The Complete Beethoven String Quartets

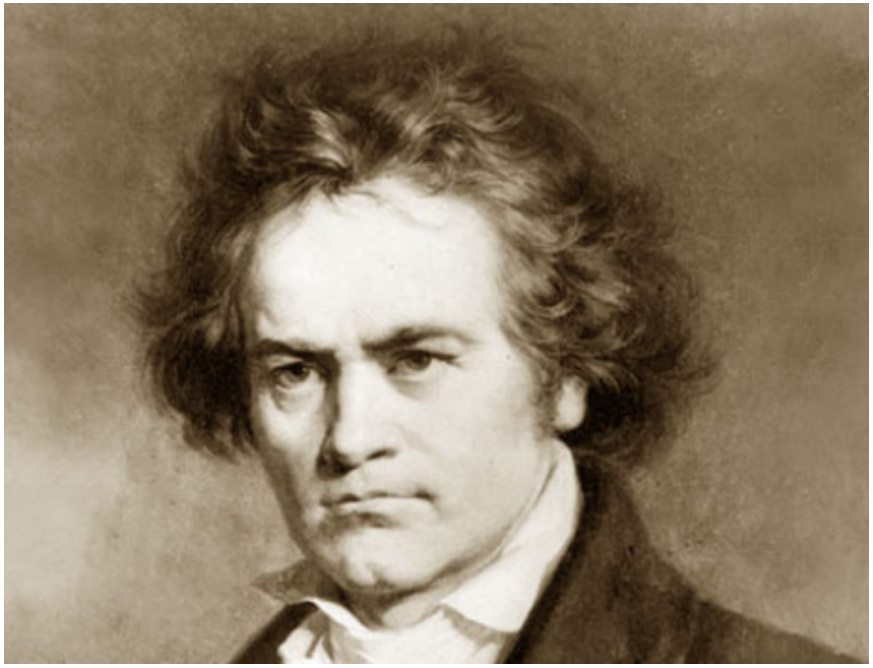
Performed by the
Artaria String Quartet

Ray Shows, violin
Nancy Oliveros, violin
Annalee Wolf, viola
Patricia Ryan, cello

February - April 2020

ASQBTHVN2020

“Tones sound, and roar about me until I set them down in notes.



Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Artaria Concert Dates

SUNDIN MUSIC HALL
Saturday Feb 8, 2020 - 7:30pm Program I
Sunday Feb 9, 2020 - 3:00pm Program II
Monday Feb 10, 2020 - 7:30pm Program III

ST. OLAF COLLEGE
Sunday Feb 16, 2020 - 8:15pm Program I
Monday Feb 17, 2020 - 8:15pm Program II
Tueday Feb 18, 2020 - 8:15pm Program III

VITERBO UNIVERSITY
Saturday Feb 22, 2020 - 7:30pm Program I
Sunday Feb 23, 2020 - 3:00pm Program II
Monday Feb 24, 2020 - 7:30pm Program III

VITERBO UNIVERSITY
Sunday Mar 22, 2020 - 3:00pm Program IV
Monday Mar 23, 2020 - 7:30pm Program V
Tueday Mar 24, 2020 - 7:130m Program VI

ST. OLAF COLLEGE
Sunday Mar 29, 2020 - 8:15pm Program IV
Monday Mar 30, 2020 - 8:15pm Program V
Tueday Mar 31, 2020 - 8:15pm Program VI

SUNDIN MUSIC HALL
Saturday Apr 18, 2020 - 7:30pm Program IV
Sunday Apr 19, 2020 - 3:00pm Program V
Monday Apr 20, 2020 - 7:30pm Program VI

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Welcome to Artaria String Quartet's performance of the Complete String Quartets of Ludwig van Beethoven. These concerts are a celebration of Beethoven's masterful achievement composing 16 timeless string quartets. They also represent a capstone event in the

concert history of the Artaria String Quartet. Following a well received Dmitri Shostakovich String Quartet Cycle in this hall circa 2012/2014, Artaria has dedicated the past three years preparing to perform Beethoven's personal and visionary thoughts deftly woven into the string quartet genre.

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ARTARIA STRING QUARTET (1986 -)

A warm, rich sound is the hallmark of the Artaria String Quartet. Named after the Italian family that published the premier issues of many of the Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven quartets, Artaria's refined and thoughtful playing has brought them critical acclaim in Europe and throughout the United States. The Boston Globe has described Artaria as "exquisitely balanced and sonorous" and that "their musical understanding was first-rate".

Formed in Boston in 1986, the quartet was mentored by members of the Budapest, La Salle, Kolisch, Juilliard, and Cleveland Quartets. They have had numerous appearances on television and live radio, and have performed at major venues in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Atlanta, Cleveland and Boston. They have also been featured at the Banff Centre in Canada, Festival de L'Epau in France, and the Tanglewood Music Center. In 2004 Artaria won the prestigious McKnight Fellowship for performing musicians. Artaria has served as MPR Artists-in-Residence and was featured on Twin Cities Public Television as part of the MN-Original Television series.

