

BEETHOVEN

COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS

audite

VOL. VII



QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

String Quartet in G major, Op. 18, No. 2

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio cantabile – Allegro – Tempo I
- III. Scherzo. Allegro – Trio
- IV. Allegro molto, quasi Presto

String Quartet in C major, Op. 59, No. 3

- I. Introduzione. Andante con moto – Allegro vivace
- II. Andante con moto quasi Allegretto
- III. Menuetto. Grazioso – Trio – Coda –
- IV. Allegro molto

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

Cristiano Gualco, Violine
Paolo Andreoli, Violine
Simone Gramaglia, Viola
Giovanni Scaglione, Violoncello



“For it is only now that I know how to write quartets...”

The performance culture and market for the string quartet in the late eighteenth century was markedly different to that of later times. In practice, professional quartets only existed at court chapels, whilst the large majority of quartets were made up of talented amateurs. The fact that these (mostly aristocratic) enthusiasts mastered their instruments much better than today's amateur musicians is proved by Ludwig van Beethoven's Quartets Op. 18 which, to their young composer, represented uncharted waters. Naturally, he looked towards models such as Haydn and Mozart for guidance and inspiration: several copies in his hand show a meticulous examination of the quartets of his older colleagues. Nonetheless, during the early years in his adoptive home city of Vienna, the celebrated piano virtuoso had been careful to avoid the quartet, instead delving into the realm of the piano trio, the piano sonata and chamber music for wind instruments. Late in 1789, however, the time had come to turn his hand to the genre which required (according to his teacher Haydn) both taste and “compositional scholarship”: two qualities which most quartets written for connoisseurs lacked.

The external impulse for the Quartets Op. 18 – published, as was common at the time, as a set of six works – was provided by Prince Lobkowitz, who commissioned both the aged Haydn and the newcomer Beethoven to create a set of quartets for a fee of 200 guilders each. Perhaps he intended to juxtapose the “inventor” of the modern string quartet with his most talented and original student. Initial sketches were made in autumn 1798, and in October 1800 Beethoven presented his six quartets to the aristocratic benefactor.

Beethoven thus spent two years composing, polishing and revising his works, in the process learning to resolve issues concerning compositional technique, motivic work, archi-

texture and sound textures. It is therefore hardly surprising that after (initially) finalising his cycle, he revisited the first three quartets, amending them heavily. “Be certain not to let your quartet slip away”, he urged his friend Carl Amenda in the summer of 1800 for whom he had copied the original version of the first quartet, “because I have changed it considerably, for it is only now that I know how to write quartets ...”. The G major Quartet, Op. 18 No. 2, was also fundamentally reworked, with Beethoven replacing the original central section in the Adagio with an unusual allegro episode and expanding the brief fourth movement into a substantial finale. As his commissioner is likely to have reserved exclusive performance rights for a certain amount of time, Beethoven’s opus 18 did not appear in print until summer and autumn 1801. The quartets were issued by the Viennese publisher Tranquillo Mollo – in a notorious edition which, as the composer commented furiously, was “teeming with mistakes like small fish in water, i.e. ad infinitum”.

That publishing problem aside, the 30-year-old Beethoven demonstrates the highest possible technical mastery in his G major Quartet that could possibly be reached by a Haydn student and Mozart admirer around 1800. Its bright sounds and supple melodies make it, as has often been pointed out, the most optimistic of the six works. The *galant* turns, the wit and the folk-like intonation of Viennese classicism still shine through the main theme of the opening movement. But even here Beethoven sets to work most productively, gathering from these opening rhythmic and melodic formulae the material for the entire movement. The instruments are granted the highest possible measure of independence and equality, and yet the texture appears entirely organically and with a homogenous sense of fluency. And in order to satisfy not only the educated enthusiast but also the expert, the Allegro provides surprises in the form of a fugal passage in the development as well as several “false” recapitulation entries in extraneous keys.

