

Chamber Music Society - Beethoven Festival 2020
Saturday, February 8, 2020 & Sunday, February 9, 2020

Emerson String Quartet

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Philip Setzer, violin

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Paul Watkins, cello

Introduction and commentary

Listening to all of Beethoven's sixteen quartets in (nearly) the same order in which they were composed will provide an extraordinary opportunity to develop a comprehensive sense of his development over time, as his string quartets trace his development more in depth than does any other genre. He began writing them early and with only one rather long break of 14 years (between 1811-1824), he continued until the very end of his life. The six quartets of Op. 18 were composed relatively early; Op. 59, 74 and 95 are wondrous compositions from mid-life, and Op. 127-135 were all composed in his very last years. Beethoven's development was continuous and multifaceted, and the string quartets provide the optimal opportunity to tune into the process at given points in time.

We are all indebted to the late Ben Franklin, Past President of the Chamber Music Society, who proposed and facilitated this celebration of Beethoven's 250th year, remembering that to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Beethoven's birth in 1970, the Juilliard Quartet performed all the quartets for the Louisville Chamber Music Society, then under the leadership of Dr. Gerhard Herz.

Beethoven's early life was very difficult. He had little access to primary education and musical training, but he was fortunate to have grown up in Bonn, where the cultural life was under the auspices of enlightened electors and music-loving princes who fostered church and orchestra music, and opera. In 1781 at the age of 11, he came under the guidance of the newly appointed court organist, Christian Gottlob Neffe, a well-trained, experienced musician with whom he is known to have studied, among other works, the keyboard music of Johann Sebastian Bach and his son Emanuel Bach. Neffe soon took him on as deputy assistant organist, and in 1783, when Neffe became the director of both sacred and secular music, he appointed Beethoven harpsichordist for the orchestra with responsibilities for both rehearsing and conducting. In 1784, he finally began to receive a salary for his work in court. During this time, Beethoven studied and composed rather steadily, and developed into a fine pianist. In 1787 when the Elector installed a national theater, Beethoven joined the orchestra as the second violist from which vantage point he was exposed to excellent performances of a large repertory of opera. In 1790 when Haydn traveled through Bonn on his way to England, Beethoven was introduced to him and was encouraged to go to Vienna to study with Haydn on his return to the city.

When Beethoven moved to Vienna in 1792, he was seeking "fulfillment of long-frustrated dreams" in the words of Count Waldstein, his patron in Bonn, and had prepared himself for the moment. During the not insignificant number of years of practical training, Beethoven had developed his musicianship, became highly skilled at improvising and had composed a significant body of music, some of which he later revised and published. Ever the realist, his plan included some self-improvement and when it turned out that Haydn seemed uninterested in teaching him, Beethoven took additional instruction from Johann Schenk and Antonio Salieri (with whom he studied setting Italian texts to music). When Haydn left Vienna in 1794 for an extended stay in England, Beethoven arranged to study counterpoint with Johann Albrechtsberger, an esteemed theorist.

During this time, he also made progress in becoming a recognized factor in the brilliant life of the Viennese aristocracy whose support he needed in order to live in the city. Joseph Kerman creates a compelling argument about Beethoven's progress in composition during this time, particularly ones that involved the piano: a Piano Concerto in B-flat and a number of innovative Piano Sonatas, one in E-flat, Op. 7, a group of three, Op. 10, each of which seems to bring forth a new and bold idea of form, as well as the justly-famous *Pathétique*, Op. 13. There were also works for piano and other instruments—including some reworked earlier pieces: the set of Piano Trios, Op. 1, the first two already composed in Bonn and a more recent third in C minor (that ruffled Haydn with its boldness), and two unusually commanding sonatas for cello, Op. 5.

While the early quartets of 1801 manifest characteristics of Beethoven's style—motivic integrity, contrapuntal adeptness, a developing sense for monumental structure—they did not spearhead his development. He was a master of improvisation, the piano was his instrument, and he first found new expressive modes in the piano sonatas. He had serious challenges to overcome before the string quartet, eventually, would be the medium for his most elevated musical thought and compositional ideals. The task before him included learning to work with four independent individuals, each with a single line, each line with its own integrity. All of which is clearly different from working with one individual with two hands capable of creating a variety of textures—from single lines to massive chords—all or parts of which can be variously sustained by the pedal.

The four-piece ensemble poses challenges for creating varied color and exploiting the range of dynamics and it takes great technical skill, rhythmic sensibility and harmonic dexterity to build a grand vertical effect for a conclusion. At the extremes, the four lines are involved in mutual confrontation or they are moving together in close synchronization. The task is to figure out how to work with all the possibilities in between, so that the work as a whole builds interestingly with a logical development in which each segment relates to the others. The greatest challenge in composing for string quartet lies in developing the structural sense of musical lines, their "linear integrity." The greater range and flexibility of the piano makes it easier to sustain forward motion, to exploit the difference and opposition between registers, and to create immediate contrasts between segments. The master of the piano had to learn a new and different approach to expressing music.

