

EMERSON STRING QUARTET

EUGENE DRUCKER, VIOLIN

PHILIP SETZER, VIOLIN

LAWRENCE DUTTON, VIOLA

DAVID FINCKEL, CELLO

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2005

— PROGRAM —

Music of LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Quartet No. 6 in B-flat Major, Op. 18 No. 6 (1798-1800)

Allegro con brio

Adagio ma non troppo

Scherzo: Allegro

La Malinconia: Adagio – Allegretto quasi Allegro

(EUGENE DRUCKER, 1st violin)

Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95 "Serioso" (1810)

Allegro con brio

Allegretto ma non troppo

Allegro assai vivace ma serioso

Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato

(PHILIP SETZER, 1st violin)

— INTERMISSION —

Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127 (1823-4)

Maestoso – Allegro

Adagio ma non troppo e molto cantabile

Scherzo: Vivace

Finale: Allegro

(EUGENE DRUCKER, 1st violin)

This performance is generously underwritten by
The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts
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Bettiruth and Adolph Susholtz.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Quartet in B b Major, Op. 18 No. 6, La Malinconia (Vienna, 1801)

What should one make of this sometimes light-hearted and somewhat eccentric quartet with the melodramatic finale which gives it its name? Sixth and last of Beethoven's first set of published string quartets, he had already demonstrated to his highly discerning audience the depths of his enormous talent. His mastery of the art of combining four stringed instruments into a conversational encounter among four generally equal voices, his mastery of musical form, his originality of style and his ability to write music deeply felt, had been amply demonstrated in the preceding five quartets, gaining him the recognition of his Viennese patrons as the rightful successor to Mozart and Haydn. In the troubled Vienna of the day, with its government intimidated by Napoleon's growing power, art events and particularly the intimate settings of chamber music concerts were popular as a safe excuse for social gatherings in what was a time of increasing political repression, complete with government spies and surveillance foreshadowing the police state later to be put in place by Metternich. At the same time, the public at large was famously given to somewhat frivolous behavior and madly infatuated with Italian *opera buffa*.

With this this in mind, we note that this is a work of extreme contrasts. It starts out on an exceptionally light-hearted note; the influence of Haydn is evidenced by the wittiness of the thematic material and its clever development. Alongside this, one can also hear at the onset of this first movement, an unmistakable aria *a la opera buffa* as the opening motif is tossed about between upper and lower calling out to each other like two characters in a comedy. This is followed by a little country dance, before moving on to a more serious theme. Beethoven's markings indicate that the entire movement is to be played very fast. In contrast, the *Adagio* which follows is meant to be slow, elegant, even rhapsodic—a *Da Capo* aria of solemnity and simplicity. Next comes a rollicking *Scherzo-Trio* filled with remarkable (for the time) syncopations by means of which Beethoven defies the listener to keep time, as duple and triple meter compete for attention. The absence of strong beats and the infrequency with which all four voices converge, produce a comical musical roller coaster always on the verge of falling apart. This resolves at the last moment, when the instruments manage to come together, to the relief of both performer and listener.

But it is the last movement for which this quartet is known—the famous *Finale, La Malinconia* with its dark, anguished opening *Adagio*, alternating with a spritely *Allegretto quasi Allegro*. The naming of the movement, its dramatic mood changes and its wide tempo swings are all unprecedented. However, I believe it is a mistake to read too much into this movement, to seek in it deep and soul searching meaning. A good case can be made for Beethoven's having written it as a spoof on the melodramas so popular on stage at the time, much as he did in his rarely played but delightful String Quintet in C. This suspicion is reinforced when the movement ends with a madcap *Prestissimo*, robustly informing the listener not to pay too much attention to all that serious stuff.

