

BEETHOVEN

COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS

audite

VOL. VI



QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

String Quartet in A major, Op. 18, No. 5

- I. Allegro
- II. Menuetto – Trio
- III. Andante cantabile
- IV. Allegro

String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 130

- I. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro
- II. Presto
- III. Poco scherzoso.
Andante con moto ma non troppo
- IV. Alla Danza tedesca. Allegro assai
- V. Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo
- VI. Finale. Allegro

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

Cristiano Gualco, Violine
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Giovanni Scaglione, Violoncello



Retrospective and Revolt

The propensity to produce complete overviews is, one might think, a phenomenon of our time. Complete recordings of a composer's comprehensive œuvre, re-releases of famous interpreters, performance cycles of all Schubert songs or presenting the complete Beethoven string quartets as concert or recording series appear to be an expression of an age of Olympian records and excessive stimuli.

However, looking back into history tells us that Beethoven's core genres in particular – his symphonies, piano sonatas and string quartets – have, ever since the master's death, motivated performance series. The cyclical efforts in relation to Beethoven's quartets began in 1845 when the "Beethoven Quartet Society", founded by the London journalist Thomas M Alsager, presented all sixteen works; during the course of the nineteenth century, the late quartets were to come into special focus. At a time when Beethoven's works – and this should not be forgotten – still presented considerable technical problems to performers, it was, first and foremost, the great violin virtuosos who championed Beethoven, including the Leipzig Gewandhaus concertmaster Ferdinand David, the Berlin-based Hungarian Joseph Joachim, Henri Vieuxtemps, Henryk Wieniawski, and Leopold Auer. Once the late quartets had established themselves (in Paris there was even a "Society of the Great Last Beethoven Quartets"), performance cycles of the complete quartets were presented in music metropolises such as Berlin or Paris, reaching an international climax at the centenary of Beethoven's death in 1927.

Reasons must therefore exist that make a Beethoven cycle appear more attractive than complete performances of the Haydn, Mozart, Schubert or Mendelssohn quartets, which occur considerably less frequently. Doubtless the top-ranking motivation is

the appeal of the hugely diverse sonic and technical challenges, followed by the fact that the quartets embody a representative reflection of Beethoven's development as a composer from 1800 until his death. Since this scrupulous composer only began producing quartets relatively late, the discourse as to whether to include mediocre early works (as in the case of his piano sonatas) becomes irrelevant. The six Quartets Op. 18 mark the effective appearance of a master who is already familiar with all compositional styles and techniques, and who does not simply copy his models, but uses them to help him find his own, new solutions.

The six Quartets Op. 18, which Beethoven wrote in 1799/1800 having been commissioned by the generous Count Franz Joseph Maximilian Lobkowitz, represent a stage between tradition and departure. Although Beethoven revolutionised the quartet style of the time, clearly going beyond the technical standards of amateurs, he nonetheless drew on great examples. In the case of the A major Quartet, Op. 18 No. 5, this was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his Quartet written in 1785 in the same key (K. 464) which, in turn, had been dedicated to his revered colleague Haydn. Beethoven uses the same movement sequence – putting the minuet in second place – as well as a number of architectural devices, including a movement of variations. That is why the opening theme with its violin flourishes seems more “old-fashioned” than those of the other Op. 18 works; the simple upbeat-dominated theme and the two-part writing of the minuet looks towards the style of Haydn.

Despite these retrospectives, Beethoven's compact, harmonically bold, roughened and accented chamber style already reveals hints of a revolt in chamber music; the metronome markings, published subsequently, often demand rapid tempi. The *Andante*

cantabile displays originality with its five variations on a naïve theme, of which the fourth is a tender, luminous movement in a slow tempo, and the fifth, in contrast, is a stomping dance followed by an expansive coda in which the theme returns. The finale nods towards the last movement of Mozart's *Prague Symphony* and its famous upbeat in 3/8 tempo.