Lessons with Johann Albrechtsberger developed Beethoven's natural instinct for counterpoint, for cultivating the equal participation of the inner voices as well as the natural opposition between the outer voices. Eventually he was able to build segments with large linear direction, and more so, to control them perfectly. We will see how Beethoven begins to alter the character of the light obbligato counterpoint of the late classical style already in early quartets of Op. 18, and we would be mistaken to try to hear them as Beethoven's "version" of Haydn or Mozart's classical style. These works already embody Beethoven's independent thought. In the three quartets of Op. 59, then, we find a texture that is far richer and more varied with a full expression of what (especially in the first one in F Major), exceeds the classical formulas. They have even been characterized as "symphonic" in their dimensions and their style. Of course, the gradual development can be traced in the compositions between Op. 18 and Op. 59: the first three symphonies, Second and Third Piano Concertos and the Triple Concerto, in the two Fantasy Sonatas, Op. 27 (includes the "Moonlight") the "Waldstein" Sonata, and the "Kreutzer Sonata" for violin and piano. Magically it comes together in these three quartets from his early middle years.

Quartet, Op. 18, No. 3 in D Major

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro
Andante con moto
Allegro
Presto

We know from Beethoven's sketch books that he composed the String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3, before nos. 1 and 2, but he chose to put it third when he arranged the set for publication, perhaps because of the predominantly lyrical nature of the first and second movements. However, the most interesting aspects of the work are the unusual aspects of form, particularly in the first, second and third movements. Who knows? perhaps he decided that it shouldn't be the first one because of some anomalies in the formal structure, some of which are pointed out in the description that follows.

The first movement begins with a deep inhale as the solo first violin traces a slowly-expanding interval of a seventh, A to G, and the ensemble joins the violin in the third measure, supporting it as it falls in a measured descent. The succeeding phrase, the consequent, moves with somewhat more urgency: the rising 7th, now in the viola, is followed in the next measure by both the cello and 2nd violin (the latter with another rising 7th) and, when the first violin enters with the A in the higher octave, it rises to the high C \sharp , *f*, precipitating a circuitous fall of eighth notes that cadences eleven bars later on the tonic. This extended exposition of the theme is not yet finished, as the cello starts anew from its low tonic D, rises up a seventh to C \sharp and initiates one last statement of the theme, finishing before the transition to a secondary key.

Ordinarily one would expect a move out of the tonic to the dominant of the secondary key with new thematic material, and in this case, Beethoven moves *toward* the dominant A Major but when he arrives there he continues beyond it and eventually cadences in the totally unexpected key of C \sharp Major. Here he introduces a new theme, one noticeably different from what has gone before. Note that the relationship between the tonic D Major and C Major is distant, harmonically-speaking, but Beethoven makes clear that he is serious as he repeats the chord on C \sharp with a *sf*. He continues in C Major for another 8 measures, and then abruptly shifts—marking the move with *f*—to A Major (the anticipated dominant key). The exposition concludes with a closing theme.

This has been, on the whole, a challenging exposition and now it is followed by a rigorous development, but one that moves with dispatch to a distant key, B \flat Major, marked by the recall of the light-hearted triplets from the transition passage in the exposition. As the development continues, substantial sequences lead directly to an engaging canon between the cello and first violin—sustained by running eighths in the second violin and off-beat chords in the viola. This is a remarkable passage, but what follows is even more so: the return to the tonic for the recapitulation takes place via what can only be described as a vehement cadence, *ff*, in the key of C \sharp Major that is subtly and ingeniously transformed into the dominant (A Major) under cover of a sustained *pp*. Once back on track, the recapitulation unfolds gracefully—albeit a bit shorter than the exposition—and in the coda Beethoven returns again to that harmonic-oddity, the second theme, this time in the special key of the lowered second degree, E \flat Major (the so-called Neapolitan), before revisiting the rising 7th in the violins and the cello.

For the second movement, Andante con moto, Beethoven returns to the key of B \flat Major he used for the triplet passage in the development of the first movement. A lilting, slow movement, the texture is in constant flux as its simple theme lends itself to numerous combinations and contrapuntal configurations. In a rondo form, the central segment is a development of the main theme, which eventually appears in the serious and solemn key of D \flat Major, with the theme in the lowest range of the cello. The opening of the rather long coda is marked with a sudden appearance of insistent sextuplets. This surprising change in texture returns several times in the final segment to briefly redirect energy, only to return to the principal tune, which, in the final measures, is slowly broken down, its motivic

identity removed bit by bit in a process that Schoenberg termed “liquidation.”

