



BEETHOVEN

Fugues and Rarities for String Quartet

Grosse Fuge • Preludes and Fugues

Fine Arts Quartet

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Fugues and Rarities for String Quartet

Born in Bonn in 1770, Ludwig van Beethoven was the eldest son of a singer in the musical establishment of the Archbishop-Elector of Cologne and grandson of the Archbishop's former Kapellmeister, whose name he took. The household was not a happy one. Beethoven's father became increasingly inadequate both as a singer and as a father and husband, with his wife always ready to draw invidious comparisons between him and his own father. Beethoven, however, was trained as a musician, however erratically, and duly entered the service of the Archbishop, serving as an organist and as a string-player in the archiepiscopal orchestra. He was already winning some distinction in Bonn, when, in 1787, he was first sent to Vienna, to study with Mozart. The illness of his mother forced an early return from this venture and her subsequent death left him with responsibility for his younger brothers, in view of his father's domestic and professional failures. In 1792 Beethoven was sent once more to Vienna, now to study with Haydn, whom he had met in Bonn.

Beethoven's early career in Vienna was helped very considerably by the circumstances of his move there. The Archbishop was a son of the Empress Maria Theresa and there were introductions to leading members of society in the imperial capital. Here Beethoven was able to establish an early position for himself as a pianist of remarkable ability, coupled with a clear genius in the necessarily related arts of improvisation and composition. The onset of deafness at the turn of the century seemed an irony of Fate. It led Beethoven gradually away from a career as a virtuoso performer and into an area of composition where he was able to make remarkable changes and extensions of existing practice. Deafness tended to accentuate his eccentricities and paranoia, which became extreme as time went on. At the same time it allowed him to develop his gifts for counterpoint. He continued to revolutionise forms inherited from his predecessors, notably Haydn and Mozart, expanding these almost to bursting-point, and introducing innovation after innovation as he grew older. He died in 1827, his death the occasion of public mourning in Vienna.

In his 16 string quartets, the first set of six published in 1801 and the last, completed in 1826 and published after the composer's death, Beethoven was as innovative as ever, developing and extending a form that seemed to have already reached a height of perfection in the later work of Haydn and of Mozart. The earliest mention of a string quartet comes in the recorded request of Count Apponyi in 1795. This had no immediate result, but it seems probable that Beethoven in these years was influenced by Emanuel Aloys Förster, a musician 22 years his senior, whose proficiency as a teacher of counterpoint he admired and recommended to others, while himself perhaps profiting from the example of Förster's own quartets. The first group of string quartets by Beethoven, published as *Op. 18*, consisted of quartets written between 1798 and 1800 and was dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz.

The period of Beethoven's last quartets starts with *Op. 127*, completed in 1825, the first of three quartets commissioned by Prince Nikolaus Galitzin, whose pecuniary embarrassment prevented payment, at least in Beethoven's lifetime. Work on the second, *Op. 132*, was interrupted by illness, Beethoven's recovery from which the *Quartet* celebrates, while the third, *Op. 130*, originally ended with the demanding *Grosse Fuge* ('Great Fugue'), a movement replaced, with the *Grosse Fuge* published separately with a dedication to Cardinal Archduke Rudolph. Beethoven's last two quartets, *Op. 135* and *Op. 131*, were published posthumously.

The *Grosse Fuge* marks in many ways the culmination of Beethoven's achievement among his string quartets and as a master of counterpoint. The work had a parallel existence in an arrangement for piano duet, the subject of some disagreement between Beethoven and his publisher, Artaria, finally resolved by the acceptance of the composer's own arrangement rather than the commissioned one. The *Grosse Fuge* had a mixed reception, a work before its time, but has in more recent years been heard as the masterpiece it is, from its

opening *Overtura* and angular first subject to its double fugue and its ensuing contrapuntal complexities.

In 1798 Karl Amenda came to Vienna as tutor to the children of Prince Lichnowsky. His employment brought a meeting with Beethoven and the beginning of a close friendship. It was to Amenda that Beethoven was able to confide his anxieties about his increasing deafness. In 1799, to meet family obligations at home, Amenda left Vienna but their friendship continued. In a long letter to Amenda in July 1801 Beethoven refers to a quartet that he had dedicated to him, the first of a set of six, *Op. 18*, dedicated on publication to Prince Lobkowitz. Beethoven warns Amenda that he has made drastic alterations in 'his' quartet, claiming now to have learnt how to write quartets. The original version has different tempo indications. The second movement, inspired by the tomb scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, in the Amenda version *Adagio molto*, became, in the revised version, *Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato*. The *Scherzo*, originally marked *Allegro*, becomes *Allegro molto*, and the final *Allegretto* becomes *Allegro*. The two versions of the quartet have been the object of detailed critical analysis¹.

