

BEETHOVEN

String Quartets Op. 18 nos. 1-3

EYBLER QUARTET



COR16164

From the opening bars of Quartet No.1 which bristle with curiosity and possibility to the wit and humour of Quartet No.2 and the supressed energy and teasing harmonic uncertainty of Quartet No.3, Opus 18 marks the end of Beethoven's 'first period' and provides the listener with a tantalising glimpse of the extraordinary music that was to follow.

"The playing throughout is defiantly un-glossy but consistently stylish: the helter-skelter finale of Op. 18 No. 3 rustles and glints like Mendelssohn's fairy music, and elsewhere there's an invigorating kick to Beethoven's rhythmic games...Beethoven would have been more than happy."

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BEETHOVEN

String Quartets Op. 18 nos. 4-6

EYBLER QUARTET



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QUARTET

he Eybler Quartet is delighted to offer its second and final volume of Ludwig van Beethoven's string quartets Opus 18.

In the introductory notes to volume I of the quartets, I made specific mention of my mentor Eugene Lehner. Undeniably, his eponymous quartet mate, Rudolf Kolisch, was amongst the most vocal, persistent and articulate advocates in the 20th century for performances that respected Beethoven's metronome marks. In his famous 1943 article published in The Musical Quarterly (Vol. 29, no. 3), Kolisch defends Beethoven's use of the device while addressing some of the common arguments resisting the proposed tempos: the impossibility of execution, doubts about Beethoven's with the metronome, accuracy speculations about his frame of mind while generating the marks or his sanity (curiously, those arguments haven't changed much in their nature in the last 75 years!). Using the existing examples that do have metronome marks and his

considerable instincts concerning the character of Beethoven's works without accompanying marks, Kolisch concludes that Beethoven had relatively precise metronome mark zones for various Italian tempo markings in various metres. He further proposes to apply those ranges of metronome marks to the works for which Beethoven never provided metronome marks.

In the midst of our preparation of these recordings, I became aware of the work of Dr. Marten Noorduin who, in his 2016 dissertation for the University of Manchester, "Beethoven's Tempo Indications" went several steps beyond Kolisch in a more thorough and systematic examination of Beethoven's works, their contemporary context and Beethoven's contemporaneous witnesses. For those interested in this topic, Dr. Noorduin's work is a fantastic resource.

Patrick Jordan & The Eybler Quartet

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4		
1	Allegro ma non tanto	7.34
2	Andante scherzoso quasi Allegretto	6.20
3	Menuetto. Allegro	2.57
4	Allegretto	4.22
String Quartet in A major, Op. 18, No. 5		
5	Allegro	8.47
6	Menuetto – Trio	3.42
7	Andante cantabile con variazioni	10.01
8	Allegro	5.41
String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 18, No. 6		
9	Allegro con brio	6.58
10	Adagio ma non tanto	8.00
11	Scherzo. Allegro	3.05
12	La Malinconia. Adagio – Allegretto quasi Allegro	7.12
	Total running time	74.41

Building a bridge to BEETHOVEN Opus 18 Part 2

Looking back through the almost 200 years since Ludwig van Beethoven's death, it is remarkably easy to repeat to ourselves the narrative of Beethoven's transcendent seriousness, greatness and genius. One of the perhaps unintentional consequences of this view is to untether the man and artist from his time and musical heritage. One needn't necessarily challenge his greatness to accept that he was a man of his time.

While a man of his time Beethoven was also a forward-looking person, one aspect of which is represented by his fascination with mechanical devices. In 1813, Beethoven composed Wellington's Sieg oder die Schlacht bei Vittoria for Johann Nepomuk Mälzel's newly invented Panharmonicon, a mechanical music machine. Two years later, Mälzel presented Beethoven with a new creation, the metronome. Mälzel's story is a checkered one, and the design of his 'new creation' had actually been stolen from the Dutch inventor Dietrich Nikolaus Winkel. Mälzel beat Winkel to both the patent office and in the marketing game: Mälzel's gift of a metronome to Beethoven, Europe's best-known composer at the time, was a shrewd maneuver to popularize his version of the device. Indeed, Beethoven adopted the metronome and even at one point proposed to do away with the Italian terms that were (and often continue to be) in use to describe tempo, replacing them instead with the very reliable, objective and easily communicated metronome marks.