Beethoven designated the three parts of the third movement, Allegro, Minore, and Maggiore, for a reason. The movement is scherzo-like in character and follows the basic tripartite formal scheme (ABA), but with substantial differences. In the Allegro, the A is a very focused eight-measure segment, but the new material in the B segment constitutes only 4 measures and is followed by an abbreviated return of the A, and then continues— mightily extended. The Minore follows somewhat the same path. After the A section, and a simplified transposition of the first 4 measures for B, it is greatly extended until it makes a smooth transition to the Maggiore where the whole Allegro is repeated with enhanced energy gained from subtle changes in register.

The fourth movement, is a virtuosic Presto in sonata form. Initially the theme just explodes with a little three-note figure that once begun, speeds along for full 26 measures. After this, one phrase another follows head long, avoiding any sense of closure as all phrases avoid the tonic D on a down beat. It’s a bit like keeping 4 balls in the air. Four-measure phrases are “answered” by two two-measure phrases, and vice versa; passages in the two violins are answered by the viola and cello until, finally, they all come together for a moment that lasts just one short beat before going on again in forward motion. The voices are constantly regrouping—now two and two, then upper three voices answered by the lower three. Imitations and short *fugatti* flit across the surface.

The development starts delicately enough—a segment working with nothing but the little three notes. Then follow sequences, imitations, mini canons and *fugatti*. Except for some accents, *sf*, and two explosive *ffs*, the whole section is subdued and gets even more so (*smorzando*) as the recapitulation approaches. Later on, moving toward the end of the coda in a spectacular development, Beethoven introduces a counter-melody, or *obbligato*, in the first violin which begins “countering” the running 8th-notes in the viola. Then, as each voice takes up the *obbligato* starting one measure after the previous one finishes, eventually all the parts are involved, resulting in a kind of pile-up that works its way through the ensemble, until at the end, the two violins race to the top while the viola and cello head to the bottom in a great climax, *ff*, in all parts—which then simply drops away, three phrases at a time. In the end, the little three-note flip from the first measure, *pp*, takes leave of the movement . . . leaving the very last measure filled only with rests, and capped with a *fermata*.

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

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro con brio

Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato

Scherzo. Allegro molto

Allegro

The String Quartet in F major, Op. 18, no. 1, was actually the second quartet in order of composition, but was placed first in the publication, as it is an ample work with a generous focus on working out musical ideas. It is cast in four movements in the familiar forms of the classical period; two movements in sonata form are followed by a scherzo-trio in ternary form and it rounds off with a large sonata rondo.

Generally speaking, the first two movements are the acknowledged strengths of the work. The first is commanding with an intense concentration on the initial motive of a single turning figure, a nugget of energy, both fleet and solid. Beethoven makes a point of thoroughly working it through all facets of the movement. Heard over 100 times this motive remains amazingly fresh. It turns up everywhere: listen when it just breaks into the end of the second subject’s contrasting theme, and ushers in the closing theme, itself still another version of the motive. Naturally, it dominates the development and at the very last of the movement, shedding its rhythmic character, it shows up as a running 16-note figure alternating with its usual rhythmic shape. The movement is already a demonstration of Beethoven’s motivic dexterity.

With the opening measure of the second movement, Beethoven, in a way, prepares us to turn away from the frivolity and light-heartedness of the first movement. Three chords each pulsing steadily with eighth notes at a moment in the work once compared to a “curtain rise,” calmly set the tone for the appearance of a main character. Alerted by Beethoven’s expressive marking at the head of the movement, the listener can prepare for some of the most emotional and passionate music that Beethoven composed in his early career. With the dramatic key of D Minor, the minor submediant to the tonic—a third related chord, a harmonic relationship that in itself gives pause—Beethoven is again being perfectly clear about his compositional intentions and to one early listener he is supposed to have said he was thinking about the “scene in the burial vault of *Romeo and Juliet*.” As the lovely slow and soaring melody rises out of the opening “nebula” of murmuring lower strings, reaches the top and descends all with the same quiet *Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato*, a youthful, but beautiful and expressive slow movement is set into motion. The second theme is equally expressive though in a contrasting mode. Simple short phrases, four notes each, very slowly ease themselves down measure-by-measure, until enough momentum has been stored to unleash flowing 16th notes that descend two and a half octaves before they turn back up and move into a very leisurely cadence. Compelling harmonies and harmonic relationships undergird every emotional turn in the movement which continues to move forward. A brief flash of drama in the coda—as a challenge comes from the outside—is successfully subdued by the final gesture.

