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**ELIAS
STRING QUARTET**

Friday, March 7, 2014 ~ 8 pm
Coolidge Auditorium
Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson Building



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The Library of Congress
Coolidge Auditorium
Friday, March 7, 2014 — 8 pm

THE GERTRUDE CLARKE WHITTALL FOUNDATION
IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ELIAS STRING QUARTET

SARA BITLLOCH & DONALD GRANT, VIOLINS

MARTIN SAVING, VIOLA

MARIE BITLLOCH, CELLO



Program

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

String Quartet in F major, op. 77, no. 2, Hob. III:82 (1799)

Allegro moderato

Menuetto. Presto

Andante

Finale. Vivace assai

GYÖRGY KURTÁG (B. 1926)

Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky, op. 28 (1988-1989)

I *Largo*

II *Più andante*

III *Sostenuto, quasi giusto*

IV *Grave, molto sostenuto—quasi doppio più lento, calando al fine*

V *Presto (Fantasie Über die Harmonien des Webern-Kanons)*

VI *Molto agitato (Canon a 4)*

VII *Sehr fließend (Canon a 2—frei, nach op. 31/VI von Webern)*

VIII *Lento*

IX *Largo*

X *Sehr fließend (Webern: Canon a 4, op. 31/VI)*

Xa *A tempo*

XI *Sostenuto*

XII *Sostenuto, quasi giusto*

XIII *Sostenuto, con slancio*

XIV *Disperato, vivo*

XV *Larghetto (Arioso interrotto—di Endre Szervánszky)*

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet in E minor, op. 59, no. 2 ("Razumovsky") (1806)

Allegro

Molto Adagio

Allegretto

Presto



About the Program

JOSEPH HAYDN, String Quartet in F major, op. 77, no. 2, Hob. III: 82 (1799)

This evening's program sheds light on the complex relationship between Franz Joseph Haydn and his heir to the string quartet throne, Beethoven. By the turn of the nineteenth century Haydn's career as a composer was in its twilight period, though this description in no way undercuts the important output from these years. Between the mid -1790s through the early 1800s, Haydn produced many of his greatest works, including the op. 76 and op. 77 quartets, *Missa in tempore belli* (*Mass in the Time of War*—1796), *Nelsonmesse* (*Lord Nelson Mass*—1798), *Die Schöpfung* (*The Creation*—1797-1798), and *Die Jahreszeiten* (*The Seasons*—1799-1801). There was a clear departure from the string quartet genre following the two op. 77 quartets (composed in 1799). This opus series was originally meant to be comprised of six quartets (as was standard), but Haydn halted work on the cycle. Evidence does not exist to definitively confirm what caused this, but one commonly accepted theory is that Haydn was increasingly feeling pressure from Beethoven's new-found popularity in composing for string quartet.¹ The two figures were familiar with each other and for a time Beethoven even avoided composing quartets, perhaps because he thought Haydn's quartets would overshadow his efforts. Ultimately when Beethoven entered string quartet composition, for which we are eternally grateful, he stole Haydn's proverbial "thunder." It made sense for Haydn, in his declining years, to pursue innovation in genres that Beethoven had minimal experience with—sacred choral-orchestral works.

Beethoven's op. 18 quartets were composed and premiered between 1798-1800. His music represented bold, fresh ideas to the Viennese public. Haydn's quartet writing reached new heights with the op. 76 and op. 77 quartets, but he was a known quantity throughout Europe by that point in his life. To make matters worse, Beethoven and Haydn shared a common patron for string quartets, Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian von Lobkowitz, the dedicatee of Beethoven's op. 18 quartets and Haydn's op. 77 quartets. This indirectly placed the two composers in competition for patronage. The public nature of the competitive spirit between Beethoven and

¹ Robbins Landon, H.C. *Haydn: Chronicle and Works—Haydn: The Years of 'The Creation' 1796-1800* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 502-505.

