**THE NEW YORK TIMES**

“The music’s moody outbursts and vivacity come fully alive in elegant readings that are attentive to quicksilver changes in dynamics and articulation…the Sonata No. 4 in A minor is darkly playful, their ‘Kreutzer’ Sonata brilliant and stormy.”

**THE STRAD**

“Their trim, alert reading of op.24 arguably provides their most effective and expansive vehicle yet…It combines an appropriate sense of idiom with an abundance of vitality, sensitivity and insight, and furnishes Beethoven’s textures with a clarity rarely achieved.”

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**BEETHOVEN String Quartets Op. 18 nos. 1-3**

**BEETHOVEN Sonatas for Fortepiano and Violin Volume 1**

Ian Watson and Susanna Ogata

**BEETHOVEN Sonatas for Fortepiano and Violin Volume 2**

Ian Watson and Susanna Ogata

**www.thesixteen.com**
These recordings were in a sense born of my student days, studying with Eugene Lehner, the violist of the Kolisch Quartet. I remember playing the first movement of op. 18, no. 6 for him. My quartet (not the Eybler Quartet) had chosen a very conventional, moderate tempo. His response, in his heavily accented Hungarian tenor voice, was something like, “Ah, children, that was very nice. But, you know, Beethoven was not always so very nice. Perhaps you would like to know that his metronome mark is 80 to the entire bar!” He proceeded to sing and conduct most of the movement at what seemed a mad and breakneck speed. We fared worse with the next movement, which he sang for us at Beethoven’s prescribed and glacial pace, the same pulse of 80, but this time to a sixteenth note.

The group’s resistance to his suggestions was immediate because we couldn’t, at the drop of a hat, perform them convincingly. His suggestion also spawned a furious debate in the group about whether to pay any heed at all to those metronome markings, so different were they to anything we had heard before. As it happens, we were not alone in that discussion or in resisting Beethoven’s will: the tradition that has grown up around these works rarely takes his tempo indications into account.

The Eybler Quartet have chosen to take Beethoven at his word, which has committed us to putting aside our received ideas and intuitions about these works, unlearning them to the degree necessary and subsequently reconstructing them with as many as possible of Beethoven’s instructions.
Much of the repertoire that the Eybler Quartet plays is from the two or three generations of composers preceding Beethoven, which is unusual for a string quartet. A typical string quartet concert programme features Beethoven as one of its earliest works; for us, his is frequently the latest. Our experience of approaching Beethoven “from the other side”, as it were, has profoundly influenced our readings of the works. To us, Opus 18 is “new music”, while still very much of its time and creative struggle. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to share our re-examination of these works with you.

Patrick Jordan &
The Eybler Quartet

Building a bridge to
BEETHOVEN Opus 18

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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet in F major, Op. 18, No. 1
1. Allegro con brio 8.12
2. Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato 7.46
3. Scherzo. Allegro molto 3.15
4. Allegro 6.29

String Quartet in G major, Op. 18, No. 2
5. Allegro 7.25
6. Adagio cantabile - Allegro - Tempo I 5.47
7. Scherzo. Allegro 4.25
8. Allegro molto, quasi Presto 4.53

String Quartet in D major, Op. 18, No. 3
9. Allegro 6.28
10. Andante con moto 6.53
11. Allegro 2.48
12. Presto 5.18

Total running time 69.43
growing from the native Viennese soil. Beethoven himself was, of course, a transplant to Vienna and his reputation and fame in his early years grew primarily from his role as a fiery and gifted pianist. His development as a composer was driven by many factors, not least of which was the high regard in which he held himself, most concisely conveyed by the infamously disdainful note that he left for Count Lichnowsky after storming out of the Count’s residence: “There are many princes and noblemen. There is only one Beethoven.” With this sense of his own importance came a desire to create a lasting legacy.

Beethoven’s first foray into the string quartet, the most popular private musical entertainment of its time, came only after publishing four piano trios (op. 1 and op. 11) and four string trios (op. 3 and op. 9). He struggled to craft this set of six quartets, reworking several movements, ultimately creating works that he believed worthy to stand with, if not above, the works that preceded him. The string quartet as a genre dates from the 1750s. Its bright lights were, to our 21st century mind, Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadè Mozart, with 68 and 26 quartets respectively. Approached, again, “from the other side”, there is a world of quartet music featuring such names as Koželuch (6), Dittersdorf (6), Gassmann (37), Vachon (41), Gyrowetz (42), Aspimayr (43), Förster (48), Vanhal (78), Pleyel (95) and Boccherini (96), to name but a few. Wolfgang Mozart claimed to his father that he was “soaked in music”; it has been said that Beethoven himself was soaked in Mozart, and we hope, as the Eybler Quartet, to have soaked ourselves in the community of composers and practitioners of the emerging string quartet.

