



CHANNEL CLASSICS

CCS 6094

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN

Opus 18, no.3 in D major
Opus 59, no.1 in F major

Orpheus
String
Quartet



DIGITAL

Ludwig van
BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Orpheus String Quartet

Charles-André Linale *violin*

Emilian Piedicuta *violin*

Emile Cantor *viola*

Laurentiu Sbarcea *violoncello*



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Opus 18, no.3 in D major

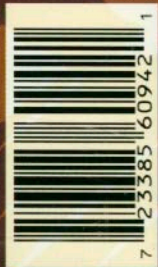
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|---------------------|------|
| 1. Allegro | 7.40 |
| 2. Andante con moto | 7.25 |
| 3. Allegro | 3.03 |
| 4. Presto | 7.01 |

Opus 59, no.1 in F major

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|--|-------|
| 5. Allegro | 10.20 |
| 6. Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando | 08.46 |
| 7. Adagio molto e mesto | 11.47 |
| 8. Theme Russe (Allegro) | 08.47 |

total time 68.24

Recording dates: 22, 23, 24 June 1993





Orpheus String Quartet, recording session
photo: Colorteam, Veenendaal

ORPHEUS QUARTET

"One of the most interesting and most promising new string quartets", wrote Jean Roy, the critic of *Le Monde de la Musique*, in July 1988, a year after the inauguration of the Orpheus Quartet. And since then the quartet - with Charles André Linale (first violin), Emilian Piedicuta (second violin), Emile Cantor (viola) and Laurentiu Sbarcea (cello) - has indeed built up a career of some prominence.

In 1988, a unanimous jury awarded first prize to the Orpheus Quartet at the Valentino Bucchi Competition in Rome; in the same year, they also won first prize in the Karl Klingler Competition in Munich. In April 1993 they were presented with first prize at the prestigious International Chamber Music Competition in Osaka, and simultaneously received the prize for the best performance of the compulsory work by the Japanese composer, Akiro Miyoshi.

In January 1993 the quartet was awarded the *Grand Prix du Disque* of the Academie Charles Gros for their recording of the complete quartets of Malpiero. In 1992, great international acclaim greeted their CD recording of the quartets of Debussy, Ravel and Dutilleux (Channel Classics CCS 3892).

Since their establishment in 1987, the Orpheus Quartet have gained a worldwide reputation. Their success is founded on their many successful concerts and on a repertoire which extends through Haydn, Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms, Smetana and Dvorák to Hartmann, Shostakovich, Malpiero, Berg and Halffter.

BEETHOVEN - STRING QUARTETS OPUS 18 NO 3 IN D MAJOR, AND OPUS 59 NO 1 F MAJOR

Participation in string quartets in the years around 1800 was largely an amateur pursuit. Before the French Revolution chamber music had primarily been the concern of professional musicians at noble courts; now, a few years later, devaluation and the decline of the aristocracy had driven increasing numbers of musicians to seek their fortunes elsewhere - in city orchestras, in teaching and in opera.

For professionals there was, at best, time for chamber music in the evening hours only, as a pleasant diversion among friends. Much the same was also true for the many amateur musicians who were the most important buyers of quartets, trios, sonatas and songs. During Beethoven's lifetime, chamber music - which before 1800 had mainly been heard in the salons of the nobility - gradually moved into the drawing-rooms of the bourgeoisie.

It was largely due to the dedication of Archduke Rudolph of Austria and of Count Razumovsky that it was still possible for Beethoven himself to concentrate on chamber music for aristocrats of the old stamp. His audiences in the spacious salons of Vienna were, as a rule, at home with the string quartets of Haydn and Mozart and were used to listening in silence to music that was not always easy.

Beethoven's luck was compounded by the fact that for twenty-five years he had at his disposal a quartet whose devotion and skill was exceptional by the standards of those times. Each of the composer's string quartets had its first performance under the enthusiastic direction of the violinist, Ignaz Schuppanzigh. For all we know, none of the work may have achieved, when played, the perfection that Beethoven had envisioned in composition - but then his demands were far from common, particularly in that era.