Haydn was a factor in Haydn's growing disdain for his younger colleague. Haydn scholar H.C. Robbins Landon's² study of this precarious relationship highlights one particular affront to Haydn's pride. Beethoven, out of jealousy, was known to make "sideswipes" publicly about *The Creation*. Word of this reached Haydn and he responded negatively, thus tarnishing the loose professional relationship he had with Beethoven.³

Melodrama aside, Haydn and Beethoven both made significant contributions to the quartet genre. Haydn's works reached a peak, while Beethoven's were just gaining ground. Haydn's late quartets are as significant to the development of the genre as Beethoven's early quartets. Musicologist Sir Donald Francis Tovey went so far as to describe String Quartet in F Major, op. 77, no. 2 as "...perhaps Haydn's greatest instrumental composition."⁴ Given that Haydn composed no less than sixty-eight quartets, this level of praise (from Tovey—a Beethoven scholar no less!) is significant as a reminder that the senior composer's stature did not wholly diminish toward the end of his career. He continued to compose exquisite music with lasting impact. Beyond the two op. 77 quartets, Haydn left two complete movements of an unfinished quartet, op. 103. These movements date from ca. 1803. While it is impossible to pinpoint who first performed the op. 77, no. 2 quartet, evidence exists suggesting that an early performance took place at Eisenstadt during October 1799.⁵ By the late eighteenth century Haydn's work for the Esterházy court had shifted from regular Kapellmeister duties to providing one mass annually during the late summer. Haydn's work for the Court was by this point centered in Vienna and Eisenstadt, whereas he previously was posted at Eszterháza.⁶

The sound world of the op. 77 quartets is very much tied to Haydn's concurrent work on major choral-orchestral works. A spring 1799 *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* review (of the public premiere of *The Creation* in Vienna) mentioned Haydn's work on the op. 77 quartets.⁷ The quartets of this late period of Haydn's life were perceived to be motivated by the same musical impetus as the large-scale works for voices and instruments. The vocal works' influence upon the quartets is evident in part with an abundance of lyrical thematic subjects and melodies, which pervade the F major quartet in particular. Described as "songlike" by musicologist Reginald Barrett-Ayres, the *Allegro moderato* begins with a flowing eight-bar thematic statement sung by the first violin.⁸ The lower voices offer simple harmonic support as an accompaniment. Repeated eighth notes that are accented with *sforzandi* and short swells propel the music forward. A sweet second theme is explored *sotto voce*, leading the harmony to the dominant key of C major.

In this movement Haydn makes use of the structure that music history has retrospectively deemed sonata form. Melodic originality and a careful balance between thematic material and tasteful accompaniment are two great reasons for experiencing this quartet.

2 The Library of Congress Music Division holds the H.C. Robbins Landon Collection.

3 Robbins Landon, 502-505.

4 Sir Donald Francis Tovey (Haydn article in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*—Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 526.

5 Mary Hunter "The Quartets" in *The Cambridge Companion to Haydn*, ed. Caryl Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114.

6 James Webster, "Haydn, Joseph" *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/article/grove/music/44593>>.

7 Floyd & Margaret Grave, *The String Quartets of Joseph Haydn* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 323.

8 Barrett-Ayres, Reginald, *Joseph Haydn and the String Quartet* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1974), 342.

If a hallmark of Beethoven's quartet style is revolution of genre, a hallmark of Haydn's late style is an effective and captivating expression of melody and harmony within a contained structural framework. In the closing section of the exposition the voices sound like a set of crochet needles realizing an intricate pattern. Nonsensical civility is brushed aside with a flurry of rhythmic exuberance to facilitate a surprise authentic cadence within the dominant key. The development section engages rhythmic fragments with mini-sequences that shift the harmony around, without straying from semi-related key areas of the F major scale. Haydn's palette of dynamics is limited in this portion of the movement, alternating between *forte* and *piano*. Excitement comes from the natural tendency of repeated notes to create intensity and a series of well-placed *sforzandi*. Haydn gets excited and throws in a crescendo to *fortissimo* and sudden *subito piano* before the grand pause that slightly delays a resolution from C major to the F major that starts the recapitulation. The recapitulation does not innovate, nor does it claim to. It revisits the thematic material, explores the main rhythmic motives in transitional phrases, and reaches a simple, but satisfying, end (without needing an extended coda to bash home F major). One notable difference from the exposition is that the recapitulation's version of the second theme is marked *mezza voce*, therefore asking for slightly more volume than the original *sotto voce* iteration requires.