What does that mean for our performances? What impact does that have on our approach to the works presented here? No matter who the composer is, the first issue we have to confront is what text we work from. With lesser-known composers, our only option is to work from the original edition or manuscript parts, in essence making our own edition as we work. Often, these early editions are full of discrepancies in articulations and dynamics, which we have to make sense of somehow. The works of Beethoven suffer no such neglect – indeed, there are at least two different editions that claim to be utext, or from the original source. We have chosen to work from the excellent Bärenreiter edition prepared by Jonathan Del Mar, but with a twist; in the early part of our rehearsal process we played from different editions – one of us from the competing urtext edition, two from the first Viennese edition parts from Mollo (which Beethoven loathed), the fourth from the Bärenreiter parts. By presenting ourselves with contradictory information, we forced ourselves to delve deeply into the exhaustive Critical Notes that detail how Del Mar reached his conclusions. Interestingly, the notion of having a score for such works, where one can see all the parts at a glance as opposed to merely a set of parts, dates from after the first edition of Beethoven’s Opus 18, with Pleyel’s edition of Haydn’s complete string quartets. Regardless of the edition one uses, Beethoven’s work immediately stands apart from the work of those working around him: articulations and dynamics are more frequent, detailed and specific, and we find more special
Beethoven's work represents a sudden step up in complexity, rather than a smooth point along the curve. His desire for added control presents another paradigm shift for us as performers, in the form of a very large “Do Not Enter” sign posted on the road to improvisation. In performing the works of the previous generations of quartet composers, we would not think twice about adding an ornament here or there, even in the works of Haydn or Mozart.

In the introductory remarks to these notes, I mentioned the Eybler Quartet’s commitment to respect the metronome marks that Beethoven left for us. There would appear to be no end of debate on this fiery topic, and I am sure that whatever I have to offer will merely fan the flames rather than extinguish anything. In any event, I will take that topic up in earnest in the liner notes for the second volume of these works, along with tackling the idea of the virtue (and historical relevancy) of playing at a relatively constant tempo. In the meantime, and with particular gratitude to Leonard Ratner, I leave the reader with some specific observations about the quartets themselves.

Beethoven placed op. 18, no. 1 in F major first in the collection, although it was second in order of composition. Based on his existing sketches and other documentary evidence, he revised this work most heavily, notably redrafting the first movement in 3/4 meter from its original 4/4. He may have chosen to place the F major first because it is the longest of the works (calculated, ideally, from Beethoven’s metronome marks), or perhaps because of the incredibly terse unison opening of the first movement, bristling with curiosity and possibility – most quartets of the time would have begun with a nice, hummable tune. The second movement, which Beethoven also reworked considerably, is full of operatic pathos. His sketches for this Adagio include written references to Act V, scene iii of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, the scene of the young lovers’ deaths in the crypt. Dispelling that powerfully tragic atmosphere, the Scherzo lives up to its name, and most of the jokes are on the players: accents that are at cross purposes and passages featuring one player out of step with the rest of the group. The Finale begins with a commedia dell’arte simplicity that belies the formal sophistication of the movement as a whole. He even makes room to reference that perennial Viennese favourite of exoticism, the Turkish janissary band.

Op. 18, no. 2 in G major was the third work in Beethoven’s composition order and is generally regarded as the most Haydnesque of the set of six, although Mozart is an inspiration as well. Here we get a lovely swirling opening that would have more happily fit an early 19th-century quartet player’s expectations. What is more Mozart than Haydn in this movement is the incredible wealth of musical ideas, most presented in the first minute of music, and packaged in discreet two-measure units. Among the devices that Beethoven plucks from Haydn’s bag of tricks for the first movement is a false recapitulation and an ending that is clearly reminiscent of the end of the first movement of Haydn’s op. 33,
no. 4, also in G major. Beethoven’s second movement, Adagio cantabile, was also subject to considerable revision. It calls to mind, in its languid expansiveness the Adagio from Haydn’s op. 77, no. 1, once again in G major, composed at roughly the same time and dedicated to the same individual, the Prince von Lobkowitz. The tributes don’t stop there, as Beethoven chooses to interpolate a scherzando section between the two Adagio sections of the movement, the scherzando material drawn from the final cadence of the Adagio. This is reminiscent of the Finale of Haydn’s op. 54 no. 2, which uses a similar device to confound the listener’s expectations; to be sure, Haydn uses this idea in a different position within the quartet, with a different emotional impact, but the technical trick is the same. The “real” Scherzo contrasts the placidness of this Adagio again with a distinctly commedia dell’arte flair, this one driven by snide Harlequinesque comments from the rest of the group upon what the first violin tries to establish. The Trio invites some muddy boots to the party, which try through tipsy triplets to become more genteel, with limited success. The rambunctious Finale begins innocently enough, suggesting a rondo with its very distinctive opening. Beethoven gradually disabuses us of that expectation, instead giving us a robust and compact yet harmonically wide-ranging sonata form.

