PRESENTS

Castalian String Quartet

Saturday, November 18, 2023
7:30 p.m.

Westby Pavilion
Tulsa Performing Arts Center

Photo by Paul Marc Mitchell

The Castalian String Quartet's concert weekend is generously underwritten by the Charles and Marion Weber Foundation.

Chamber Music Tulsa's concerts and educational outreaches are presented with the assistance of the Oklahoma Arts Council and Arts Alliance Tulsa.

Castalian String Quartet

castalianstringquartet.com

Sini Simonen, *violin**
Daniel Roberts, *violin*
Ruth Gibson, *viola**
Steffan Morris, *cello*

* Sean Lee and Natalie Loughran have graciously agreed to perform with the Castalian Quartet during Sini Simonen's and Ruth Gibson's maternity leave.

> "A powerful individuality of sound matched by an instinctive singularity of musical intention."
>
> – *The Scotsman*

Since its formation in 2011, the London-based Castalian Quartet has distinguished itself as one of the most dynamic, sophisticated young string quartets performing today. They are an Artist in Residence at the Wigmore Hall in London and are the inaugural Hans Keller String Quartet in Residence at the Oxford University Faculty of Music. They are also the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's 2019 Young Artists Award.

The Castalian Quartet will tour North America in the 2023-24 season with performances in Dallas, San Francisco, Louisville, Chicago, Houston, and many other cities. Another highlight will be their collaboration with pianist Stephen Hough, who will join them for concerts in Costa Mesa, Carmel and Napa, CA; New York, NY; Rockport, MA; and Washington, D.C.

The Quartet works with many living composers, including recent premieres of works by Mark-Anthony Turnage, Charlotte Bray, and Edmund Finnis. They have also established a strong presence abroad, with performances of the complete Haydn Op. 76 Quartets at Wigmore Hall, at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonic, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Paris Philharmonie, Vienna Konzerthaus, Montreal's Salle Bourgie, Carnegie Hall, the Spoleto USA Festival, and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. They have played at the Heidelberger Frühling, East Neuk, Kuhmo, Edinburgh, Lockenhaus, and Banff International Festivals. Further afield, they undertook tours of China and Colombia.

In spring 2022, the Castalian Quartet released its first recording, *Between Two Worlds* (Delphian), featuring works by Thomas Adès, Beethoven, and first violinist Sini Simonen's own arrangements of early works by Orlando de Lasso and John Dowland.

The Castalian Quartet studied with Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartet) at the Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media, graduating with a master's degree. In addition to the above, awards include Third Prize at the 2016 Banff Quartet Competition and First Prize at the 2015 Lyon Chamber Music Competition. The Quartet was selected by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2016. They have received coaching from Simon Rowland-Jones, David Waterman and Isabel Charisius.

Their name is derived from the Castalian Spring in the ancient city of Delphi. According to Greek mythology, the nymph Castalia transformed herself into a fountain to evade Apollo's pursuit, thus creating a source of poetic inspiration for all who drink from her waters.

The Castalian String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists (davidroweartists.com).

Program

Ludwig van Beethoven — Quartet No. 13 in B-flat Major, Op. 130

Adagio, ma non troppo – Allegro
Presto
Andante con moto, ma non troppo. Poco scherzoso
Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai
Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo
Finale: Grosse Fuge, Op. 133

Upcoming CMT Performances

Castalian Quartet Sunday Concert
Sunday, November 19, at 3:00 p.m. in the PAC's Williams Theater
Music by Orlando di Lasso, Charlotte Bray, Felix Mendelssohn,
John Dowland and Benjamin Britten

Danish String Quartet Concert Weekend
February 17 and 18, 2024

Horszowski Trio Concert Weekend
March 15, 16 and 17

Dalí Quartet Concert Weekend
April 19, 20 and 21

About the Program

by Jason S. Heilman, Ph.D., © 2023

Ludwig van Beethoven
b. 1770 in Bonn, Germany
d. 1827 in Vienna, Austria

Quartet No. 13 in B-flat, Op. 130
1825, revised 1826; 48 minutes

> "Being as passionate an amateur as an admirer of your talent, I am taking the liberty of writing to you to ask you if you would be willing to compose one, two, or three new quartets. I shall be delighted to pay you for the trouble whatever amount you would deem adequate."