The ensuing Adagio also offers a surprise. In keeping with the instruction “cantabile”, a theme with vocal qualities and manifold embellishments opens the movement. But as soon as it comes to its first halt, Beethoven inserts a busy Allegro which spreads intrusively and then disappears as rapidly, making way for the Adagio’s second verse, featuring expansive elaborations from the first violin and cello. The Scherzo is characterised by a delicate elegance (rather than Beethoven’s later ferocity) with an intricate interlocking of the theme. The finale opens with a simple “earworm” which Beethoven also favoured in later quartets – only to derive from it the most adventurous variations, break-aways and canonic interweavings. In this case, it is the bouncy opening in $2/4$ which dominates the movement as a source of energy and downgrades the brief secondary theme to a mere episode.

New rules

After exploring a new concept of the symphonic cycle in the *Eroica* and devoting himself to opera for the first time (with the two early versions of *Fidelio*), Beethoven wrote his second major quartet cycle in 1806. There were two sources of motivation for his three Op. 59 Quartets. One impulse was provided by the Russian envoy to the Habsburg court in Vienna, Andrey Kirillovich Razumovsky who, even during the disastrous times of the Napoleonic wars, did not abandon his cultural patronage but continued to host music and musicians at his palace. For him, Beethoven inserted “Thèmes russes” into his quartets – personalisations, as it were – which surely delighted his patron.

The second impulse came from the Viennese violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh and his quartet who set new standards for instrumental virtuosity and interpretation. Having served as “house quartet” to Beethoven’s patron Karl von Lichnowsky, the Schup-

panzigh Quartet was engaged by Razumovsky between 1808 and 1816. Beethoven, a long-standing friend of the violinist, thus produced a double homage, his opus 59 paying tribute to both his patron and the virtuoso. And one only needs to compare the technical and intellectual demands of Op. 59 to contemporary works (such as the quartets of the young Franz Schubert) in order to recognise that Beethoven no longer composed for able amateurs, but for highly professional specialists.

For Beethoven as a composer there was of course not just the question of technical demands but also that of musical dramaturgy. “How do I begin according to the rule?” – Walther von Stolzing’s anxious question in Richard Wagner’s *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* touches on a fundamental problem of the creative process. The beginning of a work is to be interesting and original, it needs to attract attention whilst also building on tradition, and it should already anticipate what is to follow. Responding to the Franconian squire, the wise shoemaker-poet Hans Sachs does not stipulate pedantic directives but instead formulates a revolutionary maxim: “You set a rule yourself, and then you follow it.” These words could have been Beethoven’s own. For hardly any other composer before him had, with such a degree of idiosyncrasy and entirely consciously, torn up traditional rules, replacing them with his own which he then consistently followed.

Let us examine the beginning of the “Razumovsky” Quartet, Op. 59 No. 3. Beethoven composes an “Introduzione” in a moderate Andante, provocatively obscuring the key of the quartet. A dissonant opening chord is followed by strange, boldly modulating soundscapes, almost without any melodic contours. The theme of the Allegro vivace with its bouncy opening towards the dominant key and the solo of the first violin also deliberately avoids a harmonic grounding in C major which is only reached in a stomping tutti outburst. In the development and recapitulation, the opening motif – as

inconspicuous as it initially seems – plays the lead: a continual question which, after a breathtaking acceleration in the final bars, is only answered by the closing chord.

Despite its startling beginning, the C major Quartet was deemed by his contemporaries to be the most comprehensible of the three quartets which Beethoven dedicated to Count Razumovsky. But while Beethoven had previously inserted little “sonic messages” to the count in the form of Russian folk melodies, the third quartet is devoid of traceable quotations. However, the Beethoven scholar Walter Salmen commented that the Andante con moto – a serenade-like movement over a cello pizzicato – is deliberately kept in a folk-like tone, thus transforming the original quotes in the other quartets into an “appearance of the known”. The movement in which Beethoven probably comes closest to Schubert (and Brahms) also became especially popular via arrangements, thanks to its circular *perpetuum mobile* form.

