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PRESENT THE

TOKYO STRING QUARTET

Peter Oundjian, *violin*
Kikuei Ikeda, *violin*
Kazuhide Isomura, *viola*
Sadao Harada, *cellist*

Thirty-fourth Season — First Concert

TOKYO STRING QUARTET

Stude Concert Hall Alice Pratt Brown Hall
Rice University
September 27, 1993 8:00 p.m.

PROGRAM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770 - 1827)

Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2 "Compliments"

Allegro
Adagio cantabile
Scherzo: Allegro
Allegro molto quasi presto

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp"

Poco adagio; Allegro
Adagio ma non troppo
Presto; Piu presto quasi prestissimo
Allegretto con variazioni

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo
Allegro molto vivace
Allegro moderato
Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Presto
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro

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PROGRAM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2 "Compliments"

Ludwig van Beethoven, perhaps the most influential and revolutionary composer of all time, composed nine symphonies and thirty-two piano sonatas filled with power, majesty and emotional depth. It is in his seventeen string quartets, from Opus 18 to 135, however, that he is said to reveal the greatest intimacy, the finest shades of emotion, and the greatest technical refinement.

Beethoven completed his first six quartets in 1798 and they were published in 1801 as Opus 18. While Beethoven's early string quartets are traditional in form and style, even these works pressed against established boundaries of musical convention of their time. Beethoven's *Quartet in G Major*, the second in his early quartet series, has a charm very similar in style and temperament to some of the best examples of eighteenth-century Rococo chamber music. Its light, happy character is deceptive, however, in that it tends to conceal the fact that it may be, according to several notable musicians, the most difficult of all the Beethoven quartets to perform.

The G Major quartet opens with a series of short, elegantly balanced phrases, which Theodor Helm in his 1885 book on Beethoven quartets likens to an "eighteenth-century salon, with all the ceremonious display and flourish of courtesy typical of the period...with bows and gracious words of greeting." Thus the nickname "Compliments" was given. A gruff bridge passage is then heard, leading to an appealing second subject and closing theme. In the development, the first melodies and the bridge passage are prominent. The recapitulation brings back the original themes, but more forcefully and with greater freedom.

The *Adagio* begins with a gentle violin solo before creating an extreme contrast by quadrupling tempo, a technique that was to become characteristic in the 1820's. The slow, broad *Adagio* then returns, with the gentle strains now shared in variation by all players.

The cheerful melody of the *Scherzo* is then expressed back and forth between the two violins, followed by the contrasting seriousness of the viola and cello. With the *Trio* comes the elaboration of the two opposing moods. The cello's descending scale line then signals the violins to enthusiastically repeat the first section.

Beethoven used the term "Aufgeklopft," which means "unbuttoned," to describe the last movement's free, informal character. Perfect symmetry in the beginning gives way to a second theme with a syncopated start and a charming counter melody. This lighthearted finale continues merrily along and then builds to a brilliant conclusion.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp"

Beethoven completed the *Quartet in E-flat Major* in 1809, at which time it was premiered at the Vienna home of Prince von Lobkowitz. He composed this quartet at a time of much personal and political turmoil. Early in 1809, three noblemen had granted Beethoven an annual stipend. Shortly thereafter, he was devastated by the rejection of his marriage proposal to his teen-age student, Therese Malfatti. That same year, the French attacked and occupied Vienna. Beethoven was said to have lived in absolute squalor in those years. Nonetheless, out of this turmoil came yet another rich quartet in which the complexity and emotional depth of Beethoven's inner world are revealed.

Opus 74 has been nicknamed the "Harp" quartet because of two short passages of pizzicato accompaniment in the first movement. While such pizzicato figures in the early 1800's would likely have shocked Beethoven's listeners, there appears to be general agreement today that the nickname focuses undue attention on some passages that are really very minor compared to many other noteworthy aspects of the quartet.

Beethoven begins the *E-flat Major Quartet* with a slow, tranquil introduction that revolves around a four-note motif begun by the first violin and repeated many times. The main body of the first movement is in keeping with the placidity of the introduction and, like the introduction, it is occasionally accented by some powerful chords. A closing theme with jarring off-beat accents leads into the brilliant *coda*, which contains a virtuosic passage for the first violin.

In his second movement, Beethoven creates an intensely beautiful, tender *Adagio*, conveying a profound spirituality that is said to foreshadow his late quartets. The first violin begins the expressive main theme with its exquisite ornamentation, followed by three varied repetitions separated by contrasting episodes. The repetitions include a heavy, despondent variation in a minor key followed by a loftier, more spiritual rendition.

In the third movement, Beethoven creates a *Scherzo* with very concentrated energy and rhythmic drive, full of hammering figures and breathless scale passages. The *Scherzo* concludes with a hushed repetition of the opening, followed without pause by the finale.

The finale is comprised of six variations based on a graceful theme, in which strong, active melodies are interspersed with other variations more gentle and lyrical. The accelerated tempo of the *coda* leads to a magnificent conclusion in which the melodic line of the third variation can be heard.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131

In 1823, Beethoven wrote to his friend the Archduke Rudolph, to whom he had just dedicated the *Missa Solemnis*,

There is no loftier mission than to come nearer than other men to the Divinity, and to disseminate the divine rays among mankind."

