

BEETHOVEN

COMPLETE STRING QUARTETS

audite

VOL. III



SUPER
AUDIO CD



QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4 24:05**

- I. Allegro ma non tanto* 8:39
- II. Andante scherzoso quasi Allegretto* 7:01
- III. Menuetto. Allegretto – Trio* 3:37
- IV. Allegro – Prestissimo* 4:48

‘Great Fugue’ in B flat major, Op. 133 15:13

Overtura. Allegro – Meno mosso e moderato –
Allegro – Fuga – Meno mosso e moderato –
Allegro molto e con brio – Meno mosso e
moderato – Allegro molto e con brio

String Quartet in F major, Op. 59, No. 1 39:13

- I. Allegro* 10:05
- II. Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando* 8:45
- III. Adagio molto e mesto* 12:16
- IV. Thème russe. Allegro* 8:07

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

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

audite



A quartet in C minor

During his first years in Vienna, Beethoven noticeably held back from composing string quartets and instead, apparently on account of studying this craft, resorted to copying quartets by Haydn and Mozart. Of course he knew exactly that the much-quoted Bonn farewell by Count Waldstein – “Sustained diligence will bring you Mozart’s spirit from Haydn’s hands” – did not so much refer to the piano sonatas and piano trios with which Beethoven made his musical début in Vienna as to symphonies and string quartets (and perhaps opera, for which Haydn was known then, more than nowadays). The prestige of the string quartet genre had reached a height which is perhaps best described by Goethe’s famous comparison to four people engaged in a “sensible” conversation – with which he certainly did not refer to a harmless chat, but to a trenchant dispute between equal partners.

However, this equality of the voices – which, in a homogenous structure comprising four strings without piano or added wind instruments, assumed a certain abstract, model-like quality – necessitated much experience which Beethoven initially

acquired in other genres. Only once Count Lobkowitz, one of Beethoven’s aristocratic patrons, commissioned six string quartets each from Haydn and Beethoven around the end of 1798 for the fee of 400 guilders, was there no turning back. Whilst the aged Haydn did not manage to fulfil his duty entirely, Beethoven feverishly worked, alongside large-scale works such as his First Symphony, the final version of his Piano Concerto in C and his Septet Op. 20, on the six string quartets. In October 1800 he was able to confirm receipt of the final fee from Lobkowitz; following the customary retention period of one year, required by commissioners of the time for performances of their own, the quartets were printed in Vienna as his Op. 18 in the notorious first edition, teeming with errors, by the publisher Tranquillo Mollo.

Although Beethoven revolutionised the string quartet style of the time with his Op. 18, decidedly moving on from the technical abilities of amateurs, he nonetheless drew upon his teachers and models. The agitated C minor opening of the fourth Quartet from Op. 18 does not hide the example from Haydn, to which Beethoven adds several imperious chords. The inner movements are unusual and experimental,

not allowing any *adagio* bliss to develop. An “Andante scherzoso” (the notion of which is in itself paradoxical) feigns an old-fashioned minuet by way of a fugal opening which, however, during the course of the movement turns out to be a sonata form movement of an ironic, classicist basic hue (Gustav Mahler satirised this *Biedermeier* sense of humour in the scherzo of his Symphony No. 6). The “Menuetto”, on the other hand, appears more agitated than expected and, with numerous accents and syncopations, Beethoven pushes it against the grain. The rare instruction “la seconda volta si prende il tempo più allegro” (the second time the tempo is to be taken faster) shows that he also countered the obstinate repeat of the minuet after an aromatic trio. The final “Allegro”, a fiercely dance-like rondo with three interludes and a quirky *prestissimo* ending, is once again reminiscent, in its rapidly circling theme, of similar movements by Haydn and Mozart.

