TWENTY-SECOND SEASON
FOURTH CONCERT

Houston Friends of
Music, Inc.
and
Shepherd School of Music

PRESENT THE

Juilliard
String Quartet

Robert Mann — violin
Earl Carlyss — violin
Samuel Rhodes — viola
Joel Krosnick — cello

Hamman Hall
Tuesday, February 9, 1982
8:00 P.M.
Rice University
PROGRAM

Quartet in F Major, Opus 59, no. 1 .......... BEETHOVEN
(Rasumovsky)

(1770-1827)

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto

Theme molto e mesto

Allegro assai: Alla danza tedesca

Adagio molto espressivo: Cavatina

Finale: Grosse Fuge

INTERMISSION

Quartet in B flat Major, Opus 130 .......... BEETHOVEN

Adagio, ma non troppo: Allegro

Presto: L'istesso tempo

Andante con moto, ma non troppo

Allegro assai: Alla danza tedesca

Adagio molto espressivo: Cavatina

Finale: Grosse Fuge

HOUSTON FRIENDS OF MUSIC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the presentation of chamber ensembles with national and international reputations and the development of new audiences for chamber music through concerts available to everyone.

HOUSTON FRIENDS OF MUSIC TWENTY-SECOND SEASON
HOUSTON FRIENDS OF MUSIC/SHEPHERD SCHOOL OF MUSIC FIFTH SEASON

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November 30, 1981 ............... FOLGER CONSORT
January 19, 1982 ............... DORIAN WIND QUINTET
February 9, 1982 ............... JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET
March 8, 1982 ............... CONCORD STRING QUARTET
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PROGRAM NOTES

“How can we have a group like the Juilliard Quartet without asking them to play Beethoven?” is the type of question often asked at planning meetings of the Houston Friends of Music / Shepherd School of Music Series. The choice of not one, but two, Beethoven quartets, as well as the Grosse Fuge, on tonight’s program is based on two guiding principles of natural and human affairs. The first is that of all the things in the world that have a sweet taste, a little piece of sugar is the sweetest. The second is known as Sutton’s law. When Willie Sutton, a well-known bank robber, was asked why he persisted in robbing banks, he replied, “Because that’s where the money is.” Whatever illustration one uses, it is clear that in the string quartet literature the Beethoven quartets are the sweetest and the dearest.

The period during which Beethoven composed the Opus 18 quartets has been designated his “early period.” These works are innovative and subtle and bear Beethoven’s stylistic stamp even though they show more influence of Haydn and Mozart than do his later quartets. The five quartets of his “middle period,” of which the Opus 59, no. 1 is first, were composed when increasing deafness, financial problems and inner turmoil were compounding his already bitter life. In these quartets he does not abandon balance. However, form is now more subservient to musical idea and feeling than in the earlier period. The new intensity and freedom in these compositions, so baffling and irritating to his Viennese audience, seems to us a logical extension of the musical ideas of his earlier period. The listener smiles less and thinks more when hearing these works.

If the Opus 59 quartets confused his musical contemporaries, the quartets of the “late period” (from 1818 on) completely confounded and angered most of them. His evolving independence from conventional patterns of composition resulted in shorter melodies, more abrupt rhythmic changes, and greater complexity in the development of themes and fragments of themes. We know from hearing Beethoven’s other music that nothing is wasted; every passage is necessary to the work as a whole. Yet there are measures in the quartets of the late period, especially in transitional positions, which defy analysis—they can be interpreted in different ways by different people. Thus, in these late quartets the listener is drawn more into the music as an active psychological participant than in anything he had written earlier.

The Opus 59, no. 1 Quartet begins without introduction with a big melody for the cello, soon answered by the first violin. This is the dominant theme of the movement and will recur in many guises. Every time in the movement can be thought of in terms of the first theme. It will either combine with it, alternate with it, or be a variation of it. Four eighth notes, two slurred and two dotted, provide both melodic and rhythmic development, along with triplet runs passed from instrument to instrument. The interplay of both of these patterns creates a fantastic tension which increases until the climax of the movement, a long, high C on the first violin under which nearly all the musical ideas of the movement are briefly restated in condensed form.

The Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando is dominated by drumlike beating of the cello. The other instruments reply in what may seem to be a dialogue in drum beats, but soon it is clear that out of this bumpy pattern evolve melodic and contrapuntal Inventions of great beauty and complexity. As if responding to the title of the movement, the last few measures are the only ones that are really scherzando. In the Adagio molto e mesto the solo C of the second violin leads us into perhaps the saddest and most contemplative movement that Beethoven ever composed. If the third movement of the fifth symphony can be characterized as late knocking at the door, then this movement may suggest some of our feelings when we peek inside. The long cadenza at the end leads without pause to the Theme russe: Allegro. The melody suggested by Beethoven’s friend, Count Razumovsky, begins the movement, but from then on it is Beethoven at his most robust and vigorous. Against this fast moving, rhythmically stable background there are syncopated passages similar to those in the second movement. Near the end there is a hushed recurrence of the Russian theme which leads to the brilliant Presto ending.

Composed in 1825 during a brief period of vitality between illnesses, the Quartet in B flat Major, Opus 130 shows less brooding and melancholy than most of the other late quartets. It is, nevertheless, serious, introspective, and highly complex. The first movement, Adagio molto e tranquillo: Allegro, is characterized by sudden shifts of tempo and the blending of apparently conflicting ideas. Even during the most explosively loud and fast runs of sixteenth notes, which themselves absorb one’s attention, other voices, like distant horn calls, are always lurking and focusing key fragments in unexpected ways, making the whole a masterful blend of disparate parts. The Presto is a scherzo which takes us into the fantastic world of hurrying, ghostly voices. The middle section, in 6/4, quickly establishes a heavily accented, rhythmic pattern which is so regular that the minor interruption of it (one beat displacement of the accent and absence of the grace note) is all that is needed to separate sections as if this measure were a pause. Schumann considered the Andante con moto e ma non troppo: the most inspired movement of the Quartet because of its depth of fantasy, blending of conflicting melodies, and its thematic variation, while the Allegro assai: Alla danza tedesca, with its hasty grace, is a German dance originally composed for the A minor Quartet. Although most of the variations are straightforward and could have been composed in an earlier period, toward the end of the movement the melody gets buried in the variations but is clearly identifiable in the grace and mood of the embellishments. The Coda was one of Beethoven’s favorites, and he once said he could never think of it without tears coming to his eyes. With its agonizing, pleasuring quality, the movement is one of continuous song with each phrase shading into the next as in some modern music.

The Grosse Fuge, originally composed for this Quartet, was replaced by a second Finale that Beethoven had to write because the publisher did not think the Fuge would sell. It is often played alone as Opus 133. Every phrase, even the repetition of identical notes, is an important voice in this monumental fugue which combines the logic of Bach with the heart of Beethoven.

Program Notes by Jack B. Mazow

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