



NEW ZEALAND
STRING QUARTET

National Tour 2020
Beethoven: Icon

String Quartet in F major Op. 135

- I. Allegretto
- II. Vivace
- III. Lente assai e cantante tranquillo
- IV. Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß. Grave (Muß es sein?) - Allegro (Es muß sein!) - Grave, ma non troppo tratto - Allegro

Opus 135, composed between July and October 1826, was commissioned by Moritz Schlesinger and published in Paris in September 1827. It was dedicated to Johann Wolfmayer, a longstanding admirer of Beethoven - possibly as compensation for the Requiem which Wolfmayer commissioned in 1818 but never received.

After a furtive opening, the Allegretto features concise thematic material. The understated first subject is contralto, the second, an animated soprano, is reached via a distinctive passage of octave sevenths. The development explores three motifs: the opening, the transition passage and the triplets from the second subject. The recapitulation is largely unaltered save that the transition figure is decorated chromatically. The sardonic Vivace features persistent syncopations, emphatic interjections and deliberately rough octave doubling of the outer voices. Unusually for a scherzo, the long central section contains the most complex writing, climaxing in a wild violin dance over a pounding accompaniment.

Beethoven thought the slow movement – Lente – a "sweet song of tranquility" and takes a theme and variation form. The first variation is dusted with chromaticism, the sombre second variation is fragmented and in a minor key, while the third gives the melody to the cello. The final variation only hints at the original theme in the gentle rise and fall of the violin over a spacious accompaniment.

Beethoven subtitled the finale of Opus 135 "*Der Schwer gefaßte Entschluß*" ("The Difficult Decision".) According to the well-known story, Ignaz Dembscher, a court official, asked to borrow the music for Opus 130, but as he had not subscribed to its original performance, Beethoven insisted that he pay the cost of a subscription - 50 gulden - for the privilege. Dembscher protested "*Muß es sein?*" ("Must it be?"). Beethoven's reply was the canon WoO 196, the text of which is "*Es muß sein, ja, es muß sein. Heraus mit dem Beutel.*" ("It must be, it certainly must be. Put your money on the table."). The questioning opening "*Muß es sein?*" is perhaps a parody of the popular slow introduction form, overturned by an emphatic reply, "*Es muß sein!*", soon eclipsed by a rather pompous motif. The question and reply are each recalled before a cheeky pizzicato passage leads to a final defiant "*Es muß sein!*"

String Quartet in B flat major Op. 130 Finale

- VI. Finale. Allegro

Opus 130 was the last of three quartets (Opp 127, 132 and 130) that Beethoven undertook to write for Prince Galitzin (1794 - 1866). The Russian was a fervent admirer of Beethoven's music and approached him in November 1822 to write "one, two or three quartets for which labour I will be glad to pay you whatever you think proper... I will accept the dedication with gratitude". Beethoven accepted the commission, noting that "since I see that you are cultivating the violoncello, I will take care to give you satisfaction in this regard", but it was a long time before he delivered the quartets: Opus 127 in January 1825, Opus 132 in February 1826 and Opus 130 in March 1826.

With six movements of wildly varying lengths and moods, Opus 130 has something of the feeling of a classical divertimento, in which dance movements alternate with more weighty compositions. The Finale, which Beethoven composed in September 1826 as a substitute for the *Große Fuge (Great Fugue)*, is a sonata rondo. The matter-of-fact themes are accompanied for the most part by a lively hopping figure. The

development contains a long passage of indefatigable semiquaver counterpoint which leads into a formidable series of octaves followed by the recapitulation and a surprisingly elaborate coda.

String Quartet in A minor Op. 132

- I. Assai sostenuto - Allegro
- II. Allegro ma non tanto
- III. Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenden an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart. Molto adagio - Neue Kraft fühlend. Andante - Molto adagio - Andante - Molto adagio. Mit innigster Empfindung
- IV. Alla marcia, assai vivace - Più allegro - attacca:
- V. Allegro appassionato

The second of the Galitzin Quartets is the most musically diverse of Beethoven's late quartets and has strong extramusical associations. Between April and May 1825 Beethoven was ill with a potentially fatal inflamed bowel. Recovery was slow and painful, but while convalescing he wrote the extraordinary "Heiliger Dankgesang" ("Hymn of Thanksgiving of a Convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian Mode") that became the third movement.

The first movement's highly original opening recalls Beethoven's *Große Fuge* (*Great Fugue*). Interrupted by a violin flourish which leads into the Allegro, the introductory material is not heard again in its original tempo, although later reappears, inverted, as a countermelody. The meandering Allegro explores the thematic material at great length and makes heavy use of appoggiaturas, blurring the tonality. This restless, ultimately enigmatic movement concludes with an extended coda which integrates diverse thematic elements. The Allegro is an aloof minuet. The phrases have an appealing 'lurching' quality, dovetailing and weighted towards the middle of the bar. The trio section recalls the pastoral traditions of the 18th century, with a droning figure that evokes the musette – a small bagpipe often used in classical depictions of Arcadian shepherds.

The great arch of the "Heiliger Dankgesang" consists of variations on two themes. The Adagio is a slow chorale melody, delaying cadences in a way that is typical of late Beethoven and giving a timeless, otherworldly quality. The first section transitions to the Andante, subtitled "Neue Kraft Fühlend" ("Feeling New Strength") – a fresh, innocent quality with carefree trills and grace notes. The return to the molto adagio is marked *cantabile espressivo* as the chorale floats above great chains of suspensions – Beethoven's interpretation of 16th-century sacred polyphony, while the second appearance of the Andante retains the artlessly soaring quality of the earlier passage with varied ornamentation. The final adagio "mit innigster Empfindung" ("with the most inward feeling") begins with the barest, medieval sounding harmony but soon blossoms into what can only be described as ecstatic transfiguration.

This unprecedented slow movement has been described by quoting metaphysical poet George Herbert's *The Flower*:

And now in age I bud again
After so many deaths I live and write
I once more smell the dew and rain
And relish versing: O my onely light
 It cannot be
 That I am he
On whom thy tempests fell all night

It would be impossible to write a worthy sequel to a slow movement of such profundity. Beethoven settles for a cheerfully straightforward march, followed by a passage of striking instrumental recitative, transporting the string quartet into the realm of grand opera, and leading directly into the sonata-rondo Finale – a sombre waltz. At times passionate, it teasingly modulates into A major before a last-minute return to the tonic.