



Miró Quartet & Cho-Liang Lin!

Tuesday July 12th, 2022, 7:30PM
Corbett Auditorium
University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 18 No. 2

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro

Adagio cantabile

Scherzo: Allegro

Allegro molto quasi presto

In 1798, at the age of twenty-eight, Beethoven realized that he was losing his hearing. Several years later in 1801, he wrote to his friend Franz Gerhard Wegeler, "For the past three years my hearing has been growing constantly weaker....For two years now I have ceased to attend any social function for I cannot bring myself to tell people, 'I am deaf.'" While he was being drawn into a world of silence, Beethoven was also undergoing another kind of turmoil as he searched for new and unique forms of expression to extend his musical inheritance from Haydn and Mozart. By following the older masters and publishing his first six string quartets together in a single Opus, a departure from his previous practice, Beethoven acknowledged Haydn and Mozart as his sources of inspiration. Yet his distinctive musical personality and forward-looking musical vision infused their compositional practices with new flexibility and scope, more powerful emotional content, and an imposing monumentality.

The G Major, the briefest and seemingly least ambitious of Op. 18 quartets, emerges as a charming and witty work. Despite its apparent light, happy character, it is considered difficult to perform, and Beethoven's notebooks reveal that the lightness was achieved only after a lengthy struggle, covering thirty-two notebook pages, to blend many disparate elements into a smooth creation.

The quartet opens with a series of short, balanced phrases followed by a gruff bridge passage that leads to the second subject. The development is devoted exclusively to material from the first subject and the bridge. The Adagio second movement features the solo violin at first, but Beethoven takes the closing cadenza figure of this section,

quadruples its tempo, and sends the music scurrying off in a parody-like Allegro. The slow, gentle strains of the Adagio return, now in variation and shared by all players. In the Scherzo third movement, the two violins gleefully toss the music back and forth until the other instruments join in to introduce a more sober note. In the trio that follows, the two contrasting moods – playful and serious – are expanded. In the transition back to the repeat of the Scherzo, the cello plays a descending scale line, and the violins, unable to contain their enthusiasm, anticipate the repeat of the first section. Beethoven referred to the last movement as “*aufgeknopt*” (“unbuttoned”), connoting a free, informal character. Starting with perfectly symmetrical, four-square phrases, it goes on to an impish second theme with a syncopated start and a delightful counter melody. Rollicking along lightheartedly, it builds to a brilliant conclusion.

Written between 1798 and 1800, the six Op. 18 quartets were dedicated to Prince Karl Lobkowitz, an Austrian nobleman, and their premieres were given at Friday morning musicals held at the Prince’s Viennese home. They were published in 1801.

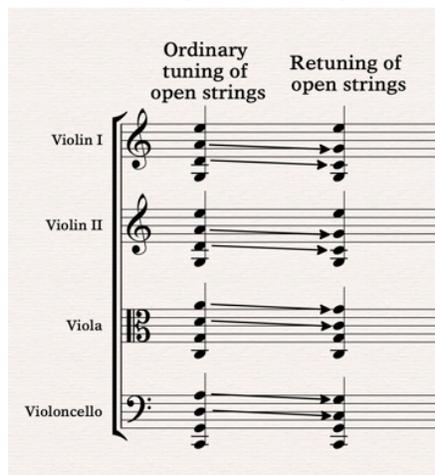
--Program note adapted from *Guide to Chamber Music* by Melvin Berger

Home

Kevin Puts

The refugee crisis in Europe, documented in recent media by horrific stories and photos of displaced families, led me to compose Home.

Performing this fourth quartet of mine requires all four members of the quartet to retune their instruments to the pitches of a C-major harmony, as follows:



The image displays a musical score for four string instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is organized into two columns: "Ordinary tuning of open strings" and "Retuning of open strings". Each instrument's part shows a series of notes on a staff, with arrows indicating the specific string and fret positions for each note. The retuning column shows the instruments tuned to a C-major harmony, which is a departure from their standard tuning.