When Ludwig van Beethoven received that letter from the Russian Prince Nikolai Borisovich Galitzin (1794-1866) in November 1822, the composer may have thought that his days writing chamber music were long behind him. After the disastrous premiere of his "Archduke" Piano Trio, Op. 97, in 1814, his now-total deafness forced Beethoven to abandon his celebrated performing career. This was followed by a series of personal setbacks, including the underwhelming premiere of his only opera, *Fidelio*, after more than a decade of work across three revisions, and the protracted drama surrounding his attempt to gain legal custody over his nephew, Carl. All of this, combined with his deteriorating health, conspired to prevent Beethoven from writing any music of consequence for at least a couple of years. At the time, he may have believed that he would never compose again.

Then, in 1816, something changed. That year, Beethoven returned to some unfinished sketches for a piano sonata and decided to complete the piece. This was the first solo piano music that Beethoven composed entirely for posterity, rather than for himself, and the experience seemed to have been liberating. Between 1817 and 1822, he followed it with four more piano sonatas that established what we now call Beethoven's "late" style. In these sonatas, you can hear the composer moving away from the fiery, extroverted passion of his earlier "heroic" style and toward a more introverted poignancy. These late works started to bend the established norms that had governed Viennese music for three generations: uncomfortable dissonances began to creep in, moods changed dramatically from moment to moment, and the sheer size of the pieces began to grow. Beethoven's demanding "Hammerklavier" Piano Sonata, Op. 106, took nearly 45 minutes to perform – at least twice the length of any of his previous sonatas. But while it's tempting to view this late style as a harbinger of the romantic movement to come, it had a cooler side: Many of Beethoven's late works included contrapuntal fugues – long considered the most academic of musical forms – which became even more ambitious and abstract as the years went by.

It was just after he published his thirty-second and final piano sonata that Beethoven received the portentous letter from Prince Galitzin. An amateur cellist, Galitzin had lived for a time in Vienna, and after returning home to Saint Petersburg, he formed his own string quartet specifically to play the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. When no new compositions were forthcoming, Galitzin created his own by adapting Beethoven's piano sonatas and other works for quartet. Beethoven was intrigued by Galitzin's offer, and in January 1823, he agreed to compose the three quartets for a fee of 50 ducats (or about six ounces of pure gold) each.

Initially, Beethoven had hoped to complete Galitzin's quartets in 1823, but by this time, he was already occupied with even more ambitious projects. He had not yet finished his monumental *Missa Solemnis*, after nearly four years of work, and he had just started writing his groundbreaking Ninth Symphony. Galitzin was forced to wait patiently as these other works took precedence (but by way of recompence, the prince was permitted to arrange the world premiere of the *Missa Solemnis* in Saint Petersburg in April 1824).

Finally, after the premiere of the Ninth Symphony in May 1824, Beethoven turned his attention to Galitzin's string quartets, and he would compose nothing but quartets for his remaining years. He completed the first of these, his String Quartet No. 12 in E-flat Major, Op. 127, in February 1825, but when it was premiered the following month by a quartet led by Beethoven's close friend, Ignaz Schuppanzigh (1776-1830), it confounded audiences with its length, its unconventional form, and its technical demands. Undeterred, Beethoven immediately started work on two more quartets at the same time, which we know as No. 15 in A Minor, Op. 132, and No. 13 in B-flat Major, Op. 130. In these two works, Beethoven expanded upon everything that had confused the audience at the premiere of his Op. 127: they were even longer, now encompassing five and six movements; they were more formally and tonally ambiguous; and they were more challenging to perform than any of his previous chamber works.

Although it was published second, the Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, was actually the third of his late quartets to be completed (in the way Beethoven had originally intended, at least). Cast in six sharply contrasting movements, the piece is in many ways closer to a Mozartian divertimento or serenade than to any of Beethoven's other quartets.

