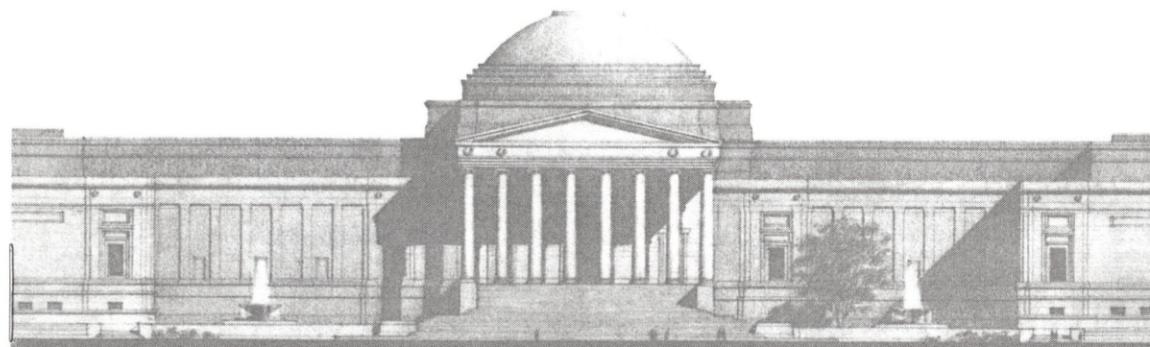


For the convenience of concertgoers the
Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

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
www.nga.gov



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

National Gallery of Art
2,822nd Concert

Ariel String Quartet
Gershon Gerchikov, *violin*
Alexandra Kazovsky, *violin*
Sergey Tarashchansky, *viola*
Amit Even-Tov, *cello*

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

Admission free

Program

Music by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

String Quartet in D Major, op. 18, no. 3 (1798–1799)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro

Presto

String Quartet in F Major, op. 59, no. 1 (1806)

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto

Thème Russe: Allegro

INTERMISSION

String Quartet in A Minor, op. 132 (1825)

Assai sostenuto; allegro

Allegro ma non tanto

Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit,
in der lydischen Tonart

Molto adagio

Neue Kraft fühlend: Andante

Alla marcia: Assai vivace

Allegro appassionato

The Musicians

Founded in Israel, the Ariel String Quartet relocated to Boston in 2004 to study at the New England Conservatory's prestigious Professional String Quartet Training Program, and was honored by the program with quartet-in-residence status. Last year, on the occasion of its graduation from the program, the ensemble performed Franz Schubert's *Cello Quintet* with its mentor, cellist Paul Katz. Though only in their twenties, the members of the quartet have played together for ten years, during which time they have earned first prize at the international competition "Franz Schubert and the Music Of Modernity" in Graz, Austria (2003); grand prize at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition (2006); and two prizes—the Székely Prize for their performance of Bartók and the overall third prize—at the 2007 Banff International String Quartet Competition. The *American Record Guide* described the Ariel Quartet as "a consummate ensemble, gifted with utter musicality and remarkable interpretive power." Quoting a recent tribute delivered by Itzhak Perlman, "To say that they are unusual is an understatement. They are extraordinary."

The Ariel Quartet has performed extensively in Israel, Europe, and North America, including Jordan Hall in Boston, the Kaisersaal in Frankfurt, and the Louvre Museum in Paris, as well as at the Corcoran Gallery of Art and the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. Later this season, the ensemble will serve as the string quartet accompaniment to the competitors at the Thirteenth Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition in Tel Aviv.

In addition to performing the traditional quartet repertoire, the Ariel String Quartet collaborates with other musicians and composers, including pianists Alexander Gavrylyuk, Yaron Kohlberg, and Roman Rabinovich, composers Matti Kovler, Matan Porat, and Menachem Wiesenberg, clarinetist Moran Katz, and violist Roger Tapping, as well as the Jerusalem String Quartet and the Zukerman Chamber Players. Currently the quartet-in-residence at the Yellow Barn Music Festival, the Ariel String Quartet appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Melvin Kaplan, Inc., of Burlington, Vermont.

Program Notes

This evening's performance is the second in 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 important 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 American String quartet inaugurated the series on January 2, and the Leipzig String Quartet will complete 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.

Although a Beethoven notebook dated 1798 is filled with fifty-eight pages of sketches for the *D Major Quartet*, op. 18, no. 3, scholars conjecture that a missing notebook contained even more preliminary studies for this composition, which is believed to be his first mature string quartet. A quiet and pensive work, it is clearly indebted to the classical masters for its concept and formal organization. The first violin floats the opening subject, with its striking interval of a minor seventh, over the soft sustained chords of the other instruments. The second subject, also stated by the first violin, is slightly more agitated than the first—the staccato bass line adding to the feeling of unease and disquiet.

The warm, simple theme of the *Andante cantabile* is presented, uncharacteristically, by the second violin. Poetically conceived and richly textured, the movement is in neither rondo nor sonata form, but falls somewhere in between. Its serious nature, great length, and careful realization seem to suggest that Beethoven attached a central importance to this movement.

In keeping with the generally contemplative mood of the quartet, the third movement has neither the rhythmic verve of a minuet nor the sparkling vivacity of a scherzo, the two genres from which classical composers typically drew their third movements. Instead, Beethoven supplies what might be called a gentle and graceful intermezzo. Especially attractive is the minor-key trio, a marked contrast to the opening in major and distinguished by flowing passages in the violins over descending scale fragments in the other instruments.

The energetic *Presto* combines in equal measure the unceasing flow of a perpetual motion, the rhythmic drive of a tarantella, and the melodic turns of a Mexican hat dance. The movement's surging motion is liberally seasoned with sharp and abrupt changes in dynamics until the bombast plays itself out, and the movement ends with a whispered farewell.

