

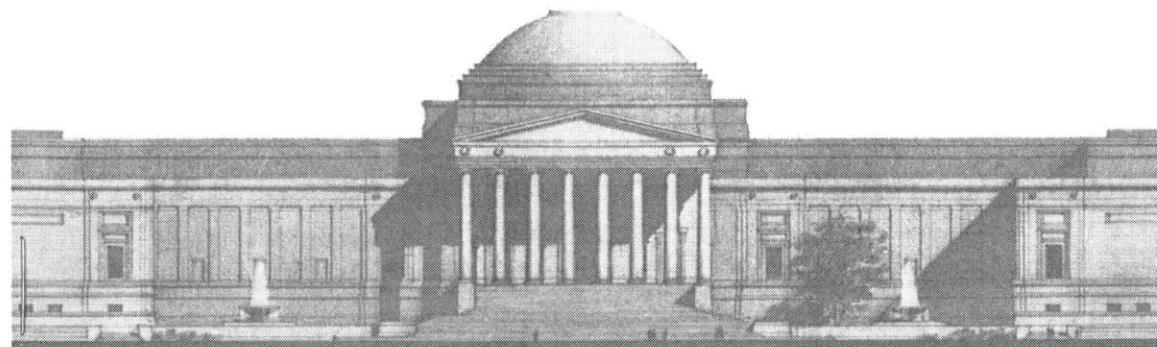
The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

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

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The Seventieth Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,853rd Concert

Talich String Quartet

Jan Talich, violin
Petr Macecek, violin
Vladimir Bukac, viola
Petr Prause, cello

November 6, 2011
Sunday, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

Music by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Quartet in C Minor, op. 18, no. 4 (1798–1800)

Allegro ma non tanto

Scherzo: Andante scherzoso quasi allegretto

Menuetto: Allegretto

Allegro

INTERMISSION

Quartet in B-flat Major, op. 130, “Liebquartett” (1825)

Adagio ma non troppo; Allegro

Presto

Andante con moto, ma non troppo

Alla danza tedesca: Allegro assai

Cavatina: Adagio molto espressivo

Finale: Allegro

This concert is the fifth of six concerts presenting the complete string quartets of Beethoven. The sixth and final concert of the series takes place at the Gallery on Sunday, December 4, 2011, at 6:30 pm. The Pacifica String Quartet will play quartets op. 18, no. 6 (“La Maliconia”), op. 95 (“Serioso”), op. 130 (“Liebquartett”), and op. 133 (“Grosse Fuge”).

The Musicians

Recognized internationally as one of Europe’s finest chamber ensembles, the Talich String Quartet was founded in 1964 by Jan Talich during his studies at the Prague Conservatory and named for his uncle Vaclav Talich, the renowned chief conductor of the Czech Philharmonic. During the 1990s new players succeeded the original members, rejuvenating the Quartet while continuing the tradition of its predecessors through continued concertizing and recording activities. Jan Talich, the current first violinist, is the son of the Quartet’s founder.

The Talich Quartet receives regular invitations to prestigious chamber music festivals including the Europalia Festival, the International String Quartet Festival in Ottawa, the Pablo Casals Festival in Prades, the Prague Spring Music Festival, Printemps des Arts in Monte Carlo, and the Tibor Varga Festival of Music. The ensemble performs frequently at New York’s Carnegie Hall, Paris’ Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Salle Gaveau, and London’s Wigmore Hall.

The Talich’s recordings of the complete string quartets of Felix Mendelssohn, released on the Calliope label between 2001 and 2004, have been widely praised. Other recordings include Dvořák’s “American” quartet and viola quintet (2003), Smetana’s two string quartets (2003), and a live recording of Schubert’s *Death and the Maiden* (2004). The Quartet’s Janáček recording was honored by *Gramophone* with a nomination for the best chamber recording of 2006—the only recording by a string quartet to be selected.

Although Beethoven made copious use of notebooks as he prepared his compositions, no notebook sketches have ever been found for his fourth quartet, probably the last one composed in opus 18. This has led to speculation that the composer did not go through his usual throes of indecision in working out the details of the composition, or that he had based the quartet on a previously completed composition. The only minor-key quartet in op. 18, the *C Minor Quartet* is probably the most popular work in the group, and like all of Beethoven's works in this key, it is a musical statement with an especially heightened dramatic tension throughout.

The first theme, dark-hued and throbbing with an inner passion, traces an irregular path from the violin's lowest note to the top of its range. Beethoven caps off the climb with a series of powerful chords and a final outcry, before a sudden hush falls and the bridge passage leads to the second subject. First stated by the second violin, this melody is derived from the second part of the first theme, but in a different key. A climactic coda fills out the end of the movement. Instead of following the powerful first movement with a conventionally slow and emotional second movement, Beethoven treats us to a moderately paced, witty scherzo. The texture is mostly polyphonic, with the tunes blithely tossed from instrument to instrument in a profusion of canons and short fugues.