Program notes © by Nora Avins Klein, July, 2005

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95 ("Serioso") (1810)

Anger and supplication are the emotional substrate of Beethoven's *F Minor String Quartet Opus 95*. His shortest, most explosive and most concentrated quartet—titled "Serioso" by the master himself—might well have been called "Furioso," possessed as it is with rage only intermittently relieved. Short in duration, high in intensity and written without commission, it is extraordinary among his quartets for the way it presents a coherent, high psychological drama comparable only to his Fifth Symphony. It was written in the wake of Napoleon's second invasion of Vienna, a time of personal anguish for the forty-year-old Beethoven as, despite new-found assurances of financial stability, it began to dawn on him that his intense desire to marry would remain unfulfilled. Six years elapsed before he allowed its publication.

The work opens *Allegro con brio* with a violent, terse motif played in unison, launching the movement on its fitful course—a brief exposition of abrupt contrasts of mood and shifts in tonality, played without repeat and leading to a short, blunt development followed by an even more concentrated, always tumultuous, recapitulation.

The second movement, *Allegretto ma non troppo*, provides the only consistent respite from the general anguish of this work. Modeled on a *Da Capo* aria, it was written in an unexpected key—a major sixth from the primary tonality. It begins in quiet resignation with an exposed solo descending scale played by the cello. This simple theme transmutes into a beautiful fugal passage of increasingly complex harmonies interlocking all the instruments. Throughout the movement, Beethoven alternates melodies of dreamy simplicity with quietly passionate passages of Baroque complexity engaging Baroque elements: the fugue with its devices of inversion and stretta, constructing an interlude of deep beauty. But Beethoven finds himself unable to end this exalted movement in peace, choosing instead to merge it directly with the furious outburst which begins—and permeates—the Scherzo, *Allegro assai vivace ma serioso* which follows. Here is another driving, tight-lipped expression of distress, erupting like a volcano; yet in its few moments of quiet, an uplifting hymn tune can be heard buried under the counterpoint.

The Finale, *Larghetto espressivo, Allegretto agitato*, and *Allegro* seems to express more sorrow than anger: anguish, elaborated in rondo form. A swinging waltz rhythm supporting a drooping melody in a minor key sweeps along a mournful path, occasionally interrupted by gruff outbursts like the roar of a caged animal. Suddenly there is an astonishing about face. As if to shake off the gloom, Beethoven ends after all, with a merry chase in a major key, in which sunshine and optimism win the day.

Program notes © by Nora Avins Klein, January, 2004

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
String Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 127 (1824-25)

Beethoven's String Quartets span what are customarily known as the three creative periods of his adult life, the third period encompassing the last ten years of his life. Beethoven's hearing had continued to deteriorate and by 1816 he could hear nothing. He was suffering from poor health, draining experiences as guardian of a difficult nephew, unrequited love affairs, and difficulties with his publishers. Yet despite his distress Beethoven wrote to his publisher in 1822: "I sit pondering and pondering. I have long known what I want to do, but I can't get it down on paper. I feel that I am on the threshold of great things." Shortly thereafter he began a period of incredible creation. After completing the Diabelli Variations, the *Missa Solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony, he set aside all other work and began to compose his five final string quartets. The late quartets are considered to be the pinnacle of Beethoven's creative achievements.

The first three "late quartets" that Beethoven composed were Opp. 127, 130, and 132. They were commissioned by a Russian nobleman and amateur cellist, Prince Nikolai Galitzin, who lived in St. Petersburg. In these works Beethoven left the classical style almost entirely. His works of this period are no longer determined by a pre-set structure, but by the musical thoughts themselves. He composes in a meditative style, working with motifs more often than with melodies. He provides continuity by blurring the dividing lines between phrases and by making use of contrapuntal techniques—treating all four instruments as separate entities. New sonorities are introduced in this manner.

Beethoven began composing the String Quartet in E Flat Major in May 1824, while staying in the forested area around the spa of Baden. (Several pastoral elements can possibly be identified in the composition.) The first movement begins with a slow introduction, then moves into a lyrical melody which is marked "*teneramenta*", or tenderly. There follows a more forceful theme over sharp repeated notes in the second violin, viola and cello, and then the cantabile character returns. The slow introduction is used again at the beginning and in the middle of the development. After the recapitulation, the movement ends very softly with fragments from the closing of the first theme.

