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THE UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Guarneri String Quartet

ARNOLD STEINHARDT, *Violinist* MICHAEL TREE, *Violist*
JOHN DALLEY, *Violinist* DAVID SOYER, *Cellist*

WEDNESDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 17, 1984, AT 8:30
RACKHAM AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

PROGRAM

First concert of the complete Beethoven quartet cycle

Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 127

Maestoso, allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Scherzando vivace
Finale

Quartet in G major, Op. 18, No. 2

Allegro
Adagio cantabile
Scherzo
Allegro molto quasi presto

INTERMISSION

Quartet in C major, Op. 59, No. 3

Introduzione: allegro vivace
Andante con moto quasi allegretto
Menuetto: grazioso
Allegro molto

RCA Red Seal Records

PROGRAM NOTES

by JEREMY YUDKIN

Quartets of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 127

The late quartets of Beethoven constitute not only the final most profound utterances of a man, but a high point in the history of Western cultural achievement. The medium of the string quartet had been established since Haydn as the most perfectly balanced, most intimate, form of musical expression. In his last five quartets Beethoven expanded the limits of this form to create works of superhuman power and scope combined with a visionary intensity that plumbs the depths of our understanding. A patron of Beethoven, the Prince Boris von Galitzin, wrote to him towards the end of his life:

“Truly your genius is centuries in advance, and at the present time there is scarcely one hearer who would be sufficiently enlightened to enjoy the full beauty of this music. But posterity will pay homage to you, and bless your memory more than your contemporaries are able to do.”

The Quartet in E-flat, Op. 127, was completed in 1825, two years before Beethoven's death. Its language is tense, restrained, fraught with meaning. It employs a rhetoric of dense significance beneath its often placid surface. The first movement is introduced by a series of full chords and then opens out into a sunny but serious atmosphere. The dense chords return twice, gaining in meaning each time; but they are subsumed into the forward impetus and drive. Brief moments of poignant yearning cast a flicker of apprehension over the music, spiky rhythms fragment the texture, and the movement ends with a gentle high cadence that leaves much unsaid.

The slow movement presents a series of moods in short sections, each of which succeeds the other before full explanation has time to take place. At the outset, the voices of the individual instruments are interwoven to create a texture, the sheer sound of which can pain the heart. The magnificent peacefulness gives way to a rhythmically pert section, which would seem to be endless, but the intervening *Adagio* evokes an exquisite beauty to wrest the angels out of heaven. A rising theme is spun out against reiterated rhythmic chords and builds in power, but is just as quickly calmed. The violin unwinds a long revolving melody, assured, unyielding, that is taken over by the other instruments. A taut tension develops. A sudden stop. A note of the briefest tragedy is heard and a melody of hushed but searing sadness. The last chord finally resolves the harmony, but very little else.

The Scherzo is spritely in rhythm but never lighthearted. Disturbing cross-currents are ever present. A moment of anxious foreboding ensues, to be swept away by a firmhanded rhythmic drive, only to return in the form of questioning hesitations. The Trio section is in the minor mode and its dancelike gaiety is grim and demonic. It stops in mid-air. The Scherzo returns with an added ending, brusque and impatient.

The final movement is spare and understated. The jaunty theme is again a disguise for an exploration of the deepest emotion. A brute energy drives the music through a kaleidoscopic diversity of textures. The occasional surging of power always stops far short of a climax. High trills introduce a section of surreal fantasy, whose hushed tones are urgent and not calm. Frenzied chords lead to the expectation of final release, but a false ending disorients the senses, and suddenly it is over.

The Quartet describes a world of such complexity, passionate restraint, resignation and resonance, that words are made the paupers of the music.

Quartet in G major, Op. 18, No. 2

In his first string quartets, Beethoven sums up the styles and the accomplishments of his two great predecessors, Haydn and Mozart, and prepares for the great advances in technique and expression that he will make in his mature quartets. His Opus 18 is a set of six that he wrote between 1798 and 1800. They were published in 1801 with a dedication to the young composer's younger noble friend, Prince Franz Joseph Lobkowitz, who spent a large part of his great fortune on music. Beethoven had already begun to suffer the progressive hearing loss that burdened him during his entire adult life, but he was just approaching the full command of the enormous creative powers that account for his special place in history.

“Some excellent works by Beethoven are outstanding among recent publications,” a reviewer wrote shortly after the first three quartets appeared. “They give perfect proof of his art

— but they need to be played well and heard often, for they are very difficult to perform and are in no sense ‘popular.’” Since then, the Second Quartet has become one of the most popular — in the best sense.

This is a bright and happy work, overflowing with musical ideas. The *Allegro* first movement has more material than many other composers could dream up for an entire four-movement work. The opening phrase alone, in just eight quick and short measures, has three distinct melodic elements that Beethoven works over and develops. Next is a long and beautiful slow movement, a grave but warm *Adagio cantabile* with a contrasting central *Allegro* that buzzes quickly and almost always quietly. The third movement is a Scherzo after the classical model of the minuets in the quartets of Haydn and Mozart, but with forceful and dramatic features, especially in the middle Trio section, characteristic of Beethoven. The finale, *Allegro molto quasi presto*, rushes through the classical sonata form: contrasting themes that are developed and then recalled with a different key relationship.

Quartet in C major, Op. 59, No. 3

The C major Quartet, Op. 59, No. 3, written in 1806, was the last of the set of quartets commissioned by, and dedicated to, Count Rasumovsky, the wealthy Russian ambassador to Vienna.