The Scherzo is an ingenious piece of concision and humor, and particularly welcome after the strong emotion of the second movement. The delightful “tricks” of three two-measure phrases, two three-measure phrases, along with the occasional odd three-measure and six-measure phrase, are all bound by the general context of regular four-measure units. Syncopations and offbeat accents in the final cadence lift it quite out of the ordinary. The Trio, the Scherzo’s slight counterpart, is exactly right as it shuffles and reshuffles light leaping octaves, streaming scales, and sustained chords.

The last movement is an extended rondo sonata and while it is not the most commanding movement, it achieves an outward balance of the dimensions of the quartet as a whole. Syncopations, strong rhythmic accents, and some musical sleights of hand tease us to attention. Far from a routine exercise, the movement spills over with extraordinary ideas.

Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto

Thème russe. Allegro

Commissioned in 1806 by Count Rasoumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna, the three quartets of Op. 59 come from a momentous period in Beethoven’s career. In the short space of two or three years, ca.1803-1806, Beethoven produced a number of extraordinary works in which he extended the dimensions of classical form far beyond those of his predecessors. In the *Waldstein* and the *Appassionata* sonatas for piano, the first version of *Fidelio*, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Violin Concerto, and the *Eroica*. the dynamic qualities gained from his expanded treatment of harmony supported a new level of developmental techniques. The free flow of thematic and rhythmic motifs takes on an aspect that seems close to improvisation. Charles Rosen captures this moment when he writes that Beethoven combined “Haydn’s technique of [creating] dynamic growth from [working out] the smallest details, with Mozart’s feeling for large harmonic masses and for tonal areas.”

Of the three quartets in opus 59, the first in F Major is the most expansive, its first two movements marvels of creative thought. Considered as a whole, these two movements and the third and fourth movements pair off in a manner of speaking; the first two are large and pose similar demands on the concept of how formal structure relates to the working out of compositional ideas. They do not travel the same trajectory but they are ideas that resonate with each other, complimentary expositions of materials with comparable expectations of what can be done creatively. The last two movements are closer to earlier models and thus are not quite as inventive and challenging as the first two; however, they are a unit by virtue of the trill that connects the extended written-out violin cadenza at the end of the hymnic Adagio (third movement) to the boisterous sonata Allegro (fourth movement). In this manner, they can be felt to balance or complement the first two movements.

In the opening antecedent phrase of the first movement, an unprepossessing tune in the cello steps up four notes then returns for an elaborated turn on the note where it began. A simple tune, it is given some urgency by the accompaniment of pulsing eighth notes in the second violin and viola. In the fourth measure, the cello lands on the dominant, the note where it began. In the next four measures of the phrase, Beethoven continues in the same vein, pushing the cello up another four steps, to land on the supertonic. The eighth-notes continue to throb; and then in response, moving abruptly to a treble range, the first violin takes up the four-note step-wise tune, and repeats it three times, each time moving higher and higher, the last one in slow motion. The Arrival comes with a climatic cadence on the tonic F Major, *ff*, *in alt*, that is on an F more than three octaves higher than where the cello began, a full 19 measures after the opening downbeat of the first measure. This simple description of the extended opening of the work should convey some of the expectation that is built into this passage. Such an extensive opening clearly requires equally expansive measures; harmonically it initiates an exploratory process that continues throughout the work.

What Beethoven starts in this movement, he continues. Small ideas are only small when they exist in a compressed space. The extraordinary expansion of harmonic thinking is nonrestrictive, and within the generous boundaries he forges, Beethoven opts for details, one after another, many very small, as he follows one idea with another. The three principal themes—those of the opening, of the secondary key area, and of the closing of the exposition—share common elements, among them the rising step-wise line. Some of the themes or motives that spring up appear superficially to have no obvious relationship to the others. Yet none of them is just a willful indulgence; in an on-going developmental commentary they complement the movement's brilliant symphonic-like adventure with chamber-like intimacy and introversion. Listen especially (toward the end of the exposition and again at the end of the recapitulation) for how the music has broadened to the point of a standstill. Unable to go further the violins arrive at a simple place, an ordinary minor tenth. Poised there on a half-note they provoke an exchange of chord with the viola and cello in slow-moving half notes: wide-spread, high answered by low, back and forth in an uncertain standstill, shifting slowly to restore tonal rectitude and with it, the by-now familiar tune. A magical moment both times it happens. Effortless, expansive, conclusive.

The second movement is unusual on more than several counts. First of all, if it were to be considered a scherzo, it would not be in the key of B-flat, that is not in the key of the first movement as would be usual for a dance movement in a multi-movement work. Furthermore, unlike most scherzos it comes right after the first movement, not after the slow second movement. As for its form, while having some characteristics of a sonata, such as a certain tonal instability and an unspecified tendency to development, it is hardly one. Rather it is an odd sort of quixotic treatment of an idea that is not really up to being a sonata allegro. As the composer indicates, it is an Allegretto, both “vivacious” and in a “scherzando” mood. To summarize: it is neither a fast allegro nor a scherzo, but something that partakes of both, something in between.

