

Beethoven

THE MIDDLE STRING QUARTETS

The Budapest String Quartet

In Concert at
The Library of Congress
1940-1960

THE BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET

Joseph Roisman, violin 1
Alexander Schneider, violin 2
Boris Kroyt, viola
Mischa Schneider, violoncello
Edgar Ortenberg, violin 2
(Op. 59, No. 3)

DISCA (44:52)

QUARTET NO. 7 IN F MAJOR, OP. 59, NO. 1 (38:38)

1. Allegro (10:06)
2. Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando (9:01)
3. Adagio molto e mesto (11:54)
4. Thème russe: Allegro (7:34)

5. *Alexander Schneider speaks about the Budapest String Quartet's early years* (6:02)



DISC B (60:14)

QUARTET NO. 9 IN C MAJOR, OP. 59, NO. 3 (28:29)

1. Introduzione: Andante con moto; Allegro vivace (8:20)
2. Andante con moto quasi Allegretto (8:53)
3. Menuetto: Grazioso (5:04)
4. Allegro molto (6:09)

QUARTET NO. 8 IN E MINOR, OP. 59, NO. 2 (31:33)

5. 1. Allegro (7:40)
6. 2. Molto Adagio (13:12)
7. 3. Allegretto (5:09)
8. 4. Finale: Presto (5:30)

DISC C (50:32)

QUARTET NO. 10 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 74 ("HARP") (30:22)

1. Poco Adagio; Allegro (9:52)
2. Adagio ma non troppo (9:55)
3. Presto (4:17)
4. Allegretto con Variazioni (6:15)

QUARTET NO. 11 IN F MINOR, OP. 95 ("SERIOSO") (19:58)

5. 1. Allegro con brio (4:17)
6. 2. Allegretto ma non troppo (6:32)
7. 3. Allegro assai vivace ma serio (4:20)
8. 4. Larghetto espressivo; Allegretto agitato (4:47)

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NOTES BY HARRIS GOLDSMITH

The sixteen quartets and Great Fugue, which many consider to be Beethoven's highest achievement, were inextricably linked with that mid-20th century icon of chamber music, the Budapest String Quartet. It is largely because of the Budapest's steadfast and inspired advocacy that "the Beethoven Cycle" has become virtually a rite of passage today for all serious quartets. The Budapest, according to surviving but incomplete logs, gave its first complete public performance of this sublime music in London during November of 1930, eighteen years after its official debut in 1918. A second cycle was played in Copenhagen during the 1931-1932 season, leading to a proliferation of many others. Indeed, by January 18, 1965 (according to a program booklet of the Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society), the Budapest had "performed the cycle upwards of sixty times." These complete cycles were supplemented by hundreds of other individual Beethoven performances—some on all-Beethoven programs, others sharing the spotlight with the works of other composers.

Some contemporary quartets perform the cycle in numerical order. The Budapest cycles were arranged with the intention of providing audiences with varied, dramatic programs. Sometimes, when the cycle was compressed to only five concerts, the Quartet in B flat, Op. 130 was played in its original version (which is to say, with its first five movements followed by the *Grosse Fuge*); in more expansive, six-concert presentations, Op. 130 was performed both with its second Finale followed by the Fugue, as a single sequence, or, in some cycles, as separate works, interrupted by applause. Often, in these six-concert cycles, room would be found for additional Beethoven compositions (e.g., the composer's own arrangement of his Piano Sonata No. 9 in E Major, Op. 14, No. 1, or his String Quintet, Op. 29).

The Budapest Quartet made three studio recordings of the cycle—one for 78 r.p.m. discs, one for monaural LPs, and finally for stereophony. A partnership between Bridge Records, The Library of Congress, and the estates of the Budapest Quartet members has enabled the release of outstanding performances from the Library's huge collection of concert transcriptions. Unlike the Budapest Quartet's studio-made recordings, the Library/Bridge cycle lets posterity experience the legendary foursome as it communicated to audiences at live concerts. For this recorded cycle, the performances have been selected from the Library's four complete cycles and numerous individual concerts, in order to document, whenever possible, periods of the Budapest Quartet's history not chronicled by its commercial recordings.



