter for the *pianissimo* coda that leads directly into the finale.

This is the only occasion on which Beethoven brought one of his string quartets to a close with a set of variations. The Allegretto theme on which it is based is deceptively written against the bar-line. Each of the "sighing" descending phrases with which it begins sounds as though it sets off on the main beat, though that is actually not the case: the phrases turn out to have been syncopated throughout, and the longer ascending phrase that rounds off the theme's first half makes the music sound as though it has suddenly acquired an extra beat. The first five variations are straightforward enough, but the concluding variation is expanded by means of an accelerating coda, as though in preparation for a conventionally emphatic peroration. With gently humorous un-

derstatement, however, the “rushing” figuration of the closing bars (it is derived from the third of the preceding variations) gives way to the simplest of cadences, allowing the work to come to a subdued close.

### String Quartet in C-sharp minor, Op. 131

With his Quartet Op. 130 Beethoven had completed the commission for three quartets he had received from Prince Galitzin (see p. 34). But no sooner had he finished the series than he embarked on a new, uncommissioned quartet—almost as though one work had spilled over into the next. The abundance of Beethoven’s ideas for string quartets at the time was described with wry humour by his young violinist friend Karl Holz:

During the time when he was composing the three quartets commissioned by Prince Galitzin, Opus 127, Opus 130, Opus 132, such a wealth of new quartet ideas streamed forth from Beethoven’s inexhaustible imagination that he felt almost involuntarily compelled to write the C-sharp minor [Op. 131] and F Major [Op. 135] quartets. “My dear friend, I have just had another new idea,” he used to say in a joking manner, and with shining eyes, when we would go out for a walk; and he wrote down some notes in a little pocket sketchbook. “But that belongs to the quartet after the next one, since the next one already has too many movements.”

The quartet that had a surfeit of movements was Op. 131. It was ready by the summer of 1826, but a performance scheduled for September had to be abandoned in view of its difficulty. Meanwhile Beethoven had embarked on the Op. 135 quartet, which he finished in October of the same year. When he returned the proofs of Op. 131 to Schott & Co. on August 12, he scribbled a note on the title-page, to the effect that the piece had been “put together out of various things stolen from here and there.” This so alarmed the publishers that Beethoven had to reassure them a week later that the work was brand new. His joke, he explained, had been occasioned by the fact that he had taken offence at Schott’s prior stipulation that the quartet had to be an original one. To Karl Holz, Beethoven de-

clared that he regarded the C-sharp minor as his greatest quartet, and posterity has generally approved his verdict. Earlier, when Holz told Beethoven that out of the three quartets composed for Prince Galitzin he thought Op. 130 the finest, Beethoven had replied: “Each in its own way. Art demands of us that we shall not stand still. You will find a new manner of part-writing, and thank God there is less lack of imagination than ever before.”

Beethoven had intended to dedicate the Op. 131 quartet to his friend and benefactor Johann Wolfmayer, but he had a last-minute change of heart, and inscribed it instead to Baron von Stutterheim, a Lieutenant Field-Marshal who had given Beethoven’s nephew, Karl, a place in his regiment. Beethoven’s worries over his nephew had culminated just a fortnight before the score of the quartet was dispatched to Schott & Co., when, barely a month before his 20th birthday Karl had attempted to kill himself. As for Wolfmayer, he received instead the dedication of the posthumously published Quartet Op. 135.

Was there, perhaps, a grain of truth in Beethoven’s joke at Schott’s expense? Certainly, the outward shape of the Op. 131 quartet is highly unorthodox. This is Beethoven’s only string quartet to play without a pause from beginning to end, and within its continuous structure the tally of its individual movements is so unusual that Beethoven was persuaded to number them in his autograph score, from 1 to 7. However, two of them are in effect little more than transitions, so the real number of movements is five, as in the Quartet Op. 132.

The two prominent concerns that characterize so much of the music of Beethoven’s final period—variation form and fugue—find their common ground in the Op. 131 quartet. As usual in the late quartets the heart of the work is formed by a set of variations, while the slow opening movement is written in the style of a fugue—a sort of intimate counterpart to the fugal finale of Op. 130. This is, in fact, Beethoven’s only quartet to begin with anything other than a sonata design. Instead, it reserves the weight of a fully developed sonata form movement for its finale—just as Beethoven’s

single previous C-sharp-minor work, the *Moonlight* Sonata (Op. 27, No. 2), had done.

The opening fugue theme itself throws a strong accent onto its prolonged fourth note, A natural. The answering voice places its corresponding accent on the note D; and together, these stressed notes may give the listener a foretaste, however subliminal, of the key of the second movement, for which the music simply glides up a semitone into a bright D Major. Such juxtapositions of chromatically adjacent keys were much beloved of Schubert, but it would be difficult to think of another instance in an important work by Beethoven.

The Allegro in D Major is followed by a short transition to the central set of variations. Like so many of Beethoven's great variation sets, it presents a process not of decoration, but of gradual distillation. The theme itself is of breathtaking beauty. So, too, is the manner of its presentation, with the individual phrases passed with infinite tenderness from one violin to the other. The first two variations show a progressive increase in animation, but the curiously spare writing of Variation 3 (*lusinghiero*—"flattering"—is Beethoven's indication for the smooth phrases handed back and forth, this time from cello to viola) is followed by an Adagio; and then an Allegretto in which the theme is reduced to its harmonic skeleton, with much use of "open" strings. The sixth variation, an Adagio of remarkable spaciousness, leads to a coda on a huge scale that presents the only significant modulation of the entire piece (to C Major), before the theme reappears in its original key in a version of sublimated grandeur, shrouded in violin trills.

The calm of the variations is abruptly shattered by the start of the following Presto. The form of the new piece is that of a scherzo and

trio, with the quasi-trio being played twice between the three statements of the scherzo. As so often in Beethoven's late scherzo movements, there is a coda in which the trio threatens to make a further return, before it is cut off by the final appearance of the scherzo's material.

The second of the quartet's two transitional movements offers a moment of repose between the scurrying scherzo and the forceful finale. The last movement itself is heralded by a four-bar introduction, given out by all four players in *fortissimo* octaves. These introductory bars are centered around the initial notes of the first movement's fugue theme; and the fugue subject is recalled even more vividly in the finale's smooth second idea, which evokes not only its melodic shape, but also its rhythm.

The cyclic structure of the work as a whole is further emphasized on the harmonic level: in the finale's recapitulation the principal second subject makes an unexpected appearance in the key of D Major, before being heard in the "correct" C-sharp Major; and the tonal conflict between the first two movements is brought into play once again in the coda, with its interpolated rushing D-Major scales.

Few of Beethoven's works exerted a more powerful grip on the imagination of succeeding generations than the C-sharp-minor quartet. One of Schubert's dying wishes—apparently granted—was to hear Beethoven's Op. 131 (the other was to read another novel by the author of *The Last of the Mohicans*, James Fenimore Cooper); and in the 20th century Bartók's Quartet No. 1 seems to take its point of departure from Beethoven's opening fugue. Nor was the continuity of Beethoven's work lost on Schoenberg, whose Quartet No. 1 is a single-movement structure on a similarly large scale.