Many of Haydn's quartets feature a middle movement order of slow movement then fast movement (minuet). In the case of op. 77, no. 2 he plays with expectation by placing the minuet in the second movement position. Marked *Menuetto. Presto, ma non troppo*, the second movement is in F major but temporarily shifts to D major and D-flat major. Haydn makes fantastic use of a rhythmic trick that is so often associated with Beethoven's *scherzi*: repeated rhythmic motives that are displaced from the principal beat(s) of a bar. The *Scherzo* of Beethoven's Symphony no. 4 in B-flat major, op. 60 is an appropriate comparable example. Haydn's minuet begins on an upbeat and he places a staccato articulation marking on the downbeat of the first full bar. Emphasis is given to the normally weaker second or third beats of bars in this 3/4 time signature. This type of rhythmic manipulation creates a dance-like undertone that is jovial, rambunctious and rejuvenating. As in the above-referenced Beethoven example, Haydn contrasts the principal subject material with a second section that is drastically more relaxed (this effect is achieved with a slower rhythmic pace). The new material focuses on more sustained tones, fewer quick runs, and chromatic movement in the leading voices. The trio section (the arrival of D-flat major) is even more restrained, sounding like a quiet romantic ditty. Rhythmic displacement goes out the window in the trio, with Haydn choosing to hold back the reigns of youthful vigor (perhaps to not completely lose credibility as the elder statesman of string quartet composition). He does not keep it under wraps for very long, as the *da capo* return to the opening section takes hold and finalizes the balanced symmetry of the movement's layout.

The *Andante* movement truly embodies the implication of its tempo marking. Translated roughly as "walking speed," Haydn's *Andante* paints an aural scene of a leisurely *passeggiata* on a Sunday afternoon, through an area such as Vienna's "Prater" (a vast public park). For the music theory-types, this movement is structured in "strophic variations" form.⁹ With origins in seventeenth century opera, this form is usually applied to vocal music (here again, a reference to Haydn's simultaneous composition of choral-orchestral works). This

form is similar to "theme and variations" and essentially contains varied statements of the principal thematic subject set above a consistent bass line and shifting subject lines. A comfortable tonality of D major anchors this stroll through greenery on a spring day. The first statement of the theme is sung by the solo violin with a light accompaniment in the cello. Inner voices join in the second phrase and all four voices gradually gain intensity. While the first violin maintains a clear solo/leader role, the other three voices do capture the spotlight in moments (particularly during transitions between phrases). In one variation the first violin's solo line evokes the glories of J.S. Bach's violin concertos, while the cello simultaneously presents the theme (in this variation the inner voices provide accompaniment to add harmonic depth). The movement concludes with a variation that is very close in-line with the opening of the *Andante*, resting on a gentle series of repeated D-major chords.

Haydn concludes the quartet with an invigorating solo vehicle for the first violin that boldly returns to F major. Characterized by syncopated rhythms and frenetic combinations of motivic subjects, the *Finale. Vivace assai* boasts the energy of a young professional in Washington, DC combined with the class and polish of the city's established elite, thus representing the balance within Haydn's compositional genius. By the latter part of his career Haydn had refined the craft of quartet composition, but what makes his music so consistently fulfilling is the continuity of spirit evidenced throughout his long career. Spirited energy is conveyed with a quick rhythmic clip, intentioned combinations of *staccato* and *sforzandi* markings, as well as unexpected dynamic shifts. Haydn's final complete quartet will surely leave you with either the hair raised on the back of your neck, toes tapping in your shoes, a quicker heartbeat, or for the true quartet junkies, possible dancing in the aisles (who said Classical music could not be fun?).



GYÖRGY KURTÁG, *Officium breve in memoriam Andrea Szervánszky*, op. 28
(1988-1989)

Hungarian composer and pianist György Kurtág (b. 1926) holds a revered status in contemporary music circles. He studied at the Liszt Academy in Budapest and in Paris, where he had the opportunity to learn from major French figures such as Olivier Messiaen and Darius Milhaud. During his years as a young professional Kurtág was best known as a pianist and interpreter of Bartók. His now long, distinguished career is rather unique among composers of equivalent stature, many of whom hold or have held professorships in composition. Kurtág went a different route and worked extensively as a répétiteur (vocal coach). He also held professorships in piano and chamber music at the Liszt Academy. Kurtág notably coached at the International Bartók Seminar in Hungary, where he worked with the Takács Quartet (which most recently performed at the Library in November 2012).