According to many musicologists, Beethoven accomplished this mission in the six quartets that he composed between 1824 and 1827, the year of his death. In these quartets, Beethoven defies many musical rules that had heretofore governed his works. The fluidity that replaces previous concepts of harmony, form and melody has led one musical expert to describe Beethoven's late quartets as "the most divinely inspired music in the literature."

Beethoven dedicated Opus 131, which he completed in 1826, to Baron Joseph von Stutterheim, Field Marshal, as an expression of gratitude for accepting Beethoven's nephew Karl into von Stutterheim's regiment. Beethoven's relationship with his nephew, whom he had raised, had been marked by extreme tension and turbulence.

While each of his quartets is masterful in its own right, Opus 131 is said to have been considered Beethoven's own favorite among all of his quartets. And when Schubert heard the piece, according to Beethoven's friend Karl Holz, "he fell into such a state of excitement and enthusiasm that we were all frightened for him." Indeed, many have called it the greatest quartet ever written.

The seven connecting movements of Opus 131, played without pause, begin with a *fugue* that is somber yet at the same time remarkably serene. Richard Wagner stated that this introductory *Adagio* "reveals the most melancholy sentiment in music." In contrast, the second movement is full of gaiety and warmth, without the contemplativeness or the dramatic tension of the first. A short eleven-measure recitative follows, which then introduces the *Andante* whose expansive theme and variations provide the pivotal focus of the quartet. Wagner described the synopated theme of the two violins in this movement as "a vision of perfect loveliness, the incarnation of pure heavenly innocence." A playful and humorous *Presto* follows, corresponding to the classical *scherzo* movement. While light in character, the *Presto* requires the highest level of musicianship in order to master its treacherous passages. Following the *Presto*, the prayerful melodies of the brief, pensive *Adagio* then lead into the final movement, in which a forceful melody builds momentum before yielding to the softness of a contrasting melody in which can be heard the opening *fugue*. A shortened development follows the second theme, then a recapitulation and full-length *coda*. Richard Wagner captured the wondrous intensity and intricate complexity of Beethoven's nature in these final years in his description of the finale to the C-sharp minor quartet as "the fury of the world's dance - fierce pleasure, agony, ecstasy of love, joy, anger, passion, and suffering; lightning flashes and thunder rolls."

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Hailed for its "superbly integrated artistry" (*Los Angeles Times*) and for its exceptional technical command and intensity, the Tokyo String Quartet has received extraordinary acclaim. Although officially formed in 1969 at the Juilliard School of Music, the Tokyo String Quartet traces its origins to the Toho School of Music in Tokyo, where several founding members were profoundly influenced by Professor Hideo Saito. The original members of what would become the Tokyo Quartet, including violinist Kazuhide Isomura and cellist Sadao Harada, eventually came to America for further study, and in 1969 the ensemble was officially created and scholarships were awarded by the Juilliard School of Music. Soon after, the Tokyo Quartet won First Prize at the Coleman Audition in Pasadena, the Munich Competition and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions, which brought them worldwide attention. Kikuei Ikeda, who was also trained at the Toho School, joined the Quartet as second violinist in 1974, and Peter Oundjian, a student of Ivan Galamian, Itzhak Perlman and Dorothy DeLay, became first violinist in 1981. The Tokyo continues as Artists-in-Residence at Yale University where it has actively taught for the last seventeen years and at The University of Cincinnati's Conservatory of Music where it has taught since 1987.

During the 1993-94 season the Tokyo String Quartet will be featured in Lincoln Center's "Great Performers" series. In addition to performances for leading music series in several major U.S. cities, the Tokyo will tour Europe in a series of engagements including La Scala - Milan, Konzerthaus - Vienna, and Concertgebouw - Amsterdam. A particular milestone will be the commencement of a two-year project performing cycles of the complete Beethoven String Quartets throughout the world.

Recording exclusively for BMG Classics/RCA Victor Red Seal, the Tokyo Quartet has recently completed a landmark series of recordings - the complete quartets of two of the world's great composers, Beethoven and Schubert. Their numerous recordings have earned them such honors as the Grand Prix du Disque Montreux, "Best Chamber Music Recording of the Year" awards from both *Stereo Review* and *Gramophone*, and six Grammy nominations, including one this year for their performance of the late Beethoven String Quartets.

Peter Oundjian plays a Guarnerius del Jesu violin, made in 1743.

Kikuei Ikeda plays an Antonius Stradivarius violin, made in 1719.

Kazuhide Isomura plays a Luigi Marianini of Pesaro viola, made in the late 16th century.

Sadao Harada plays a J. B. Guadagnini of Piacenza cello, made in 1743.

Program notes were written with reference to the following sources:

The Music Masters, Volume One, edited by A. L. Bacharach

Guide to Chamber Music, Melvin Berger

History of Western Music, Christopher Headington