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Saturday, March 4, 2017, 8pm

Hertz Hall

## The Takács Quartet

Edward Dusingberre, *violin*

Károly Schranz, *violin*

Geraldine Walther, *viola*

András Fejér, *cello*

### PROGRAM

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) String Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5  
Allegro  
Menuetto  
Andante cantabile. Thema –  
Variations I-V-Coda. Poco Adagio  
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 – Andante – Molto adagio –  
Andante – Molto adagio  
Alla marcia, assai vivace – Piu allegro-attacca:  
Allegro appassionato

*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.*

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**String Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5**

Among the works of Beethoven's early maturity are a handful that are clearly modelled on specific pieces by Mozart. The most striking homage is Beethoven's Op. 16 quintet, which is scored for the same ensemble—piano, oboe, clarinet, horn, and bassoon—as Mozart's Quintet K.452, and mirrors it by prefacing its first movement with a slow introduction, and including a written-out cadenza near its close. In the case of the Quartet Op. 18, No. 5, Beethoven took as his blueprint Mozart's quartet in the same key of A Major, K.464—the fifth in the series that he inscribed to Haydn. This seems to have been Beethoven's favorite among the great Mozart quartets, and, as we shall discover, its influence is felt as late as the Quartet in A minor, Op. 132. Like Mozart, Beethoven places his minuet as the second of the four movements (this is the only instance among the Op. 18 quartets in which the two inner movements appear in this sequence), and follows it with a slow movement in variation form. Moreover, Beethoven's finale contains a detail that can be traced directly to the parallel movement in K.464: the exuberant flow of the central development section in Mozart's piece is interrupted by the appearance of a broad chorale-like theme in long notes that is then restated above a “running” accompaniment from the second violin. Beethoven does much the same, placing his mysterious slow idea, however, not in the development section, but in the movement's first stage.

If Beethoven borrowed the formal design of this work from Mozart, in its spirit the playful opening movement perhaps owes rather more to Haydn. This is music in which one idea succeeds another with witty insouciance, and the lilting, waltz-like rhythm of the piece may remind us of the opening movement of Haydn's Quartet in A Major, Op. 20, No. 6—a work Beethoven almost certainly knew: he had copied out the first quartet from Haydn's series in the early 1790s, for study purposes.

The gently understated two-part texture of the opening bars in Beethoven's minuet is something else that might have earned Haydn's approval. Beethoven scores the minuet's first

half for the two violins alone (shades of the similarly transparent trio of the “scherzando” second movement from Haydn's *Bird* Quartet Op. 33, No. 3?), before providing a varied repeat in which the theme passes to the viola, in a three-stranded texture that has the violins playing in octaves throughout. It is the leanness of the minuet's opening half that gives the start of its second section, in which the full quartet sound is heard for the first time, its peculiar glow of warmth. The trio section is a *Ländler* whose graceful lilt is scarcely compromised by typically Beethovenian off-beat accents.

Beethoven first toyed with a rhythmically elaborate theme for his variation slow movement, before venturing to present a melodic idea of utmost simplicity—little more, in effect, than a descending and ascending scale. Unlike Mozart in his Quartet K.464, Beethoven does not include a variation in the minor: instead, his penultimate variation offers a *pianissimo* version of the theme in a new harmonization whose broad, chorale-like texture interrupts what has been a progressive increase in rhythmic motion between succeeding variations. No less characteristic at this stage of Beethoven's career is the sudden switch of key at the start of the coda, coinciding with the appearance of a deliberately banal cello accompaniment brazenly introduced without any theme above it.

Like the concluding Allegro of Mozart's Quartet in A Major, Beethoven's finale is a largely contrapuntal piece, though it falls behind its model in elegance. All the same, the closely worked texture of its opening page is intricate enough to throw into relief the chorale-like start of the exposition's second stage. The rising fourths of this second theme are derived from the movement's opening “tag”—a point Beethoven emphasizes during the central development section, where the two ideas are combined.

**String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4**

The fourth quartet of Beethoven's Op. 18 series has sometimes been less admired than its companions, and the influential early 20th-century music historian Hugo Riemann went so far as

to argue on stylistic grounds that the work would appear to contain material going back to the composer's early years in Bonn. There is no evidence to support such a supposition, but it's true that the piece sometimes betrays an awkwardness of a kind that is not to be found elsewhere in Beethoven's quartets. The opening movement, in particular, contains writing that seems to be conceived in orchestral or pianistic terms: the bars leading to the recapitulation, for instance, with their "broken" octaves for the first violin, and shuddering tremolos for the inner two players; or the long series of full-blooded chords that follows shortly thereafter. By the time Beethoven composed his Quartet in C minor, he had already completed four large-scale pieces in what was always to remain his most characteristic dramatic key—the Piano Trio Op. 1, No. 3; the String Trio Op. 9, No. 3; the Piano Sonata Op. 10, No. 1; and the *Pathétique* Op. 13. Perhaps it was the attempt to carry the forceful, dynamic style of the piano trio and the sonatas into the realm of the string quartet that presented Beethoven with more problems than he knew how to solve. He thought highly enough of the piece, however, to place it at the head of the second half of the Op. 18 series. (As was normal at the time, the six works appeared in two parts. In this case, the original edition assigned the separate opus number of 19 to the second part, though that number was subsequently transferred to the Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major.)

There is, however, no sense of awkwardness about the quartet's C-Major second movement—an intimate counterpart to the parallel movement of the Symphony No. 1 in C Major. It is, indeed, a translucent masterpiece—not a genuine slow movement, but a scherzo in sonata form—that shows Beethoven's contrapuntal art at its most relaxed. Its opening subject is already a fugato given out in a delicate *pianissimo* (Beethoven may have learned a trick or two from the *sotto voce* fugal finales contained in Haydn's six Op. 20 quartets), but the recapitulation adds a new countersubject in dotted rhythm, and the entire texture is composed in seemingly effortless triple counterpoint.

As always when he wrote his second movement in the manner—or at least against the background—of a scherzo, Beethoven followed it not with an actual scherzo, which in the context would have been superfluous, but with a minuet. This time, however, he seems to have wanted to have it both ways: the minuet's *da capo* is played in a quicker tempo, as though to show that after a respectable lapse of time the second movement could be followed by another scherzo after all.

The finale also features a quicker coda, with the tempo increasing from *Allegretto* to *Prestissimo*. Had it not been so, Beethoven might have ended the work with a composed fade-out in C Major, as he had done in all his previous C-minor works except the *Pathétique* Sonata. Perhaps he felt he had tried that trick once too often: at any rate, the music appears to be heading in the direction of a similar surprise ending, but at the last moment Beethoven cannot resist bringing the proceedings to a close with a *fortissimo* symphonic flourish—not merely a gratuitous gesture, it is true, since the fanfare of the closing bars, with its echo of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony, is derived from the C-Major episode that stands at the center of the movement.

### String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132

In the autumn of 1825 the English conductor Sir George Smart travelled to Vienna in order to meet Beethoven, and to discuss with him the correct tempi for his symphonies—including the Ninth, of which Smart had already conducted the English premiere. He arrived in time to witness the first, semi-private, performance of Beethoven's latest string quartet, Op. 132. The members of the Schuppanzigh Quartet had assembled in the rooms rented at the tavern "Zum wilden Mann" by the Parisian music publisher Moritz Schlesinger, who had acquired the rights to the new work. It was Karl Holz—an official in the Austrian Chancellery, as well as the ensemble's recently appointed second violinist—who engineered the meeting between Smart and Beethoven. Smart noted in his journal:

At twelve I took [the piano manufacturer] Ries to the hotel Wildemann, the lodgings of Mr. Schlesinger, the music seller of Paris, as I understood from Mr. Holz that Beethoven would be there, and there I found him. He received me in the most flattering manner. There was a numerous assembly of professors to hear Beethoven's second new manuscript quartette, bought by Mr. Schlesinger. This quartette is three-quarters of an hour long. They played it twice. The four performers were [Ignaz] Schuppanzigh, Holz, [Franz] Weiss, and [Joseph] Lincke. It is most chromatic and there is a slow movement entitled "Praise for the recovery of an invalid." Beethoven intended to allude to himself I suppose for he was very ill during the early part of this year. He directed the performers, and took off his coat, the room being very warm and crowded. A staccato passage not being expressed to the satisfaction of his eye, for alas, he could not hear, he seized Holz's violin and played the passage a quarter of a tone too flat. I looked over the score during the performance. All paid him the greatest attention.