Kurtág's international success as a composer flourished during his middle-age, beginning in the late 1970s. By the 1990s he was appointed to residencies with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Wiener Konzerthaus and Ensemble Intercontemporain, as

well as honorary teaching posts in the Netherlands and Paris. Kurtág's career outside of composing is now devoted to a performance project with his wife Márta (b. 1928), who is also a pianist. They perform Kurtág's compositions along with music that they love and have found influential. This project has been a part of their lives for over forty years, and each appearance is inevitably a highlight of any local music season. These "homage" concerts are programmed to include specific repertoire in tribute to teachers and musicians whom the Kurtágs have encountered, as well as those composers who have influenced György's music—Bach, Bartók, Ligeti (who was a classmate of Kurtág's), Stravinsky, Webern, and others. *The Guardian's* Tom Service has described these musical encounters as follows: "What you're seeing is private, intimate music-making raised to the level of a joyous miracle. It's one of the treasures of the 20th- and 21st-century music."¹⁰



KURTÁG AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

On February 7, 2009, György and Márta Kurtág performed at the Library of Congress as part of the composer's first visit to the United States. This performance was a featured event in a yearlong festival of Hungarian culture in the United States, *Extremely Hungary*. Their concert paid tribute to a legendary concert given at the Library by Béla Bartók and Joseph Szigeti on April 13, 1940, which featured a performance of Bartók's Sonata no. 2 for violin and piano, BB 85 (1922). Kurtág described that event as sacred for all Hungarian musicians.¹¹ The Library's special relationship with Bartók and Hungarian music was advanced when the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation commissioned Bartók's String Quartet no. 5, BB 110 (1934). To mark this history the Library commissioned a new work from Kurtág, *Hommage à Bartók* (2008), which was premiered in the Coolidge Auditorium by the composer and his wife. Charles T. Downey described the momentous evening in 2009 as "a concert of historic importance."¹²



Kurtág's music emulates the styles of Bartók and Webern. He distinguishes himself from them by adding a personal spin to many of his works, which are conceived as homages to various personalities to whom Kurtág feels connected. Though Kurtág's compositional output is small compared to many of his contemporaries, this is a result of his preferred deliberate and patient manner of working. He has composed for orchestra, chorus, vocal and instrumental chamber ensembles, solo instruments (many for piano), and electronics. One of Kurtág's most popular works in the United States at present is *Kafka-Fragmente*, op. 24, for soprano and violin (1985-1987), which gained attention following a 2005 staged performance at New York's Zankel Hall by Dawn Upshaw (directed by Peter Sellars). His nine works for string quartet include short individual compositions and extended works comprised of fragments, such as this evening's selection.

¹⁰ Tom Service, "A guide to György Kurtág's music," *The Guardian*, March 12, 2013 <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2013/mar/12/contemporary-music-guide-gyorgy-kurtag>>.

¹¹ György Kurtág, *Hommage à Bartók* manuscript score (2008), Library of Congress.

¹² Charles T. Downey, "Kurtágs play Kurtág at the Library of Congress" *Ionarts*, 10 February 2009 <<http://ionarts.blogspot.com/2009/02/kurtags-play-kurtag-at-library-of-congress>>.

Officium Breve in memoriam Andreæ Szervánsky for string quartet, op. 28 was premiered in Witten, Germany on April 22, 1989 by the Auryñ Quartet. In the quartet Kurtág incorporates influences and tributes to at least eight different musicians, on multiple levels in each instance. The most elevated dedication is evident in the title of the quartet: "Brief Tribute in Memory of Andreæ Szervánsky." Szervánsky (1911-1977) was a leading Hungarian modernist composer during the mid-twentieth century. A secondary dedication is inscribed on the title page of the score: "*Wilfried Brennecke gewidmet*" ("Dedicated to Wilfried Brennecke). Brennecke was a German musicologist, radio producer and critic. Dedications to four additional musician colleagues of Kurtág's are included in the quartet score.¹³

The musical style of the quartet evokes, among other influences, the rhythms of Bartók, brevity of Webern and Hungarian-flavored serialism of Szervánsky. Kurtág quotes directly from works by Webern and Szervánsky and essentially improvises on different fragments related to those excerpts. In the quartet Kurtág weaves the different musical threads together, forming a cohesive and integrated collection of sixteen short vignettes. Many of the movements omit a time signature, and the first three movements are even marked *Ad Libitum*. Szervánsky's *Serenade* for string orchestra (1947-1948) is quoted (the same tone row and repeating neighbor-note figure from the first few movements of *Officium Breve* are used) until Kurtág transitions to material directly related to Webern.

The first movement, *Largo*, is scored for muted solo cello and is comprised of just four bars. It is dedicated to cellist Tibor Turcsányi, suggesting that at times Kurtág's instrumentation is informed by the dedicatee's instrument of choice. *Più andante*, the second movement, is identified by harmonic open fifth intervals, evoking the sound of a woodwind instrument. All four instruments play for the first time. The dedicatee of the movement is Zsolt Baranyai (who played recorder). The cello strums *ppp* chords in the bass line.