Historically, this act of employing a tuning other than the customary stack of perfect fifths in all instruments has been referred to as scordatura. It allows the quartet to resonate in a unique way when its open strings are played, thereby creating a sonic representation of "home" and one which is abandoned after the idyllic atmosphere of the work's first several minutes in search of new and unfamiliar harmonic terrain.

I am grateful to Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival and to all co-commissioners for their support of this work. Home is the third work of mine written for the Miro Quartet, and it is dedicated with admiration and affection to its members.

--note by Kevin Puts

Octet in E-flat major, Op. 20

Felix Mendelssohn

"He started playing the piano at the age of four and was composing at eight, by which time he had memorized all the Beethoven symphonies and could play them on the piano. He may have even been superior creatively to Mozart as a young man, for Mendelssohn at sixteen had already written the Octet and was to follow it up in the following year with the Midsummer Night's Dream Overture. Mozart at the same age had nothing comparable to show."

- Harold C. Schonberg

Felix Mendelssohn is surely one of music's most celebrated child prodigies. His precocity manifested itself in both performance and composition. He appeared successfully as a pianist at age seven, and by twelve had composed sonatas, songs, cantatas, operas and symphonies.

Mendelssohn came from an upper-middle-class family. And while this meant that Felix never had to "work" for a living, he nevertheless drove himself to an early grave in an attempt to fulfill all of his many assumed musical responsibilities. It is said that he made the profession of music "respectable." He was by all accounts a remarkable person. He possessed considerable talents as both a visual artist and writer.

Languages came easy to him. His administrative and organizing talents were also considerable. Along with Robert Schumann and Ferdinand David, he founded the Leipzig Conservatory in 1843. (During the Nazi Era, his commemorative statue at the Conservatory was torn down.) He helped promote his contemporaries, among them Chopin, Berlioz, and Schumann, whose symphonies he was the first to conduct, and was regarded as one of the finest conductors of his time. It is also to Mendelssohn that we owe the "modern" approach to performing the works of Bach and Handel.

Mendelssohn was adamant about sticking to the score – well almost, compared, that is, to the liberties then regularly taken. In this respect he ran afoul of most of his contemporaries who believed they could improve the scores of these past masters. He was also one of the great pianists of his day. Clarity, nuance, lack of mannerism, and, again, fidelity to the score marked his playing. His style of playing eventually won out over the empty virtuosity, charlatanism, and showboating of many early 19th Century pianists. He also kept the keyboard works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven alive when they were eclipsed, much to his disgust, by those of Field, Hummel, and Kalkbrenner. In his work *The Great Pianists*, Harold Schonberg asserts that Mendelssohn was probably “one of the greatest improvisers of musical history.” The Octet for Strings was a product of his sixteenth year. It was most likely intended for the 19th Century equivalent of jam sessions held at his parents’ home each week on Sunday mornings (what kind of musicians would be up on Sunday mornings?). Actually, they were some of Berlin’s finest musicians, as well as those passing through the neighborhood on tour.

Young Felix dedicated the work to his violin and viola teacher Eduard Rietz, and he took up the viola for the first performance in the fall of 1825. Though perhaps overshadowed by his Overture to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, it is in the Octet that Mendelssohn can be seen to have “come into his own” as a composer - for it is here that Mendelssohn’s talents have been allowed to flow, unhampered by past musical models. This is particularly evident in the sparkling melodic stream of the opening Allegro. The second movement is marked by bold harmonic excursions. The third movement Scherzo seems to be possessed by those spirits that will abound in the yet-to-be-composed Overture to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. However, according to the composer’s beloved sister Fanny, a composer and pianist in her own right, the Scherzo was inspired by the “Walpurgisnacht” scene from the first act of Goethe’s *Faust*. The final movement Presto, while filled with wonderful contrapuntal combinations, also features prominently a reintroduction of the Scherzo theme as well as a variant of the first movement’s second theme.

--note by Joseph Way

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