

Music in the Park Series
St. Paul, MN

Saturday, January 30, 2010

The Pacifica Quartet

Simin Ganatra, violin
Sibbi Bernhardsson, violin
Masumi Per Rostad, viola
Brandon Vamos, cello

Program

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No.1

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

Intermission

Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, "Liebquartett"

Adagio ma non troppo; Allegro
Presto
Andante con moto, ma non troppo
Alla danza tedesca: Allegro assai
Cavatina: Adagio molto espressivo
Grosse Fuge: Allegro (*Op. 133*)

The PACIFICA QUARTET is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.,
115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
www.melkap.com
www.pacificaquartet.com
Recordings: Cedille Records

Ludwig van Beethoven
Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn
Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Quartet in F, Op. 18, No. 1

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

Beethoven most likely chose the F major as the first quartet, even though it was composed second, because it is the biggest and most impressive work of the group. The particularly brilliant opening and closing movements, as well as its unequalled dramatic sweep and emotional tension, distinguish the F major from the other quartets in Op. 18.

Five pages in one Beethoven notebook and eleven pages in another bear witness to the composer's titanic struggle to bring the all-important motif, which starts and dominates the first movement, to its final form. The process was largely one of simplifying and concentrating his original musical idea into the most terse and pithy statement that one writer, Joseph Kerman, describes as a "coiled spring, ready to shoot off in all directions." Although he introduces a subsidiary subject, a charming, light, synchopated melody, and casts the two themes in sonata form, the opening motto clearly maintains its ascendancy throughout the movement, even as it changes its character from laconic to prolix, from tender to aggressive, from somber to joyful. In the summary coda, Beethoven surprises the listener with a completely new theme, an ascending scale passage that he then combines with the main motif, which reasserts its dominance in the closing measures.

About the deeply passionate and tragic Adagio, Beethoven wrote at the end of one sketch, "les derniers soupirs" ("the last breath"). It is reported that when Beethoven played the movement for Karl Amenda, his friend said, "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." The first violin sings the first theme, a poised arching melody that floats lightly over the gently pulsating accompaniment. The second violin introduces the subsidiary subject, a one-measure descending phrase, and the viola is entrusted with the concluding subject, also one measure in length and downward in direction. Although the three themes are quiet in character, Beethoven in the ensuing development invests them with an energy and agitation that far exceeds the range of eighteenth-century quartet writing. After the emotional heights reached in the Adagio, the listeners, though not the performers, are 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 trio is followed by a literal repeat of the Scherzo.

The first subject of the final movement, a flashy run of notes ending with three concluding chords, bears a striking resemblance to the Finale of the C minor string trio. 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.

Notes from Guide to Chamber Music, by Melvin Berger ©1985 (used with permission).

The PACIFICA QUARTET is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.,
115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
www.melkap.com
www.pacificaquartet.com
Recordings: Cedille Records

String Quartet in B Flat Major, Op. 130

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Adagio ma non troppo. Allegro

Presto

Andante con moto, ma non troppo

Alla danza tedesca: Allegro

Cavatina: Adagio molto espressivo

Grosse Fuge (Op. 133)

From 1811 until the early 1820s, Beethoven produced few major works. In addition to suffering poor health and, from 1816, complete deafness, a succession of draining experiences—unrequited love affairs, troubles as guardian of his nephew Carl, the death or desertion of his patrons, and quarrels with his publishers—left him bereft of all personal happiness and financial security.

Yet Beethoven was able to write his publisher in 1822, “I have long known what I want to do, but I can’t get it down on paper. I feel I am on the threshold of great things.” Soon after there began a period of artistic creation in which Beethoven composed the crowning achievements of his life’s work—his *Missa Solemnis*, the Ninth Symphony, the five “Late Quartets,” and the *Grosse Fuge*, or Great Fugue (Op. 133).

The first three “Late Quartets” and the *Grosse Fuge* were written under a commission from Prince Nikolai Galitzin, a Russian nobleman from St. Petersburg and an amateur cellist, who simply asked Beethoven for “one, two, or three quartets.” From May 1824 to November 1826, a scant four months before his death, Beethoven devoted all his energy and genius to three quartets for Prince Galitzin, Opp. 127, 130, and 132, and the two others, Opp. 131 and 135, that he wrote without commission.

In these last works, Beethoven went beyond many of the accepted musical norms, creating new formal structures and organizing principles, vastly increasing the music’s length and scope, and demanding more from the players than was ever dreamt possible. In a sense, he sought to achieve a music that would communicate the revelation that had come to him—the ability of the human spirit to transcend suffering and chaos. The epic theme of his music had become the concept of man as master of his fate. He wrote, “Whoever truly understands my music is free from the miseries that haunt the world.”

Op. 130 is the third and last of the quartets Beethoven composed for Prince Galitzin, but it was published second, between Op. 127 and Op. 132. It follows the Classical order of movements, fast, scherzo, slow, and finale, except that Beethoven adds extra scherzo and slow movements just before the finale. Overall, the musical treatment handles the melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and internal formal structures quite freely.

Most notable are the fifth movement *Cavatina* and the following sixth movement *Grosse Fuge*, or Great Fugue. The soft *Cavatina* (Italian for “short aria”) exemplifies Beethoven’s spiritual and emotional “interior music.” His friend, violinist Karl Holz, wrote that Beethoven composed the *Cavatina* “amid sorrow and tears...even the memory of this movement brought tears to his eyes.” The climax comes just before the return of the opening

The PACIFICA QUARTET is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.,
115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
www.melkap.com
www.pacificaquartet.com
Recordings: Cedille Records

melody, in a brief seven-bar passage marked *beklemmt* (“oppressed”), when the first violin sings its disconnected cries over pulsing repeated notes in the other instruments.

Beethoven originally composed the *Grosse Fuge* as the final movement of Op. 130, although he was later persuaded to replace it with another finale. Intense and often frenzied, the *Grosse Fuge* baffled listeners with its giant leaps, clashing dissonances, and overwhelming rhythmic drive. Massive and complex, it was a particular shock coming moments after the quiet eloquence of the lovely *Cavatina*, as though Beethoven smashed down his fist to counteract the soft outpouring of melancholy emotion. Symphonic in its grand proportions and at times brutal, the *Grosse Fuge* harked back to the polyphony of J.S. Bach while at the same time it looked ahead to more advanced musical thinking of the future.

For some unknown reason Beethoven did not attend the premiere performance of Op. 130 in Vienna but waited in a nearby tavern. When his friend Karl Holz, the premiere’s second violinist, rushed over to tell him that the audience has insisted on repeats of the second and fourth movements, Beethoven replied, “Yes, these delicacies! Why not the Great Fugue?” Then after a moment’s thought, he contemptuously exclaimed, “Cattle! Asses!” Despite the positive reaction to other movements of the quartet, listeners and players were critical of the *Grosse Fuge*, and Beethoven’s publisher was able to persuade him to replace it by artfully telling him that the public demanded it as a separate piece and by offering him additional money for its publication.

--Program note adapted from Guide to Chamber Music, by Melvin Berger

The PACIFICA QUARTET is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.,
115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
www.melkap.com
www.pacificaquartet.com
Recordings: Cedille Records