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AT HOME

Streaming Premiere – Thursday, October 8, 2020, 7pm

Tetzlaff Quartet

Christian Tetzlaff, *violin*
Elisabeth Kufferath, *violin*
Hanna Weinmeister, *viola*
Tanja Tetzlaff, *cello*

Filmed exclusively for Cal Performances
at b-sharp studio, Berlin, Germany, on September 19–20, 2020.

PROGRAM

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 130
with *Grosse Fuge* in B-flat major, Op. 133
Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro
Presto

Andante con moto, ma non troppo. Poco scherzoso
Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai
Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo

Große Fuge (Great Fugue)

INTERMISSION

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132

Assai sostenuto – Allegro
Allegro ma non tanto

Holy Song of Thanksgiving from an Invalid to the Divinity, in the Lydian Mode. Molto adagio – Andante
Alla marcia, assai vivace (attacca)
Allegro appassionato

The Tetzlaff Quartet appears by arrangement with CM Artists.

Recordings by the Tetzlaff Quartet are available on the Ondine and CAvi Music labels.

*Note: following its premiere, the video recording of this concert
will be available on demand through January 6, 2021.*

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Ludwig van Beethoven
String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 130;
Grosse Fuge, Op. 133

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132

By the mid-1820s, when Beethoven wrote his last string quartets, he had long since made deafness work in his favor. Without the reality of sound to confine his imagination, new musical possibilities opened. Unconventional his late works may be, but the challenges they present to a listener are their own reward. And while Beethoven's contemporaries may have found his late works odd, the 200 years between then and now have been filled with so many wonders and horrors that rhythmic displacements and unexpected harmonies seem more part of the world than alien to it. The two quartets on this program, both composed in 1825, each express a kind of manifesto that makes a case for living. Try to explain what ignites such music, given the circumstances Beethoven faced while creating it—ill health, a social isolation imposed in part by deafness and in part by his own less than gracious demeanor, and who knows what other wretchedness brewed in a mind too immersed in sickness and misanthropy, forced too long to accommodate the loss of the one sense (as he himself put it) in which he ought to have excelled. These quartets refuse even to hint at such misery. And each includes a slow movement for which the word “sublime” might have been invented.

On the subject of words: the first audience for Beethoven's Opus 130 String Quartet earned a few choice ones from him: “cattle” and “asses.” Why, he wondered, could they not get their ears around the great serious fugue with which he capped the first five movements, each so immediately appealing in its own way? He was being defensive. In fact, he was not sure his finale was right, and when his publisher asked for an alternate ending, he very uncharacteristically obliged. (The fugue was published separately as his Opus 133.) These days, string players tend to favor the fugue over Beethoven's alternate ending. To call the *Grosse Fuge* a *tour de force* is to give it short shrift. It retains all its power to shake and disturb. Beethoven hoped his con-

temporaries could come to terms with it, and while such hope may seem clueless, perhaps he felt he had provided enough audience-pleasing music in the first five movements for his listeners to cut him some slack at the end. He seems at last to have admitted he had gone too far, and in his new finale he offered something short and sunny, more in keeping with the spirit of the earlier movements and, because it is in proportion to them, transferring the work's center of gravity to the Cavatina. The alternate ending is worth hearing, and adopting it arguably makes for a more balanced, structurally sound string quartet. But also one less interesting.

At first hearing, the individual movements have little apparent in common, but from so careful a builder as Beethoven we expect relationships and correspondences between movements. The grave unison opening, for one example, will find its counterpart in the first measures of the fugal finale. Although this first movement is tightly knit, it seems bipolar, shifting constantly between a somber adagio and an upbeat (even ecstatic) allegro.

The brief second movement is a magical display of perpetual motion, not a measure too many or too few.

The Andante picks up where the Presto left off, and a similar sense of endless motion inhabits the flowing melody, rippled with gestures that seem continually to repeat but which, like the swells that wrinkle a river's surface, are never exactly the same. The first violin yearns his opening line, an anticipation of the great tune at the heart of the Cavatina.

This quartet is a fusion of the exalted and the popular. The German dance movement proves that Beethoven could write a tune with the best of them. Set to words and sung on Broadway, this would be a show-stopper.