Nationally recognized as dynamic teachers and for their commitment to education, the quartet has appeared at major summer festivals including the Banff Centre in Canada, Festival de L'Epau in France, and the Tanglewood Music Center in Lenox, Massachusetts. Artaria is the recipient of a highly coveted McKnight Fellowship for Performing Musicians, and has received Teaching Artist grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Chamber Music America, Midori's Partners in Performance, and the Heartland Fund for performance and educational outreach. They possess the rare ability to offer outstanding performances in both concert and educational outreach settings and have performed hundreds of programs to thousands of students throughout the United States.

Honored as recipients of the inaugural Rural Residency Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the quartet has continued to establish and enhance string programs for communities across the Midwest. Artaria has held residencies at Boston College and Viterbo College and now resides in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where members of the quartet are founders and directors of the Artaria Chamber Music School, a weekly chamber music program for young string players, Stringwood, a two-week summer festival held in Lanesboro, MN each June, and the Saint Paul String Quartet Competition, an annual national event that showcases America's finest young string quartets from around the country.

Firmly rooted in the great traditions of the chamber music masterpieces, the Artaria String Quartet is also a staunch advocate of contemporary music. They have premiered a wide array of new works and have numerous commissions to their credit. The quartet's performances are recorded on Centaur Records and Aequebis Recordings.

The Beethoven String Quartets

Introduction

The sixteen string quartets of Beethoven's monumental canon span thirty-six of his fifty-seven years and represent, perhaps better than any other of his works, the revered Early, Middle, and Late periods of his compositional life. These so-called "periods" are not mere academic divisions but rather a glorious arc of Beethoven's work. So, too, do they encompass his deafness from its beginning to its final and awful silence.

Within the Artaria String Quartet's six programs of the complete Beethoven string quartets is infinite variety. If you wonder why chronological order is not honored, trust that the Artaria has valid musical reasons for that. For example, each three-concert section of the cycle ends with a great fugue revealing Beethoven's compositional prowess. Another highlight of the Artaria's programming is Concert I ending with Op. 130 including the Finale with which Beethoven replaced the original Grosse Fuge. Also notable is Concert IV in which the Artaria explores Beethoven's unique harmonic and rhythmic signatures in Op. 127. In the final concert of the series, the Artaria surprisingly returns to Op. 130 but this time with the original and forever modern Grossa Fuge. Within each of the concerts, the Artaria offers us quartets from all three of Beethoven's famous periods—a most satisfying experience for the listener!

The Early Period

The six quartets of Op. 18, begun in 1798 when Beethoven was twenty-eight and completed two years later, represent the Early Period when, at least in part, he still looked to Haydn and Mozart as his models. Despite those powerful influences, one of the most astonishing characteristics of the early quartets is Beethoven's incorporation of his own innovative style into the form handed down to him by those earlier masters. The Op. 18 quartets were also conceived in the context of Beethoven's encroaching deafness. In an 1801 letter to his friend Franz Gerhard Wegeler, Beethoven admitted: "For the past three years my hearing has been growing constantly weaker...For two years now I have ceased to attend any social function for I cannot bring myself to tell people, I am deaf."

The Middle Period

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 the Middle Period as well as a daring exploration into an uncharted territory of emotional expression. Op. 74, "Harp," and Op. 95, "Serioso," came, respectively, in 1809 and 1810 and are fascinating transitions between the Middle and Late periods, suggesting what has been and what will come.

Conflict is inherent in the public reception of the entire Op. 59 quartets.

The reactions to the three "Rasumovsky" quartets that represent Beethoven's Middle Period stretched from animosity to bewilderment. Members of the Schuppanzigh Quartet reportedly joked about the technical difficulties of the F Major Quartet, causing Beethoven's famous retort: "Do you think I worry about your wretched fiddles when the music speaks to me?" When violinist Felix Radicati 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 Late Period

Opp. 127, 130, 131, 132, and 135, plus the Grosse Fuga, comprise the Late Period quartets. They were all composed between May of 1824 and November of 1826, just four months before Beethoven's death. Opp. 127, 130, and 132 were commissioned by Prince Nikolai Galitzin, a Russian nobleman and amateur cellist. Opp. 131 and 135 were written without commission. This same period brought the Missa Solemnis and the Ninth Symphony although it is the late quartets that are considered Beethoven's crowning achievement. How this music emerged from a time so fraught with illness and despair is one of its ultimate mysteries, explained only by the sheer force of genius—a genius that itself remains inexplicable. These quartets represent a culmination of greatness that defies definition, an endless source of wonder for performer, scholar, and listener.

The late quartets so stretched the early 19th century imagination that it would be years before they came into their own. Even with that, the French critic Pierre Scudo in 1862 called them: "the polluted source from which have sprung the evil musicians of modern Germany, the Liszts, Wagners, Schumanns, not to mention Mendelssohn in certain equivocal details of his style." Fortunately the accused composers, along with others such as Schoenberg, Bartók, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich, felt otherwise. Even more importantly, listeners have come to terms with the late quartets as the most complex and inspiring music ever written. That they culminate Classicism but move beyond it, that they are inherently Romantic in their deeply personal expression, and that they define Modernism is only a statement of their transcendence and timelessness.

In Beethoven's own words: "He who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world." Far be it from this writer to divine that secret but rather to report some of the conditions under which this music was created.

