



BEETHOVEN

Op. 131



The Jasper String Quartet

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Ludwig van Beethoven's Quartet in C# minor, Op. 131, is a landmark work in the string quartet repertoire for its incredible structural cohesion and its depth of emotion and imagination. The structure, seven movements played without pause, lends an unprecedented continuous narrative to the piece. Beethoven composed Op. 131 in his difficult, final years and the work is truly transcendent.

The first movement, *Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo*, begins with a hushed fugue. The subject is notable for its dramatic dynamics—each entrance begins softly but crescendos to a desperate, longing *sforzando* on the fourth note only to be drawn back in again to *piano*. This gives the movement an overall sense of drama within the expansive long lines. Near the middle of the movement (m. 67), the upper voices begin a duet section in A major, foreshadowing the texture and key of the fourth movement. The movement draws to a close with all four voices holding a C# on the first *pianissimo* of the piece.

With magical, Neopolitan motion, the quartet moves in unison from C# to D, beginning the second movement, *Allegro molto vivace*. The theme seems simple and happy, but Beethoven's treatment of it is true genius. The first violin begins the melody, but instead of completing it, leads to a questioning fermata. The viola answers with the completion of the melody and the movement gets rolling. The witty subito dynamics add playfulness and virtuosity to the texture. As the movement rolls along, Beethoven periodically halts the motion with the same opening fermata, alluding to something more complex lurking beneath the happy facade. However, any doubt is quickly dispelled and near the end of the movement the voices join in triumphant octaves, leading to a *fortissimo* climax which moves to the same fermata as before. Finally, here, the questioning fermata resolves and floats away.

The third movement, *Allegro moderato*, is a brief transition to the fourth movement. In it, the four voices of the quartet speak to each other in an operatic *recitative* style. The sudden shift to minor darkens the mood from the second movement; we often think of the first two notes as if to say emphatically, "What's wrong?".

For the center of the piece, *Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile*, Beethoven indulges in an incredible variation movement. The theme is a single rhythmic motive that beautifully starts on an off-beat and passes between the two violins. Accompanied by the ever steady viola and resonant pizzicati in the cello, there is a sense of warmth and beauty from the first note of the movement. The fourth variation is marked *Andante moderato e lusinghiero* (glowing and seductive) and harkens back to the duet section in the first movement.

The fifth movement, *Presto*, is a marathon of quartet focus and technique. The cello breaks the mood from the end of the fourth movement with a brusk four-note motive and, after a short pause, the movement begins. Throughout the movement the quartet passes motives seamlessly through all registers, creating a game of ping-pong, which is especially exciting to see in live performance. The movement is a double-repeated minuet and trio and, as in the second movement, Beethoven uses fermatas to pique interest and drama. In the coda, the instruments all play *sul ponticello*, heightening the excitement in the already bright sonority of E major. The movement concludes in triumphant resolution, firmly on E. But not so fast! A set of unison G#s changes the mood suddenly, undoing the E major finish in only three notes.

The sixth movement, *Adagio quasi un poco andante*, is in G# minor, which as a key center serves as the dominant of the key of the entire piece. Though brief, the sixth movement is the one true slow movement of the entire work.

The seventh movement returns to the key of the first movement (C# minor) and serves as a mighty culmination. The second theme is based on the same notes as the first movement's subject, showing Beethoven's skill at transforming motives to create a wholeness throughout the work. The dark, powerful opening is marked by several interjections of a hopeful theme, which is traded between the upper three voices. A surprising twist to D major (recalling the second movement) leads into the coda, which is firmly rooted in C# minor. The mood is desolate and seems fated to end in minor until the last six bars of the piece abruptly and briefly achieve C# major, the goal of the entire piece. The work ends emphatically on three major chords.

On a personal note, this piece is especially remarkable to us for its embodiment of unity and equality between the four voices that create a sum far greater than its parts. Each time we sit down to play together, our goal is to realize these ideals and there is no other piece that showcases them more powerfully.

