

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Quartet in F major for Strings, Op. 77, No. 2 (H. III/82)

Joseph Haydn

Born March 31, 1732 in Rohrau, Lower Austria.
Died May 31, 1809 in Vienna.

Composed in 1799.

Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian Lobkowitz, born into one of Austria's most distinguished families in 1772, was among Vienna's preeminent patrons of music at the turn of the 19th century. Beethoven's biographer Thayer described him as "a violinist of considerable powers and so devoted a lover of music and the drama, so profuse a squanderer of his income upon them, as in twenty years to reduce himself to bankruptcy." In 1799, the young Prince commissioned not one but two sets of string quartets — one from the young lion Ludwig van Beethoven, who had first pounced upon the city seven years before; the other from Joseph Haydn, then Europe's most revered composer, who was still basking in the unalloyed triumph of the premiere of *The Creation* in April 1798. Though Haydn had reached the not inconsiderable age of 67, he was still vital and energetic, and readily set to work on Lobkowitz's order for a series of six new quartets. Johann Elssler, Haydn's valet and copyist, left an interesting account of his master's daily schedule at that time: "He rose at 6:30. The first thing he did was to shave, which he did for himself up to his 73rd year. After shaving, he got dressed completely. If a pupil were present, he had to play the lesson he had been assigned on the piano to Herr Haydn as he was dressing. The mistakes were at once corrected, the pupil instructed about the reasons thereof, and then a new task was assigned. For this, one and a half hours were required. On the dot of 8 o'clock, breakfast had to be on the table, and right after breakfast, Haydn sat down at the piano and improvised, whereby at the same time he worked out the sketch of the composition; for this, a daily period from 8 to 11:30 in the morning was required. At 11:30, visits were paid or received; or he took a walk until 1:30. From 2 to 3 o'clock was the hour for lunch. After lunch, Haydn always concerned himself with some small domestic task, or he went into his small library and read a book. At 4 o'clock, Haydn returned to musical affairs. He took the sketch which had been prepared that morning and put it into score, for which task he took three to four hours. At 8 p.m., Haydn usually went out, but came home again at 9 and either sat down to write scores or took a book and read until 10 o'clock. The hour of 10 o'clock was supper time, which consisted of bread and wine. Haydn made it a rule not to have anything else except bread and wine in

the evening, and he broke the rule now and then only when he was invited out for dinner. At table, Haydn liked light conversation and altogether a merry entertainment. At half past eleven, Haydn went to bed. In old age, mainly during the last five to six years of his life, physical weakness and illness disturbed the above schedule. The active man could, at last, find no occupation. In this latter period, Haydn used to lie down for half an hour in the afternoon.”

Haydn completed two of the quartets for Lobkowitz in 1799 (G major and F major, published by Artaria in Vienna in 1802 as Op. 77, No. 1 and No. 2, with a dedication to the Prince), but then broke off the series to take up the enormous labor on *The Seasons*, the successor to *The Creation*, which so sapped his strength that he was unable to finish any more of the quartets. In 1803, he managed to write an *Andante* movement and a minuet for a third quartet, but got no further, and allowed Breitkopf und Härtel to publish that final instrumental effort in 1806 as his Op. 103. That original edition reproduced the calling card Haydn presented to visitors and correspondents during the waning years of his life: “Gone is all my strength, old and weak am I.” The two quartets of Op. 77 were the last in the incomparable series of instrumental creations stretching over five decades with which Haydn had brought the quintessential forms of musical Classicism to their perfected states.

The Quartet in F major, Op. 77, No. 2 displays the ease and fluency of form-building through motivic development that Haydn had wrested from a half-century of instrumental composition. As the first movement’s principal thematic material, the first violin posits a descending scale, perfectly balanced in two loud-soft phrases, which is carefully embellished with tiny decorative figures and sharply etched rhythmic cells. The lower strings underpin the second phrase with a smooth, scale-step accompaniment and punctuate the end of the eight-measure theme with a quick, repeated note motive. From this handful of ideas — a scale, a distinctive rhythm or two, a few legato notes — Haydn spun a masterful eight minutes of music: tightly integrated yet constantly inventive; attractive in every detail yet never losing sight of the movement’s overall formal scheme; simple yet complex; expressive yet cerebral; lovely yet profound. It is music-making of the highest order, significant not just as the basis for this single piece but also as the culmination of the work of many earlier generations of composers and the model (and standard) for those to follow.

The second movement is labeled “*Menuet*” but it is really a fully developed scherzo, a form that had gained considerable currency in fashionable Viennese musical circles

following the publication of Beethoven's Op. 1 Piano Trios in 1795. The joke inherent in the Italian word "scherzo" is amply demonstrated by the movement's outer sections, with their toe-stubbing rhythmic tricks, surprise dynamic changes, sly harmonic side-steps, and tweaky grace-notes. Providing an emotional and stylistic foil for this exalted foolery, however, is the central trio, sedate, almost somber in mood, smoothly flowing in demeanor, and tinged with expressive chromatic harmonies.

The *Andante* is a set of free variations on an elegant but rather prim melody presented by the first violin above the lean accompaniment of only a walking-bass line in the cello. The other instruments enter as the theme unfolds (a wonderful effect — rather like switching from mono to stereo on the home audio system), and the second violin and then the cello take over the melody for successive variations. An elaborate passage in the first violin provides the transition to the final variation, which returns the quiet and simplicity of the opening, though here with the inner voices filling out the texture.