If the purpose of Sir George Smart's Viennese trip was in part to go through the score of the Ninth Symphony with Beethoven (he also attempted to persuade the great composer to come to London), he might have noticed with hindsight that the symphony and the new string quartet shared some important features. Most strikingly, the quartet's finale, like that of the symphony, is preceded by a dramatic burst of instrumental recitative; and in both works the slow movement is conceived as a series of variations on two alternating themes, the second of

them more flowing than the first. What Smart cannot have known is that Beethoven's sketches for the Ninth Symphony reveal that he originally conceived it with a purely instrumental finale, and that its planned main theme provided the springboard for the main subject of the string quartet's last movement.

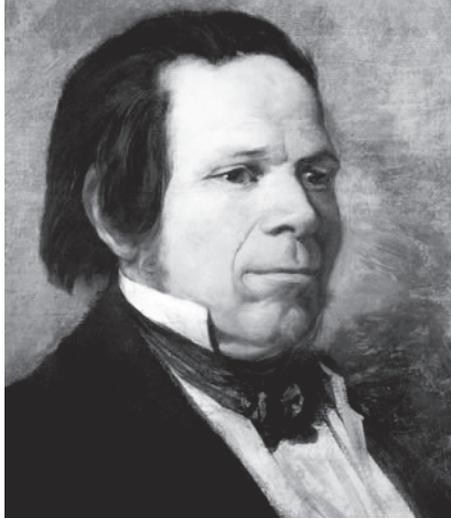
Beethoven's Quartet in A minor is a work intimately bound up with its two successors, Opp. 130 and 131. The brief, mysterious

slow introduction with which it opens was sketched out at the same time as the subject of the fugue that originally formed the finale of the Quartet Op. 130, and the thematic shape of the two beginnings is very similar: in each case a rising and falling semitone, forming a motif of four notes. The fugal theme with which the Quartet in C-sharp minor, Op. 131 opens has a rather narrower compass, but once again its four-note

cell concentrates on the interval of the minor second, or semitone.

The main Allegro of Op. 132 bursts in as though propelled by the subdued tension of the opening bars, whose four-note motif is threaded into the Allegro's main theme almost in the nature of a *cantus firmus*. Its individual long notes are distributed between the players in a "hocketing" manner that seems to offer a foretaste of a technique favored by Webern. The Allegro's main subject itself stresses the falling semitone F-E; and, as we shall see, the same two notes are woven into the fabric of the theme of the finale.

Beethoven's second movement is not a scherzo, as it was to be in the Quartet Op. 130,



Ignaz Schuppanzigh

Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

but to all intents and purposes an old-fashioned minuet. Like the scherzo of Op. 127, it is based entirely on two tiny melodic fragments presented in every conceivable combination. If Beethoven's model for this contrapuntal patchwork was almost certainly the minuet of Mozart's great Quartet in A Major (K.464), the movement's trio section looks nostalgically back to the world of Beethoven's own youth. It begins with a floating melody unfolding high above a rustic drone, and continues with quotations from two unpublished pieces Beethoven had composed more than 30 years earlier—an Allemande for piano, and an orchestral German dance.

Sir George Smart was correct in asserting that Beethoven had been ill while he was working on Op. 132—ill enough, in fact, to have written a humorous letter to his doctor, at the end of which he had scribbled a canon on a theme in the style of a chorale, setting the words, "Doctor bolts the door to death." Perhaps it was this that gave him the idea of writing the quartet's slow movement in the form of chorale variations. This deeply affecting piece bears the title of "Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart" ("Holy Song of Thanksgiving from a Convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian Mode"), and it consists of a series of serene chorale variations whose spaciousness seems to open up infinite vistas, interlinked with a livelier variation theme headed "Neue Kraft fühlend" ("Feeling new strength"). That life-affirming second theme, with its wide melodic skips, has internal repeats that are themselves intricately varied. As for the chorale melody, its phrases, in long notes, are punctuated by short passages of closely worked counterpoint. In the concluding variation the first of these forms an intensified contrapuntal web that runs throughout the chorale melody itself, generating an overwhelming climax before the piece sinks to its subdued close. Beethoven's use of two alternating themes as the basis for a variation movement is a procedure that harks back

to Haydn, who frequently had recourse to this hybrid of variation and rondo forms. Beethoven invoked it on a few other occasions, notably the slow movements of the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, and the Andante of the Piano Trio Op. 70, No. 2 (the companion to the well known *Ghost* Trio).

Until a very late stage in its gestation, Beethoven had intended to cast the Op. 132 Quartet in six movements, rather than five. On August 11, 1825 he wrote to his nephew, Karl, telling him he was deeply concerned about the fate of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth movements, which Karl Holz had taken away to have copied. (The task was begun by the cellist of the Schuppanzigh Quartet, Joseph Linke; but the stress caused by copying the parts for the first four movements gave him headaches, and it was Holz himself who dealt with the finale.) The additional movement—an "Alla danza tedesca"—was to have followed the "Holy Song of Thanksgiving"; but Beethoven eventually transferred it to the Quartet Op. 130. Perhaps it was because two quick movements had originally been placed side by side that the second of the pair—the one that survives in Op. 132 as we know it—is so condensed. It consists of a lively march, not dissimilar in character to the march-like second movement from the first of Beethoven's late piano sonatas, Op. 101. In place of the expected trio section, however, Beethoven seizes on the march's closing cadence and uses it to launch a brief burst of recitative for the first violin, to a shimmering tremolo accompaniment from the remaining players. The recitative comes to rest with the minor second F-E familiar from the opening movement; and the same two notes are reiterated as an inner-voice accompaniment during the opening phrases of the rondo finale, which follows without a break. Towards the end of this intense piece (it carries the marking of "appassionato") the tempo becomes more urgent, and the theme is transferred to the upper register of the cello, passing from minor to major, and in so doing actually increasing the music's impassioned nature.

—© Misha Donat

Sunday, March 5, 2017, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

## The Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinger, *violin*  
Károly Schranz, *violin*  
Geraldine Walther, *viola*  
András Fejér, *cello*

### PROGRAM

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. Si tratta questo pezzo  
con molto di sentimento  
Allegretto  
Finale. Presto

### INTERMISSION

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127  
Maestoso – Allegro  
Adagio con moto – Adagio molto espressivo –  
tempo primo  
Scherzo: Vivace – Presto  
Finale

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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.*

*This performance is made possible, in part,  
by Patron Sponsors Nadine Tang and Bruce Smith, and Charles and Helene Linker.*

### String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3

Beethoven's detailed sketches for this work suggest that it was the first in the Op. 18 series of quartets to be composed (though the absence of sketches for Op. 18, No. 4 makes that piece impossible to date), and that it must have been completed in the first months of 1799, at the latest. None of Beethoven's string quartets begins more arrestingly than this one: two long unaccompanied notes on the violin, arching upwards to form the melodic interval known as the minor seventh—just a whole-tone short of an octave. Are we witnessing the start of a mysterious slow introduction; and if so, what is the music's key? All is explained when the remaining players enter in the third bar of what turns out to be an ingratiating *Allegro*, but Beethoven's striking beginning leaves him with the very real problem of how to cap this moment when it returns later in the movement, at the start of the recapitulation. His solution is brilliantly original: the music reaches a full-blooded climax on the chord of C-sharp Major, and the violins break off while the two lower instruments sustain the fundamental note C-sharp. While this note is still being sounded, the second violin calmly re-enters with the main theme's two initial long notes, allowing the music to resolve onto the home key in its third bar. Beethoven was pleased enough with this moment to recall it at the parallel point in his Second Symphony.

