

# THE ARTARIA STRING QUARTET

2017-18 Season

Basically Beethoven

## Program II

In this second program of its “Basically Beethoven” series, the Artaria String Quartet continues its exploration of Beethoven’s glorious string quartets. Here the Artaria includes Joseph Haydn as the “other” composer. By “other” the Artaria means no discredit to Haydn. Instead, the Artaria reveals him as one of the strong influences that pointed the way to Beethoven and the development of string quartet form. We will experience the later history of the form in programs III and IV that include, in addition to Beethoven, Dmitri Shostakovich and Walter Piston. How fortunate we are to have the history of the string quartet as well as the glories of Beethoven revealed in the Artaria’s inventive programming!

### Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

#### String Quartet in F Major, Op. 77, No. 2

**Allegro moderato**

**Minuetto: Presto, ma non troppo; Trio**

**Andante**

**Finale: Vivace assai**

If Haydn’s paternity of the piano trio is sometimes overlooked, his fatherhood of the string quartet is honored universally. The number, some 83, is astonishing in itself, but the depth and breadth of his string quartets bespeak his genius even more clearly.

Haydn wrote his first quartet somewhere between 1755 and 1757 for an amateur ensemble that by chance consisted of two violinists, a violist, and a cellist. He abandoned the form for some years but returned to it with seriousness as early as 1769 with the six quartets of his Op. 9, the six of Op. 17, and, in 1772, the six of his well-known Op. 20 “Sun” quartets. From that point on, the string quartet became a highly-respected form that served as a challenging test of a composer’s skill. Haydn continued the challenge with his “Russian” quartets (1781), Op. 42 (1785), the “Prussian” quartets, the two sets of “Tost” quartets (1788 and 1790), the Ops. 71 and 74 “Apponyi” quartets (1793), the Op. 76 “Erdödy” quartets (1796-1797), the Op. 77 “Lobkowitz” quartets (1790), and finally the incomplete Op. 103 of 1803. We should not omit from this distinguished list his Op. 51 masterpiece of 1787, *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, a transcription for string quartet of an earlier orchestral work. Beethoven brought the string quartet to new dimensions with his sixteen quartets, but we must question if he would have done so had Haydn not given birth to the form.

Haydn’s two Op. 77 quartets and Beethoven’s six Op. 18 quartets appeared simultaneously as commissions from Prince Lobkowitz, but Beethoven’s work was received with more public enthusiasm than the aging Haydn’s. One might speculate that this could have caused Haydn to turn from the form of which he was father and master, but it did not. Although Op. 77, No. 2 is Haydn’s final complete string quartet, it is no classic last statement fraught with painful summations. It is simply a meticulous piece of writing filled with the vigor and graciousness we associate with all his quartets.

In the first movement, however, with its descending scales and diminuendos, there is a kind of pervading melancholy. At the same time, the movement contains some of Haydn’s boldest harmonic changes. The *Minuetto* is sheer fun until the unexpected sobriety of the *Trio* section. Fun returns, however, with the “wrong” beat entrances in the transition back to the *Minuetto*. The poignant *Andante* that follows is as close as Haydn comes to traditional “last thoughts.” Interestingly, “Papa Haydn,” father of the string quartet, chooses to end his final complete string quartet, as he did his last symphony, with a rustic dance reflecting his lifetime of affection for the folk styles of Eastern Europe.

**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**  
**String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3**

**Introduzione: Andante con moto; Allegro vivace**

**Andante con moto quasi allegretto**

**Minuetto: Grazioso**

**Allegro molto**

The three “Razumovsky” quartets of Op. 59, so named after their commissioner and dedicatee, Count Andrey Razumovsky, were written between July and September of 1806 and represent Beethoven’s Middle Period as well as a daring exploration into an uncharted territory of emotional expression. Conflict was inherent in the public reception of the entire Op. 59 quartets stretching from animosity to bewilderment. When violinist Felix Radicati of the Schuppanzigh Quartet said to Beethoven, “Surely you do not consider this music,” Beethoven replied, “Not for you, but for a later age.”

While we might conclude that the animosity has receded, surely we cannot hear any of the Op. 59 quartets without some sense of wonderment over the differences among them. It is this total individualism that drives the opus and explains its transitional position between the elegance of the Op. 18 quartets and the elusive greatness of the late quartets.

“Let your deafness no longer be a secret—even in art,” Beethoven scrawled on a page of sketches for the Op. 59 quartets. So it is he unleashed his truthfulness upon us who, even in this century, remain startled.

The curious opening statement of the first movement of the Op. 59, No. 3 Quartet seems almost suspended in time compared to the reckless forward motion that will follow. Tucked into that slow and stern opening, however, is a hint of the elaborate music to come in the *Andante con moto* and *Allegro vivace* sections. Things literally blossom—in tempo, melodic and harmonic invention, and rhythmic power. One surprise after another occurs including the spectacular two octave leaps by the violin. While this is music of great spaciousness, it is also highly ornamented with virtuosic demands made on all four instruments including the cello which was the instrument of Beethoven’s patron, Count Razumovsky, the commissioner and dedicatee of the Op. 59 quartets. In order to please his patron, Beethoven had incorporated Russian themes in the two earlier Op. 59 quartets, but he made no such accommodation in this movement or in any of the C Major Quartet. This is elaborate music in the richest 18<sup>th</sup> century style yet shot through with a Modernism yet to come.

Of no less wonder is the alluring second movement which has been variously described in the past in terms of its despairing and mysterious qualities. Contemporary ears might hear it as frankly sensual. What suggests that sensuality is the crawling minor scale Beethoven employs, giving the movement almost the flavor of an exotic dance. To say “belly dance” probably pushes the image too far, but we would love to brave that description. Motion, however, is central to the movement, indicated even by Beethoven’s specific *con moto* tempo marking. Anchoring this motion is the plucking of the cello that opens and closes the movement and persists throughout it. The ornamentation of the first movement remains in this second movement but with a new anguish.

Sensuality is briefly mitigated by the graciousness of the *Minuetto*. Beethoven may appear to resume his 18th century guise, but little is ever really traditional in Beethoven and especially in the Op. 59 quartets. A simple arpeggio becomes extraordinary in his hands. Even the modesty of this movement is suspect with its artful relief from the exotic intensity of the preceding movement.

We are hurled without pause into the famous conclusion with its subtitle, like its symphonic counterpart, “Eroica.” It is this movement that enlarged the scope of string quartet writing and performance beyond any previous example. Despite virtuosic display and complex fugal writing, this movement and the entire Quartet remain a deeply personal and individual statement.

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