The *Quartet in F Major*, op. 59, no. 1, is the first of three dedicated to Beethoven's patron Andrey Kirilovich Rasumovsky (1752–1836), who was the Russian ambassador to the Congress of Vienna in 1815. All three quartets are major monuments in the history of chamber music, marked by high expressivity, sweeping formal structure, rich harmonies, and surging rhythms. The monumental *Allegro* that opens the *F Major Quartet* presents a serene and noble first theme, starting low in the cello and soaring up to the first violin's highest register. Several other distinctive melodic phrases round out the first group of themes before the first violin introduces the upward-stretching second subject. The development, which starts like a repeat of the exposition, is vast in size and imaginatively varied, with a brilliant fugal center section. The cello sneaks in to start the recapitulation under a descending scale in the first violin. The process of motivic variation and enrichment continues through the recapitulation and concluding coda.

Musicians in Beethoven's day considered the opening rhythmic drumming on one note in the second movement (*Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando*) strange and oddly amusing. Although the movement is lighter in mood than the *Allegro*, it still is somewhat restless. As in the previous

movement, Beethoven uses many themes, some dancing exuberantly, others more lyrical and songlike. Structured as a scherzo with two trios, this movement grows organically and inevitably from the melodic material.

A phrase penned by Beethoven on the sketches for the third movement (*Adagio molto e mesto*)—"A weeping willow or acacia tree upon my brother's grave"—may be a clue to the intent of this great and profoundly moving piece of music. Some say that the brooding intensity has to do with the composer's distress over his brother Caspar Carl's (1774–1815) recent marriage to Johanna Reiss, six months pregnant, and his belief that Caspar's life had effectively ended. Others hold that the sorrow was evoked by the memory of another brother, born one year before Ludwig, who died in infancy. Written in sonata form, the movement has two cantilena themes, both characterized by wide intervals between the notes. The first is stated at the outset by the first violin; the second is sung by the cello while the violin weaves a filigree accompaniment above the theme. The rest of the movement grows from these two melodies until a series of brilliant runs in the first violin brings the movement to an end.

The *Thème russe* ("Russian theme") of the final movement follows without pause. No one is sure whether Count Rasumovsky asked Beethoven to include a Russian melody in the quartet, or whether the composer did it to honor his patron. Nevertheless, it has been determined that Beethoven derived the melody from a collection of Russian folk songs published by Ivan Pratsch. While the song was originally in minor key and slow in tempo, it appears here in major key and at double the speed. The dancelike rhythm of the first theme is followed by a contrasting legato subsidiary subject, played by the second violin. At the very end, Beethoven slows down the last statement of the *Thème russe* by a factor of four before a brilliant flourish concludes the quartet.

While working on his op. 132 quartet during the winter of 1824–1825, Beethoven fell gravely ill with liver disease, bowel inflammation, and other painful and debilitating abdominal maladies. The condition left him seriously weakened, but he was still able to finish the work by July. Although it

has the highest opus number of the three quartets that he composed at the behest of Russian nobleman and amateur cellist Prince Galitzin, it was actually second in order of composition. Study of his sketchbooks shows that he originally planned the quartet in the traditional four movements, but on recovering from his sickness decided to replace the two middle sections with three movements, including the central *Heiliger Dankgesang*.

The quartet starts with a short slow introductory motif that bears a similarity to the ones heard at the opening of the quartet, op. 131, and the *Grosse Fuge*, op. 133. Some think Beethoven used this motif—a slow, rising half-step followed by a large leap—as a way of unifying these three works; others believe that the motifs resemble each other because they were all composed around the same time, and the inadvertent repetition of certain favorite melodic turns is almost inevitable. Emerging from the introductory measures, a brilliant violin flourish leads to the main theme, played high in its register by the cello. Following some expansion, a new idea is heard, starting with three repeated notes. It quickly passes through the quartet, leading to still another distinctive idea—a flowing melody in the second violin over a nervous, agitated triplet accompaniment.

Wistful and nostalgic in tone, the second movement has two motifs that run throughout the entire opening section. The first is a pair of rising three-note figures; the second is a long note that drops down with a little flurry of faster notes. After many repetitions of the two melodic cells, Beethoven moves on to the middle section, a musette, in which the first violin sustains a bagpipe-like drone under its high-pitched melody. The movement ends with a literal repeat of the opening section.

As a title for the third movement, Beethoven inscribed the words *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart* (Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Divinity by a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode). An expression of his gratitude for the return of good health, the music conveys a spiritual tone through use of the Lydian mode. The music consists of five lines of a slow, solemn chordal hymn, with each line preceded by a faster moving contrapuntal prelude. In the vital and vigorous contrasting second section, *Neue Kraft fühlend* (Feeling new strength), alternating

loud and soft measures surge with a powerful, propulsive force. After varied returns of both sections, the movement ends with a restatement of the opening hymn, marked on the score to be played *Mit innigster Empfindung* (with the most intimate emotions).

The raucous *Alla marcia* provides a sudden change in mood from heavenly to earthly, a change that Beethoven often introduces in his music after moments of deeply emotional expression. After a brief aggressive march, the music completely changes character and takes on the style of a recitative, a rhythmically free section, in which the first violin plays an improvisatory melodic line over a minimal accompaniment in the other parts.

The finale (*Allegro appassionato*) follows the recitative without pause. Structurally, it combines rondo and sonata form. The basic lyrical character is modified by an underlying turbulent rocking motion that introduces ambiguity, even as the work draws to a close.

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Next week at the National Gallery of Art

Janice Martin, violinist
Michael Ricchiuti, pianist
John Wohlstetter, guest lecturer

Music by George Gershwin

February 9, 2011
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
West Building Lecture Hall