If this work was the first of the Op. 18 set to be composed, it finds Beethoven determined to stamp his personality on the music from the very outset. The moments described above epitomize the quirkiness of the work as a whole, but scarcely less wilfully original is the second limb of the main theme, which sees the first violin suddenly taking flight in an improvisatory fantasy. The main second subject is followed by a sudden switch of key that allows the music to slip quietly into a distant C Major. Beethoven was fond of such tonal surprises at this stage of his career, though he generally reserved them for his finales, and for a much later point in the movement. In the opening *Allegro* of Op. 18, No. 3 Beethoven returns to his unexpected change of key not only in the recapitulation, but

also in the coda, where he takes it a stage further by having the music turn, with tongue even more firmly in cheek, to a still more remote key, before it slides effortlessly and charmingly back homewards.

The slow movement is a study in contrasting sonorities and textures. Its smooth main theme, initially entrusted to the second violin, eventually gives way to a contrapuntal second idea played in a delicate staccato. The main subject itself presents a single four-note phrase reiterated in a rising pattern, with each occurrence a whole tone higher than the last. In order to avoid such a sequential theme engendering any feeling of monotony, Beethoven not only provides it with a variety of countersubjects during the course of the piece, but also has it played simultaneously with its own inversion. It is with a fragment of its inverted form that the movement eventually dies away to a *pi-anissimo* conclusion.

Beethoven's decision to highlight the inverted form of the slow movement's theme during the closing bars of the piece is no accident. The inverted shape—a falling and rising semitone—anticipates not only the theme of the following movement, but also the main subject of the finale. The third movement actually lies midway between a minuet and a scherzo. Its heading is simply "*Allegro*," and it its "running" trio in the minor has a slightly old-fashioned feel; but the outer sections, with their dramatic off-beat accents and unexpected tonal shifts, bring us near to the world of the genuine Beethovenian scherzo. As for the finale, it is a dazzling 6/8 "*Presto*." Behind it—and notably its second subject—lurks the characteristic rhythm of the tarantella. Beethoven invoked the same swirling rhythm in the finale of his *Kreutzer* Sonata (Op. 47) and the Piano Sonata Op. 31, No. 3; and these were all pieces that left a deep impression on Schubert, who based the concluding movement of his *Death and the Maiden* Quartet, as well as that of the G-Major D.887, on a similar premise. Schubert, however, was too serious a composer to end either of those pieces with a joke of the kind we find at the close of Beethoven's quartet. It is one that Haydn had enjoyed on more than one occasion

in his string quartets: there is no ending at all, properly speaking—just a reiterated fragment of the main theme, followed by a pause that leaves the players with their bows poised in the air, and their listeners on the edge of their seats.

### String Quartet in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2,

#### *Razumovsky*

Beethoven's three Op. 59 quartets have become inseparably linked with the name of Count Andreas Kirillovich Razumovsky. He was the Russian ambassador in Vienna, as well as one of the city's foremost musical patrons. From 1808 until 1814, when his palace burned down, he employed a permanent string quartet led by the well known player Ignaz Schuppanzigh, and he was himself a competent enough violinist to take his place in the ensemble from time to time. Whether it was Beethoven's idea to use Russian folk melodies in his quartets in homage to his patron, or whether he was asked to do so by Razumovsky, isn't known; but to judge from the cavalier manner in which the composer treated the melodies in question in the first two quartets of his series (the last work forgoes any Russian theme), it is likely that they were included to order.

The *Razumovsky* quartets were composed within an unusually short space of time, from April to November 1806. This was altogether a remarkably prolific period, and the same year saw the composition of the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Fourth Symphony, and the Violin Concerto. In addition to the six large-scale new masterpieces, Beethoven was busy with the first revision of his opera, for which he wrote one of the most thrilling of all his orchestral scores—the overture known as *Leonore* No. 3.

Only six years separate the *Razumovsky* quartets from Beethoven's first set of string quartets, Op. 18, but in that time his style had changed almost beyond recognition. Just as, in 1803, the face of symphonic thought had irrevocably been changed by the *Eroica* Symphony, so the Op. 59 string quartets threw down a similar challenge to the traditional notion of chamber music. Not only did their technical demands render them patently unsuited to domestic performance by amateurs, but the

breadth of their canvas was such that it had been exceeded among Beethoven's instrumental works only by the *Eroica* itself. Not surprisingly, of the three quartets only the last, in C Major, was at all favorably received by early audiences, and the view of the pieces as reported by the Vienna correspondent of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* on February 27, 1807 is one that was likely to have been shared by the majority of his readers:

Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven violin quartets dedicated to the Russian ambassador, Count Razumovsky, are attracting the attention of all connoisseurs. They are profound in conception and admirably written, but not generally comprehensible—with perhaps the exception of the 3rd in C Major, which through its individuality, melody and harmonic strength cannot fail to win the favor of every cultured music lover.

Even a decade-and-a-half after they were first heard, Beethoven's *Razumovsky* Quartets were still regarded as exceptionally demanding fare. A performance of the second quartet in 1821 led the same journal to declare: "Whoever knows this composition must have a good opinion of a public to whom one dares to play something so significant but unpopular. The unusual silence in which everyone listened to the often somewhat bizarre sounds could only have been produced by an exceptionally successful performance."

One feature of the second *Razumovsky* quartet that sets it apart not only from Beethoven's own remaining string quartets but also from their great predecessors is its key. Mozart, whose Violin Sonata in E minor (K.304) is a work of haunting melancholy, did not venture to choose the same key for a string quartet. Nor did Haydn, who wrote a fine piano trio in E minor (albeit with a cheerful rondo finale in the major), as well as the somber *Trauer* Symphony No. 44. Perhaps the shadow of that Haydn symphony lurks behind Beethoven's quartet—at any rate it, too, has a slow movement in E Major that is at once radiant and deeply poignant. The challenge of writing a string quartet in E minor was to be taken up by Mendelssohn, Smetana, and Verdi.

Curiously enough, the tonal scheme of Beethoven's work is one that is shared by all his other works in the tonality of E: each has all of its movements in the home tonality, with contrast being provided only by a change from major to minor, or vice versa. The second *Razumovsky* quartet, however, offers a different kind of tonal variety: the theme of its finale sets off in an unambiguous C Major, and does not alight on the home key with any degree of firmness for fully 50 bars. This “wrong key” beginning is, then, Beethoven's compensation for having maintained the same basic tonality over such a long stretch of time. Just how fundamental the conception was to his overall plan can be seen from his preliminary sketches for the finale: although in thematic terms many of them bear no relation to the familiar shape of the opening bars, they all invoke the same vacillation between C Major and E minor. The juxtaposition of those particular keys is one of which Beethoven appears to have been particularly fond. The E-minor conclusion of the Fourth Piano Concerto's slow movement is followed by a rondo that sets off as though it is to be in C Major (its home key is G Major); while the E minor middle movement of the Piano Sonata Op. 14, No. 1 has a trio in C Major, and the two keys rub shoulders again in the movement's coda.

The C Major undertones of the finale in the Quartet Op. 59, No. 2 are maintained throughout the piece, with each reprise of the main theme being approached by way of a preparation for a return not of the home key, but of the key in which the theme appears to begin. The movement's second theme, moreover, unfolds in B minor, but has strong leanings towards the flattened second degree of the scale. Those “Neapolitan” inflections once again evoke the sound of C Major—albeit within a very different context.