The viola and cello are juxtaposed in movement three, *Sostenuto, quasi giusto*. According to Benjamin Frandzel's extensive article on the structure and musical composure of *Officium Breve*, this movement is a transcription of another homage that Kurtág composed for Szervánsky in the third volume of *Játékok* ("Games"—published in 1979—pedagogical piano works similar to Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*). In this movement Kurtág introduces one of the principal motives that is used throughout the *Officium Breve*: the falling motive.¹⁴ It is comprised of two notes (usually) that are separated by a descending interval. It becomes transformed in countless different ways, remaining at the core of the music. The falling motive opens the movement and is immediately met with a rebound of low C in the cello and D (first above middle-C) in the viola. The cello subsequently inverts the motive. While these kinds of transformations could easily be trivial in most music, given Kurtág's brevity, each note length, pitch, articulation, rest and millisecond has intention.

Grave, molto sostenuto (movement four) opens with a blurred *fortissimo* cluster in the upper three voices. The cello follows with accented, hollow octave C's. Subsequent statements

13 György Kurtág, *Officium Breve in memoriam Andreæ Szervánsky* for string quartet, op. 28 (Budapest: Editio Musica Budapest), 3-4.

14 Benjamin Frandzel, "A Canon Across Time: György Kurtág's *Officium Breve in memoriam Andreæ Szervánsky*, op. 28," in *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* T. 43, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2002), 383-396.

by the upper voices diversify rhythmically with the voices splitting slightly from *tutti* declarations. The opening C of the bass voice morphs into a dark C#. The second part of the movement (marked *pppp subito*) alters rhythmically, forming a creepy (achieved by playing *sul tasto*—"on the fingerboard"—and with harmonics) sequence of repeated rhythmic patterns.

The fifth movement, marked *Presto*, is named "Fantasy upon the Harmonies of Webern's Canons." Kurtág appropriates and reorders pitches and harmonies that Webern utilizes in his Cantata no. 2, op. 31/VI (which is referenced in other movements of *Officium Breve*).¹⁵ This is the first movement to employ irregular string techniques, such as *molto pressato* ("very pressed"), an indication for the bow to be literally pressed down firmly into the strings to create a scraping sound. The pressed moments are pitched specifically in the score. Ironically one of the instances that uses pressed bows is marked *dolce* ("sweet"). Another moment is marked with accents and *fff ruvido* ("coarse" or "rough"). Kurtág succeeds in alternating rapidly between different textures, therefore creating a sense of emotional instability for the listener.

Movement six, *Molto agitato (Canon a 4)*, passes in the blink of an eye (it lasts approximately seventeen seconds), not helped by the fact that it follows the fifth movement without pause (*attacca*). In five bars it acts as a four part canon, focusing on the interval relationships between pitches. Harmonically the movement refocuses on E as a focal pitch, whereas movement five centered around D. The seventh movement, *Sehr fließend (Canon a 2-frei, nach op. 31/VI von Webern)*, offers a direct reference to Webern, as in movement five. Kurtág makes indications in the score that certain moments are to be played as solos by the individual violins. These solo moments usually only last for approximately two bars, and are complemented with adjusted dynamic markings that facilitate the solo voice's emergence from the ensemble texture.

Gabriella Garzó, a friend of Kurtág's, is the dedicatee of movement eight. Reminiscent of movements one, two and four, *Lento* (comprised of three bars) is relatively static except for an isolated motive in the final bar played by the first violin. The eighth and ninth movements reaffirm D as a focal pitch.¹⁶ Movement nine, *Largo*, follows the eighth without pause. The viola acts as a single voice against the consort of two violins and cello. The falling motive described previously is highlighted in the viola solo. Only in the final bar are the violins and cello given a more equal presence. The tenth movement follows *attacca*.

Movement ten, *Sehr fließend (Webern: Kanon a 4, op. 31/VI)*, is a transcription for string quartet of the canon from Webern's op. 31, VI. Kurtág makes one significant adjustment, which is to shift the canon up by a whole-step. Frandzel's study of the quartet explains this transposition as necessary for Kurtág to maintain the pitch structure he laid out for the overall work. He also notes that Kurtág's three statements of the canon correlate with the three verses of the text ("Gelockert aus dem Schoße" by Hildegard Jone) in Webern's original work.¹⁷ Movement Xa is a second version of the Webern canon. It shifts the staggering of voices—the first violin and viola now begin together, as do the second violin and cello. The first pair plays the primary tone row and the second pair plays the inversion

15 Ibid, 388.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 391.

of the row.¹⁸ Movement ten repeats immediately after the conclusion of Xa, offering a symmetrically packaged transcription.