QUARTET NO. 7 IN F MAJOR, OP. 59, NO. 1 PERFORMED AND RECORDED ON OCTOBER 26, 1941

The first of the *Razoumovsky* quartets has always been especially closely associated with the Budapest Quartet, and might, in fact, be referred to as its "signature piece." Indeed, Nat Brandt, the author of the quartet's biography (*Con Brio*; 1993, Oxford University Press) suggested that the work's four movements—*Allegro*, *Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando*, *Adagio molto e mesto*, and *Thème russe: Allegro*—typify the colorful *personae* of the Budapest (respectively, Joseph Roisman, Alexander "Sasha" Schneider, Boris Kroyt, and Mischa Schneider).

Paradoxically, Op. 59, No. 1 was one of the first Beethoven quartets to enter the Budapest's discography, but, also, one of the last to be recorded with its Russian personnel. The HMV 78 r.p.m. set of the F Major

Razoumovsky, recorded on February 11, 1929, is perhaps the rarest and most arcane of any of the Budapest's records, and, according to those familiar with it, decidedly not a success. Philip Hart, in his ongoing Budapest Quartet discography for the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) Journal, 1998, discusses the group's four players of that period (Emil Hauser, Joseph Roisman, Istvan Ipolyi, and Harry Son) and describes their performance as "suffer(ing) from typically precipitous tempos and impersonal style; the F Major Quartet, with its exposed cello part, showed up Son's shortcomings very markedly." Brandt's book also tells us how the early Budapest came to be called the *Spitzenquartett* by a German critic who objected to its outmoded technical habit of producing staccatos by making *spitzen* (points) by playing with the tip of the bow, rather than at its middle, most especially in this very composition's second movement. The nickname was in no way a compliment!

Understandably, the Budapest players were eager to re-record "their" quartet with the new members, but for myriad reasons, they were forced to postpone that desired opportunity. Contractual restrictions imposed by the HMV company precluded the quartet from re-recording a work it had already done, and even a new contract with American Columbia, in 1940, gave priority to having the Budapest first record those Beethoven quartets still needed for completion of its as yet unfinished cycle. Accordingly, Columbia assigned Op. 59, No. 1 to the Busch Quartet. The projected Budapest re-make was then further postponed by James Petrillo's notorious edict, prohibiting all musicians in Local 802's rank-and-file from making new records between 1942 and 1944. The quartet finally realized its ambition—twice—with splendid remakes, taped in 1952, mono, and then in 1959, stereo.

Luckily, the Petrillo ban didn't apply to recordings of concerts and broadcasts for archival purposes—and, thus, some 60 years after the fact, posterity can now savor Op. 59, No. 1 as gloriously played in the Budapest's vintage prime. This newly retrieved broadcast of October 21, 1941, is a particularly vital and intense one. The staccatos are biting audacious (no *spitzen* here!) and Mischa Schneider's many solos are exquisitely secure and eloquent. To add a further "plus," a repeat in the *Thème russe*, usually omitted from Budapest performances, is heeded here.



QUARTET NO. 9 IN C MAJOR, OP. 59, NO. 3 PERFORMED AND RECORDED ON MARCH 6 AND 7, 1946

The 1946 performance heard in this anthology contributes another missing link in Budapest Quartet archeology, representing the period (between 1944 and 1949) when Edgar Ortenberg was sitting in the second violin's chair. Edgar Ortenberg's tenure in the quartet altered the foursome's collective sonority to a "cooler" aggregate sound than we hear with "Sasha" playing. This Op. 59, No. 3 performance strikingly offers a premonition of the approach the Budapest was to take in its final 1960 studio recording of this piece. Both opt for slightly slower tempi, and greater dramatic inflection and emphases (note Mischa Schneider's rhetorical 'holding back' in the lilting second movement here, and how the broader 1946 and 1960 pacing puts more stress on asymmetrical accents to better savor incipient dissonances). Everything considered, this 1946 performance is bold, virile and less silken than the quartet's other readings of this music.

QUARTET NO. 8 IN E MINOR, OP. 59, NO. 2
PERFORMED AND RECORDED ON APRIL 1, 1960

The Budapest's superb 1935 version of Op. 59, No. 2, deservedly enjoyed a near-legendary acclaim and was widely distributed on both sides of the Atlantic by HMV. The musicians involved were Roisman, the two Schneider brothers and Istvan Ipolyi, on viola. Ipolyi was the last founding member of the Budapest, and remained in place until 1936, at which point he was replaced by Boris Kroyt.