The quartet begins in dramatic fashion, with two assertive chords followed by an expectant pause, and a smooth, subdued phrase. The chords sound not so much like an introductory gesture, as an integral part of the principal subject, and symmetry would have demanded their restatement following the subdued phrase. But

Beethoven is the least symmetrical among great composers, and the quietly rising and falling phrase is greeted first by silence, and then by its repetition a semitone higher. There are other beginnings by Beethoven that present a similar sudden harmonic shift of a semitone—the *Appassionata* sonata and the String Quartet Op. 95, both in F minor, offer familiar examples—but none is more disorientating than that of the E-minor *Razumovsky* quartet. The chords return both at the start of the central development section, and at its climax, with the latter moment finding them overlain with an energetic “running” passage whose figuration subsequently serves to launch the recapitulation.

The length and richness of the development section do not prevent Beethoven from asking for a repeat of the second half of the movement, in addition to the exposition—a peculiarity this piece shares among the composer's large-scale middle-period works only with the opening Allegro of the *Ghost* Piano Trio Op. 70, No. 1, though the repeats in question are seldom observed in practice. Beethoven's intention in both cases was no doubt to throw greater weight onto the coda when it eventually arrives. Taking its cue from a syncopated passage that occurs near the close of both exposition and recapitulation, the coda builds up towards a moment of almost painful intensity, hammering out a single dissonance with seemingly obsessive insistence, before the music dies away to a subdued conclusion.

According to Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny, the composer was inspired to write the radiantly serene slow movement “while contemplating the starry heavens and thinking of the music of the spheres.” Its chorale-like main theme and the variation that immediately ensues, with the first violin superimposing a gently “tripping” motif over the original melody, may remind us of the “Holy Song of Thanksgiving” from the Quartet Op. 132. The melody's continuation sees a sustained line played against a staccato accompaniment of sublime banality—a juxtaposition of opposites of a kind that few other composers would have dared to venture. Towards the end of this melodically generous piece (it contains no fewer than five



more sonorous than the last. This is by no means the first occasion on which Beethoven made such integrated use of a slow introduction: the *Pathétique* Sonata Op. 13, whose somber opening bars return at the end of the exposition and the start of the coda, provides a familiar instance; and the slow introduction of the String Quartet Op. 18, No. 6 similarly makes itself felt during the remainder of the piece. There are, too, rare examples of the same kind of procedure to be found in the late works of Mozart and Haydn: Mozart's D-Major String Quintet K.597 and Haydn's *Drum Roll* Symphony No. 103 both have an opening movement whose slow introduction makes a reappearance at a much later stage. Perhaps of greater relevance to Beethoven's Quartet Op. 127 is Mozart's *Magic Flute* overture, also in E-flat Major, whose imposing opening chords return in a new key to mark the transition between exposition and development. However, unlike Mozart's Masonic fanfare, which stands apart from the main body of his overture, Beethoven's solemn chords are joined seamlessly each time to the Allegro's principal theme, with a "dissolve" between the two, effected by means of an expressive violin trill, linking them to what follows.

Among Beethoven's late string quartets this work and the last in the series, Op. 135, are exceptional in being cast in a traditional four-movement pattern. Beethoven had, however, contemplated a more extended plan for Op. 127. His sketches for the work show that it was at one stage to have included a piece called "La Gaité" between its opening movement and slow variation movement; and that the finale was to have been preceded by a slow introduction beginning in the distant key of E Major. These two additions would have mirrored the tonal scheme of the work as a whole: the "Gaité" movement was to have been in C Major—the key in which the first movement reaches its climax (marked by the final appearance of the opening chords); while it is in E Major that the slow movement attains its expressive high-point.

With the single exception of Op. 130, the expressive heart in Beethoven's late quartets is

formed by a serene set of variations. In Op. 127 the variations are set in motion by means of a throbbing note initiated by the cello, and rising progressively as the remaining members of the quartet enter one by one. As already mentioned, the theme itself is shared between first violin and cello—a layout that is maintained at the start of the first variation. The second variation, in a more flowing tempo, is an ornate dialogue between the two violins; while the third, in a radiant E Major, is at once more tranquil and more condensed than what has preceded it: the music sings with greater breadth, its stillness thrown into relief by the motion of the preceding variation, but the melody is now shorn of its quasi-repeats. As this variation draws to a close, the music sinks back into its original key and meter for a further full variation; and once this has run its course the piece progresses in a single arc, suspended for a moment only by the passing shadow of a fragmentary variation in the minor, to its close. Shortly before the movement reaches a full stop with a rising violin phrase derived from the theme's opening bar, Beethoven offers a fleeting glimpse of the key of that calm third variation, as though to suggest that its melody might make a return; but instead the music slips almost immediately back into its home key.

The scherzo begins with a flourish tapped out by the pizzicato strings. Its scoring is as rich as were the initial chords of the opening movement, but the effect of this toy fanfare could hardly be more different. The scherzo is almost entirely built out of the two tiny ideas presented at the outset by the cello: a jagged four-note motif, and a smooth phrase of three notes incorporating a trill. The two motifs appear in every conceivable combination, both in their original form and in inversion, during the course of the piece. In this, it reveals itself as a close relative of the minuet-like second movement from Beethoven's next string quartet, Op. 132. The trio is an agitated *minore*; and following the reprise of the scherzo itself it threatens to make a comeback, before being abruptly cut off. The scheme is similar to the one Beethoven used in the scherzo of his Ninth Symphony, and both pieces play on the listener's

expectation of hearing the expanded scherzo form he had established during the preceding decade, whereby the trio is played twice, between three statements of the scherzo.

The finale again begins with a form of introduction—a dramatic gesture given out in octaves by all four players. Its apex falls on the note A-flat, which Beethoven is careful to emphasize with a strong accent. It is the conflict between A-flat and its immediate neighbour, a “foreign” A natural, that characterizes the main theme that follows. Towards the end of the movement the music alights on a static violin trill, first in a minor form, then in the major, with the trill’s upper note changing from A-flat to A natural.

The moment marks the start of the coda, and one of the most startling events in a work not exactly short of surprises. Not only does the coda begin in a sustained *pianissimo*, and in a translucent C Major, but the music’s pulse slows at precisely the point where one might have expected it to increase. The more relaxed tempo, however, allows Beethoven to write notes of smaller value, and the effect is one of quiet scurrying. He may have learned the idea from the closing pages of Haydn’s Symphony No. 98, which feature a similar slackening in tempo in order ultimately to achieve greater brilliance, though the subdued excitement of Beethoven’s coda is wholly individual.

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Saturday, April 8, 2017, 8pm  
Hertz Hall

## The Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre, *violin*  
Károly Schranz, *violin*  
Geraldine Walther, *viola*  
András Fejér, *cello*

### PROGRAM

- 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 e cantante tranquillo  
Grave, ma non troppo tratto – Allegro –  
Grave – 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 – attacca:  
Allegro molto

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**String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6**

The last of Beethoven's Op. 18 quartets is conceived on a smaller scale than some of its companions, and its opening two movements, in particular, seem to cast a glance back to Haydn and Mozart. At the same time, the quartet's latter half is as defiantly original as anything to be found in the Op. 18 series, and it is tempting to read autobiographical significance into the finale, with its melancholy slow introduction. Certainly, few of Beethoven's pieces of the time exhibit more startling emotional shifts: if he gave the title of "La Malinconia" to its introduction, he might well have called the main body of the movement "La Gaiezza." Around the time he composed the quartet he wrote a small piano piece invoking a similar contrast, entitled *Lustig – Traurig* ("Happy – Sad").