Kurtág dedicates movement eleven, *Sostenuto*—which follows the tenth without pause, to pianist György Szoltsányi. This movement marks a shift back to Szervánsky material. C is the central pitch and repeated frequently in all voices. Each voice shifts between repeated pitches and incremental chromatic orbits around C. The movement closes with a cluster of B-flat (cello), C (doubled in second violin and viola) and D (first violin). Movement twelve, *Sostenuto, quasi giusto*, recalls the simple layout of the falling motive in the third movement (which has the same title). The viola and cello parts are identical to those in the third movement. The violins interpret the falling motive in variations that cross voices.

Movement thirteen, *Sostenuto, con slancio* beckons the sustained tones in movement four and open fifths of movement two. The second phrase is marked *misterioso* and calls for quiet contemplation. The movement concludes with harsh chords played *espressivo*. The penultimate movement is marked *Disperato, vivo*. This may evoke imagery of a downward spiral into an inferno. Desperation is conveyed with a dense, abrasive texture of note clusters, undulating rhythms and instructions such as *agitato* and *marcatissimo*.

The closing movement, *Larghetto—Arioso interrotto (di Endre Szervánsky)*, states the direct quote from the third movement (mm. 1-12) of the Szervánsky *Serenade* that forms the basis of *Officium Breve*. Kurtág intends for the listener to experience this quote at the end of the quartet, banking on a drastically different aural and emotional experience than if it were to be laid out blandly at the beginning (like in theme and variations form). The quote ultimately acts as a hymn prayer for Szervánsky. It suggests that he has found peace and respite away from the chaos and instability of human existence.



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN, String Quartet in E minor, op. 59, no. 2 ("Razumovsky") (1806)

Beethoven's three op. 59 string quartets (composed in 1806) were commissioned by Count Andrey Kirillovich Razumovsky (1752-1836), the Russian Ambassador to Vienna from 1792-1799 and 1801-1806. Razumovsky, who remained in Vienna after his ambassadorship, was an important patron of the arts. Aside from a close relationship with Beethoven, he was also acquainted with Haydn and Mozart. These three quartets are distinguished as being the principal string quartets of Beethoven's middle or "heroic" period. According to the Beethoven-Haus Bonn (the principal repository of Beethoven's archive and manuscripts), the op. 59 quartets were premiered in January or February of 1807 by violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh's (1776-1830) quartet in a private performance.¹⁹ Beethoven's previous contributions to the string quartet genre were the six op. 18 quartets (1798-1800).

18 Ibid.

19 Beethoven-Haus Bonn, "Drei Quartette für zwei Violinen, Viola und Violoncello (F-Dur, e-Moll, C-Dur) op. 59, 1-3," <<http://www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de/>>.

In the six years since the op. 18 quartets were completed, Beethoven's compositional style developed rapidly, with the landmark achievement of Symphony no. 3 in E-flat major, op. 55 "Eroica" (1803) that revolutionized possibilities for symphony orchestra composition. Orchestral works of the heroic period are characterized by advancing the limitations of structure and harmonic development. Aside from "Eroica," this period produced many of Beethoven's most important works, such as the Piano Sonata in F minor, op. 57 ("Appassionata"), Piano Concerto no. 4 in G major, op. 58, Symphony no. 4 in B-flat major, op. 60, and the Violin Concerto in D major, op. 61. Additionally Beethoven drafted the first version of *Fidelio* and began sketching the fifth symphony. In *The Beethoven Companion* Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune refer to these years as "the most amazingly prolific period of Beethoven's life."²⁰ While it may be argued that Beethoven's late years were more innovative, considering the impact of the late quartets, it is safe to say that the middle period is when Beethoven's compositional voice became fully developed.

The second quartet in the op. 59 series, the E minor, was met with mixed reviews by the press. Two responses in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* stand out. One reviewer called the work "difficult [to listen to] but substantial."²¹ A review of an early performance in Frankfurt balanced sarcastic criticism with praise: "Everyone listened to often rather bizarre notes with remarkable silence, an affect that only such a successful performance can bring about."²² The reviewer continued to report that the audience gave a rousing round of applause for the performers. These comments captured the quartet's significance; it stretched the bounds of quartet convention and challenged listeners' harmonic expectations, while being absolutely captivating.