The simplicity of the “Menuetto” and its somewhat angular trio serves as a breather before the finale which opens with a splendid fugal exposition on a seemingly endless theme. The movement itself, however, is still a long way from the unwieldy monumentalism of the *Great Fugue*, Op. 133. It unites old contrapuntal technique and modern sonata form, intellectual challenges and musical exuberance which does not calm at any point. According to Salmen, Beethoven, from all the Quartets Op. 59, “draws a positive, liberating conclusion which, in its extremely expansive sonorities, truly is generally comprehensible and strives towards a destination which can also be appreciated by a wider public”.

Michael Struck-Schloen

Translation: Viola Scheffel



During the past ten years the **Quartetto di Cremona** has matured into a string quartet of international renown, combining the Italian culture of string playing with an awareness of historical performance practice. As a quartet of the younger generation, the Quartetto di Cremona has acquired an excellent national and international reputation. Having for many years performed at the great international halls, it is often regarded as the successor to the famous Quartetto Italiano. The musical style of the Quartetto di Cremona is marked by a fruitful tension between Italian and German-Austrian influences. Following their academic studies the players continued their training with Piero Farulli of the Quartetto Italiano. He strongly favoured intuitive playing and a fervent, emotional, romantic and “Italian” approach to music. Afterwards the musicians pursued their studies with Hatto Beyerle of the Alban Berg Quartet. As an expert in the classical era, he represents a clear, classical, “German-Austrian” style, focusing on faithfulness to the original, form and structure as a basis for musical interpretation and inspiration.

Both teachers have left a lasting impression on the quartet and significantly influenced its musical style. The players naturally unite both poles, combining boisterous enthusiasm with a distinct sense for musical architecture, cultivating the fusion of structure and expression, external shape and internal passion.

The Quartetto di Cremona has performed at major festivals in Europe, South America, Australia and the United



States, including Beethovenfest in Bonn, Bozar Festival in Brussels, Cork Festival in Ireland, Turku Festival in Finland, Perth Festival in Australia and Platonov Festival in Russia. They have performed at such prestigious international concert halls as the Konzerthaus Berlin, London's Wigmore Hall, Bargemusic in New York and Beethovenhaus Bonn.

Since 2010, the Quartetto di Cremona has been Ensemble in Residence at the Società del Quartetto in Milan and as such it is featured in numerous concerts and projects. In 2014, the 150th anniversary of the society, the co-operation culminated in performances of the complete Beethoven String Quartets Quartets; in 2016 a similar project will bring the complete Mozart String Quartets on stage.

The quartet collaborates with artists such Pieter Wispelwey, Angela Hewitt Larry Dutton, Antonio Meneses, Andrea Lucchesini, Lilya Zilberstein and Lynn Harrell. Its repertoire ranges from the early works of Haydn to contemporary music; here their particular interest lies in works by Fabio Vacchi, Michele Dall'Ongaro, Helmut Lachenmann and Maxwell Davies.

The musicians are also dedicated to teaching, giving master-classes throughout Europe. In 2011 the quartet was entrusted with the leadership of the String Quartet Course at the Accademia Walter Stauffer in Cremona, closing a circle, for all four members received their initial training at this institution.

Alongside the latest Beethoven volume, a Saint-Saëns album, recorded together with the pianist Andrea Lucchesini, was released in October 2016.



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Quartetto di Cremona

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recording location: 'Fondazione Spinola Banna per l'Arte', Poirino
The 'Fondazione Spinola Banna per l'Arte' was established in 2004 with the aim to promote contemporary art and music. Based in Banna (Poirino, Italy), it administers a number of programs, such as workshops, residencies and commissions for young artists and composers with the supervision of leading figures of the art and music world.
instruments: violin I: Nicola Amati, 1640
violin II: Paolo Antonio Testore, 1750 Milan
viola: Gioacchino Torazzi, Turin, Italy ca. 1680-1720
cello: Dom Nicola Amati, 1712 Bologna
recording / executive producer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff
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