As a whole, an intricate weave of delicate ideas unfolds from the beginning of the first theme, which is subtly robust, a tuneless rhythm in a very soft cello, answered by a sweet and idyllic tune in the first violin. Always *scherzando*, it has the unexpected turns typical of a Beethoven scherzo: phrases dealt out in uneven numbers of measures, as in the minor variant of the second thematic segment. Here two three-measure phrases follow a neat eight-bar phrase, or when the cadence comes at the end of a phrase, there are only seven bars. Unexpected harmonic ideas are frequent as when the consequent phrase follows the initial statement on B-flat with one on A-flat, or when we reach the second key area we find a melancholic tune in the dominant minor instead of the major. And with respect to melodic and rhythmic ideas that are drawn from the first unpromising tune, it is as though the composer almost suffered from versatility: melodic diversions, dramatic pauses, contrapuntal combinations, a mysterious digression or two, and unexpected, lovely lyrical moments.

The third and fourth movements are united tonally (the third is in the parallel minor key, the fourth in the major mode), and temporally, for there is no break between them: the coda of the third is extended by a cadenza in the first violin and ends with a trill that connects directly to the fourth movement. For some listeners, the third movement is one of Beethoven's most sublime achievements with its slow unfolding of a tragic mood completely sustained throughout a generously proportioned movement. For others the sentiment might be considered exaggerated—or somewhat superficial. Perhaps it will depend on the performance—the time of day and the energy it embodies—as to how it is perceived.

The last movement, a sonata form, begins as the trill from the end of the violin cadenza turns into accompaniment for the Russian theme in the cello. The tune's rising interval of a fourth brings to mind the first movement's inspiring question: did this simple tune provide the starting point (even as it was a starting point for the composition of the quartet) for the shape of the quartet's first theme—and consequently all that eventually subsequently flows from it? Or (as Joseph Kerman suggests) is it the other way around, a subtle parallel, a comment—or a parody—of that first Allegro?

Energetic and brilliant, the structure of this last movement benefits from Beethoven's freedom in treating form, and, in some aspects, it can be as demonstrating connection with the first movement. But then perhaps it's only high spirits that cause the composer to twice recall the first violin's third movement cadenza; or to refer to the harmonic uneasiness at the beginning of the first movement by sliding into the wrong key at the beginning of the recapitulation; or to insert imitative and fugal writing at the end that harks lightly back to the ending *fughetto* of the first movement; or lastly—just before the final burst—to suddenly slow the forward motion (*Adagio man non troppo!*) for a mock-serious presentation of the theme, a move foreshadowed twice in the first movement.

Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro

Adagio cantabile

Scherzo. Allegro. Trio

Allegro molto quasi Presto

Much has been made of this quartet and its apparent reference to the classical style as found in quartets by Haydn. So much of its character, especially in the first movement, awakens a feeling for the delicate graces of the eighteenth century as practiced in courtly drawing rooms. Such is the style of the piece that it has been known in Germany as the *Komplimentierungsquartett*, or the "Compliments Quartet," for it does seem to capture an old-fashioned charm. The music also features enough wit combined with stylistic elements to warrant a discussion of just how close Beethoven wanted to get toward emulating or reviving classicism in the work. How does it compare with a Haydn quartet? Is it a parody? A sign of respect? As with all creative work in which foundations are humor or wit, such a discussion requires deep and thorough knowledge of the style and examples so that the humor can be enjoyed. Here, it is

only possible to point out some of the more obvious details and trust that greater familiarity with the music will facilitate enjoyment of these elements.

The first movement, a sonata form, opens with a series of two-measure phrases or units that bear no clear relationship to each other. Imaginatively, they are sort of like a series of bows and curtsies one might make while moving from one person to the next in a formal setting—and not really connecting with anyone. Those who have listened to Op. 18, nos. 1, 3, and 4 where the opening phrases constitute an antecedent phrase that refers or connects to the consequent, which then carries the energy forward to the transition, will find the arrangement of the materials in this antecedent and consequent quite a contrast.

For what we have here is an antecedent with three single units: first a tonic chord with a flourish in the violin, then a single phrase outlining a chord with a dotted rhythm, and last, a four-measure unit in which the melody turns upward at in the second measure, and then down in the fourth. Each of these “units” has stood alone; they are separated by silence. The twelve-measure consequent follows the same pattern: stop and start. Again, there is no musical connection between the consequent’s final notes and the opening of the following transition. Done. Decorum preserved.