Op. 18, no. 3 in D major falls first in order of composition. For the listener, profound uncertainty marks the first two notes – not only are we denied a hummable tune, but we’re also left in the dark about what the key and metre are. That uncertainty remains a fixture of the movement, which features one of Beethoven’s most extended and tortuous melismatic lines, in the first violin. Again, we meet with a Mozartean profusion of ideas, this time coupled with a fairly circuitous harmonic path – his Viennese audience is expecting to land up in A major, which we do eventually, but we’re not expecting a visit to C major along the way! We also don’t expect the pivot point for the recapitulation of the opening material to be C-sharp major, but Beethoven cunningly uses that to accurately frame the opening two notes of the movement, in essence “explaining himself” after the fact. The second movement challenges the listener in two respects. First, it is in B-flat major (the same overall key relationship Haydn employed for the previously mentioned Adagio of Op. 77, no. 1). Second, it isn’t, strictly speaking a “slow” movement: Andante con moto translates roughly as “going ahead, with motion”. The Scherzo draws heavily upon the Scherzo in Haydn’s op. 33, no. 6, complete with displaced accents on beat three of many bars. Beethoven, who studied with Haydn for some years in Vienna, famously claimed that he never learned anything from the man. By this point you should all be in on our rehearsal joke, “Never learned anything from Haydn…yeah, right, Ludwig!” The Presto finale of the work is a moto perpetuo, once more drawing upon a vast reservoir of opera buffa gestures. For the curious, the Mexican Hat Dance (more properly the Jarabe Tapatío) is roughly contemporaneous with the composition of Opus 18. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Beethoven knew or intentionally quoted it in this movement!

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The Eybler Quartet came together in 2004 to explore the works of the first century and a half of the string quartet, with a healthy attention to lesser known composers such as their namesake, Joseph Leopold Edler von Eybler. The group plays on instruments appropriate to the period of the music it performs. The Toronto-based ensemble’s live performances have consistently garnered praise as “glowing and committed”, “spirited” and “lively and energizing”. Their recording with clarinetist Jane Booth won praise from Gramophone for being “totally engaging performances that breathe life into Backofen’s music”; their Haydn Op. 33 garnered this praise in Early Music America: “The Eybler Quartet’s rendition of Op. 33 by Joseph Haydn… is simply a treasure. The sound of the strings is warm but not overly vibrated or assertive; the articulation is clear but not didactic; the tempos are beautifully chosen, the ensemble perfect, and the intonation absolutely pure. This is music-making that reflects the deeply human and attractive qualities found in Haydn the composer”.

Violinist Julia Wedman and violist Patrick G. Jordan, are both members of Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra. Violinist Aisslinn Nosky is a former member of Tafelmusik and currently Concertmaster of the Handel and Haydn Society and Principal Guest Conductor of the Niagara Symphony Orchestra. Aisslinn and Julia are also members of I FURIOSI Baroque Ensemble. Cellist Margaret Gay, Artistic Director of the Gallery Players of Niagara, is much in demand as both a modern and period instrument player; she is also a founding member of the innovative and genre-bending
Ensemble Polaris. The Eybler Quartet harnesses a unique combination of talents and skills: razor-sharp ensemble skills, technical prowess, expertise in period instrument performance and an unquenchable passion for the repertoire.

The group’s three other recordings feature world premieres of Eybler’s Opus 1, world premieres of Backofen quintets coupled with Mozart’s clarinet quintet featuring Jane Booth, Haydn’s six quartets Op. 33, complete on 2 CDs and the world premiere of Johann Baptist Vanhal’s op. 6 on period instruments.

www.eyblerquartet.com

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