Concert I

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

Both history and Beethoven's scrupulously kept notebooks suggest that the D Major Quartet was his first string quartet. That is not to suggest that Beethoven was a beginner in 1798 when he first turned his attention to the genre. He had already published his remarkable piano trios and string trios, his String Quintet, two of his five cello sonatas, and a number of his piano sonatas (including the famous "Pathétique"). He was well established in Vienna where he had arrived some eight years earlier in the shadow of Mozart's death in 1791. The Viennese aristocracy, which lavishly supported composers, smiled upon Beethoven. He caught the attention of both Count Apponyi who had commissioned Haydn's Opp. 71 and 74 quartets and Count Lobkowitz who would commission Beethoven's Op. 18 quartets.

Beethoven set to work, then, in the best of circumstances but not without a certain anxiety about the task before him, which he approached with great seriousness. Even Beethoven heard the tramp of genius before him in the quartets of Haydn and Mozart. This anxiety, however, took the form of great respect for the string quartet, clearly evident in Op. 18, No. 3 with its grace and ingenuity. Here we have a piece that is hardly the work of a beginner.

This is immediately evident in the first movement. As grace and elegance reign in the first movement, so do charm and warmth hold sway in the second. The third movement Allegro is a monument of perfection. The last movement Presto is perhaps the most satisfying of the movements if for no other reason than its virtuosic demands and its wonderful counterpoint. It teems with life.

The notion of a kernel idea governing a whole work, as set forth by Beethoven in the Op. 18, No. 3 Quartet, would shape the course of musical history from his own time through what Arnold Schoenberg would call the "developing variation" in Brahms. In the D Major Quartet, Beethoven also proved himself not only master of the sonata form in new explorations but also a daring harmonist, a sumptuous lyricist, a contrapuntist beyond measure, and a master of rhythmic surprise.

String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95, "Serioso"
Allegro con brio
Allegretto ma non troppo
Allegro assai vivace ma serioso
Larghetto; Allegretto agitato

Written in 1810, Op. 95 is often seen as the culmination of Beethoven's

Middle Period or the beginning of his powerful Late Period. It is probably both, but, even more accurately, it stands alone in its expressiveness, its human qualities, and its musical ingeniousness. It is sometimes grouped casually with the earlier Op. 74 Quartet as a transitional work, but in fact the two works could not differ more.

To say that the downdraft of a love affair, encroaching deafness, and financial woes could have affected the composition of Op. 95 is to treat Beethoven like an ordinary human. Academicians turn instead to his use of the Neapolitan Sixth, i.e., a chromatic chord progression from the tonic to the flattened supertonic in its first inversion. In other words, in C Major the Neapolitan Sixth chord would be F, A-flat, and D-flat and in F minor A, D-flat, and G-flat. This writer, however, chooses the less technical approach to figuring out the erratic and inscrutable Op. 95.

The work bursts upon us with angry protest followed by petulant silence that gives way to lyricism before the anger returns. So this pattern continues, the cello warring against the other instruments. The tantrum is quickly over.

The cello opens the second movement in a slow crawl down the scale before all turns lyrical. Lyricism, however, is complicated by a fugue before it returns. This second movement ends on a riveting minor chord (a diminshed seventh) that leads directly to the fast third movement bearing the interesting tempo marking, Allegro assai vivace ma serioso.

Despite its fast tempo, this third movement is not designated as a scherzo. Indeed, it has nothing jocular about it and, in fact, may be the cornerstone of the work's "Serioso" subtitle which Beethoven himself inscribed on the score.

Consistent with his surprise tactics in this piece, Beethoven opens the final movement with a slow introduction filled with expressive yearning. But true to form, he kicks us in the pants with a comic ending.

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

One cannot help but be surprised by the Allegro of the first movement after the slow, sad opening statement. Remarkably, we are surprised again by a return to the Adagio. Thus the movement alternates relentlessly between the slow and the fast, but with subtle changes that underscore its genius. Motivic and contrapuntal writing of the highest order weaves its way through the whole movement.

In contrast to the full-blown first movement, the second movement Presto is a brief race with even some comic moments with the first violin's downward slides. Its sheer fun is complicated only by its brilliance.

The third movement Andante is both gracious and complex. Almost a bow to Haydn and Mozart, the movement still suggests modernity with its use of motifs and its democracy among the instruments. Contrast is still evident here but toned down from the first movement.

The fourth movement continues the graciousness but with a growing intensity. As its Alla danza tedesca movement marking suggests, it is a German-style dance form with changing tempos. Without really being labeled as such, contrapuntal writing marks this movement as well as the whole Quartet.

The fifth movement Cavatina, literally a brief operatic song, is unremittingly sad. As the sadness is relentless so is the melodic invention underscored by a pulsing rhythm. We are tempted to think of nothing but the touching beauty of this movement, but we must also be reminded of its ground-breaking inventiveness in terms of the vocal quality Beethoven brings to instrumental music. While Mozart also accomplished that, Beethoven adds his own special stamp to the process.

The element of surprise is not lost in the Finale in the sense that Op. 130 ends on an unexpected cheerful note. Still the movement is not without its complexities as a remarkable culmination of what has come before. It is again an exercise in musical democracy as four strong voices come together for the common good.