The notion of beginning the finale with a tragic slow introduction is one that Beethoven may have learned from Mozart's great String Quintet in G minor (K.516). It is an unusual procedure, and Beethoven instructs the players to treat the music with special care, in a sub-heading that mirrors the performance direction prefacing the famous opening movement of the *Moonlight* Sonata. While the pianist is told *Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente* ("This entire piece must be played very delicately"), the string quartet bears the instruction: *Questo pezzo si deve trattare colla più gran delicatezza* ("This piece must be treated with the utmost delicacy"). In addition, Beethoven writes *sempre pp* over the first bar of music—despite the fact that the introduction contains several moments whose dramatic intensity invokes more forceful dynamic markings, and even rises in its closing moments to *fortissimo*.

The main body of the finale is a country dance, though one whose strong off-beat accents lend the music a pronounced limp. Both its constant semiquaver motion and the shape of its melody mark it out as a distant forerunner of the finale of the *Tempest* Piano Sonata (Op. 31, No. 2), but in its overall plan the piece is one that looks forward to Beethoven's late string quartets. As in the finale of his last quartet, Op. 135, with its seemingly metaphysical

dilemma, the music of the slow introduction returns to cast a shadow over the otherwise care-free quicker portion of the movement. In Op. 18, No. 6, however, that later return throws the reprise of the quicker main theme momentarily into the "wrong" key, as though it were determined to continue the slow material's tonal peregrinations; and towards the end of the piece, the two contrasting elements make a further exchange, with the dance-like theme appearing briefly in the slow tempo of the introduction. Those few bars of Adagio are followed by a scurrying conclusion whose manic cheerfulness calls to mind the sudden lightening of the clouds at the end of Beethoven's only remaining work of the kind to preface its finale with a slow introduction—the F-minor *Serioso* Quartet Op. 95.

No less forward-looking than the finale is the scherzo third movement. It is true that the first two of the Op. 18 quartets also contain a scherzo, but those pieces are a good deal better behaved than this energetic movement. With its disturbingly dislocated accents thrown onto the last quaver of the bar, and its repeated-note patterns consistently written across the bar-line, it becomes almost impossible for the listener to pinpoint where the main beat actually falls. At the end of the trio section Beethoven suddenly brings back the scherzo's theme in the minor, and *fortissimo*, to provide a dramatic link to the *da capo*.

In comparison with its latter half, the work's first two movements can seem disappointingly conventional, though the sudden turn to the minor in the opening Allegro's second subject is nothing if not a thoroughly characteristic gesture. Perhaps the most memorable passage of the piece occurs at the approach to the recapitulation, where, as though suddenly aware of the unremittingly energetic nature of the music up to this point, Beethoven introduces a softly undulating new idea moving in mellifluous parallel thirds. The moment of stillness that ensues is broken in unceremonious fashion by the abrupt start of what turns out to be a surprisingly unsurprising recapitulation.

The gently rocking main subject of the slow movement sounds almost as much like an ac-



*Sketch for Beethoven's Quartet Op. 18, No. 6, held in the collections of the Jean Gray Hargrove Music Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

companion as a fully fledged theme, and it appears more often than not during the course of the piece in the middle of the quartet texture, while new countersubjects are introduced above or below it. The opening section is followed by a mysterious idea in the minor that reappears towards the end of the movement in a luminous C-Major transformation, after which the music returns to the “softer” home key of E-flat almost as suddenly as it had left it. The closing bars expand the main subject’s turn-like figure into a form of expressive trill, before two pizzicato chords bring the piece to a gentle close.

### **String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135**

The last of Beethoven’s string quartets was also his final work altogether, though it was not quite his last word as a composer of music for string quartet: immediately after finishing it, in the autumn of 1826, he began work on the new finale for his Quartet Op. 130, as a substitute for that work’s original fugue. It was shortly after the first performance of Op. 130, with its fugal last movement, that Beethoven’s friend Karl Holz, who had taken part in the performance, related the incident that was to give rise to the finale of Op. 135. It seems that a wealthy music-

lover by the name of Ignaz Dembscher wanted to hear the Quartet Op. 130, but had been equally anxious to avoid having to pay for the privilege of attending the concert at which the Schuppanzigh Quartet had given the premiere of the new work. Instead, he decided to have the new piece played at one of the regular quartet-parties he held in his own home. Beethoven, however, refused to let Dembscher have the music; and when the latter asked Karl Holz how to overcome this obstacle, Holz told him to send the composer 50 florins—the cost of the subscription to the original concert. When Beethoven heard that Dembscher had responded by asking “Must it be?,” he was so amused by the man’s stinginess that he dashed off a canon on the words, “It must be! Out with your purse.” Both the words and the theme of that canon were to leave their mark on the finale of the Quartet Op. 135.

Beethoven’s last quartet was conceived from the outset as a work of comparatively small dimensions, composed for the Paris publisher Moritz Schlesinger. Schlesinger had expressed an interest not only in issuing a collected edition of the composer’s works, but also in having two new string quartets. Beethoven had already offered two quartets (probably Op. 130

and the as yet unwritten Op. 132) to Schlesinger's father, who ran a publishing house in Berlin, for 80 ducats each. As things turned out, Op. 130 went to neither of the Schlesingers, but to the Viennese firm of Artaria & Co., though Moritz Schlesinger did issue Opp. 132 and 135. For the latter he sent 360 florins. Whether or not this was substantially less than Beethoven had expected to receive, the fee prompted Beethoven to make a fortunately very rare anti-Semitic remark: "If a Jew sends circumcised ducats he shall have a circumcised quartet."

Op. 135 is the most classically proportioned among Beethoven's late string quartets. It is certainly a strikingly forward-looking work, but at the same time it casts more than a passing glance towards the past, and its opening movement, in particular, seems imbued with the spirit of Haydn. As Haydn so often liked to do, Beethoven begins as though in mid-stream, approaching the music's home key only obliquely. He is able to capitalize on the unstable, fragmentary nature of the opening to splendid effect much later in the movement, where the powerfully dramatic climax of the development actually overlaps with the start of the recapitulation.

Perhaps it was on account of the fact that the opening movement is in a moderate tempo—"Allegretto," rather than "Allegro"—that Beethoven chose to follow it with the work's scherzo. It is a curiously mosaic-like piece that unfolds for a great deal of its length over a drone, in the manner of some wild rustic dance whose tiny motivic ideas pass from one layer of the quartet texture to the other in such a way that it is impossible to determine which voice represents the principal line. The energy of the trio section is cumulative: as the music's pitch rises progressively from one key to the next, so its intensity increases, until it develops into one of the most ferocious pieces of string quartet writing that even Beethoven ever conceived—an ecstatic, elemental dance, with spectacularly wide melodic leaps for the first violin over a forceful ostinato from the remaining players.

Since the Op. 135 Quartet is written on a smaller scale than its companions, the scope of

its variation slow movement is correspondingly reduced. Its theme, however, is serene and smooth enough to impart a strongly devotional atmosphere to the piece as a whole. The theme is found, fully harmonized, among Beethoven's sketches for his Quartet in C-sharp minor, Op. 131, where it follows immediately on from a draft of that work's conclusion. Whether or not the composer initially intended to end Op. 131 with a further, valedictory, movement, its key of D-flat Major would have fitted perfectly well in the context of the earlier work, and Beethoven preserved it when he transferred the theme to Op. 135. Curiously enough, the slow movement of Op. 135 very soon moves into the darker realm of C-sharp minor, for a variation whose pace is even slower than that of the theme. With the return to the major, the theme is transferred to the cello, with the first violin playing in freely canonic imitation; while the radiant, more freely flowing final variation brings the piece to a close of infinite poignancy.