Beethoven completed his *Quartet in C sharp minor, Op. 131*, in 1826, the last of a group of three. It has seven connected movements, and was regarded by the composer as the greatest of his works in this form. The original dedication had been to his friend Johann Wolfmayer, but he eventually dedicated the work to Baron Joseph von Stutterheim, Lieutenant Field-Marshal, in

thanks for the provision of a place in the latter's regiment for Beethoven's nephew Karl, who had attempted suicide. The slightly shorter earlier version of the first movement, marked *Adagio espressivo* instead of the later *Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo*, has again been the subject of scholarly analysis².

Beethoven's study of counterpoint with Albrechtsberger probably continued for some 15 months in 1794 and 1795. These studies resulted in the *Prelude and Fugue in F major, Hess 30*, the *Prelude and Fugue in C major, Hess 31*, and the fragmentary *Fugue in D minor, Hess 245*. Beethoven's arrangement of the *Fugue, Hess 36*, from the overture to Handel's *Solomon* has been dated to 1798, while his *Menuett in A flat major, Hess 33*, is an earlier composition, to be dated to Beethoven's period at home in Bonn.

The *Allegretto in B minor, WoO 210* reflects something of Beethoven's interest and further study of counterpoint. Rediscovered in an English country house, Pencarrow House, in 2000, the brief piece was written out by Beethoven to oblige an English visitor, Richard Ford, in 1817.

Keith Anderson

¹ Hans Josef Wedig, Beethovens Streichquartett op.18 nr.1 und seine erste Fassung, Bonn, 1922

² Emil Platen, Eine Frühfassung zum ersten Satz des Streichquartetts op. 131 von Beethoven, Bonn, 1983

Fine Arts Quartet



From left to right: Ralph Evans, Efim Boico, Gil Sharon, and Niklas Schmidt

The Fine Arts Quartet, described by the *Washington Post* as 'one of the gold-plated names in chamber music', ranks among the most distinguished ensembles in chamber music today, with an illustrious history of performing success and an extensive legacy of over 200 recorded works. Founded in Chicago in 1946, the Quartet is one of the elite few to have recorded and toured internationally for well over a half-century. Violinists Ralph Evans (prizewinner in the International Tchaikovsky Competition) and Efim Boico (former concertmaster of the Orchestre de Paris under Daniel Barenboim) have performed together since 1983. They are joined by two eminent musicians: violist Gil Sharon (founder of the Amati Ensemble), and cellist Niklas Schmidt (co-founder of Trio Fontenay). Many of the Quartet's recent releases have been selected for inclusion on GRAMMY Awards entry lists in the categories Best Classical Album and/or Best Chamber Music Performance, and have received multiple awards and distinctions, among them: *Gramophone* Award Winner and Recording of Legendary Status (*The Gramophone Classical Music Guide*), Key Recording/Top Recommendation (*Penguin Guide to Recorded Classical Music*), Editor's Choice (*Gramophone* magazine), Critic's Choice (*American Record Guide*), *BBC Music Magazine* Choice, three times Recording of the Year (*MusicWeb International*), and a GRAMMY Award for producer Steven Epstein (Fauré *Quintets* with Cristina Ortiz). The Quartet has also received the CMA/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming.

www.fineartsquartet.com

The string quartets of Beethoven are among the greatest works of their kind, but he composed other works for quartet which have been neglected. This album is dedicated to these intriguing rarities. Alongside the wild and monumental *Grosse Fuge*, in many ways the culmination of Beethoven's achievements in the string quartet genre, this recording further displays his mastery of counterpoint by bringing to light brilliant yet forgotten original versions of his quartets *Op. 18, No. 1* and *Op. 131*, plus six virtually unknown miniatures, including his *Preludes and Fugues*.

Ludwig van
BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

Fugues and Rarities for String Quartet

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| String Quartet in F major, Hess 32
(1st version of String Quartet No. 1,
Op. 18, No. 1) (1799) 30:30 | | 8 Prelude and Fugue in C major,
Hess 31 (1795) 4:44 |
| 1 I. Allegro con brio 10:19 | | 9 Fugue in D minor,
Hess 245 (fragment) (c. 1795) 0:40 |
| 2 II. Adagio molto 9:32 | | George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) |
| 3 III. Scherzo: Allegro 3:46 | | 10 Solomon, HWV 67, Part I – Overture:
Fugue (arr. Beethoven for string
quartet, Hess 36) (1794–95) 2:11 |
| 4 IV. Allegretto 6:46 | | Ludwig van Beethoven |
| 5 String Quartet No. 14 in C sharp
minor, Op. 131: I. Adagio espressivo
(early version) (1826) 6:04 | | 11 Menuett in A flat major, WoO 209,
Hess 33 (c. 1790) 2:05 |
| 6 Prelude and Fugue in F major,
Hess 30 (1795) 6:28 | | 12 Grosse Fuge in B flat major,
Op. 133 (1825) 16:42 |
| 7 Allegretto in B minor,
WoO 210 (1817) 0:34 | | |

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Ralph Evans, Violin I • Efim Boico, Violin II
Gil Sharon, Viola • Niklas Schmidt, Cello

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