Beethoven wrote Op. 130, the third and last of his commissions from Prince Galitzin, between March and October of 1825. At the encouragement of his publisher, Matthias Artaria, he replaced the original Grosse Fuge of the last movement in 1826 with the present Finale. One cannot help but think that Beethoven's willingness to make that change was based not only on an offer of more money, but also on the opportunity to have his monumental Fugue stand on its own. The work was premiered in its original version on April 22, 1827 by the Schuppanzigh Quartet, which also gave the first performance of the revised version on March 21, 1826, two months after Beethoven's death.

Concert II

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

With bold inventiveness, Beethoven pushed Classicism to its limits in this Quartet, written third in Op. 18. In that inventiveness lay satire. The ostensible lightness of the Op. 18, No. 2 Quartet belies the effort Beethoven put into its composition and the fact that many musicians consider it the most difficult of all Beethoven's quartets in terms of performance.

Its gracious opening statement has earned it the nickname, the Komplimentier Quartett (Quartet of Bows and Curtseys) a nickname as unfortunate as "How d'you do" for Haydn's Quartet in G, Op. 33, No. 5. Curiously enough, this opening statement, often compared to a curtsey, is resurrected in Op. 131, certainly one of the most complex and cryptic of Beethoven's late quartets.

That said, the work does abound in graciousness, particularly in the first movement with its 18th century elegance edged with 19th and even 20th century urgency. Sudden dark shifts to the minor suggest something beyond wigs and pantaloons as one new idea after another develops.

Central to the second movement is Beethoven's sudden insertion of the almost crude Allegro dance parody into a movement that is otherwise grave, formal, and elegant. While there is little precedent for this, Beethoven himself would use this device repeatedly in later quartets.

After the Scherzo of the third movement, a serious Trio reminiscent of the Adagio movement momentarily interrupts the musical romp.

The final movement is an exuberant statement of the youthful Beethoven and also a reflection of Haydn's influence with its sheer brilliance and satire leading us to wonder about Beethoven's reputed statement quoted in Eliot Forbes' Thayer's Life of Beethoven, "Though I had some instruction from Haydn, I never learned anything from him."

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

For the sake of organization, the Op. 74 String Quartet of 1809 and its contrasting companion piece, Op. 95 of 1811, might be grouped into the Middle Period, but in reality, they are transitional works. Much about Op. 74 suggests that it represented a pulling back from the audacities and complexities of Op. 59, which apparently caused Beethoven to lose some fans in conservative Vienna. Yet it was no compromise in quality, losing nothing in rich technique and beauty but simply employing a straightforwardness of form. It also served as a hiatus before the jarring Op. 95, "Serioso."

The first movement's Poco adagio introduction gives way to the alarm of an Allegro containing the pizzicatos that give the work its "Harp" nickname—one that was not assigned by Beethoven and less than accurate in its implication. More significant than the pizzicatos are the repeated forzando outcries and motto that mark the movement. Beethoven ends with a blazing passage of great energy before he gives a relatively simple conclusion to this complex movement.

The second movement Adagio, almost of equal length to the first movement, opens with a sweet sadness that gains power with its dramatic pauses. Beethoven sustains the mood throughout the movement, but he does so with great variety. A hint of tragedy invades with his attention to the darker voices of the viola and cello.

The third movement Presto, the briefest of the four movements, is extraordinarily lively but its intensity competes with its liveliness. Here Beethoven makes virtuosic play with a dance form which might be better described as a gallop. While that seems contrary to Beethoven's attempt to reestablish himself with conservative

Vienna, it is in keeping with his unfailing audacity in matters both musical and social. Unexpectedly, the movement slips away.

The last movement surely brought him accolades with its straightforward energy and even a certain devil-may-care attitude. He opens with a bow to Haydn-like graciousness, but in Beethoven style. There are moments of fury, but they occur within a wonderful exploration of variation form at which Beethoven so excelled and that produced some of his finest works. To this final movement, Beethoven gives a spectacular conclusion.

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

By the time Beethoven began Op. 131 in 1825, his compositions had become deeply personal. No better example of this exists than Op. 131.

The arguable seven movements of Op. 131 form an organic whole, not simply because they are played without interruption but because of their rhythmic, harmonic, and conceptual integration. While some of this unity depends on the performers, Beethoven seems to prepare the listener for a next movement by predicting it in the previous one. In another sense, however, we are never prepared for what happens in Op. 131.

The somber introductory statement takes the form of a melancholy fugue, but we soon sail forth into the happier waters of the Allegro molto vivace. Two soft chords at the end of the second movement beckon the two loud ones that bring the brief Allegro moderato which, in turn, serves as an introduction to the lengthy Andante. This movement, the centerpiece of the quartet, takes the shape of a theme with six variations. There is a suggestion of a clean break, but the last two notes of the Andante really serve as stepping stones into the playful but treacherously difficult Presto. In the final statement of this scherzo-like movement, Beethoven calls for the melody to be played sul ponticello (close to the bridge), which produces a strange, glassy sound almost suggesting the frustrations of his own hearing loss. So it is with the dramatic gesture leading to the sixth movement Adagio. The viola introduces the meditative melody of the brief Adagio. Then, with two angry statements, we are thrust into the final Allegro on which Richard Wagner lavishly commented in an essay: "This is the fury of the world's dance—fierce pleasure, agony, ecstasy of love, joy, anger, passion, and suffering; lightening flashes and thunder rolls; and above the tumult the indomitable fiddler whirls us on to the abyss. Amid the clamor he smiles, for to him it is nothing but a mocking fantasy; at the end, the darkness beckons him away, and his task is done."