Beethoven begins the E minor quartet with an *Allegro* in sonata form, but ensures that it is fresh and exciting. He begins with two bold chords that have been described as "two sharp handclaps."²³ They are very similar in energy to the opening two chords of "Eroica." In both instances the chords act as aural shocks that focus all attention on the quiet opening theme. These chords return in various forms throughout the movement, but more importantly, they introduce one element of harmonic tension. The first chord is a root position E minor chord that leads into a first inversion dominant (B major) chord. In the bass voice (cello) the initial tonic E slides down by a half-step to D#, the leading tone. After a short pause the D# resolves back to E. The descending half-step figure is a principal motive in the *Allegro*, simultaneously causing angst against and emphasizing the tonic.

After the opening phrase the movement erupts into a rather violent series of sequences and transformations based on the principal subject. A brief chromatic hemiola transitions to the close of the exposition and the entire section is repeated. The development opens with harmonic transformations of the two chord strikes, leading into a restatement of the

20 Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune, eds, *The Beethoven Companion* (London: Faber, 1971), 252.

21 *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 9 (5 May 1807): 517, in Wayne M. Senner, et al, eds. *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by his German Contemporaries*, volume 2 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 53.

22 *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 23 (21 Feb 1821): 111-112, in M. Senner, et al, eds. *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by his German Contemporaries*, volume 2 (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 111-112.

23 Arnold and Fortune, 255.

opening theme that is unsettled harmonically. A focal pitch in this first phrase is G, which is only touched upon fleetingly after tension builds up with repeated F#s and A-flats. Beethoven makes frequent use of sequences that gradually nudge the harmony around like a small creature on a hamster wheel. The recapitulation is relatively standard in its revisiting of the principal motives and thematic material. Beethoven repeats the entire development and recapitulation, before proceeding to the coda. Overall, the *Allegro* is very aggressive and indicative of some type of struggle, whether personal or communal. The notion of struggle and triumph is a key theme in Beethoven's "heroic" period works.

Beethoven biographer William Kinderman describes the *Molto Adagio* as "music of sublime contemplation."²⁴ The movement drastically contrasts the *Allegro* with slow developing chromaticism that is guided by the cello, evoking the falling half-step motive of the *Allegro*. At times the chaotic energy of the *Allegro* peeks through the supple thematic material, largely when chromatic sequences come to a head and erupt into brief unhinged *fortissimo* shouts. The movement is structured in sonata form and contains three main thematic groups that smoothly transition between C# minor and E major. The first theme is a soft-spoken lyrical tune introduced by the first violin. It is supported frequently with a warm chorale-like accompaniment.

A second thematic group is characterized by a dotted-rhythm motive that jumps up and down, cresting in the higher register of the violins. The third thematic section is a recurring transition figure that combines the slow lyrical character of the first theme with the unsettled impulse of the second. This third thematic section acts as a painstaking attempt to find resolution, moving step-by-step. There is one magical moment of transcendence in which the viola steals the spotlight with a mysterious and sinewy statement of the transition motive, a simple arpeggiation. One of Beethoven's most exquisite slow movements, the *Molto Adagio* gradually creates a sense of calm and release, so desperately yearned for after the boisterous *Allegro*.

The *Allegretto* comes off like music from a playlist that Beethoven would have created for a carriage ride out to the Austrian countryside, perhaps to a spa town like Baden where he later composed the ninth symphony. The principal theme sounds rustic and rough around the edges, an effect that is achieved by focusing on syncopated rhythms. The bouncy accompaniment of alternating figures between the cello and second violin/viola duo contributes a sense of motion. Chromaticism is ultimately at the core of making this theme sound rustic, something that music appreciation classes associate with the concept of "exoticism."