The first movement is introduced by an unusual series of progressions, which are given a fantastical quality through changes of dynamics and long sustained tones. The opening melody of the *Allegro vivace* is presented on first violin alone, but with the first clearly focused emphasis on the key all the instruments join in the bright and rhythmically defined exposition. Throughout the movement there is a continual contrast between sharply defined rhythmic outline (which dissolves into sustained notes or trills) and smoothly flowing melody. The ending is terse and epigrammatic.

A gently lilting song characterizes the *Andante*, with *pizzicato* cello notes and a long flowing melody in the upper strings. A contrasting atmosphere is provided by a new theme in the first violin with crisper articulation and a Baroque embellishment. The movement closes with a sense of rolling timelessness.

The minuet is elegant and fluid, with a bright, jerky Trio section. A short *coda* leads directly into the last movement, which has a tensely nervous fugal opening and an impressionistic build-up of voices. The crackling energy of the music is extraordinary, with the barest contrast or momentary release in a pause or trill. Nothing seems capable of stopping the single-minded drive of this movement until the definitive final chords.

About the Artists

The Guarneri String Quartet celebrates its 20th Anniversary Season in 1984-85 with one hundred recitals in North America and Europe. Highlighting this season will be a gala program in New York's Carnegie Hall, twenty years after their New York debut at the New School on February 28, 1965. A tour of Europe, their nineteenth, is also scheduled for the season. The Quartet has made three tours of Australia, has toured Japan and New Zealand, and has been heard at the major international music festivals. They have been featured on television and radio specials, documentaries and educational presentations both in North America and abroad, and are the subject of a book entitled *Quartet*.

In New York, the Quartet continues its annual series begun in 1975, “Guarneri and Friends,” presented at Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the 92nd Street YM-YWHA. In May 1982, Mayor Edward Koch presented the Quartet with the New York City Seal of Recognition, an honor awarded for the first time.

Three of the four players are faculty members of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and all members are Professors of Music at the University of Maryland. Their annual residencies at the University of South Florida began in 1972, and in 1976 that university awarded the Quartet Honorary Doctorates of Music. They were similarly honored with Honorary Doctorates by the State University of New York (Binghamton) in May 1983.

Among the Guarneri's recordings, several of which have won international awards, are collaborations with such artists as Arthur Rubinstein, Pinchas Zukerman, and Boris Kroyt and Mischa Schneider of the Budapest Quartet.

Founded in 1964 at Vermont's Marlboro Music Festival, the Guarneri has had no changes in personnel. All members have had major solo careers and continue to appear as soloists or in musical collaborations with others. Each has recorded as soloist on a variety of labels.

This evening's program is the first of six to be presented in Ann Arbor over three successive seasons, in which the Guarneri will perform the complete cycle of Beethoven's string quartets. Tonight's concert marks the Quartet's 17th Ann Arbor appearance.

1984-85 Concert Season

- *JAMES GALWAY, *Flutist* Sat. Oct. 20
 ATLANTA SYMPHONY / ROBERT SHAW Sun. Oct. 21
 ROYAL WINNIPEG BALLET Sat., Sun. Oct. 27, 28
 IVO POGORELICH, *Pianist* Tues. Oct. 30
- *NEXUS Fri. Nov. 2
 THE MASTERPLAYERS OF LUGANO Sun. Nov. 4
 LEIPZIG GEWANDHAUS / KURT MASUR Thurs. Nov. 8
- *LEIPZIG GEWANDHAUS / KURT MASUR Fri. Nov. 9
 VIKTORIA MULLOVA, *Violinist* Sat. Nov. 10
 KUIJKEN QUARTET (early music) Tues. Nov. 13
 JUDITH BLEGEN, *Soprano*, and
 HÅKAN HAGEGÅRD, *Baritone* Sat. Nov. 17
 ROMANIAN NATIONAL CHOIR (aft.) Sun. Nov. 18
 AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE II (eve.) Sun. Nov. 18
 Handel's *Messiah* / DONALD BRYANT Fri.-Sun. Nov. 30, Dec. 1, 2
- *VIENNA CHOIR BOYS Sun. Dec. 9
 PITTSBURGH BALLET, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* Fri.-Sun. Dec. 14-16
 VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY, *Pianist* Tues. Jan. 15
 MUSIC FROM MARLBORO Wed. Jan. 23
 BALLETP USA Sun. Jan. 27
 PRAGUE SYMPHONY / JIRI BELOHLAVEK Sat. Feb. 2
 FESTIVAL CHORUS and soloists
- FELD BALLET Fri., Sat. Feb. 8, 9
 GUARNERI STRING QUARTET Sun. Feb. 10
 KATIA & MARIELLE LABÈQUE, *Duo-pianists* Sun. Feb. 17
 ROYAL PHILHARMONIC / YEHUDI MENUHIN Tues. Feb. 19
 NEW YORK CITY OPERA NATIONAL COMPANY Tues. Mar. 5
 Verdi's *Rigoletto*
- *KODO Thurs. Mar. 7
- †ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE Fri. Mar. 8
 PAUL BADURA-SKODA, *Pianist* Sun. Mar. 10
- *ACADEMY OF ANCIENT MUSIC Thurs. Mar. 14
 NATIONAL SYMPHONY / MSTISLAV ROSTROPOVICH Wed. Mar. 20
- *FACULTY ARTISTS CONCERT Sun. Mar. 24
 SHERRILL MILNES, *Baritone* Fri. Mar. 29
 POLISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA Thurs. Apr. 18
 MAY FESTIVAL Wed.-Sat. May 1-4

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