In 1822, Beethoven wrote to his publisher: "I sit pondering and pondering.

I have long known what I want to do, but I cannot get it down on paper. I feel I am on the threshold of great things." There followed soon after this the Missa Solemnis, the Ninth Symphony, and his crowning achievement, the late quartets. Among those five astounding works—plus the Grosse Fuge—Beethoven confided to his friend Karl Holz that Op. 131 was his favorite. Many agree. The 2012 film, *A Late Quartet*, is a modern confirmation of the monumental impact of Op. 131.

Concert III

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

While the Op. 18 quartets were not written in the order of their numbering, the musical advancements of No. 6 suggest that it was written last, serving as a stepping stone to Beethoven's Middle Period. That said, there are still certain recognizable things about Op. 18, No. 6 that mark its uncharted territory that eludes any one period.

The themes of the first movement are not merely melodies but simple harmonic chunks fired up with arpeggios and scales. While critics disagree on the quality of genius employed in the first movement, to the listener the effect is almost dizzying with its high energy. There is hardly time or inclination to analyze.

The second movement is as ornate as the first is straightforward. Yet the plan is simple: two melodies wind their way from major to minor. The third movement Scherzo is another matter with its ambiguous rhythmic patterns that become so prevalent in Beethoven's later works. We have a moment of rest in the Trio section.

Beethoven weights the whole Quartet with the last movement, another distinguishing characteristic of later works. Gone is the elaborate attention to first movements as practiced by Haydn and Mozart. Here Beethoven seems to have a firm conviction that he need not follow convention. The movement is filled with sharp contrasts from its ominous "La Malinconia" opening, so-named after Albrecht Dürer's famous etching, to its lively conclusion.

Whatever criticisms of this Quartet exist, all agree that its energy and spaciousness are the products of pure genius.

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135
- Allegretto
- Vivace
- Lento assai, andante e tranquillo
- Der Schwer gefasste Entschluss: Grave, ma non troppo tratto; Allegro

Briefer and ostensibly less intense than the other works which comprise the late quartets, Op. 135 nevertheless offers its own startling beauty and transcendence disguised, if you will, by its congeniality. That congeniality should figure in a discussion of this Quartet is ironic indeed, since it came from one of the darkest periods of Beethoven's life, only months before his death and on the heels of an attempted suicide by his beloved nephew Karl. Beset with illness and a personal life in total disarray, Beethoven retreated with his nephew to the Austrian hamlet of Gneixendorf where he completed the F Major Quartet on October 30, 1826.

The warm and conversational first movement could be seen as a look backward to the Classical models of Haydn and Mozart, but that is surely an oversimplification. So is it a misjudgment of all three composers.

The nostalgia of the first movement gives way to the breakneck Vivace with its acrobatic leaps for the first violin and its accompanying ostinato phrase repeated forty-seven times. No backward looks here.

Over the lovely Lento assai, often compared in beauty to the Cavatina of Op. 130, Beethoven wrote the words, "sweet restful, peaceful song." There is no better description of the movement with its tranquility in utter contrast to the preceding Vivace.

Over the final movement Beethoven wrote the famous inscription, "Must it be?" with its affirmation, "It must be! It must be!" While the source of this quotation might be more mundane than we would like to think—some unhappy financial arrangements—the inevitability it suggests is inherent to this music that is a profound reflection of Beethoven's triumph over despair. If there is an ironic gaiety to this movement, it is only further proof of the ultimate inscrutableness of Beethoven's quartets and, in particular, Op. 135. No analysis can really explain them.

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3, "Razumovsky"
- Introduzione: Andante con moto; Allegro vivace
- Andante con moto quasi allegretto
- Minuetto: Grazioso
- Allegro molto

The curious opening statement of the first movement 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 18th 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.

Concert IV

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127
- Maestoso; Allegro
- Adagio
- Scherzando vivace
- Finale

Beethoven worked on the E-flat Quartet from May of 1824 until March of 1825, a relatively long time since the six quartets of the Late Period were all completed in two-and-a-half years. The result of this labor is superficially modest, but beneath its seemingly traditional surface is a work of incredible genius and invention, one that Schoenberg and Bartók would look to for inspiration. About the work, there is a kind of magnificent understatement, an elegant modesty, if you will.

For example, the first movement's outer reserve veils an inner strength, tension, and power. The opening chordal statement would seem simple except that it serves as a motto for the movement and the point of return from the complexity of the Allegro that quickly follows it. Nor is the movement without the distinct lyricism that pervades the entire Quartet.

The long second movement Adagio is touched with the tragedy but not the tears of Op. 59, No. 1. Here lyricism blossoms slowly through the subtle chro-

maticism of the theme and variations. Things brighten briefly with the suggestion of a dance, but Beethoven is cautionary in this as he was in the slower section marked "slow, but not too slow." His consistent demand in the movement is to sing, molto cantabile.