A cavatina is a song or aria; the word is related to the now obsolete *cavation*, a hollowing out, as in *excavation*. In this darkly voiced music, Beethoven indeed mines a vein of emotion. After stately reflection from the ensemble, the second violin introduces a song-without-words that is one of Beethoven's most beautiful creations, a soulful cousin to the preceding



movement's show-stopping dance. Against a pulsing figure, the first violin utters anguished, broken phrases that fade at last into tranquility.

Now comes the epic finale, so different from what has preceded it. After a brief introduction of themes, the slashing fugue interrupts and continues with increasing ferocity. In great jabs, first and second themes are torn apart, fused, transformed. Watch the players. See what effort this brutal music demands. After an interlude of calm, the dynamic level rises abruptly. Beethoven taunts us, then throws us back into rough water growing rougher. Casting off all restraint, the music threatens to spin out of control. Only concentration and muscle can hold it together. Suddenly it seems to exhaust itself and for a moment grows almost giddy. Again momentum gathers, subsides, bursts out in one more recall of the slashing figure that initiated the fugue. Then Beethoven reconciles his themes, then closes. Triumphantlly.

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Beethoven's physicians were faced with a wreck. Even today, the medical world marvels at the composer's many ailments—deafness, of course, but also kidney and liver disease, deteriorating bones, and cardiac arrhythmia, a malady that in recent years captured the imagination of researchers from the

University of Michigan and University of Washington, who speculated that it helped shape the Cavatina of Opus 130. A few months after Beethoven began composing his Opus 132 Quartet, a bout of inflammatory bowel disease threatened to finish him, or so he believed. When he was able to work again, he gave thanks in this music for his recovery.

Beethoven's hymn of gratitude, the third movement of this five-movement work, could well stand alone, it is so complete a statement. But it lies embedded between some other extraordinary music, beginning with a remarkable essay in ambiguity. Starting in the cello and moving up one by one, through the viola, then the second violin, then the first, each player intones a four-note figure whose effect achieves something other than its apparent aim. Seemingly, Beethoven intends to establish a forbidding atmosphere, and yet, even if you do not see the musicians as they enter, low strings to high, he creates an effect of slowly rising, as though from shadow into light. After this compact introduction, the first violin begins the push forward, switching abruptly from *assai sostenuto* to *allegro*. Then the cello states a theme—taken up immediately by the first violin—made up of closely spaced intervals, a phrase of three rising tones plus four falling

tones. This will serve as the main theme and a primary reference point, recurring and binding the movement.

Throughout the exposition, impassioned writing is spelled by lyrical episodes, the serious and the buoyant interlacing, much as the introduction drew light from dark. We hear recollections of the introduction, explorations of the rising-falling main theme, the charm of Beethoven's songful inclinations—all of this emphasizing the delicate balance of shade and sun. In the coda, passion dominates until all falls to a whisper. Out of this near-silence, with a gradual rise into a sudden *forte*—mirroring the levitation we sensed in the quartet's first moments—the ensemble joins in final, lacerating figures while the first violin injects rapidly pulsing strokes, concluding the movement in a brilliant flash of sound.

The Allegro that follows is the quartet's most conventionally structured movement, two outer sections framing a central part. After four introductory bars, we hear a rustic dance, distributed (along with its accompaniment) among the musicians in a way that keeps the simple tune fresh throughout its many appearances. The central section starts as the first violin plays another dance-like tune along with a lower-string drone. The second violin accompanies this with a trembling ostinato. Individually, these sounds are not out of the ordinary. Combined, they create an oddly beautiful shimmer.

Next comes the movement, *molto adagio*, that Beethoven inscribed “Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart”—“Holy Song of Thanksgiving from an Invalid to the Divinity, in the Lydian Mode.” The Lydian is an ancient mode associated with sacred music. In simplest technical terms, it is a major scale with the fourth degree raised a half-step. Who knows why Beethoven felt compelled to mention it in explaining his prayer? The “Heiliger Dankgesang” can easily overwhelm you. Whether or not you're familiar with the Lydian mode is irrelevant.