Counterpoint ecstasy

A fugue as a finale to a string quartet was no alien concept to a composer of the Viennese Classical era. Both Haydn and Mozart deemed the strict contrapuntal

form to be a “perfect” form of four-part writing; Beethoven closes the third of the “Razumovsky” Quartets with a fugue, to great effect. However, the final movement that Beethoven composed in the autumn of 1825 for his Quartet in B flat major, Op. 130, the “Great Fugue”, is singular in its radical and uncompromising design. On 21 March of the following year, this work in six movements was premièred by the Schuppanzigh Quartet, who valiantly took on the enormous complexities of the finale. The reviewer of the significant *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, however, was left confounded by the fugue: “The reviewer dares not interpret the meaning of the fugal finale: to him it seemed unfathomable, like Chinese.”

Perhaps it was the bewilderment of the audience, or rather the technical complexities, which led Beethoven – on the instigation of his Viennese publisher, Artaria – reluctantly to compose a new finale and to publish the fugue separately as Op. 133 (Beethoven also published his own arrangement for piano duet as Op. 134 during the same year, 1827). Despite its well-balanced attachment to the Quartet Op. 130, the “Great Fugue” probably stands apart from all usual chamber music as an individual

piece. Its sound, despite occasional lyrical excursions, is unusually rugged and sharpened by harsh accents, gruff rhythms and radical harmonies, anticipating not so much Brahms as Schoenberg.

Formally, Beethoven attempts to compress baroque fugal technique and the classical-romantic sonata form into one enormous movement. A brief “Overture” initially presents the intensely chromatic fugal theme in its original form, and then in short fragments whose rhythmic shapes become significant during the course of the movement. This is followed by the first main section which combines the subject with a dotted counter-subject. A true *tour de force* breaks forth, *fortissimo*, which comes to a sudden standstill after 130 bars, clearing the way for a tender, flowing variant of the theme (“Meno mosso e moderato”). In terms of sonata form, this could be described as a slow movement which, after only a few minutes, is swept away by a delicate “Allegro molto e con brio”. The airiness of this section gives way to another fugal development, speckled with triplets and trills – a variation of a *scherzo*, perhaps, leading into the much-transformed repeat of the opening section. A coda with a high-volume repeat

of the theme in unison, softly murmuring chords and an effective ending closes this work, which is completely unique within the string quartet repertoire.

Russian pastoral

F major! For Beethoven the key of bright moods, often inspired by the arcadian calm of country life, even if this, during the time of the Napoleonic wars with its constant troop movements, was already a deceptive idyll. Beethoven chose this key for the first of his three Quartets for the music connoisseur Count Razumovsky which even his contemporaries considered to be “deeply thought out and splendidly fashioned, but not generally comprehensible”. And indeed, where had a composer’s language ever developed so radically as in the seven years that separate Beethoven’s set of Quartets Op. 18 of 1800 and the first “Razumovsky” Quartet? Whilst the quartets of the 28-year-old were an ambitious attempt to take his place within “Viennese Classicism”, Beethoven introduced an entirely new concept of chamber music with his Quartets Op. 59 of 1806/07, when Haydn was still alive: music for highly specialised professional musicians whose lan-

guage, in contrast to the generally more approachable symphonies and concertos, had become increasingly complex and cryptic. The noble salon had become a sound laboratory; occasional music for connoisseurs and enthusiasts had become confessional scores of an individual.

The inspiration to the three Quartets Op. 59 was twofold: Count Andrey Kirillovich Razumovsky provided the financial requirements as well as the venue – as Russian envoy at the imperial court in Vienna he acted as host and patron to music and musicians at his palatial house, until it and many invaluable works of art were destroyed during a fire on New Year's Eve, 1814. The second stimulus for the quartets came from the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh who, together with his string quartet, set new standards in Vienna for instrumental virtuosity and interpretation. Until 1816 the Schuppanzigh Quartet were engaged by Razumovsky. And Beethoven, who had been on friendly terms with the quartet's leader for a long time, produced a double homage, as it were, to his patron, as well as the virtuoso, with his opus 59.