Modesty persists even in the third movement Scherzando, which does not have the usual fury of many Beethoven scherzos. It seems in many ways an older and wiser Beethoven.

Nor does the Finale burst upon us in the manner of many Beethoven last movements. Before we take the idea of modesty and simplicity too far, however, we need to be reminded that what seems simple here is highly complex. Multiple themes are developed, some related and some entirely new. There is no real recapitulation in the traditional sense, but there is a subtle suggestion of the first movement in the coda-like conclusion. Is there a happy ending? Perhaps, if one can find it in the complexity of voices and rhythmic patterns.

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

Allegro con brio
Adagio affettuoso e appassionato
Scherzo: Allegro molto; Trio
Allegro

The conflict, despondency, and anger the twenty-eight-year-old Beethoven experienced as he withdrew into a world of silence are undeniable in the F Major Quartet with its tragic Adagio and powerfully dramatic first movement. Op. 18, No. 1 bears its numbering because of impact rather than date of composition. Of the six quartets of Op. 18, the F Major was probably written second, but without question it is the most impressive of the group. In sheer size, the first and last movements are the longest of any in the opus. The Adagio is the most emotional and the Scherzo the fastest. Governing all is Beethoven's use of motifs and sharp contrast.

Motivic impact is most evident in the opening movement with its single controlling motif. Sketches involving this motif fill sixteen pages of Beethoven's notebook. He uses it no less than 104 times in the movement, a reduction from the 130 times of an earlier version. While he introduces three subsidiary themes and surprises us with a new one in the coda, the initial motif dominates the movement.

The second movement Adagio is monumental in its originality, its daring use of contrast, and its sheer beauty. We are shocked by its silences, torn by its harmonic shifts, and agitated by its rhythmic energy. Over a sketch of the Adagio, Beethoven wrote "les derniers soupirs" (the last sighs).

The ensuing Scherzo is as charming as the Adagio is tragic. A Trio in a surprising minor key abounds with comic leaps reminiscent of the Op. 1, No. 1 Piano Trio before the repeat of the opening theme.

In the opening statement of the final movement, there is a relationship to the powerful motto of the first movement, almost a variation on it, as well as a recollection of the Adagio. It also includes an exquisite sonata-rondo form complete with a section of double counterpoint.

Overwhelming in Op. 18, No. 1 is the realization that it is only the second of Beethoven's string quartets and the mere beginning of his genius in that form.

String Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2, "Razumovsky"

Allegro
Adagio molto
Allegretto
Finale: Presto

From the shock of its opening chords to its ending race, the E Minor Quartet is an exercise in contrast and complexity. Its difficulty and length probably account for its being less often performed. The educated amateurs such as Prince Razumovsky who played many of Beethoven's quartets were given pause by this one. Even music critics were confounded. "The concept is profound and the construction excellent, but they are not easily comprehended," said one critic for the Allegemeine musikalische Zeitung, referring to the Op. 59 quartets. Surely the challenges of the E Minor Quartet must have inspired that statement.

Pathos invades the opening movement with its intensity juxtaposed to its lyricism. One might also see the movement as a constant pull between the horizontal and the vertical with its winding melodies interrupted by silences and strident chords. Darkness and light struggle against each other. Imprinted on the whole movement is the use of musical mottos, most obvious in the descending seven-note scale that pervades the movement. Also noticeable is a repeated two-note phrase with a simple half-step chromatic change in harmony. Simple but disturbing. One is reminded here that Minimalism did not begin in the second half of the 20th century.

Beethoven's elaborate tempo marking tells the story of the second movement: "This piece is to be played with great feeling," he clearly marked on the score. The "feeling" of which he spoke goes well beyond poignancy. With its dignified theme, it is closer to pathos and even tragedy. Those two effects are intensified by a simple cradle song that seems to spring out of nowhere. The rocking continues with throbbing repetition until a winding scale shifts us into a dark minor mode.

Things brighten considerably in the Allegretto with its quote from a Russian folk song, "Sláva Bogu ne nebe, Sláva" (Glory to God in Heaven, Glory), that Beethoven explored in creative counterpoint. Mussorgsky would use this theme later in the coronation scene of his opera Boris Godunov and Rimsky-Korsakov in his opera The Tsar's Bride. Despite its brighter skies, this third movement is not without its clouds of nervous agitation and gloom.

The Finale would be almost gay were it not for its harmonic ambiguity and a certain frenetic quality that underlies its cheerfulness. At face value, however, it is an energetic romp beset with treacherously difficult dotted rhythms and high-speed tempos intimidating to all but the best players. One proceeds in this Quartet with the sense that anything could happen.

Concert V

String Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5
- Allegro
- Minuetto; Trio
- Andante cantabile
- Allegro

Perhaps too much has been said of Beethoven's imitation of Mozart in the Op. 18, No. 5 Quartet, yet it is recorded history that Beethoven so admired Mozart's fifth quartet of his six dedicated to Haydn (K. 564) that he modeled his own A Major Quartet after it.