--Rachel Henderson Freivogel, 2014

The Jasper String Quartet

Winner of the 2012 Cleveland Quartet Award, the **Jasper String Quartet** (J Freivogel and Sae Chonabayashi, violins; Sam Quintal, viola; Rachel Henderson Freivogel, cello) has been hailed as “sonically delightful and expressively compelling” (*The Strad*) and as “powerful” (*The New York Times*). The *Classical Voice of North Carolina* says they play “with sparkling vitality and great verve, ...polished, engaged, and in tune with one another.”

Based in Philadelphia, PA, the Jaspers recently released two highly acclaimed albums for the Sono Luminus label featuring the works of Beethoven, Schubert, and Aaron Jay Kernis. In 2014, they will digitally release Beethoven Op. 131 on Sono Luminus as well. From 2015-2017, the Quartet will premiere their commission of Mr. Kernis’ 3rd Quartet across the world, including at Carnegie Hall and Wigmore Hall in London.

After winning the Grand Prize and the Audience Prize in the 2008 Plowman Chamber Music Competition, the Jaspers went on to win the Grand Prize at the 2008 Coleman Competition, First Prize at Chamber Music Yellow Springs 2008, and the Silver Medal at the 2008 and 2009 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competitions. They were the first ensemble to win the Yale School of Music’s *Horatio Parker Memorial Prize* (2009), an award established in 1945 and selected by the faculty for “best fulfilling... lofty musical ideals.” And in 2010, they joined the roster of Astral Artists after winning their national auditions.

The quartet was the 2010-12 Ensemble-in-Residence at Oberlin Conservatory and, in conjunction with Astral Artists, was awarded a 2012 Chamber Music America grant through its Residency Partnership Program for work in Philadelphia schools. From 2009-2011, the Jaspers were the *Ernst C. Stiefel String Quartet-in-Residence* at the Caramoor Center for Music and Arts (Katonah, NY). They were the first ensemble to be invited for a second year as such.

The Jaspers perform pieces emotionally significant to its members ranging from Haydn and Beethoven through Berg, Ligeti, and living composers. They have commissioned string quartets from some of today’s up-and-coming composers, including Andrew Norman, Nicholas Omiccioli, Conrad Tao and Annie Gosfield. Critics and audiences commend the Jasper String Quartet’s “programming savvy” (*clevelandclassical.com*) and they have performed throughout the United States and in Canada, England, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway and Panama.

The Jasper String Quartet has brought well over 100 outreach programs into schools and enjoys educational work of all types. In their *Melba and Orville Roleffson Residency* at the Banff Centre they embarked on “guerrilla chamber music,” performing concerts in unusual settings around Alberta, Canada. Currently, the quartet works closely with Philadelphia’s Astral Artists to bring outreach activities to schools.

Formed at Oberlin Conservatory, the Jaspers began pursuing a professional career in 2006 while studying with James Dunham, Norman Fischer, and Kenneth Goldsmith as Rice University’s Graduate Quartet-in-Residence. In 2008, the quartet continued its training with the Tokyo String Quartet as Yale University’s Graduate Quartet-in-Residence.

The Jasper String Quartet is named after Jasper National Park in Alberta, Canada. The quartet receives Career Development support from Astral Artists and is represented exclusively by Dispeker Artists.



SL-D-97203 - The Jasper String Quartet - Beethoven Op. 131

Total Time: 37:42

Recorded at Sono Luminus Studios, Boyce Virginia - November 2-3, 2013

Producer: Dan Merceruio

Recording, Mixing and Mastering Engineer: Daniel Shores

Editing Engineers: Dan Merceruio, Daniel Shores, Adam Olson

Recorded at 24bit 192kHz in 7.1 Surround Sound

Graphic Design and Layout: Daniel Shores

Booklet Notes: Rachel Henderson Freivogel

Cover Photograph: Vanessa Briceno-Scherzer

Photo Pg. 4: Mozingo Photography



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