But now, as forward motion begins to matter more than style, the transition begins to function more as a connection and it forges a shift to the dominant key of D Major, marked by a satisfying cadential flourish in triplets. The new thematic material in the second key is somewhat less formal. The four-measure units are now connected with running 16th note scales. But, on reaching the end of the passage, the cadence veers off course and turns suddenly to the key of F-sharp Major (!) Necessitating a return to D Major, Beethoven devises an odd segment that lasts a full 10 measures, in a slightly off-beat “jazzy” style involving syncopations across the bar, brings on the closing theme and ends the exposition with a kind of exuberant celebration.

The development begins, as expected, with motives from the first movement and the harmonic foundation shifts again, first to the flat side, B-flat Major, and then to the even more distant E-flat. With that the flow stops, and then—abruptly—both texture and dynamics are altered to introduce an almost bizarre, certainly foreign idea: in an intensely contrapuntal and extended passage (25 measures, *sempre pp*), four different motives (some vaguely familiar from earlier material) are presented in the style of a mock chorale-prelude (perhaps, this passage has challenged more than one commentator—the jury is out). A most unusual development. But take heart, the rather long, harmonically-mobile passage does find its way through the changes to arrive at the point for a transition where the “classic” style is “reset” for the recapitulation—which covers the same terrain as the exposition (even the “jazzy” passage) and concludes with a short coda.

The slow second movement is a rather uncomplicated form song form, ABA', in which the center (B) is in bold contrast to the outer sections which are also in aba' form. The slow triple meter and uncomplicated form invite ornamentation—the first time discreet, but the second time greatly expanded (an understatement). The middle segment, as total a contrast in tempo, meter and style as possible, is also an aba' form in keeping with the custom. Its only challenge is keeping up. A short passage at the end turns back to the aria, this time with extravagant (!) ornamentation.

The Scherzo (aba'), Allegro molto, with its Trio (also aba') is bright and sassy. Each phrase starts with a 16th-note “flip” and ends with three or four. In the second segment (b) Beethoven returns already by the 8th measure to the tonic, but then diverts it and extends this portion completely out of proportion—but happily so. Even the coda has a clever high note to add to the fun. Listen to the coda as successive waves of syncopations pile up and complicate the rhythmic flow to the point of causing the individual syncopations to stumble on successive ones, only to have all of them crash down at the end. “Brilliant,” as my Irish friend, Anne Leahy, used to say. Though the second segment of the Trio is greatly extended similarly to the Scherzo, it is a bit subdued in comparison—more business-like—than the Scherzo. The transition back to the Scherzo is particularly sweet.

The final movement, a sonata form without a repeat poses no mystery as to form and lots of style. Unadulterated listening pleasure with a few passages in unexpected keys, canons, and a couple of musical jokes playing on expectations, all of which might encourage a listener to recall a final movement by Haydn.

Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1727)

Allegro ma non tanto

Scherzo. Andante scherzoso, quasi Allegretto

Menuetto. Allegretto

Allegro - Prestissimo

Each moment in this quartet is marked with a sense of forward motion, even at times a propulsive one, and the texture is frequently quite imitative, reminding us that Beethoven recently had studied counterpoint with Johann Albrechtsberger, who was by all accounts a rigorous teacher and thorough taskmaster. Furthermore, each of the principal themes opens with an ascending line in the first violin that finishes on a pitch considerably higher than the one on which it began. This is true even of the theme in the final movement, which is the only one that begins rather high in the range; it also ascends to a higher pitch before it plunges precipitously to the bottom of the instrument for the cadence at the end of the phrase. Movements that rush ahead (in spite of the *ma non tanto* in the first movement) and themes that reach with upward-flung gestures speak, quite simply, to a youthful sense of drama. Hopefully these introductory observations convey some of the drama that is inherent in the work, which is after all, in C Minor, the key of several of Beethoven's best-known compositions, including the Fifth Symphony and the *Pathétique* Sonata for piano.

In the first movement, the line in the first violin starts low and is swept along by repeated eighth notes in the cello. Reaching higher with each phrase, it comes to rest, *ff*, thirteen measures later and more than two octaves above the opening note. Thus, casting aside the classic opening of an antecedent phrase followed by a consequent, Beethoven continues with insistent, heavy chords hammering on the minor tonic and its dominant. Such a beginning with its highly dramatic tone poses a double-edged challenge: to maintain the intensity—without becoming too insistent—and maintaining the diversity—without becoming too fragmented. Beethoven straddles these ideas, composes an array of thematic ideas that follow after one another, and forges a highly dramatic course with a number of different characters. Taken together these ideas work both in opposition and in consort with each other, bringing new elements in, one after another, as well as reusing some that have already been introduced. At times, there is great contrast, one idea calling for a brusque response or unexpected interruption: at other times, there is a small connection—a repeated note or a falling line in the accompaniment, an offbeat accent or thick abrupt chords. What remains most intriguing about this movement is the interrelationship between the multiple ideas that creates unity in spite of the diversity.