Accusations of imitation in the Quartet are based on form rather than substance. Like Mozart, Beethoven chose to reverse the usual order of the second and third movements, putting the Minuetto with its remarkable Trio section before the Andante with its even more remarkable set of variations. The logic of this is beyond mere imitation since he breaks tradition by giving the most weight of the Quartet to the Andante movement. Further similarities to Mozart occur in the fifth variation of the Andante where Beethoven's so-called "circus music" is comparable to Mozart's "drum music" in the K. 564 Quartet. The final Allegro is undeniably Mozartean in its sudden changes of tempo and style. The nervous agitation of the movement, however, seems purely Beethoven, as do the sonorities of the whole A Major Quartet.

String Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4
- Allegro ma non tanto
- Andante scherzoso quasi allegretto
- Minuetto: Allegro; Trio
- Allegro

Perusing even a portion of the lavish scholarship on Beethoven's string quartets and, in particular, the C Minor Quartet, one is struck by the number of disagreements among the impressive entries. Among listeners, however, the C Minor Quartet is probably the most beloved of the six quartets of Op. 18 because of its thrilling intensity that hardly lets up for a moment. The only quartet of the entire opus in a minor key, it also marks an early exploration of C minor, the key in which Beethoven would write some of his greatest works, including the Fifth Symphony.

The riveting and ominous opening statement of the first movement immediately reveals Beethoven's passion for C minor. Although the movement has its lighter moments, it never loses the intensity and throbbing energy suggested in this opening. Forceful exclamations (forzandi), strong accents, and dramatic shifts from major to minor mark the movement everywhere until Beethoven brings things to a breathless climax and a definitive conclusion.

Curiously, there is no actual slow movement in the C Minor Quartet. Instead, Beethoven assigns slower andante and allegretto tempo markings to the scherzoso indication of the second movement but gives us a moment of playfulness if not

the actual humor often associated with a scherzo. If there is humor here, it might come from a suggestion of rudeness that Beethoven wittingly inserts. Indeed, it is a movement filled with one surprise after another including the sense of dance which one would expect in the following Minuetto movement rather than in this scherzo-like movement.

The third movement Minuetto brings some gentler moments but little relief from intensity. We might expect a gracious 18th century dance but get instead an ingenious and artful repetition of the dark opening statement of the first movement. A Trio section brings a remarkable duet between second violin and viola with cello accompaniment before a return to the Minuetto opening but this time played in a faster tempo.

The delicious Gypsy rondo of the last movement Allegro is certainly a bow to Haydn but still bears the clear stamp of Beethoven. Despite its minor key, this movement is as close as we get to sheer fun in the Quartet. Beethoven kindly interjects a sweet moment before a fiery race to an impudent ending.

String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132
- Assai sostenuto; Allegro
- Allegro ma non tanto
- Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen tonart: Molto adagio;
- Neue Kraft fühlend: Andante
- Alla marcia, assai vivace
- Allegro appassionato

Beethoven suffered a grave illness during the winter of 1824 and spring of 1825 while he was working on Op. 132. While his own problems are reflected in the work, so does it also speak of universal suffering.

The grim intensity of the first movement is mitigated only by the occasional flourishes of the violin. Flourishes though they may be, they are also downward swirls into darkness. We are pulled back and forth between darkness and light, and the pulling itself is ominous. The tempo quickens after the painfully slow opening Assai sostenuto, but the mood remains serious despite the occasional shots of sunlight. With all its seriousness, however, the movement is not without its lyricism.

Indeed, Beethoven had not deserted song—or dance—as illustrated in the second movement Allegro ma non tanto. Relief comes in this second movement, but it is short-lived. Yet one thing we must not miss in that moment is Beethoven's incredible use of counterpoint. If there is any relief in the movement, it lies in its abstraction more than in what might be perceived as its rustic charm.

Now we are thrust into the heart of the Quartet, the third movement Molto adagio over which Beethoven wrote the phrase, "Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Divinity by a Convalescent, in the Lydian mode." The thanksgiving is one for a temporary return of good health. The Lydian mode is a reference to a Medieval church scale, used in Gregorian chant, which corresponds to the scale of F major without the B flatted. A more vigorous section follows which Beethoven marked Neue Kraft

fülend (Feeling of new strength). The movement ends with a return to the slow hymn of thanksgiving, which Beethoven marked to be played Mit innigster Empfindung (With the most intimate emotions). If there are what seems to be awkward moments in this movement, they are indeed intentional since Beethoven used them elsewhere in such great works as his final Op. 111 Piano Sonata.

Another relief of tension comes with the fourth movement march, a technique Brahms would later use. The march is left unfinished, and we are thrust, without pause, back into a minor key and into the powerful last movement. Odd strains of what modern ears might identify as a Russian Christmas carol are heard over a restless rocking motion that pervades this disturbing movement with its pastiche of musical ideas to which Beethoven somehow brings an astounding unity.

Concert VI

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

Six years separate the three "Razumovsky" Quartets of Op. 59 from the earlier set of Op. 18. In those six years Beethoven had come to terms with his growing deafness as suggested by the question he included in the sketchbook: "Can anything stop you from expressing your soul in music?" The answer to that question seems obvious in this first Razumovsky Quartet, which marks the start of his so-called Middle Period but in many ways seems more like a culmination than a beginning.