Chromaticism did not suddenly appear in the mid-nineteenth century. Previous Classical era composers like Haydn and Mozart used chromaticism to channel Eastern European folk melodies and influences. The E minor first section gives way to a pleasing, chipper E major section (the trio) that quotes a Russian folk tune. This same tune is quoted by Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) in the "Coronation Scene" of his opera *Boris Godunov* (1868-1869).²⁵ The *Allegretto* may have been composed in this

24 William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 108.

25 Ibid. The Library of Congress Moldenhauer Archives contains six pages of the holograph manuscript score from Rimsky-Korsakov's reworking of Mussorgsky's "Coronation Scene." These pages may be viewed digitally via loc.gov/performingarts.

manner specifically to please Count Razumovsky. Russian folk music was also quoted in the finale of op. 59, no. 1. The melody is played first in the viola, then the second violin, cello and first violin consecutively. They then work together to create a fugue-like section, with the Russian tune acting as the fugue subject. It feels like a dance, and for comic relief you might enjoy imagining the Russian Ambassador to Vienna in 1807 hearing this for the first time and tapping his feet out of sheer apolitical delight.

Beethoven goes wild in the *Presto*, which is definitely not a bad thing. The movement, which is ultimately in E minor, begins with a C major statement of the principal subject. It unfolds rapidly, brazenly, and splendidly. Beethoven creates music that would certainly inspire some life and enthusiasm in an early nineteenth century Viennese audience comprised of dry aristocrats and diplomats. The second theme is slightly laid back, but is driven by the same rhythmic principles as the first theme—repeated notes create forward energy and syncopations generate cyclical motion. Fans of the Beethoven symphonies will note that this type of Beethovenian rhythmic energy is used in many finales of the symphonies, the fourth and fifth in particular. The movement finally resolves to a solid statement of E minor, thus bringing the journey full circle and resolving the contemplation that prompted the pesky chromatic underpinnings of the first three movements.

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About the Artists

The **Elias String Quartet** is named after Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah* (*Elias* is the German translation and original title), and has quickly established itself as one of the most intense and vibrant quartets of its generation. The quartet performs around the world, collaborating with many different artists. The Elias was formed in 1998 at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester where they worked closely with the late Dr. Christopher Rowland. They also spent a year studying at the Hochschule in Cologne with the Alban Berg quartet. Other mentors in the quartet's studies include Hugh Maguire, György Kurtág, Gábor Takács-Nagy, Henri Dutilleux and Rainer Schmidt.

The Elias String Quartet made its North American debut in March 2012 to great critical acclaim. In addition to a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall, they were praised in *The Washington Post* for their "shimmering beauty," and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* proclaimed, "few quartets at any stage of their evolution have this much personality." Their concerts in Philadelphia and Washington, DC were with pianist Jonathan Biss; they return to North America for concerts both with and without Mr. Biss in March 2013.

The quartet has been chosen to participate in BBC Radio 3's prestigious New Generation Artists scheme, and received a 2010 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award. With the support of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, the Elias is now immersed in their Beethoven Project, which encompasses learning and performing all Beethoven string quartets. Performances of the cycle began during the 2012-2013 season and continues throughout the current season in Great Britain. The quartet is documenting its journey on a dedicated website: www.thebeethovenproject.com. The Elias has performed alongside artists such as Michael Collins, Jonathan Biss, Simon Crawford-Phillips, Ralph Kirshbaum, Alice Neary, Ann Murray, Joan Rogers, Mark Padmore, Roger Vignoles, Michel Dalberto, Peter Cropper, Bernard Gregor-Smith, Ettore Causa, Timothy Boulton, Robin Ireland, Adrian Brendel, Anthony Marwood, and with the Endellion, Jerusalem and Vertavo Quartets.

The Elias received second prize and the Sidney Griller prize at the 9th London International String Quartet Competition in 2003 (as the Johnston String Quartet), and was a finalist in the Paolo Borciani Competition in 2005. For four years the Elias was resident string quartet at Sheffield's "Music in the Round," as part of Ensemble 360. Ensemble 360 has released discs of music by Mozart, Beethoven and Spohr with Sanctuary Classics and Nimbus. The Elias most recently recorded the piano quintets of Schumann and Dvořák with pianist Jonathan Biss, available on the Onyx label. A recording of Haydn and Schumann quartets was released in Spring 2012 on the Wigmore Live label. The quartet's previous release on that label, a disc of Mendelssohn, Mozart and Schubert, received the *BBC Music Magazine* Newcomer Award in April 2010. A debut recording of Mendelssohn quartets for Sanctuary Classics also received wide acclaim, and their performance of the op. 80 quartet was chosen as best recording on BBC Radio 3's *Building a Library* series in September 2009. The Elias also released a disc of French harp music with harpist Sandrine Chatron for the French label Ambroisie, and Goehr's Piano Quintet with Daniel Becker for Meridian Records. A recording of Britten quartets was released by Sonimage.

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