A scrutiny of various Budapest performances of Op. 59, No. 2 reveals a subtle evolution in the group's basic interpretation, moving toward heightened energy and drive. This April 1, 1960 performance from the Budapest's fourth and last Beethoven cycle at the Library catches the ensemble at its inspired best. The heroic breadth of this interpretation is supplemented by increased tonal richness, and despite primarius Roisman's slow start (he seems to take a movement to get warmed-up), this taping offers an exciting and revelatory memento of the late work of the Budapest Quartet.



QUARTET NO. 10 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 74 ("HARP")
PERFORMED AND RECORDED ON SEPTEMBER 7, 1941

There were three studio recordings of the "Harp" Quartet by the Budapest: the first, on HMV 78 r.p.m. discs was made in 1936 just before Istvan Ipolyi's departure from the group; the second in 1951, with Jac Gorodetzky playing second violin; and the last in May 1960. The 1936 and 1951 versions are suavely lyrical and quite similar. The September 1941 broadcast heard in this set is big-

ger, bolder and altogether less *genteel* in feeling. Op. 74 is an atypically "first-violin dominated" work in the Beethoven quartet canon, its principal voice a wonder of virtuoso writing. In this unusually heroic Budapest interpretation we have the opportunity to hear Op. 74 as Op. 73: in other words, The "Harp" Quartet played in the same manner as the "Emperor" Concerto!

Producers' note: Due to a damaged master, a patch lasting one minute, thirty two seconds, beginning at track 3, 3:41, has been inserted from a 1946 Budapest String Quartet performance.



QUARTET NO. 11 IN F MINOR, OP. 95 ("SERIOSO")
PERFORMED AND RECORDED ON MARCH 3, 1940

The three Budapest studio recordings of the terse, poignant, moody Op. 95 (*Serioso* is the nickname Beethoven himself gave this work) document a progressive movement toward increased breadth—an inexorable line from 1942, 1952 and, finally, the powerfully inflected 1960 valedictory stereo interpretation. This 1940 performance is remarkably fleet, even feverish, in a no-holds-barred reading. Not only are tempos breathlessly fast and winged, but there is, also, a greater excitability and tendency to make tempo fluctuations (*a la* Furtwängler) in transitions from episode to episode. In that regard, note the impulsive agitation from the introduction into the main body of the last movement. The 1940 approach, however different, anticipates the freedom and improvisatory feeling the Budapest reached at the other end of their interpretive odyssey.

Tributes to the
BUDAPEST STRING QUARTET
on the occasion of the release of
BEETHOVEN: THE MIDDLE QUARTETS
The Budapest String Quartet In Concert at the Library of Congress (1940—1960)



When I was a high school student in the late 1950s, I used to go regularly to hear many of the great soloists and string quartets at the People's Symphony Concerts at Washington Irving High School in New York City. I soon came to realize that the Budapest String Quartet was outstanding among all the groups that I heard. Their particular combination of elegance and perfection represented by first violinist Joseph Roisman; tremendous rhythmic vitality and spirit represented by "the greatest second violinist in the world", Alexander Schneider; meltingly beautiful sound and brilliance of technique represented by violist, Boris Kroyt; and strong rhythm and uncanny depth of feeling of the bass line that provided the underpinning of the whole group represented by cellist, Mischa Schneider became for me the ideal of what a string quartet should sound like. Their performances of a good cross section of the repertoire from Haydn and Mozart to Prokofiev and Bartók made me understand how very special the String Quartet was as a genre and that I could not live the rest of my life without this playing a major role in it.

A few years later, I had the incredible privilege of meeting and performing with Sasha, Boris, and Mischa at the Marlboro Music Festival. My struggles to make my playing worthy to be in the same group with them were a major factor in my development as a musician. I am very proud to have followed in their footsteps at the Library of Congress.

—Samuel Rhodes, Violist, The Juilliard String Quartet, June 2000

During my student years, the Budapest String Quartet represented something quite distant and unattainable. Years later I had the privilege of knowing and working with these great players—and what a lesson in commitment and musical truthfulness it proved to be! These qualities are present in every phrase they play.

—Michael Tree, Violist, The Guarneri String Quartet, May, 2000

I, along with most other musicians of my generation, grew up listening to the Budapest Quartet recordings of the Beethoven String Quartets. When, in later years, I came to know the Budapest's cellist, Mischa Schneider, this admiration-from-a-distance turned to deep personal affection. Mischa was mentor to the Sequoia Quartet, of which I was cellist, honorary and beloved grandfather to my children, and musical and personal inspiration to me. He was an exemplar of refinement blended with passion, of open-mindedness blended with strong convictions. The music-making of the Budapest Quartet reflected these same qualities, set the standard for a generation of chamber music players, and brought joy beyond measure to millions who heard their concerts, broadcasts and recordings.