Indeed, the first movement is as sure-footed in its lyricism as in the sharp chords that interrupt the lovely song treated by each instrument. The particularly interesting cello parts may be a bow to Beethoven's patron, Count Razumovsky, an accomplished amateur cellist. A noble and highly developed exposition is followed by a huge development section and a recapitulation that is a still further development of the opening theme. The whole movement suggests a culmination of Classical form.

The repeated notes that open the second movement were probably a source of bewilderment for the musicians of Beethoven's time, and, in truth, are no less imposing today. We are teased by the staccato playing of this aptly indicated Allegretto vivace e sempre movement with its merry eight-note theme twisted and turned about in every way imaginable. Delicacy, however, turns to power. Lyricism sings over a staccato accompaniment, and we have a suggestion of the contrasts and conflicts that will follow in Op. 59, No. 2. The ending of this movement affirms Beethoven's new confidence and the advancing power of his genius.

On the score of the third movement, Beethoven wrote, "A weeping willow or acacia tree upon my brother's grave," elusive words that have been given various interpretations by scholars but which ultimately point to the profoundly contemplative quality of the movement. Some are tempted by programmatic interpretations

that suggest Beethoven's distress over his brother Casper's marriage to Johanna Riess, but perhaps it is best to hear it as a crying out for what is sad in the world.

The brilliant final movement, which follows without pause, is built on a Russian theme, possibly requested by the work's dedicatee, Count Rasumovsky, but implemented fully by Beethoven in terms of elegance and spirit. After a dramatic pause, it comes to a remarkable conclusion.

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

One cannot help but be surprised by the Allegro of the first movement after the slow, sad opening statement. Remarkably, we are surprised again by a return to the Adagio. Thus the movement alternates relentlessly between the slow and the fast, but with subtle changes that underscore its genius. Motivic and contrapuntal writing of the highest order weaves its way through the whole movement.

In contrast to the full-blown first movement, the second movement Presto is a brief race with even some comic moments with the first violin's downward slides. Its sheer fun is complicated only by its brilliance.

The third movement Andante is both gracious and complex. Almost a bow to Haydn and Mozart, the movement still suggests modernity with its use of motifs and its democracy among the instruments. Contrast is still evident here but toned down from the first movement.

The fourth movement continues the graciousness but with a growing intensity. As its Alla danza tedesca movement marking suggests, it is a German-style dance form with changing tempos. Without really being labeled as such, contrapuntal writing marks this movement as well as the whole Quartet.

The fifth movement Cavatina, literally a brief operatic song, is unremittingly sad. As the sadness is relentless so is the melodic invention underscored by a pulsing rhythm. We are tempted to think of nothing but the touching beauty of this movement, but we must also be reminded of its ground-breaking inventiveness in terms of the vocal quality Beethoven brings to instrumental music. While Mozart also accomplished that, Beethoven adds his own special stamp to the process.

Beethoven wrote Op. 130, the third and last of his commissions from Prince Galitzin, between March and October of 1825. At the encouragement of his publisher, Matthias Artaria, he replaced the original Grosse Fuge of the last movement in 1826 with the present Finale. One cannot help but think that Beethoven's willingness to make that change was based not only on an offer of more money, but also on the opportunity to have his monumental Fugue stand on its own. The work was premiered in its original version on April 22, 1827 by the Schuppanzigh Quartet, which also gave the first performance of the revised version on March 21, 1826, two months after Beethoven's death.

Grosse Fuge, Op. 133 (Great Fugue)

Without question, the Grosse Fuge defies categorization and remains, even today, an avant-garde work. And yet Anton Schindler, Beethoven's friend, biographer, secretary, and factotum, spoke of the Grosse Fuge as belonging "to those dark ages when the art of tonal combination was still determined by mathematical calculation."

Op. 133, the Great Fugue, was composed in 1825 as the final movement of Op. 130 but published separately after Beethoven replaced it with another movement when the Schuppanzigh Quartet refused to play it because of its difficulty. In reality, the Schuppanzigh's refusal is understandable in light of the 745 bars of terrifying virtuosic demands. This is to say nothing of the eccentric rhythmic patterns and the anguished violence of the work.

Beethoven traded in the Grosse Fuge, which he called "the high point of my chamber music," for an easier final movement of the Op. 130 Quartet. The change delighted his publisher [Artaria] who felt that the more traditional finale would sell better than the Grosse Fugue. More than an agreeable and entrepreneurial composer, this might also suggest that Beethoven knew the Grosse Fuge should stand on its own.

Igor Stravinsky called the Grosse Fuge an "absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary forever."

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Lucy Miller Murray is the author of Chamber Music: An Extensive Guide for Listeners published by Rowman & Littlefield and available on Amazon.

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GUEST SPEAKERS (in order of appearance)

Mark Mazullo - February 8 and April 18
Elwyn Alexander Fraser Jr. - February 9
Silvester Vivic - February 10
Anya Wilkening - February 16
Nancy November - February 17 and March 29
Mike Mader - March 22

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Thank you colleagues at **St. Olaf College** for hosting and providing video recording services for the Beethoven Cycle concerts in Urness Recital Hall. The live web-stream makes it possible for friends and family across the country to join us in this capstone event.

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