The second movement, in A Flat Major, consists of a theme in two sections, and five variations. These variations are no longer the standard embellishments of a theme. Instead, the statement is transfigured and these alterations are often difficult to follow. An abbreviated guide can help the listener follow the construction of the movement, but the ethereal quality of this movement truly escapes words. The first variation begins after the three quiet chords that close the initial theme, but the theme all but disappears in the polyphonic nature of the variation. The second variation starts with short dry notes in the cello, and can be likened to a gentle twittering—almost birdlike. The third variation is marked by a modulation to E Major, while in the fourth variation the theme is once again recognizable. A short minor section leads into the fifth variation which is characterized by diatonic meandering and the movement ends with eight bars derived from the conclusion of the theme.

The third movement is a fairly typical scherzo and makes continual use of one rhythmical pattern. A middle section contains virtuosic passages for the first violin, and then the rhythmical pattern returns. The Finale is full of joyful country dance tunes. Its coda, while harking back to the original theme, takes on a completely different tonal aura and rhythm; then is punctuated by the final chords.

The premiere of this quartet was given on March 6, 1825, but because it was under rehearsed and consequently poorly played, it was also poorly received. Beethoven then invited another quartet to prepare the music under his tutelage. Though completely deaf at the time, he coached the group by watching their bow and finger movements. A highly successful performance on March 26 was the result, and this led to nine more performances over the next few weeks.

Program notes © by Margaret Bragg, July, 2005

Emerson String Quartet

Acclaimed for its insightful performances, brilliant artistry and technical mastery, the Emerson String Quartet is one of the world's foremost chamber ensembles, and has amassed an impressive list of achievements: a brilliant series of recordings exclusively documented by *Deutsche Grammophon* since 1987, six *Grammy Awards* including two unprecedented honors for "Best Classical Album," three *Gramophone Magazine Awards* and performances of the complete cycles of Beethoven, Bartók and Shostakovich quartets in major concert halls throughout the world. The ensemble is lauded globally as a string quartet that approaches both classical and contemporary repertoire with equal mastery and enthusiasm.

In the summer of 2005, the Quartet continued its exploration of Dmitri Shostakovich, with multiple performances of "The Noise of Time" in both Paris and Moscow with Simon McBurney's theatre ensemble *Complicité*. In April and May, 2006 the Emerson performs the complete Shostakovich string quartet cycle for Great Performers at Lincoln Center as part of *A Creative Path, the Music of Dmitri Shostakovich*, which also includes Valery Gergiev conducting the complete symphonies. The string quartet cycle will also be performed in five concerts at London's South Bank Centre in March of 2006. In January 2006, *Deutsche Grammophon* releases a disc of Nielsen, Sibelius and Grieg.

In addition to its active performance schedule in the major concert halls of North America, the Quartet tours Europe extensively, with stops in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, and Austria. In 2005-2006, the Quartet continues its relationship with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. as part of the group's 26th sold-out season. Programs this season include the world premiere of a Nicholas Maw quartet, commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. In the fall of 2002, the Emerson joined Stony Brook University as Quartet-in-Residence, coaching chamber music, giving master classes and providing instrumental instruction. The ensemble conducted its first International Chamber Music Festival at Stony Brook in June 2004 and is planning its second Festival for May 2006. In addition to these duties the group performs several concerts during the year at Stony Brook's Staller

Center for the Arts and continues its educational affiliation with Carnegie Hall. In March 2004, the Quartet was named the 18th recipient of the 2004 Avery Fisher Prize—another first for a chamber ensemble.

The Emerson has received six *Grammy* Awards: two for its Shostakovich cycle, two for its Bartók cycle, one for *American Originals* (works by Ives and Barber) and one for the complete quartets of Beethoven.

Formed in 1976, the Emerson String Quartet took its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. Violinist Eugene Drucker and Philip Setzer alternate in the first chair position and are joined by violist Lawrence Dutton and cellist David Finckel. Since January 2002, the Emerson has performed while standing—the cellist plays on a podium—and incorporates this practice in all appearances. The Quartet is based in New York City.

The Emerson String Quartet appears by arrangement with Kirshbaum Demler & Associates, Inc. and records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon.

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