Rather than composing a slow movement, Beethoven follows the first one with a gentle scherzo-like fugato, cast, surprisingly enough, in sonata form. Seemingly in all innocence, he fashions a movement that progresses from an opening in which each instrument enters one measure earlier than the previous one. The thematic material is not particularly distinguished, but it is interesting to listen as the composer works out his ideas, especially in the recapitulation where we find an amusing elaboration of the initial simple tune. The minuet with its chromatic lines and *sf* accents reminds listeners of the minuet in Mozart's G Minor Symphony, but the trio has no such precedent for its rather odd disposition of the lower three parts in imitative exchange while the first violin rattles away in triplets throughout. At its conclusion Beethoven contravenes usual procedure first by omitting the repeat of the second section of the trio, and then by prescribing that the return of the minuet is to be "played at a faster tempo," which compresses the otherwise gracious minuet into preparation for the energetic rondo finale.

The last movement, with its openly frantic gaiety, features the same sort of diversity of ideas as found in the first movement—only here the elements function as a structural factor, dividing and delineating sections one from another. Many of the same types of detail heard already in the earlier movements sustain the impulsive energy: reiterated chords, offbeat accents, imitative interplay, smooth modulations to third-related keys. There is even a section in which a propulsive first violin chatters away over give-and-take in the lower three instruments. At the end, we have a flashing finish, *Prestissimo*, for the last repeat of the main idea.

Partly because there are no extant sketches for this quartet, it has been argued that it both draws extensively on very early material, and that, together with two of the other quartets from Op. 18, it shows Beethoven beginning to experiment and challenge stylistic norms. He is about to depart from the confines of the classical style. In any event, it seems most likely to be a mix of the two: the young composer, fresh from strenuous contrapuntal study and close exposure to works by Haydn and Mozart, works out his early ideas. Of the six from Op. 18, this quartet has some unique qualities that speak to a particular moment in Beethoven's compositional development.

String Quartet in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro

Molto Adagio

Allegretto. Maggiore

Finale. Presto

The three “Razumovsky” quartets composed in 1806 belong to the extraordinary period in Beethoven's development when his compositions take on greater character and become more personal. The apparent catalyst for the change was his realization that his deafness would consign him to an existence isolated from other living persons. In the Heiligenstadt Testament, he declares that only one thing held him back from ending his life, Art—and the impossibility of not accomplishing all that he felt capable of. The works that follow this moment of despair, the *Eroica*, the *Walstein* and *Appassionata* sonatas for piano, and the “Razumovsky” quartets, have a new unmistakable complexity and abundance; they are no longer genre pieces where the principal reference is to earlier works of the same sort. Wagner writes in his *Art Work of the Future* that Beethoven's achievement was to create a “harmonic melody” one that is “divorced from speech in distinction to the rhythmic melody of dance, and capable—though merely bourne by instruments—of the most limitless expression together with the most unfettered treatment.” He continues: “In long connected tracts of sound, as in larger, smaller or even smaller fragments, it [the harmonic melody] turned beneath the Master's hand to vowels, syllables and words and phrases of a speech in which a message hitherto unheard, and never spoken, yet could promulgate itself.” Wagner was also at pains to insist that though we can “marvel at the wholly new world found in these works—when comparing them to earlier ones we find that outwardly they are quite identical form,” as in the present case: a four movement work with a fast-moving sonata form, a slow-sustained sonata rondo, a bright scherzo-trio, and a furious rondo finale.

Be prepared: the opening plays out in abrupt confrontations of sound and silence. First, two chords, *forte*, flash outward followed directly by a whole measure of silence. Then, *pianissimo*, moving down an octave, an arpeggio traces the same upward line and finishes with a downward flourish. Another measure of silence. Abruptly, and just a half-step higher (the Neapolitan relationship), an immediate repetition, *pianissimo*, of the same arpeggio and flourish, followed by—a measure of silence. And now those three notes of the arpeggio, first one set, then more—quickly following—pile upwards, until they reach almost as high as the chords at the beginning, when they dissolve into running, fluid 16ths and come to an abrupt stop, *forte*, on two chords. Once again, the outer pitches flash out in both directions and then—a measure of silence. This is no ordinary antecedent, but that is just what it is. Still in the key of E Minor, Beethoven returns to the register of the opening chords for the consequent; and

retracing that upward reach in the first violin—but this time in a lyrical state—the phrase now supported by flowing 16ths, dissolves into a transition which will take us to the relative key of G Major.

