

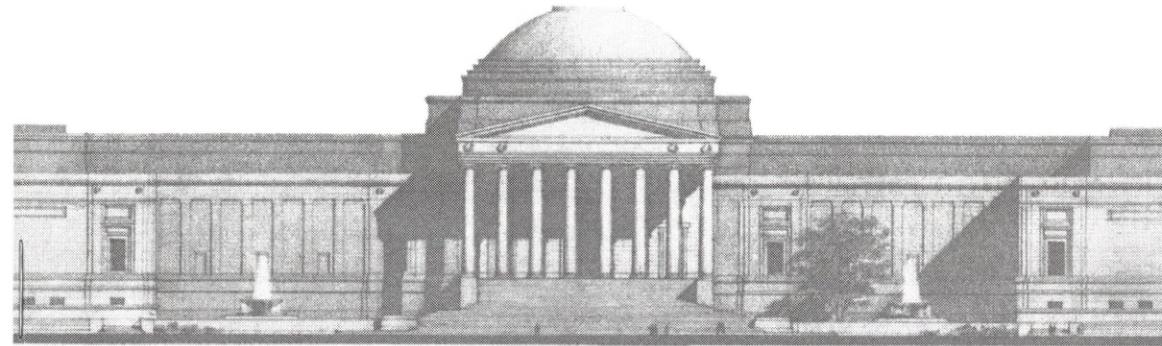
The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

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

For the convenience of concertgoers, the Garden Café remains open for light refreshments until 6:00 pm on Sundays.

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

www.nga.gov



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

National Gallery of Art
2,830th Concert

The Leipzig String Quartet

Stefan Arzberger, violin
Tilman Büning, violin
Ivo Bauer, viola
Matthias Moosdorf, cello

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

Admission free

Program

Music by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Quartet in F Major, op. 18, no. 1

Allegro con brio
Adagio affettuoso et appassionato
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Allegro

Quartet in E-flat Major, op. 74 (“Harp”)

Poco adagio; allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo
Presto
Allegretto con variazioni

INTERMISSION

Quartet in F Major, op. 135

Allegretto
Vivace
Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo
Grave, ma non troppo tratto; allegro
(Der schwer gefasste Entschluss: Muss es sein?
Es muss sein! Es muss sein!)

The Musicians

Since its founding two decades ago, the Leipzig String Quartet has garnered the attention of international critics and audiences with its distinctive dark timbre and meticulously sculpted interpretations of widely varied repertoire. Formed originally by the string principals of the renowned Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Quartet continues to uphold the principles of sound and integrity ascribed to this great orchestra. Called “one of the towering and most versatile quartets of our time” by the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and lauded by *The New York Times* for presenting “rich, mellow, unadulterated beauty” and a true “Leipzig sound,” the Quartet performs widely throughout Europe at major halls and festivals. Since 1991 the Quartet has had its own “Pro Quatuor” series at the Gewandhaus, where it has offered a multi-year cycle of the major quartets of the First and Second Viennese Schools in addition to premieres of works by Alfred Schnittke and Wolfgang Rihm. In addition to its 2009 concert at the National Gallery of Art in the festival honoring Mendelssohn’s 200th birth anniversary—“Mendelssohn on the Mall”—the Quartet has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Frick Collection, the Library of Congress, Lincoln Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wolf Trap, and chamber music series in Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Chicago, Los Angeles, Ottawa, and Toronto. In 2010 the ensemble performed at New York’s Le Poisson Rouge with jazz great Steve Wilson.

Having released more than sixty recordings of repertoire from Mozart to Cage, the Leipzig String Quartet has received praise from the editors of *Strings* magazine, who proclaimed its recordings of the complete string quartets of Franz Schubert to be “of the highest order—the interpretations bracing and intense, and the recordings themselves ideal in clarity, richness of sound, and naturalness of acoustics.” The quartet has also won ECHO and Diapason d’Or awards and prizes from the German Record Reviewers Association. The ensemble has performed and recorded with pianists Alfred Brendel, Marc-André Hamelin, Joseph Kalichstein, Menahem Pressler, and Christian Zacharias, as well as acclaimed klezmer clarinetist Giora Feidman.

Program Notes

This evening's performance is the third 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 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 American String Quartet inaugurated the series on January 2, and the Ariel String Quartet presented the second concert on February 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.

Published in 1801, Beethoven's first set of string quartets, op. 18, was commissioned by Prince Lobkowitz and composed between 1798 and 1800. Though it was the second to be composed, Beethoven chose the F major as the first quartet in the published set, probably because of its brilliant opening and closing movements as well as the unequalled dramatic sweep and emotional tension of the quartet as a whole.

About the deeply passionate and tragic *Adagio*, Beethoven wrote at the end of one sketch, "les derniers soupirs" ("the last breaths"). It is reported that when Beethoven played the movement for violinist Karl Amenda, his friend who worked for Prince Lobkowitz, Amenda responded, "It pictured for me the parting of two lovers." "Good!" Beethoven replied, "I thought of the scene in the burial vault in Romeo and Juliet." After the emotional heights reached in the *Adagio*, the listener is allowed to relax with the modest and very charming *Scherzo*. Adding a touch of wit and humor in the middle Trio section, Beethoven sends the first violin on rapid flows of notes between rhythmically limping unison passages. The first subject of the final movement—a flashy run ending with three concluding chords—bears a striking resemblance to the Finale of his *C Minor String Trio*, op. 9, no. 3. With virtuosic parts for all four instruments, the movement is cast partly in rondo form, with a repeated

theme and contrasting episodes, and partly in sonata form, with two contrasting themes that are developed and returned.