The finale carries the heading *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss*—"The decision taken with difficulty." Beneath the heading appear two musical mottos—one, slow and with heavy minor-mode undertones, setting the question "Must it be?"; the other, a free inversion in the major, providing the carefree answer, "It must be!" In order to illustrate the difficulty with which this seemingly metaphysical dilemma is finally resolved, the two motifs interact throughout the movement. Only on the final page is the question brushed aside, with an airy sonority in which the Allegro's second subject appears in a delicate pizzicato.

As we have seen, the problem posed by Beethoven's finale had a surprisingly mundane origin. No one listening to this concluding movement of the last work Beethoven completed could suspect that such spiritual music was based on so down-to-earth a matter as money; but as an example of his lifelong sense of humor, the paradox is nothing if not typical.

### String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3, *Razumovsky*

Of the three *Razumovsky* quartets Op. 59, it is the C-Major last work that most palpably

glances back towards the music of the past. It even goes to the extent of having an old-fashioned minuet, in place of a scherzo. Beethoven had, moreover, sketched out the minuet several years earlier; and his use of pre-existing material is one pointer toward the probability that the entire quartet was put together in some haste.

Early listeners to the work may well have detected Mozartian undertones in its outer movements, and in particular its finale, whose fusion of sonata form and brilliant fugal writing echoes the concluding Allegro of the first in Mozart's series of six *Haydn* Quartets, K.387. What Beethoven's piece, for all its dazzling virtuosity, does not attempt to emulate is the impudent wit of the Mozart, with its tongue-in-cheek juxtaposition of passages of intricate counterpoint, and melodies in exaggeratedly simple popular style. Nor does Beethoven match the contrapuntal sleight of hand of the Mozart, which sees both its main subjects combined in a double fugue. Beethoven's recapitulation does, it is true, add a new countersubject to the original theme, but the contrapuntal intensification is short-lived. All the same, the function of his piece within the context of the quartet as a whole is perfectly judged: it crowns a work that had begun hesitantly, and as though in a void, with a triumphant affirmation of faith. Perhaps it is not by chance that among Beethoven's sketches for the finale is to be found the comment, "Make no secret of your deafness, not even in art." The finale follows on from the preceding minuet movement without a break, and this time there is a sense in which the transition between the two pieces renews the effect of the link between the work's slow introduction and its opening Allegro: the minuet's concluding page transforms its theme into the minor at the point where one would least have expected it to do so, and although the finale begins unostentatiously, the impression of a transformation from darkness to light is immediately apparent.

The opening movement pays homage to Mozart's *Dissonance* Quartet (K.465) in the same key of C Major. Like Mozart, Beethoven begins with a somber and slow introduction

that only gradually gropes its way towards the home key; and some of the figuration in the following Allegro seems clearly to have been remembered from the Mozart. Beethoven's slow introduction, however, goes far further than Mozart's in veiling the home key. While Mozart's initial bars, with their famous dissonant first-violin entry, are anchored firmly over a repeated note of C on the cello, Beethoven brazenly begins with a sustained discord dying away to nothing. The bass note of that chord, moreover, is as far removed from the tonic, C, as possible. Nor do Beethoven's following bars, with their fragmentary nature and their unrelievedly discordant harmony, afford any clue as to what the music's key will be. Only with the start of the Allegro does the music clearly settle in C Major; though the presentation of the main theme in the form of a largely unaccompanied melodic line for the first violin does little to establish the home key with any degree of firmness, and it is not until the work has been under way for nearly 50 bars that the music emerges into the bright sunlight. As for that unaccompanied violin theme, its unsettled character is enhanced by the fact that from C Major it moves immediately up a whole tone for its second half, into D minor. Beethoven had previously presented a C-Major main theme with the same harmonic shift in the opening movement of his First Symphony.

The recapitulation emerges out of a shroud of trills turning from minor to major, thereby revisiting the transition between the slow introduction and the start of the Allegro. The main theme returns here in an elaborately ornamented, rhapsodic form, as though the violinist were improvising on what had been an unusually free theme in the first place. The coda, when it comes, is of almost indecent haste: a last-moment *accelerando* and a chromatically rising staccato scale lead to a climax followed by a forceful concluding cadence.

Beethoven had apparently promised Count Razumovsky to include a Russian tune in all three of the Op. 59 quartets. In the case of the first two works of the triptych, that tune is clearly identifiable, but no one has yet pinpointed a Russian source for any of the mate-

## PROGRAM NOTES

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rial in the C-Major work. It has been suggested that its second movement, with its melancholy main theme, represents Beethoven's attempt to evoke a Slavonic character, but it is worth remembering that Beethoven wrote it at the same time as another piece in the key of A minor with a similar tempo marking—the second movement of the Seventh Symphony. Of all the movements in the *Razumovsky* quartets it was this one that held the greatest appeal for Beethoven's contemporaries, and among the numerous arrangements of it that appeared at the time was one for two guitars—prompted, no doubt, by its highly original pizzicato cello

part. No less individual is the form of Beethoven's piece—a sonata design in which the recapitulation is inaugurated by the major-mode second subject, and followed by an extended further passage of development. At the end, the pizzicato cello returns in a more intense form, eventually allowing the piece to die away to a *pianissimo* conclusion of haunting effect. Even if it is possible to feel that the remainder of the work is at times less willfully original than its two companions, this second movement is surely among Beethoven's most strikingly individual creations.

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Sunday, April 9, 2017, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

## The Takács Quartet

Edward Dusinberre, *violin*  
Károly Schranz, *violin*  
Geraldine Walther, *viola*  
András Fejér, *cello*

### PROGRAM

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 – attacca:  
Thème russe. Allegro

### INTERMISSION

String Quartet in B-flat Major,  
Opp. 130 & 133, *Grosse Fuge*  
Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro  
Presto  
Andante con moto, ma non troppo  
Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai  
Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo – attacca:  
Overtura. Allegro – Meno mosso e moderato –  
Fuga. Allegro – Meno mosso e moderato –  
Allegro molto e con brio

*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.*

*This performance is made possible, in part,  
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**String Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1,**  
*Razumovsky*

The unprecedentedly large canvas on which the three *Razumovsky* quartets are conceived makes itself felt at the outset of the first work, with its long cello melody unfolding beneath an obstinately unchanging, and largely dissonant, accompaniment that delays any firm establishing of the home key of F Major for some 20 bars. It is a beginning that breathes an air of great expansiveness, while at the same time unleashing a sense of tension that is not resolved until the movement's closing pages. The scope of the piece is actually reduced by the lack of the traditional repeat of its first stage, but Beethoven had initially intended to have the much longer second half repeated instead: six bars leading to such a repeat, plus the instruction *La seconda parte due volte* ("The second part twice"), were deleted from the manuscript. (A similar repeat in the scherzo second movement was also suppressed.) Beethoven had actually carried out an analogous plan in the finale of his *Appassionata* Sonata (Op. 57), but in the string quartet it would clearly have resulted in a piece of unmanageable proportions.

The omission of the exposition repeat was an idea Beethoven had already tried in his C-minor Violin Sonata (Op. 30, No. 2), as well as the opening movement of the *Appassionata*; but here the structural short-cut is highlighted through an *implied* repeat, in the shape of a literal reprise of the movement's opening bars, before the music strikes out along new paths, and the development gets under way. Beethoven's procedure, which he carried out again in the finale of the Eighth Symphony and the first movement of the Ninth, exerted an influence on a host of composers to come, including Mendelssohn, Brahms, Mahler, and Schoenberg, but he may have had a model himself—the finale of Mozart's *Haffner* Symphony, which exploits a similar *trompe l'oreille*.