Dramatic and dynamic, the transition brings into play many features that will assume important roles in the rest of the movement; great extensions upwards and downwards, arpeggios and scales rising to peaks precipitating abrupt falls, a rhythmical scrub-brush texture pushing ahead with forward motion, sudden accents marking important new harmonic twists, until arrival (on a low D, *sf*, in the cello) of a second theme that is apparently calmer, but, in fact, equally restless. It continues relentlessly to move, rising and falling, in flowing scales or arpeggiating 16ths. At this point the beginning of the movement until now manages to feel transitory and always in forward motion, when—out of nowhere—suddenly a long series of syncopated chords intrude, halting all forward motion for an extended passage of 7 measures. Beginning pianissimo, these chords are played crescendo and culminate, *forte*, in a boisterous closing theme with arpeggios that plunge precipitously, a return to the downward flourish of the opening measures. So much for the exposition.

The nervous, fragmented character of the material introduced in the exposition resists a comprehensive general description. All the small details—the single measures with two chords and single measures of silence; the restless, transitory 16ths; abrupt dynamics; expanding registers and passage of consolidating syncopations—become a matrix from which Beethoven makes an exposition that, because of the short nervous character of much of the material, seems more like a transition. However, the wonder of it is that all these elements return—some greatly disguised or altered, some not—in the subsequent movements. The outline of the opening line in the first violin, an “e” that rises to the fifth degree, “b,” and falls back to “e,” is the same one traversed in the opening of the second movement, albeit many times slower. Syncopations abound in the third movement, the Neapolitan relationship reappears in all the movements, arpeggios and all the rest. Eventually, the imitative and fugal elements in the 3rd and 4th movements transfer the direction of force toward the end of the work.

With the second movement, a very slow, sustained hymn in E Major, the parallel key to the first movement, Beethoven captures the inspiration that “occurred to him,” according to his pupil Carl Czerny, “when contemplating the starry sky and thinking of the music of the spheres.” Every element in the sustained movement conspires to communicate his vision of the universe and its meaning for humankind, as he noted in his diary, “the moral law within us and the starry sky above us—Kant.” First, he sustains the subdued quality from the end of the first movement. Hardly ruffling the surface, taking up the last pitch in the first movement, the violin continues in essentially the same key on E (now Major), with the admonition to the players: *Si tratta questo pezzo con molto di sentimento* - “this piece must be played with much feeling.” An uninterrupted stream of melody traces the shifting forms of the sonata movement without ever disturbing the calm and contemplative quality of the opening. After one last broad, fully harmonized statement of the chorale, the peaceful end comes as a triplet figure winds its way down through the instruments, and loses itself in the cello.

The quick, dancing Allegretto that follows—now back in E Minor—is witty and vivacious with its nearly empty first beat and “hop” on the second extended beat in the first violin. It is full of clever surprises and restless humor, a good preparation for the seemingly “possessed” Maggiore that follows in which in a near panic pursuit of the “thème russe” (a condition of the commission), Beethoven sends one statement after another coursing through the ensemble: viola, 2nd violin, cello, 1st violin. A running triplet counterpoint barely seems to keep up as the texture thickens or thins with each entry of the theme, and culminates in a high-energy canon that aggressively surges upwards before gradually melting into the gentler mood that effects the return to the Allegretto. Beethoven instructs the performers to play—after this repeat—both the Maggiore and the Allegretto once more before moving on to the last movement.

Each of the first three movements in this quartet poses challenges in following Beethoven's thought and the Finale does even more so, as the task of solving the puzzle here is beyond simple rationalization. The opening theme, heard time and again throughout this extended sonata that is also a rondo, seems to be *not* in the key of E Minor, but in C Major—at least for the first 7 measures before the brief two-measure cadence in minor, which immediately turns back to—C Major! And so it continues throughout a very insistent and complex movement. Of course, this is the best means Beethoven has to avoid the monotony of having all the movements in the same key; it might have been quite impossible to compose a movement strong enough to avoid the feeling that all movements in the same key was too much of a good thing. And indeed, this is Beethoven in the highest of good spirits: confounding listeners and players first with this “out of key” tune, and then shortly after the second episode insisting on a devilishly difficult tossup of a three-note motive taken from the theme that runs riot through the ensemble. This immediately conjures up a composer who loves a good contest. An unusually gentle melody for the principal contrasting segments, a serious fugal episode in the development, and a weighty coda in which the theme is finally forced to make an appearance in the tonic E Minor, all assure that this rousing finale can be compared to Beethoven's best finales of the period.

Program Notes by Dr. Jean Christensen.

*The pre-concert presentations will be given by Jean Christensen beginning at 2 PM in room 135.
All are welcome to attend.*