surrounding The controversies Beethoven's metronome and his use of it will not be resolved in these liner notes or in the recordings that they accompany. There is no real evidence to support the supposition that Beethoven's metronome was broken (the one 'scholarly' investigation of that takes as its point of departure the rather dubious and subjective judgement of one musicologist). The argument that Beethoven did not devote much time or effort to the application of this new vector of control on his earlier works is equally speculative. The idea that anyone's use of the metronome to generate tempi

tends to push one to a tempo that is 10 to 15% faster than what we might reasonably expect in a performance is equally speculative: applying that logic, what are we to make of the tempo of the second movement of Op. 18, no. 6, which by Beethoven's reckoning should unfold at the honey-in-January pace of sixteenth note equals 80 pulses per minute? Shall we reduce that by a further 10 to 15%?

What we do have reliably are his published metronome marks and a body of writing from the early 19th century on the topic of "tactus," or a relatively steady pulse. During the first third of the 19th century, there was a great deal of ink spilt on the topic of performances of the day that departed from a steady tactus, with some writers embracing the change and others railing against it. Certainly, as the century progressed, most performers' comfort with multiple

tempi within a single movement grew, with such luminaries as Wagner and Berlioz advocating for the new freedom. That flexibility of tempo remains part of today's performance traditions, and understandably, musicians and audiences alike are today sometimes in the habit of viewing the late 18th and early 19th centuries through the lens of that later practice.

Any live performance or sound recording represents a snapshot, crystalizing the performers' understanding in that moment. Like any other group in live performance, the Eybler Quartet are obliged to accommodate the space we're in; we have certainly adjusted our tempi or articulation if what we're doing doesn't work in a particularly live or dead acoustic. The process of studio recording is perhaps the most controlled environment available to us. Within that context, we have chosen

to realize these works as the late 18th-century works that they appear to us to be, continuing a tradition that regards a single tactus within a movement as a unifying feature. In this approach we share the company of Louis Spohr and Johann Nepomuk Hummel, both strong early 19th-century adherents to the "steady as she goes" approach.

The first piece on this recording is the immensely popular Quartet no. 4 in C minor. The almost operatic approach of the opening theme of the first movement, with the dark and powerfully ascending first-violin melody driven by a throbbing accompaniment in the lower voices immediately engages the listener. The second theme is an equally compelling if more expansive vocal line, again with an accompaniment typical of the operatic practice of the day. The second movement, marked *Andante scherzoso*

quasi Allegretto is in the parallel major key of C. While not a slow movement as such, it creates in its joking and generally contrapuntal writing a stark contrast to the opening Allegro ma non tanto. It is also one of a handful of mechanical derivations in this set, almost certainly reflective of Beethoven's passion for mechanical devices. Like Mozart. Beethoven composed for the Flötenuhr the Viennese version of the mechanical organ that was popular in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. Three of his compositions for Flötenuhr, WoO 33 nos. 1-3, date from 1799, in the middle of the period of composition of the Opus 18 quartets.

The third movement Menuetto regains the dark key and terse agitation of the first movement, while the relatively bucolic Trio shows its *galant* influence in more regular phrasing and sing-able character. The return to the *Menuetto* is

unique in this set of quartets in that the players are given the instruction to play "più allegro"; this heightens the agitation of the movement and is also the one instance in the set for which Beethoven offers no specific metronome mark. The last movement is by turns increasingly furious in the gypsy-tinged C-minor sections and expansive in the major key areas of A-flat and C major. The blisteringly fast coda ends in a brusque C-major cadence.

Quartet no. 5 in A major is perhaps the cheeriest of the group of six and falls into the category of what we refer to as "Happy Beethoven." The opening movement, a lilting *Ländler* in 6/8 metre begins with a bit of a tussle between the cello and first violin over where the strong beat should be, but that crossrhythmic fun is quickly settled. The minor-key second material is stated in unison and octaves, offering contrast

while maintaining a sense of simplicity. A brief coda toys with the cross-rhythmic character of the opening. The waltz-like second movement Menuetto continues the simple and clear approach with the two violins stating the opening material. Normally the reprise of that material would be a direct repeat but here Beethoven re-orchestrates it, featuring the viola. The slightly tipsy Trio briefly suggests a hurdy-gurdy.