String Quartet, Op. 130

The folk-like tone which Beethoven adopted in the *Andante* of the A major Quartet from Op. 18 can also be found in his late works; even the most complex works of his late period feature passages of heart-rending simplicity, such as in the *Andante con moto* from the Quartet Op. 130: a graceful viola melody emerges, accompanied by a busy cello line and discreetly commenting violins. In its playful lightness, the entire movement appears as a serenade in a garden of a Viennese suburb. And yet this stance seems more like a quote from distant times, an evocation which in the coda loses itself in romantic harmonies – not unlike the following movement, *Alla danza tedesca* [in the manner of a German dance], quoting the popular *Deutschen* (a form of Ländler which was still cultivated by Schubert) whilst at the same time alienating it by inserting idiosyncratic surges and resolving it in the coda. In his late works Beethoven thus no longer views convention as a form of opposition to be creatively overcome, but instead he proceeds to integrate it as an instant of reconciliation and nostalgia for an unalienated life (which of course never existed in that form).

The modernism of the B flat major Quartet was already beyond dispute for Beethoven's contemporaries, who by no means always approved of the composer's artistic

development during the 1820s. “Who would not remember the enthusiasm created by his first symphonies, his sonatas, his quartets”, Ignaz Mosel wrote fifteen years after Beethoven’s death. “All music lovers were delighted to find, so soon after Mozart’s death, a man emerge who promised to replace the sorely missed. But alas, albeit gradually, though increasingly, he departed from his initial path, insisted on cutting out a new one, and finally went astray.” As Mosel, many perceived Beethoven’s new idiom as incomprehensible – the irritations are comparable to the shock caused by the music of a Karlheinz Stockhausen or Luigi Nono around 1950.

A significant reason for this incomprehension was that Beethoven (in contrast to Stockhausen and Nono) worked with known musical elements, but put them into an unfamiliar, experimental context which he treated differently in every single one of the late quartets. These known elements include, in Op. 130, the afore-mentioned movement types of serenade and dance which Beethoven re-phrased in a startlingly novel manner. A further example of productive irritation is the customary succession of slow introduction and fast *Allegro* in the first movement which in the B flat major Quartet is conceived as a tightly interconnected “thematic configuration”: the *Adagio* and *Allegro* are so closely intertwined that they are in constant exchange. The *Scherzo* (in second place), on the other hand, is condensed into extreme, terse brevity, with the middle section (“trio”) being frantically dealt with in a few bars.

The most spectacular quotation of traditional forms in the initial version of the B flat major quartet was, of course, the finale, an enormous double fugue which the composer later took out, following his publisher’s advice, releasing it separately as the *Great Fugue* Op. 133. In late 1826 Beethoven wrote a rondo-like *Allegro* as a replace-

ment finale – this was his last completed composition, tying in with the playful tone of the *Andante*.

This account shows that the traditional four-movement form had also been replaced in Op. 130, yielding to a new dramatic form in six movements with which, as countless sketches reveal, Beethoven wrestled for a long time. Tempo and character, however, are well-matched. The weighty opening complex of *Adagio* and *Allegro* is followed, as a contrast, by a rushing movement in an extreme tempo; whilst the *Andante*, at a moderate speed, is succeeded by the middle *Allegro*, *Alla danza tedesca*. The final contrasting pair is the *Cavatina* with its heartfelt, hymn-like melody, and the harrowing solo episode of the first violin (Beethoven marks this “beklemmt” – “anguished”), as well as the clearly structured *Finale* with its folk-like, earthy theme. If this melody originates in the instrumental pieces of the salon and dance music of the time, then the *Cavatina* represents an excessive form of “sound speech” and human expression – similar to the expression Beethoven sought in the vocal passages of his Ninth Symphony and *Missa solennis*.

It was typical of his contemporaries’ reaction that, at the premiere on 21 March 1826 given by the Schuppanzigh Quartet, they did not ask for the *Cavatina* to be repeated (which Beethoven loved most out of his quartet movements), but instead the *Presto* and *Alla danza tedesca*. Here, his audience found what Beethoven otherwise denied them. His late œuvre was, as a critic rightly observed, not suitable for those “who use music only to amuse themselves, to create a pastime”.

Michael Struck-Schloen

Translation: Viola Scheffcl



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.

In 2016 alongside the continuation of the Beethoven cycle the quartet will issue a new recording with works by Saint-Saëns under the collaboration of Andrea Lucchesini.



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Quartetto di Cremona

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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: Giovanni Battista Guadagnini, 1776 Turin
violin II: Paolo Antonio Testore, 1750 Milan
viola: Gioacchino Torazzi, Turin, Italy ca. 1680-1720
violoncello: Dom Nicola Amati, 1712 Bologna

recording / executive producer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

editing: Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer

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