Until far into the 19th century the status of the solo-violinist in the average string quartet much outweighed that of his colleagues. It was not for nothing that the term 'violin quartet' was common; and, although the quartet oeuvre of Mozart and Haydn had altered this situation to a certain degree, it was only with Beethoven's work that quartets came to be performed by four partners of absolute equality.

Opus 18 was commissioned by Prince Lobkowitz. Beethoven first completed the D major quartet in January 1799, thereby establishing in a powerful and highly personal fashion his credentials as a composer of string quartets.

It is often noted that this work bore a particular affinity to Haydn's quartets and also to parts of Mozart's. This is not without justification; it is particularly relevant with regard to the technique of quartet playing. But in terms of both melody and

harmony the language in which Beethoven expresses himself in this first quartet is already very much his own. For him, the drama of opera had ceded to the sharp accentuation and capricious twists of tragedy, to turns of fate expressed in harmonic modulation, and to great dynamic contrasts. There are contrasts, too, between extended melodies and sharp motifs; between carefree merriment, exuberant humour and an intense awareness of nature.

Although the String Quartet in F major, opus 59 No 1, was completed a mere six years after the Lobkowitz quartets, the two opuses seem worlds apart. In each of the three quartets of opus 59 we are seized by unique melodic and harmonic discoveries, the independence of the voices, the solidity of construction, the individuality of each part and the symphonic length of the whole. Such elements did not, of course, come from nowhere. The many piano sonatas, the piano concertos and the great symphonies - particularly the Eroica - had each made their individual contribution.

In these quartets, despite their aristocratic derivation and their dedication to Count Razumovsky, features typical to bourgeois music are closely interwoven with those inherent to the elite. In Beethoven's time this gave rise to some confusion. Many critics were of the opinion that the music was a weak joke - *'ein Flickwerk eines Wahnsinnigen'*, *'eine verrückte Musik'*. Beethoven managed to remain relatively calm in the face of such attacks, answering at most that his music was intended for the future.

But, as the art-loving middle classes became increasingly influential and the masses became consumers of artistic entertainment, feeling and intuition replaced understanding. Ethics lost out to aesthetics, intellect gave way to emotion. Beethoven complained - with good reason - that, more and more often, he had to explain his music. Technically, though, he continued to advance, preferring - as an enlightened rationalist - to write music that was intellectual.

At the same time he succeeded in satisfying desires which this new public frequently left unarticulated. This was, in itself, not too difficult: was he not himself a citizen, a product both of the Enlightenment of the 18th century and of the spirit of the French Revolution? In the opus 59 quartets he accordingly concentrated on melodies

that were increasingly reminiscent of folksong. However mannered this may have been at times, he developed themes endowed with powerful motives and a wealth of melody.

The Razumovsky quartets are full of such melodies, a unique example being the beautiful cello solo which begins quartet No 1 in F major and which is elaborated as the piece proceeds. The apparent contradictions between complex technique, songlike melodies and some maddeningly difficult passages contributed to the initial incomprehension with which this quartet was greeted.

The note-repetitions in the second part, *Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando*, were received with laughter; the slow part which follows it, *Adagio molto e mesto*, although meeting with a certain appreciation, was generally agreed to be too contrived, too complex. And even now, perhaps, when considering the instantly identifiable Russian tune with which Beethoven juggles in the final *Allegro*, it might be better to refrain from comment. In those days, too, it needed getting used to.

Leo Samama

Translation: David Alexander

Ludwig van

BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Orpheus String Quartet

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Colophon

Production: Channel Classics Studio

Executive producer: C. Jared Sacks

Producer: T.A. Diehl

Recording engineer/editing: Bert van der Wolf

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Text: Leo Samama

Technical information

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