Early in 1809, when Beethoven was composing the *Quartet in E-flat Major*, op. 74, three noblemen collaborated in granting him an annual stipend. Anticipating financial security, Beethoven proposed to Therèse Malfatti, his teenage pupil, and was devastated by her family's rejection of his suit. In May, the French army bombarded Vienna, wreaking havoc on Beethoven's already shabby apartment. In a journal entry dated not long after the French occupation of the city began, a friend who visited Beethoven expressed shock at the composer's living conditions: "Picture to yourself the dirtiest, most disorderly place imaginable..." There are accounts of the composer cowering in a cellar with his hands over his ears, attempting to protect what little remained of his ability to hear. No one can say exactly how the personal and political turmoil in his life affected the composition of op. 74, but, as his letters reveal, Beethoven found it difficult to write under wartime conditions. Perhaps this is why this particular opus does not push forward into new and unexplored regions, but rather demonstrates a consolidation of previous growth, with some backward glances over well-traveled classical territory.

The subtitle, "Harp," was added later by an editor. Often criticized as an unfortunate choice, it draws attention to some pizzicato accompanying figures in the first movement that are of minor musical importance. The slow introduction to the first movement centers around a four-note motif heard immediately from the first violin and repeated a number of times. The viola introduces the second theme—a long note followed by a flurry of ascending and descending notes—and is soon joined by the three other instruments. The striking coda is highlighted by brilliant passages by the first violin and elaboration by the other instruments of the melodic fragments heard earlier.

The *Adagio*, a movement of profound spirituality, presages Beethoven's sublime late quartets in its rich emotional content. The movement revolves around the tender main theme, initially stated by the first violin, which is heard three times, separated by contrasting episodes. The second appearance of the theme is in minor key, conveying despondency, while the third is loftier and more spiritual in tone.

The concentrated energy and drive of the third movement—a scherzo marked *Presto*—make this the high point of the quartet. Apparently still haunted by the dramatic “fate knocks on the door” opening of the *Fifth Symphony* (composed one year earlier), Beethoven gives the movement a power and a force that is rare in chamber music.

The disarming finale of the *E-flat Major Quartet*, a theme and six variations, has a simple, easygoing melody, and seems almost anticlimactic after the furious pace of the third movement. The coda reintroduces drama, as it accelerates in tempo, leading to a high-speed, brilliant conclusion based on the melodic line of the third variation.

Designated op. 135, the sixteenth and last complete string quartet that Beethoven wrote represents a sharp departure from the other late quartets. The work is quite short, vying with op. 18, no. 2, as the briefest of them all. One possible explanation of its brevity is supplied by the composer’s friend Karl Holz, who reported that Beethoven, believing that his publisher had not paid him enough for the work, had said: “If [he] sends circumcised ducats he shall have a circumcised quartet. That’s why it is so short.”

In addition to the modest length of the quartet, it has less emotional intensity and more peaceful resignation than the other late quartets. In it can be heard a serene acceptance of the inevitability of death, as Beethoven implies in a letter he sent with the quartet to his publisher, Moritz Schlesinger: “Here, my dear friend, is my last quartet. It will be the last; and indeed it has given me much trouble. For I could not bring myself to compose the last movement.” Composed during August and September 1826 at his brother’s country estate in Gneixendorf, Austria, the work was published in September 1827. The Schuppanzigh Quartet gave the premiere in Vienna on March 23, 1828, almost one year to the day after the composer’s death.

For some listeners, op. 135 represents a return to middle-class taste, perhaps affected by the Biedermeier movement, a conservative trend in the decorative arts of the early 1800s. Brevity, accessibility, and the use of more

traditional compositional techniques were some of the particular qualities that Beethoven associated with music written for the bourgeoisie. The fact that Beethoven dedicated the quartet to Johann Wolfmayer, a cloth merchant, and not to an aristocrat, lends some credence to this belief. But, taking into account Beethoven’s tendencies over the course of his life, it is most likely that neither theory is correct. It is not surprising to find him turning to something buoyant and light-hearted after creating music of great depth and personal involvement, such as his penultimate string quartet (op. 131).

The final movement, *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss* (The difficult resolution), asks the question “Muss es sein?” (Must it be?). The answer is the ringing affirmation, “Es muss sein! Es muss sein!” (It must be! It must be!). Although in a letter to Moritz Schlesinger Beethoven assigns a profound meaning to this exchange, its origins were simple and humorous. A friend of Beethoven, a government official by the name of Ignaz Dembscher, requested a copy of an earlier quartet, op. 130, and was refused by the composer, who was miffed that Dembscher had not attended the premiere performance. Wanting to set matters right, Dembscher asked Karl Holz to intervene. Holz suggested that Dembscher send the cost of the subscription, fifty florins, to the Schuppanzigh quartet, which had paid that amount for the right to the first performance. To Dembscher’s question, “Muss es sein?” Holz replied, “Es muss sein!” When Holz recounted the story to Beethoven, he burst into laughter and immediately sat down to compose a canon on the dialogue. Later Beethoven expanded the musical material of the canon into the quartet’s last movement. In slow, solemn tones the two lower strings pose the question, as if singing the words “Muss es sein?” And in forceful, joyful musical phrases, the two violins deliver the exultant response, at once a musical pun and a statement of Beethoven’s sense of coming to terms with death.

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