The theme and variations is the longest movement and is the centerpiece of the work. Its first few variations, with their increasingly quick sub-divisions offer precisely what an 18th-century listener might have expected, but then Beethoven bends the form. Where we might expect an *adagio* variation, he slows the pace without altering the pulse and then sends us off into another realm with a circuslike variation that sounds for all the

world like a street-style barrel organ, another example of his passion for things mechanical. The coda that follows is an extended and discursive fantasy on the primary material, and the whole remarkable journey ends with a wistful *adagio*. The Finale is, as Leonard Ratner indicates, a *commedia dell'arte* romp, punctuated by almost solemn hymn-like material that never persists. The very brief coda allows the music to float gently up and away.

Quartet no. 6 in B-flat major displays the widest emotional range to be found in the set. If *opera buffa* is the comedic interlude in an otherwise serious business, the opening movement is just that, complete with moments of slapstick and a second theme that is a parody of a march which quickly collapses under the weight of its own harmonic complexity. The development adopts a semi-serious learned tone,

but that doesn't last long either! By contrast, the second movement, Adagio ma non troppo is an extremely refined da capo aria whose opening material features an exquisitely balanced phrase structure. The contrasting section that follows is marked by a desolate unison in all voices. The return to the opening material shows decorative filigree and the coda maintains the refinement of the whole. Incidentally, Beethoven's tempo relationship between the first two movements of this quartet is fascinating; he proposes the same metronome mark for both, making the Allegro con brio blisteringly fast and the Adagio ma non troppo very much at ease. We have taken the extremity of his marks and their close proximity to be a strong indication that he really means what he writes. The Scherzo recaptures the buffa character with the various parts in what seem to be simultaneous duple and triple metres.

The Trio is by contrast a much more cutand-dried affair. The last movement is entitled *La Malinconia* (Melancholy) and it is in the *Adagio* introduction that any recollection of the *buffa* elements of the piece are almost immediately dispelled. The quick waltz-like *Allegretto quasi Allegro* would seem to be the musical remedy for that despondency, but the remedy is incomplete, as the *Adagio* material recurs in the course of the movement. The *Prestissimo* coda finally banishes any trace of melancholy.

We close with some reflections about things we have learned in the process of relearning these works.

Firstly, the proportions of the lengths of the movements within each work take on a subtly new significance when performed respecting Beethoven's metronome marks. For example, the first movement of Quartet no. 6 which.

when performed considerably more slowly than Beethoven proposes, as is often done, can assume enormous proportions in relation to the other movements, especially if the second movement is performed more quickly. A frequently chosen solution to the resulting imbalance is to eliminate in the first movement one or more of the repeats that Beethoven indicates.

Secondly, by maintaining a relatively steady tactus, Beethoven's genius for finding contrast within a single pulse is manifest. An excellent example of this is the Finale of Quartet no. 5: a single tactus gives a very bright pulse for the *commedia dell'arte* romp which Beethoven contrasts in the hymn-like section by reinterpreting that pulse in a considerably broader metre. Another is the opening movement of Quartet no. 6: the opening scurries along, and in the contrasting march material

Beethoven again creates a slower metre from the same tactus.

Thirdly, we have discovered depths of humour, wit and irony in Beethoven that we had not found before, in particular his ready embrace of the *commedia dell'arte*. The received wisdom about Beethoven, the serious master with a sense of his own importance and legacy, does not often present those features, but they are there if you look and they have helped us place the man in his time

Finally, a word of thanks to the authors of significant works consulted in the production of these recordings and notes: Clive Brown, Jonathan Del Mar, Marten Noorduin, Leonard Ratner, Robert Winter & Robert Martin, and Weldon Whipple.

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Aisslinn Nosky violin I Julia Wedman violin II Patrick Jordan viola Margaret Gay violoncello



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 Torontobased 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 Havdn 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 LEURIOSI Baroque Ensemble, Cellist Margaret Gav. Artistic Director of the Gallery Players of Niagara, is much in demand as both a modern and period instrument player; she 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 five 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, the world premiere of Johann Baptist Vanhal's op. 6 on period instruments and volume one of Beethoven's Opus 18 – the companion to the present album.

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(Oil paint on canvas).

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851)

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DESIGN: Andrew Giles: discoyd@aegidius.org.uk

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