*--Robert Martin, President, Chamber Music America;
Producer, "Music for Mischa" concert series at the
Metropolitan Museum of Art in
New York City, May 2000*

The Budapest Quartet was a role model and an inspiration for the next two generations of string quartets in the United States. With their elegance, warm tone and flexible, expressive phrasing, they influenced even those groups who were not consciously trying to emulate their style. They were also the first major group to establish themselves in the U.S. as a full-time entity, able to make a living primarily from quartet-playing. Their residency at the State University of New York in Buffalo, which gave rise to the famous Slee Cycle of Beethoven Quartets performed every year, was only one example of how they opened up and solidified the market for chamber music series' all over this country. Their performing residency at the Library of Congress, partly enshrined in the present recordings, was an important part of the cultural life of our nation's capital.

As a sixteen-year-old aspiring violinist, I took the train to Buffalo for a seminar with the three surviving Budapest members after Joseph Roisman had died. Subsequently I worked on various quartets with both Sasha and Mischa Schneider at Marlboro. Their enthusiasm and love for the music, as well as their quest for a personal expressive imprint on the interpretation, made a lasting impression on me. I also had the chance to work on string orchestra music with Sasha both at Marlboro and in the Brandenburg Ensemble. Thus I was able to absorb, even if indirectly, many of the artistic values of the Budapest Quartet, and perhaps some of those values have filtered through into my work with the Emerson Quartet. I hope so.

--Eugene Drucker, Violinist, The Emerson String Quartet, May, 2000

For me, the Budapest String Quartet was, and always will be, the standard of great string quartet playing. There was something more than just the playing, there was an aura about these four extraordinary gentlemen. When they walked out on a stage and began to play, you knew that you were in the presence of greatness.

What a privilege and honor it was for me to have known them so well personally and musically—especially Mischa and Sasha Schneider and Boris Kroyt. The countless number of times that we made music together will live in my memory and in my heart forever.

--Jaime Laredo, Violinist and Conductor, June 2000




ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In 1996, Bridge Records began to produce CD restorations of classic performances from the Library of Congress Concert Archive. We were thrilled to have the opportunity to work on the recordings of The Budapest String Quartet, a series of hundreds of recordings made in concert from 1940-62, during the Budapest String Quartet's residency at the Library of Congress. Bridge Records is most grateful to The Library of Congress for its vision and cooperation in bringing these treasures to the public's ear, and to the family members of the Budapest String Quartet, for their dedication to the memory of the quartet.

These never-before-released recordings have been extensively restored using all relevant analog and digital technologies. Though the aging acetate master recordings sometimes defeat even the most up-to-date equipment, we can assure the listener that every possible measure has been taken to preserve and 'clean' the sound of these historic recordings. Mastering engineer and restoration specialist Adam Abeshouse has our gratitude and admiration for his insight, patience and keen ear.

-Becky and David Starobin, Bridge Records, Inc.




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The Budapest String Quartet on BRIDGE



BRAHMS: Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34

SCHUBERT: "Trout" Quintet, Op. 114 with George Szell, piano
BRIDGE 9062

RACHMANINOFF: String Quartets No. 1 & 2; Trio élégiaque, Op. 9
with Artur Balsam, piano
BRIDGE 9063

HAYDN: String Quartet Op. 64, No. 5; String Quartet Op. 76, No. 5 ("Lark")
Rondo from Trio, Hob. XV: 25; BEETHOVEN: Quartet, Op. 16
with Mieczyslaw Horszowski, piano
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BEETHOVEN: THE LATE QUARTETS

In Concert at The Library of Congress (1941-1960)
BRIDGE 9072A/C

SOUVENIR: HANDEL: Concerto for Harp and Strings, Op. 4, No. 6; MASON:
String Quartet on Negro Themes, Op. 19; DEBUSSY: Danse sacrée et danse profane
GRIFFES: Two Sketches based on Indian Themes; DVOŘÁK: Lento from String
Quartet in F Major, Op. 96, "American"; Arrangement of "Dinah"
with Marcel Grandjany, harp
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MOZART: Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581; String Quartet in D Minor, K. 421
Piano Quartet in E-flat Major, K. 493; Divertimento in E-flat Major, K. 563
String Quartet in A Major, K. 464; with Gustave Langenus, clarinet; George Szell, piano
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