Throughout his career, Beethoven strove to make something strikingly original out of the way in which the opening movement's recapitulation was approached and got under way. In the F-Major *Razumovsky* quartet, the latter half of the central development section unfolds

as a fugato, beginning in a mysterious *pianissimo*, and reaching a climax on the same dissonance with which the movement had begun. (The chord in question is the one with which in a concerto the orchestra always announces the start of the soloist's cadenza.) The fact that Beethoven's climax overlaps with the harmony underpinning the main subject allows him to bypass any resolution of the dissonant harmony, and to have the music simply dissolve into the start of the recapitulation to the accompaniment of a gentle descending violin scale. There is no end to the depth of Beethoven's mind: in the coda the familiar dissonance engenders a quasi-cadanza for the full ensemble, after which the music draws towards its close with the same violin scale with which the dissolve between development and reprise had been effected, but now the passage is underpinned with consonant harmony that seems at last to resolve the tension inherent in the previous appearances of the main subject.

The strikingly original second movement—a scherzo in character, though not in tempo or in form—presents a kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of contrasting material. Despite its initial impression of piecemeal construction, however, the movement contains elements of both a highly personal sonata design, with its second subject unusually set in the minor, and an expanded scherzo and trio form. In its propensity for passing unaccompanied melodic lines rapidly from one instrument to another, it is a piece that seems to anticipate the world of Beethoven's late quartets

The F-minor slow movement is one of Beethoven's great tragic pieces, its pervasive atmosphere of grief enhanced by the retention of the minor for its second subject. Beethoven's sketches contain the curious inscription "A weeping willow or acacia tree on my brother's grave"; and the heading of the movement includes the word *mesto* (sad)—an indication the composer otherwise used only for the somber slow movement of his Piano Sonata Op. 10, No. 3.

An elaborate violin cadenza provides a link to the finale, with its Russian main theme—which, as was to be the case with its counterpart

in the second *Razumovsky* quartet, Beethoven treats with a willful disregard for its solemn character. (The original melody is a soldier's lament on his return from the wars, and is cast appropriately enough in the minor.) As in the opening subject of the first movement, the theme is given out by the cello beneath a harmonically static accompaniment—in this case, no more than a violin trill. At the end of the ex-

position, Beethoven renews the link between slow movement and finale with a reprise of the same violin cadenza, now scored for the full quartet, leading back to the only section of the work that is marked to be repeated. In this respect, it is interesting to note how often in his middle-period works, when the last two movements are joined together, Beethoven revisits the link between the pieces at a later stage in the finale, in order to create a design that is at once circular, and more

“open.” The Fifth Symphony is an extreme example, in that not only does Beethoven re-invoke the transition between scherzo and finale, but that this renewed bridge is followed by an abbreviated reprise of the scherzo itself. The link between slow movement and finale also reappears in varied form and a different context during the course of the concluding rondo in the Piano Concerto No. 5 and the Triple Concerto. Shortly before the end of the first *Razumovsky* quartet the Russian tune is momentarily heard in a tempo and mood more in keeping with its original character, before it is brushed aside with a gesture of impatience.

### String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, with *Grosse Fuge*, Op. 133

The Quartet Op. 130—the last in the series of string quartets composed for Prince Galitzin—was first heard on March 21, 1826, at a concert given in Vienna's *Musikverein* by the Schuppanzigh Quartet. The occasion was at best a mixed success. The quartet came at the end of a long program that also contained a move-

ment from Haydn's *Emperor* Quartet; a song composed by the Schuppanzigh Quartet's viola player, Franz Weiss; Beethoven's *Archduke* Trio Op. 97, and his song *Ade-laide*. Beethoven's new string quartet prompted the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* to comment:

The first, third, and fifth movements are serious, gloomy, mysterious, and at times bizarre, rough and wilful; the second and fifth full of wantonness, cheerfulness and mischief. In them, the great composer, who in

his earliest works especially only seldom managed to find the right proportions for his objectives, has expressed himself with unusual brevity and concision. A repeat of both movements was demanded with stormy applause. But the meaning of the fugal finale is something the reviewer cannot explain: for him it was as incomprehensible as Chinese. When the instruments have to struggle with immense difficulty in the regions of the South and North Poles, when each of them plays in different figuration and crosses over the others *per transitum irregularum* amid endless dissonances, when the players, mistrustful even of themselves, don't quite understand it, then we have a sure recipe for Babylonian confusion—



Cover sheet of Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, Op. 133, held in the collections of the Jean Gray Hargrove Music Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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a concert which could be enjoyed perhaps by Moroccans, to whom nothing would be more pleasing than to tune the instruments in bare fifths, and have them strum in all the keys at once. Perhaps something like this would not have been written if the Master could *hear* his own compositions. But we shouldn't dismiss it too hastily: perhaps the time will come when what seems to us at first sight opaque and confused will be perceived as clear and pleasing.

That Beethoven's fugal finale posed such problems to his contemporaries is hardly surprising. It is surely the most uncompromisingly demanding piece he ever wrote—one which, far from being clear and pleasing, will, as Stravinsky so succinctly put it, “be contemporary forever.” That the *Grosse Fuge* was intended from the outset as the work's focal point is shown by the reduced weight and proportions of the preceding movements. It is true that the opening movement is unique among Beethoven's late quartets in that its exposition is repeated, but the central development section is extraordinarily concentrated for a work of such scope. Moreover, in contrast to Beethoven's remaining late quartets, the work's centerpiece is formed not by an extended set of variations, but by a delicately scored slow movement with unmistakable scherzo-like undertones. The fugue itself may be said to encapsulate the preceding movements. Not only does it fuse the elements of sonata and variation forms, it can also be construed as consisting of several movements forged into one, with a central slow section being followed by a quasi-finale in the manner of a scherzo. In its tonal design, too, the piece reflects the key-scheme of the remainder of the work: its slower central section is in G-flat Major, the key of the opening movement's second subject; and there is also an extended passage in A-flat—an important secondary key in both the first and third movements.

If the colossal fugal finale of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata had carried with it a deliberate sense of straining against the medium, so too—and perhaps to an even greater degree—does the *Grosse Fuge*. It is Beethoven's equivalent to the famous Chaconne that ends Bach's D-minor Partita for solo violin—a piece that to an even

greater extent outweighs the combined movements that precede it. Just as Beethoven described the *Hammerklavier*'s finale as being a fugue *con alcune licenze* (“with some liberties”), so Op. 133 carries its own disclaimer: *Tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée* (“at times free, at times rigorous”). Both fugues are prefaced with an introduction. In the sonata the introduction functions as a transition from the profound calm of the preceding slow movement to the contrapuntal style of the main part of the finale; while in the quartet, the opening page presents most of the material on which the fugue will be based. That material consists of one of the two themes that go to make up the main double fugue itself, and the smooth countersubject that appears much later, in the finale's slower sections.

It was in response to pleas from the publisher Matthias Artaria and from the violinist Karl Holz that the composer eventually agreed to provide the work with a substitute finale, and to have the enormous fugue issued separately. Beethoven's decision to take an alternative view of the Op. 130 Quartet is one that also accords with the almost modular construction of his late string quartets in general. Mention has already been made of the fact that the composer had at one time contemplated adding a further movement to the first work in the series, Op. 127; and that its successor, Op. 132, also originally had six movements, one of which was transferred bodily (though transposed in key) to Op. 130. Such interchangeability of pieces between one work and the next was made possible not so much by the quartets' multi-movement design, as by the exceptionally strong unity that exists between them. No one listening to the subdued opening bars of the Quartet Op. 132 could doubt that they spring from the same inspiration as the initial theme of the *Grosse Fuge*, written at more or less the same time; nor that Op. 132's alternation of a slow, mysterious idea and a sequential pattern of rapid semiquavers is echoed at the start of the Quartet Op. 130. It is as though Beethoven had conceived his late string quartets—the focal point of his creativity during his final years—as a single organic entity, though one whose individual components at the same time display infinite variety.

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