Beethoven strikes a serious tone at the outset of the piece with an almost hymnlike *adagio, ma non troppo* ("slow, but not too slow") introduction, only to pivot dramatically after just fourteen measures into an *allegro* ("fast") running passage led by the first violin. The remainder of the movement is dominated by this alternation of somber and capricious moods, as it unfolds in a modified sonata form, hidden under the drastic tempo changes.

The next four movements each have their own specific characters, not unlike the succession of movements in a baroque dance suite. The *presto* ("very quick") second movement opens with barely restrained energy, which quickly explodes in exuberance. A central episode almost derails the momentum with halting chords from the quartet and operatic responses from the first violin, but the scintillating opening music returns to bring this brief movement to a close.

Beethoven gives the third movement enigmatic markings, directing it to be played *andante con moto, ma non troppo* ("at a walking pace, but not too much") and *poco scherzoso* ("a bit like a joke"). The little joke might have been the slight misdirection at the beginning: the movement opens dramatically, recalling the somber tones of the first movement. But this seriousness is only momentary, and the remainder of the movement exudes a pleasant charm as it gently tramps along, with only fleeting callbacks to the opening on its way to a sudden end.

The *allegro assai* ("very quick") fourth movement is to be played *alla danza tedesca*, or "in the style of a German dance," recalling the charming bucolic dances Mozart had written. Here, however, the music unfolds lyrically, more like a genteel precursor to the waltz than

a rustic peasant dance.

The heart of the piece is the fifth movement, which Beethoven calls a *cavatina*, referencing the short, simple arias that had long been a staple of Italian opera. This *cavatina* is "sung" by the first violin, opening with a soulful *adagio molto espressivo* ("slow, with great expression") melody that is temporarily waylaid by a much tenser *beklemmt* ("heavy of heart") passage before returning to close with a kind of sigh.

If, up until now, this quartet had been a kind of homage to the baroque dance suite, then Beethoven's original idea for the sixth and final movement makes perfect sense: To follow the deeply emotional *cavatina*, Beethoven created a fugue on a scale that he had never before attempted. This original finale opens with a bold statement of the main fugue subject played by all four instruments together in what the composer calls an "overture." After this, the music segues into the main fugue, which explodes with a leaping second subject introduced by the first violin, while the viola declaims the first. Both of these subjects then chase each other (in Latin, "fuga" means "fly") across the four instruments in careful counterpoint. A third of the way through the movement, Beethoven gives us a respite, as the pace slows to a more moderate tempo and flowing filigrees cover a kind of fugue-within-a-fugue based on the first subject. This gradually builds into a restatement of the main fugue, only with the subjects extended, contracted, inverted, or otherwise modified. Gradually this starts to unravel, with the subjects getting stretched to even greater lengths. Finally, a series of quiet chords leads into a faster, galloping take on the main subjects. From here, Beethoven, with an unexpected dash of humor, treats us to a few false endings as the movement reaches its denouement.

When a fifteen-minute fugue at the end of an already challenging quartet proved to be too demanding for performers and audience alike at the work's premiere by the Schuppanzigh Quartet in March 1826, Beethoven remained defiant. It was only after his publisher, Artaria, convinced him that such a finale would hamper sales that Beethoven made a rare revision: six months later, he composed an entirely new movement – a pleasantly bouncing *allegro* rondo – as the new finale for his Op. 130 quartet. It would be the last movement of any kind Beethoven ever completed. But the publisher kept the original fugal finale, and it was eventually published separately as his *Grosse Fuge* ("Great Fugue") for String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 133. For more than a century after Beethoven's death, performers respected his final wishes and concluded the Op. 130 quartet with the new finale. Since the rise of the atonal *avant garde* after World War II, however, it has become increasingly popular to substitute the *Grosse Fuge*, the way Beethoven originally intended. The fugue is, as composer Igor Stravinsky called it, "an absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary forever."

The String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, completed Prince Galitzin's commission, but Beethoven found that he had still much more to say in the genre, and he went on to complete two more quartets completely unprompted. Galitzin himself seemed to have been pleased with his three works, but he only paid for one of them before Beethoven's death in March 1827. It would take another quarter of a century for the composer's heirs to wrest the final 100 ducats from the Russian nobleman.

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