The somber and serious *Menuetto* recaptures to some extent the mood of the first movement. Beethoven's recurrent use of third-beat accents distances it from typically dance-like minuets. The middle section, or trio, is essentially a dialogue between second violin and viola, to which the cello supplies a bass line and the first violin contributes a running triplet commentary.

Ferdinand Ries, a pupil of Beethoven, recounted an anecdote connected with the last movement of the *C Minor Quartet* that provides insight into his teacher's independent and unorthodox spirit of composition. In response to Ries' discovery of an instance of parallel perfect fifths in the last movement, a practice forbidden by all teachers of composition, Beethoven replied, "Ah!

Well, who is it who says perfect fifths are wrong?" After Ries named several leading music theorists of the day who forbade them, Beethoven said simply, "Very well, I allow the use of them!"

There are few other surprises in the final movement, a clearly defined rondo in the style of Haydn. The sparkling main theme melody, played by the first violin, has elements of the Turkish style so favored by eighteenth-century composers, including Haydn and Mozart. The second violin has almost exclusive rights to the richly lyrical episode that follows. A varied return of the main theme leads another construct in which the instruments enter one after the other—a gruff, pyramid-like sequence. After the third reprise of the opening melody, there is a lengthy coda, ending with a rapid-fire finish.

In some ways the most appealing of Beethoven's late quartets, the *Quartet in B-flat Major*, op. 130, is the third and last of the quartets he composed for Prince Galitzin. It follows the classical order of movements—fast, scherzo, slow, and finale—except that Beethoven adds an extra scherzo and slow movement just before the finale. The treatment also makes obeisance to classical concepts, even though the melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and internal formal structures are handled quite freely.

The subtitle ("Liebquartett") comes from the conversation books Beethoven used for daily communication in face of his total deafness, in which he affectionately referred to op. 130 as "Dear Quartet" (Liebquartett). For some unknown reason Beethoven did not attend the premiere, given in Vienna by the Schuppanzigh Quartet on March 21, 1826, but waited in a nearby tavern.

The final movement, an exceedingly long and elaborate fugue, confused most listeners and invited criticism from players and audiences alike. Beethoven's publisher, Matthias Artaria, and many others felt it should be replaced with a finale more in keeping with the rest of the quartet. Well aware of Beethoven's strong and principled nature, Artaria designed a roundabout way to get him to write a new last movement. Claiming that the public was demanding the fugue as a separate piece, Artaria first offered

to pay Beethoven for a transcription for piano four hands, and then convinced him to compose a substitute last movement—for an additional fee. Although the extra money probably played some part in Beethoven's acquiescence, he most likely would have refused unless he agreed that the fugue was indeed too massive and powerful for the rest of the quartet. The published version of op. 130, therefore, includes Beethoven's new finale, while the original, the *Grosse Fuge* ("Great Fugue"), appears separately as op. 133.

The serene opening *Adagio* is not a prelude to what follows, but is an integral part of the thematic material—it reappears several times and binds the movements together. The high-spirited *Allegro* simultaneously flings out two striking phrases—a running sixteenth-note pattern in the first violin and repeated notes followed by a jump up to a held note in the second. In his novel, *Point Counter Point*, Aldous Huxley describes the slow and fast parts of this movement as "majesty alternating with a joke." The very short, engaging second movement presents the outgoing, jocular side of Beethoven's nature and offers a startling change from the complex first movement. The third movement projects a contrary air of mingled gaiety and melancholy. After two bars of introduction the viola states the somber principal theme in its darkest, lowest register, against which the other instruments contribute fresh, charming countermelodies and accompaniment figures. The first contrasting melody is unabashedly sprightly and joyful; it is followed by a shortened, revoiced statement of the opening theme.

Functioning as a second scherzo, *Alla danza tedesca* (like a dance in the German style) is innocent and whimsical in mood. The first part captures the swaying rhythmic robustness of the *Ländler*, a three-beat German peasant dance. The middle section is also in a rustic dance style, with three repeated staccato notes serving as its most prominent melodic feature. The poetic and predominantly soft *Cavatina* (Italian for "short aria") exemplifies Beethoven's "interior music," spiritual and emotionally intense utterances of the utmost eloquence. His friend, violinist Karl Holz, wrote that Beethoven "composed the Cavatina of the *Quartet in B-flat* amid sorrow and tears; never did his music breathe so heartfelt an inspiration, and even the memory of this movement brought tears to his eyes."

The *Finale: Allegro*, which Beethoven substituted for the original monumental fugue, was written at his brother's house in Gneixendorf, in November 1826, between bouts of serious abdominal illness that would lead to his death four months later. Delightful and cheery on the surface, the new finale reflects several connections with earlier movements: the opening rhythm derives from the *Presto*, the subsequent active subject comes from the theme of the first movement, and the closing rhythm recalls the quartet introduction. The Schuppanzigh Quartet introduced the new finale in December 1826 and gave the premiere of the entire reconstituted quartet on April 22, 1827, nearly one month after the composer's death.

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