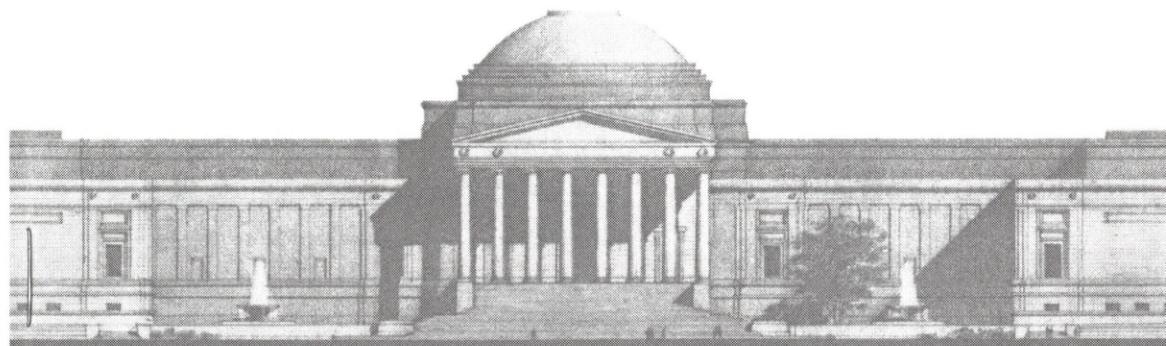


The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

Music Department  
National Gallery of Art  
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC

[www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov)



The Sixty-ninth Season of  
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin  
**Concerts**

National Gallery of Art  
2,816th Concert

**American String Quartet**  
Peter Winograd, violin  
Laurie Carney, violin  
Daniel Avshalomov, viola  
Wolfram Koessel, cello

January 2, 2011  
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm  
West Building, West Garden Court

*Admission free*

## Program

Music by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

*Quartet in A Major*, op. 18, no. 5 (1800)

Allegro

Menuetto

Andante cantabile

Allegro

*Quartet in E Minor*, op. 59, no. 2 (1806)

Allegro

Adagio molto

Allegretto

Finale: Presto

## INTERMISSION

*Quartet in C-sharp Minor*, op. 131 (1825)

Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo

Allegro molto vivace

Allegro moderato

Andante, ma non troppo, e molto cantabile

Presto

Adagio quasi un poco andante

Allegro

## The Musicians

Internationally recognized as one of the world's finest quartets, the American String Quartet has spent decades honing its luxurious sound. Celebrating its thirty-fifth anniversary in the 2010–2011 season, the ensemble has presented the complete quartets of Beethoven, Bartók, Mozart, Schoenberg, and Schubert. Resident quartet at the Aspen Music Festival since 1974 and at the Manhattan School of Music in New York since 1984, the American String Quartet has also served as resident quartet at the Taos School of Music, the Peabody Conservatory, and the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The ensemble's diverse activities have also included numerous international radio and television broadcasts, tours of Asia, and performances with the New York City Ballet and the symphony orchestras of Montreal and Philadelphia. In 2010 the quartet embarked on its fortieth European tour, with appearances in Germany, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland.

The American String Quartet's MusicMasters recording of the complete Mozart string quartets, performed on a matched set of instruments by Stradivarius, is widely considered to have set the standard for the repertoire. A recent recording on the NSS Music label features chamber music by Franz Schubert (1797–1828), Alban Berg (1885–1935), and Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951), and connects the contrasting styles among the composers. The ensemble's other recordings can be heard on the Albany, CRI, Musical Heritage Society, Nonesuch, and RCA labels.

A champion of new music, the quartet has given numerous world premiere performances, including Richard Danielpour's *Quartet no. 4*, Curt Cacioppo's *a distant voice calling*, and Tobias Picker's *String Quartet no. 2*. In May the ensemble will premiere Glen Cortese's *Four Dances for String Quartet and String Orchestra*, a work commissioned by the Oregon Mozart Players. The American String Quartet appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Melvin Kaplan, Inc., of Burlington, Vermont.

## Program Notes

This evening's performance inaugurates a series of six concerts at the National Gallery of Art in which six different string quartets will play all of the works that Beethoven wrote for the medium. Scheduled to occur on the first Sundays of the first three and the last three months of the year, the series is intended to give Washington-area concertgoers an opportunity to hear this great body of work and compare the interpretations provided by quartets from the Czech Republic, Germany, and the United States, representing several different stylistic traditions. The Ariel String quartet will continue the series on February 6, and the Leipzig String Quartet will round out the first half of the series on March 6. Next fall, the series will resume with the National Gallery of Art String Quartet on October 2 and the Talich String Quartet on November 6. The Pacifica String Quartet concludes the series on December 4, 2011.

Written in the same key, Beethoven's *String Quartet in A Major*, op. 18, no. 5, and Mozart's *String Quartet*, K. 474 contain many similarities. As Carl Czerny wrote in 1852, "Beethoven once saw at my house the score of six quartets by Mozart dedicated to Haydn. He opened the fifth in A and said: 'That's what I call a work! In it Mozart was telling the world: Look what I could create if the time were right!'" Beethoven evidently recopied the last two movements from Czerny's copy of the Mozart quartet in order to study the late composer's compositional technique in depth.

The first movement of Beethoven's quartet is fairly straightforward, utilizing the standard three-part sonata-allegro form. The exposition proceeds directly, without the customary bridge, from a statement of the first subject to the minor-key unison of the second subject. The development is based on subsidiary and transitional motifs from the exposition, and the recapitulation almost literally repeats the exposition. The short coda is a fragmented A-major scale, with the first violin out of synchronization with the other instruments. As did Mozart, Beethoven places the *Menuetto* next, rather than the more usual slow movement. The gently rocking waltz-like theme sets the mood for this sweet, sedate movement. The use of third beat accents in the more thickly textured trio gives the impression of a clumsily played accordion.