Already the first work in the pastoral key of F major, begun in May 1806, revealed that Viennese audiences were about to be con-

fronted with revolutionary music. With a duration of nearly forty minutes, the quartet exceeds even symphonic dimensions (which Beethoven had, of course, already stretched considerably with his own "Eroica"); technically, the "Razumovsky" Quartets, with their complex part-writing, awkward figures and extreme registers, are a challenge for any quartet to the present day. But formally the Beethoven of op. 18 had also taken an enormous step. For the tender, "dolce" cello melody at the opening of the first quartet does not develop into a clear structure with flowing transitions, but instead into a kaleidoscope of themes, motifs and moods that only become accessible to the listener after several performances. The sharp distinction between a prominent principal theme and a lyrical secondary theme is relinquished. Beethoven develops permanently, accelerating the pulse in passages such as the double fugue in the middle of the movement, or lifts them through strangely floating chords. The rough gesture of a *sforzato* accent or wild *crescendi* stands alongside an almost Schubertian sense of pensiveness, a banal phrase alongside highly complex textures. Beethoven's idiosyncratic simultaneity of asynchrony

that distinguishes his late works is hinted at even here.

Those who expect, after this wondrous opening, a hands-on *scherzo* in the style of his Seventh Symphony, will find themselves disappointed once again. Beethoven, whose “Razumovsky” Quartets had been dubbed (by contemporaries) “quartet symphonies” thanks to their orchestral sonorities, maintains a chamber music tone and does not expose a melody in the “Allegretto” but a rhythm in the cello, stipulating the basic pulse. What follows fulfils the instruction “sempre scherzando” (always with a sense of humour). For this movement, in essence, is an essay on musical humour; on listeners’ expectations and their disappointment; on musical irony; on dismembering, reinterpreting and reformulating thoughts; on the overall meaning of a sonic vocabulary. The music scholar Walter Salmen pointed out the baroque mourning motifs in the “Adagio”, suggested by the addition of the word “mesto” (melancholy). The distant biographical motivation for this movement was, as can be gleaned from sketches, Beethoven’s brother’s wedding and his emotional alienation from Beethoven, who remained unmarried. Indeed, Schuppanzigh’s violin may, for once, break

away from the other players and embody the individual who at the end of the movement floats above certain resting chords.

However, the sorrowful mood is not permanent and makes way for the worldly tone of a “Russian theme” which – as a reverence towards the commissioner Razumovsky – provides the basis for the finale. Beethoven had found it in Ivan Prác’s collection “Sobranije narodnych russkich pesen” (Collection of Russian songs), although he changes the minor hue of the song “Oh! My destiny”, which talks about the hardships of a soldier’s life, into a brighter F major. At the same time, Beethoven does not simply trail the fashion of Eastern exoticism. His “Thème russe” is not the object of variations or a mood creator, but provides the basic material of a full-scale sonata movement where popularity and craftsmanship, foreign and own elements are united in a sophisticated and genial manner.

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, Turku Festival in Finland and Perth



Festival in Australia. 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 will culminate in performances of the complete Beethoven String Quartets. In 2012 the Quartetto di Cremona also became Ensemble in Residence at the renowned Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome.

The quartet collaborates with artists such as Ivo Pogorelich, Pieter Wispelwey, Angela Hewitt, Bruno Giuranna, Alessandro Carbonare, Andrea Lucchesini, Pietro de Maria, Lilya Zilberstein and Cédric Tiberghien. Its repertoire ranges from the early works of Haydn to contemporary music; here their particular interest lies in works by Fabio Vacchi, Helmut Lachenmann and Silvia Colasanti.

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.



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We want to express our sincere thanks to Giancarlo and Etta Rusconi for supporting this project.
Quartetto di Cremona

recording: June 3 - 5, 2013
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.

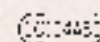
instruments: violin I: Guarneri del Gesù
violin II: Giovanni Battista Guadagnini, 1752 (*Great Fugue*)
Salvatore Scalia, 2012 (Op. 18 No. 4 and Op. 59 No. 1)
viola: Pietro Gargini, 2012 (*Great Fugue*)
Alberto Giordano, 1995 (Op. 18 No. 4 and Op. 59 No. 1)
violoncello: Marino Capicchioni, 1974

equipment: Sennheiser MKH 20, MKH 40, Microtech Gefell M 930,
Neumann KM 130, KM 140, Brüel & Kjær 4006
RME Micstasy, AD18QS
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