The answer to the mystery of the final chord of the second movement lies in the link to the third movement (Allegro assai vivace ma serioso). This mystery chord serves to facilitate the return to the original key of F minor and its agitated universe. From the opening measure of this movement, which is actually a scherzo, a dotted rhythmic figure projects an immense drive, propelling the listener into a constant ride at full speed up to the trio section. At this juncture, a charming melody offers a serene and most welcome reprieve.

The fourth movement (Larghetto; allegretto agitato) commences with a slow introduction of solid harmonic movement, suggesting that the work might end without further unsettling changes of key. Almost without warning, however, the highly inflammatory final theme enters and assumes the dominant role. With an unrelenting rhythm and a change of key to F major, the theme carries the sonata away from the serioso character. The work ends in a coda that is extraordinary even for Beethoven, with a compelling cadenza for solo piano that fills the role of the prelude. It is resolute, richly chromatic, and ambiguous in its tonality. The fugue also has an uncertain tonal base, in addition to a highly chromatic subject. Its luminous melody utilizes materials from the Präludium. The Walzer is Viennese in conception, with harmonic dissemination resembling that of the Präludium, but it retains its inherent romantic sentiments. The Groteske is a scherzo and trio that alternates between the time signatures 4/8 and 3/8 and features a piano cadenza similar to that in the opening movement. The fourth piece, Lied, is a heartrending song entitled Was du mir bist? from Korngold’s Songs, Op. 22. The final Rondo; Variationen opens with an engaging principal theme, announced by the cello, that brims with emotional intensity and vigor. After a series of ingenious and exciting variations on the theme, a brilliant and fiery coda brings the suite to a successful close.

Program notes by Elmer Booze

The Fifty-ninth Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art

2568th Concert

BORROMEO STRING QUARTET

NICHOLAS KITCHEN, violin WILLIAM FEDKENHEUER, violin MAI MOTORUCHI, viola YEESUN KIM, cello

with GARY GRAFFMANN, piano

Sunday Evening, 14 January 2001
Seven O’clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free
PROGRAM

Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998)

Quintet for Piano and Strings (1972–1976)

Moderato

Tempo di valse

Andante

Lento

Moderato pastorale

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Quartet No. 11 in F Minor ("Sériso") Op. 95 (1810)

Allegro con brio

Allegretto ma non troppo

Allegro assai vivace ma serioso

Larghetto; allegretto agitato

INTERMISSION

Johann Sebastian Bach (1650–1750)

Chaconne in D Minor

from Partita No. 2, BWV 1004, for Solo Violin arranged by Johannes Brahms for piano left hand

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897–1957)

Suite for Piano Left Hand and Strings (1923)

Präludium und Fuge

Walzer

Grotesk

Lied

Rondo; Variationen

Taking its name from a region in northern Italy where it played its first concerts together, the Borromeo String Quartet was founded in 1989 by four young musicians from the Curtis Institute of Music. In just eleven years, the quartet has won recognition as one of the most exceptional ensembles of its generation. Winner of the 1991 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, the quartet played its New York debut on the Young Concert Artists Series at the 92nd Street Y and its Washington, DC, debut at the Kennedy Center. In 1992 the quartet received an invitation to join the faculty of the New England Conservatory, where it now serves as quartet-in-residence. Exhibiting a distinctive style and personality, the Borromeo String Quartet has been honored with two prestigious awards: second prize at the International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France (1990), and the Cleveland Quartet Award (1998).

Born in New York of Russian parents, Gary Graffman began playing the piano at age three. At age seven, he was accepted by the Curtis Institute of music for study with the renowned Isabelle Vengerova. After graduating from that school, he worked intensively for several years with Vladimir Horowitz and at the Marlboro Music Festival with Rudolf Serkin. In 1979 Graffman's performing career was curtailed by an injury to his right hand. The reduction in his concert activity provided him with a remarkable opportunity to expand his horizons beyond the stage, most notably as director of the Curtis Institute, his alma mater. Among the many awards he has received are the Handel Medallion of the City of New York and the Governor's Arts Award of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A Steinway artist, Graffman has made a series of highly acclaimed recordings for the Columbia (CBS) and RCA labels.

Gary Graffman and the Borromeo String Quartet appear at the Gallery by Designated by Beethoven as a "serious" work, the Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 95, is the shortest of his string quartets. As stated by Kerman and Tyson in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, it is "unmatched in Beethoven's output for compression, exaggerated articulation, and a corresponding sense of extreme tension." The first movement (Allegro con brio) explodes immediately and most decidedly with a repetition of five notes by the four instruments in unison that becomes emblematic for the entire movement. A brief melodic diversion follows, offsetting the previous aggressive theme. The unabashed principal motive returns with even more striking force in the coda, then gently whimpers away as a closing statement.

The second movement (Allegretto ma non troppo) begins somewhat innocently with a downward and upward six-note scale played by the cello. The scale fans out into a splendid and capacious melody. An intriguing aspect of the movement is its ambiguity of key. Although the key signature indicates D major, this is never firmly established, and a surprise ending adds to the confusion. The movement ends quietly, in a manner that seems to favor D major, but there is a sudden insertion of an upward leap to a diminished seventh, transforming the final chord from major to diminished. Why the suspense? Was there more to be said?

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