Beethoven provides the word "Pastoral" as a clue for interpretation of the third movement, a theme and variations. The rather plain melody consists of a descending and ascending scale, with only minor deviations. But the five variations leave behind the eighteenth-century variation concept, which tended to keep the theme's harmonic outline while varying the details of figuration, rhythm, and tonality. Instead, Beethoven reveals different aspects of the theme's expressive concept. In the lengthy coda, the composer effectively introduces the theme in its original form, pitting it against a double-time scale figure that essentially moves in contrary motion. The nervous, agitated first theme of the final movement is in sharp contrast to the organ-like sonority of the second theme, which sounds much slower but is actually in the same tempo. The quick four-note motto that opens the movement pervades the development section, and after a full stop, the recapitulation brings back the previously-heard material. The coda, with the four-note phrase still dominant, summarizes the movement.

The *String Quartet in E Minor*, op. 59, no. 2, is one of three dedicated to Beethoven's patron Andrey Kirilovich Rasumovsky (1752–1836), who was the Russian ambassador to the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The quartet opens dramatically with two sharp, imperious chords, followed by a tense measure of silence. The subsequent tender, melodic phrase also ends abruptly. The melody, repeated one note higher, is again cut off. After this mysterious and foreboding start, the work unfolds in energetic phrases, each one little more than a fragment, yet all seamlessly interwoven into an extended musical line that continually pulls the listener forward. The second movement, *Adagio molto*, is sublimely eloquent, exhibiting a majestic calm that rises serenely above human concerns. The main theme's first four notes are derived from a transposition of the musical spelling of Bach's name. (In German, B, A, C, and H are the notes B-flat, A, C, and B.) At one point in the development section, the cello plays those exact notes. The individual sections of the sonata form are molded so unobtrusively that they flow one into another to create the impression of one extended, glorious song.

The *Allegretto* starts quietly, as though not to disturb the lofty sentiment of the *Adagio molto*. Despite its surface grace, this movement is based on a quirky and highly eccentric rhythmic pattern. The melody of the middle

section is a *theme russe*, the patriotic hymn “Slava,” taken from a collection of folk songs by the Russian composer Ivan Pratsch (1750–1819). It is not known whether Beethoven did this on his own initiative to honor Count Rasumovsky or whether the count requested it. Beethoven repeats the theme a number of times, with various combinations of instruments and an assortment of countermelodies. The brilliant *Finale: Presto* sets off at once on a high-speed, high-spirited rhythmic gallop. The structure combines elements of rondo and sonata form, with the first violin playing the lyrical second theme while the other instruments echo the turns of melody. After bringing back the various themes in a spirit of lively playfulness in the development, the composer picks up the tempo for a spectacular dash to the final chords.

Beethoven wrote to a friend, the violinist and conductor Karl Holz (1798–1858), that the favorite among his quartets was the *C-sharp Minor Quartet*, op. 131. Holz and many subsequent composers, musicians, and listeners have considered it the greatest string quartet ever written. Lasting close to forty minutes, the work is divided into seven sections that are played without pause. With characteristic flippancy, Beethoven presented the manuscript of op. 131 to the publisher with a note scribbled on the cover page: “Put together from pilferings of this and that.” This remark caused the publisher great concern—he thought it meant the composer was reusing things he had written earlier—and the composer had to assure him that his remark was only a joke. Scholars believe that the first hearing was at a private concert in Vienna in December 1826, but the initial public performance did not take place until 1835, long after Beethoven’s death.

The very slow introductory *Adagio* is a fugue followed by four episodes and a coda, all based on the sober melody originally stated by the first violin. More than sorrowful or pitying, the music is contemplative and serene, surmounting personal despair and sadness. The section ends with a quiet rising C-sharp octave leap, which finds an echo in the ascending D octave leap that opens the second section. The fast second movement sails forth, cheerful and open-faced, with none of the profundity or expressivity of the first movement. Performers traditionally use the two soft isolated chords at the end of the movement to set the tempo for the two loud answering chords that start the *Allegro moderato*.

Only eleven measures long, the short third movement that follows is in effect a recitative, a rhythmically free introduction to the *Andante* that follows without pause. This fourth movement is an expansive theme and variations that provides the pivotal central focus of the entire quartet. The syncopated theme is shared by the two violins. Echoing what occurred in two of the previous movements, the two notes heard at the very end determine the speed of the next movement.

The *Presto* corresponds to the classical scherzo movement, playful and humorous in spirit and tripartite in form. After the abrupt four-note growl by the cello that opens the movement, the first violin picks up the dancelike tune. Beethoven directs that the final return of the opening tune be played *ponticello* (bowed near the bridge), producing a glassy, whistling sound. The whirlwind motion continues until two sets of chords end the movement.

The introspective *Adagio quasi un poco andante*, only twenty-eight measures long, provides a transition between the lightness of the preceding *Presto* and the rhythmic excitement of the finale, which is also marked *presto*. In summarizing this movement, Richard Wagner wrote:

This is the fury of the world’s dance—fierce pleasure,  
agony, ecstasy of love,  
joy, anger, passion, and suffering; lightening flashes  
and thunder rolls;  
and above the tumult the indomitable fiddler whirls us  
on to the abyss.  
Amid the clamor he smiles, for to him it is nothing but  
a mocking fantasy;  
at the end, the darkness beckons him away, and his task is done.

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