The “Dankgesang” is a meditation. Succumb to it. Note the movement's first four-tone phrase, so different from the phrase that opened the quartet, and yet so reminiscent of it. A little more than three minutes into the music, tempo and meter shift (to *andante* from *adagio* and from 4/4 time to 3/8) and a new theme enters, bright and optimistic. “Neue Kraft fühlend,” Beethoven writes at this point in his score—“feeling new strength.” He alternates this “recovery” music with his hymn. When he brings the hymn back for its final appearance (about 11 minutes into the movement), it is to be played “Mit innigster Empfindung”—“with the deepest feeling.” This seems an impossible direction, for Beethoven appears already to have spent the supply of emotion. And yet new depths open as the music grows increasingly hypnotic, seeming to stand still before vanishing.

One of the marvels of this quartet is how Beethoven avoids sentimentality. We inhabit his song of thanksgiving only while it unfolds. We have no time to dwell on it—or wallow in it—for what follows immediately is a short, upbeat march. Take this as evidence that the convalescent has recovered or as a song of triumph—or simply as a palette-cleanser that now leads with no break into the finale.

After a transitional passage that offers the first violin the opportunity to dazzle and that mirrors a similar passage starting nine bars into the opening movement, the fifth movement proper begins with a swaying, confident song that sounds two centuries ahead of its time. It is the continuation of the first movement's main theme. The music grows harsh and disjointed—the opposite of the “Dankgesang.” The volume dials down, then swells as the pace accelerates, rushing to the end.

—Larry Rothe

Larry Rothe's books include For the Love of Music and Music for a City, Music for the World.

Tetzlaff Quartet

Founded in 1994 by Christian Tetzlaff, Elisabeth Kufferath, Hanna Weinmeister, and Tanja Tetzlaff, and praised by the *New York Times* for its “dramatic, energetic playing of clean intensity,” the Tetzlaff Quartet is one of the world’s leading string quartets. All four artists take time off from their successful individual careers to tour several times each season, performing concerts that regularly receive impressive critical acclaim.

They are frequent guests at international festivals such as the Berliner Festwochen, Schleswig-Holstein, and Musikfest Bremen and regularly perform in prestigious European chamber music halls such as London’s Wigmore Hall, Berlin’s Pierre Boulez Hall, the Cité de la Musique in Paris, and the Cologne Philharmonie. The quartet has also appeared at the Musikverein in Vienna, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, Leipzig’s Gewandhaus, and Munich’s Herkulessaal.

The Tetzlaff Quartet has made four highly acclaimed tours to North America, each including an appearance at Carnegie Hall and with additional stops in Berkeley, San Francisco, Atlanta, Washington (DC), Cleveland, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Vancouver, Ann Arbor, Orange County, and Portland.

The group’s first recording—music by Schoenberg and Sibelius—was released by CAvi Music in 2010, while its second recording (Berg and Mendelssohn) received the prestigious Diapason d’Or award in 2015. In 2017, Ondine released a CD of quartets by Haydn and Schubert, followed in 2020 by a CD with two late Beethoven string quartets—Opp. 130/133 and Op. 132, the same program performed on this concert.

Christian Tetzlaff, violin

Described as “one of the most brilliant and inquisitive artists of the new generation” (*The New York Times*), Christian Tetzlaff is a regular guest with the world’s leading orchestras and festivals. He also enjoys collaborations with the most distinguished chamber musicians, including recital partners Leif Ove Andsnes and Lars Vogt. He plays a Peter Greiner violin.

Elisabeth Kufferath, violin

A regular guest at international music festivals including Lucerne, Schleswig-Holstein, Rheingau, Ravinia, and Aspen. Kufferath’s regular chamber music partners include Lars Vogt, Antje Weithaas, Isabelle Faust, and Jens Peter Maintz. She is currently a professor of violin at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hannover, Kufferath plays a Peter Greiner violin.

Hanna Weinmeister, viola

Currently the first concertmaster at the Zurich Opera House, Weinmeister has collaborated with Leonidas Kavakos, Heinz Holliger, Gidon Kremer, and Benjamin Schmid, among others. She plays a Peter Greiner viola.

Tanja Tetzlaff, cello

Tanja Tetzlaff has an active solo career and has appeared with many international orchestras. She is especially dedicated to chamber music and regularly plays with Lars Vogt, Martin Fröst, and Carolin Widmann. Tetzlaff plays a violoncello made by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini in 1776.

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