The closing movement, Haydn's last instrumental finale, is a dashing, monothematic sonata structure built on a theme of folk-dance vivacity, "a sublimation and fulfillment of all that had gone before," according to Rosemary Hughes in her study of the composer's string quartets.

Quartet in E-flat major for Strings, Op. 74, "Harp"

Ludwig van Beethoven
Born December 16, 1770 in Bonn.
Died March 26, 1827 in Vienna.

Composed in 1809.
Premiered in autumn 1809 in Vienna.

The year 1809 was a difficult one for Vienna and for Beethoven. In May, Napoleon invaded the city with enough firepower to send the residents scurrying and Beethoven into the basement of his brother's house. The bombardment was close enough that he covered his sensitive ears with pillows to protect them from the concussion of the blasts. On July 29th, he wrote to the publisher Breitkopf und Härtel, "We have passed through a great deal of misery. I tell you that since May 4th, I have brought into the world little that is connected; only here and there a fragment. The whole course of events has affected me body and soul...What a disturbing, wild life around me; nothing but drums, cannons, men, misery of all sorts." He bellowed his frustration at a French officer he chanced to

meet: “If I were a general and knew as much about strategy as I do about counterpoint, I’d give you fellows something to think about.” Austria’s finances were in a shambles and the annual stipend Beethoven had been promised in February by several noblemen who supported his work was considerably reduced in value by the end of the year, placing him in a precarious pecuniary predicament. As a sturdy tree can root in flinty soil, however, a number of significant musical works grew from these unpromising circumstances — by the end of that year, 1809, Beethoven had completed the Piano Sonatas, Op. 78 and Op. 81a (“Lebewohl”), the Sonatina Op. 79, the Op. 77 Piano Fantasy, the “Emperor” Concerto and the String Quartet in E-flat, Op. 74.

The Op. 74 Quartet, apparently composed during the summer and early autumn of 1809, was dedicated to Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, who, with Prince Kinsky and Archduke Rudolph, had contracted to provide Beethoven with a generous annual income if he would remain in Vienna and not accept a proffered position in Germany. So confident did Beethoven feel with this turn of events that he proposed marriage to Therese Malfatti, a teenage pupil of his. Though the deaf, gruff, notoriously untidy, 39-year-old composer was hardly a likely partner for an aristocratic debutante, he was deeply wounded by the family’s rejection of his suit. (The thought of Beethoven as a husband threatens the moorings of one’s presence of mind!) It is the optimism and confidence of that year, however, rather than its disappointment and destruction that are reflected in the E-flat Quartet.

The Quartet opens with a hushed introduction into which is woven a preview of the upcoming principal theme. A quick crescendo leads directly to the fast-tempo main body of the movement, which commences with three ensemble chords followed by the principal subject, a smoothly flowing eighth-note figuration in the second violin upon which is draped a melody with dotted rhythms in the first violin. The pizzicato arpeggios heard in the transition and frequently thereafter in the movement suggested the Quartet’s sobriquet — “Harp.” The second theme is made from long winding scales given by the instruments in imitation. The development section treats chiefly the principal theme, especially its dotted-rhythm motive, before the pizzicato arpeggios return to serve as a bridge to a full recapitulation of the exposition’s themes. An extensive coda, with much pizzicato writing, closes the movement. The *Adagio* consists of three increasingly elaborate presentations of the hymnal melody given at the outset. The tightly woven part-writing, harmonic daring, and deep stillness of this music look forward to the peerless series of quartets that Beethoven was to undertake a decade later. The third movement is a furious, minor-key scherzo grown from the same elemental musical force (and rhythmic

motive: dot—dot—dot—dash) that had spawned the Fifth Symphony the year before. A whirlwind trio in flying scalar figures twice intervenes: A (scherzo)—B (trio)—A—B—A. The finale is a set of variations on a long theme of short phrases. The Quartet ends with a flurry of unison scales and a kittenish surprise.

***An die ferne Geliebte* (“*On the Distant Beloved*”) for Baritone and Piano, Op. 98**

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed in 1816.

Beethoven’s younger brother, Caspar Carl, a bank clerk of modest success in Vienna, died of tuberculosis on November 15, 1815. Though Caspar seems to have lived with her contentedly, his wife, Johanna, was a woman of sullied reputation whom the composer characterized as “wicked and vicious ... The Queen of the Night.” Beethoven felt that she was unfit to raise the couple’s nine-year-old child, Karl, and he convinced his brother to name him as the boy’s guardian — two days before he died, Caspar Carl included this provision in his will. During the following hours, however, he had misgivings about taking Karl from his mother, and added a codicil that, in effect, named his wife and brother as co-guardians, thereby contradicting the earlier provision. There ensued nearly five years of bitter legal battles between Beethoven and Johanna over the custody of Karl, who was mired in misery all the while by the unsettled state of his young life. The case was first decided in Beethoven’s favor in February 1816. Various subsequent proceedings were instituted by Johanna (usually after Karl had fled to her from the smothering attentions of his uncle), and the courts again formally took up the matter in 1818. Litigation dragged on for the next two years. The eventual settlement in 1820 was painful for Beethoven, not because he lost the suit (he won, but alienated the boy so thoroughly that six years later he tried to kill himself), but because the proceedings revealed that he was without noble ancestors, a life-long belief that he held tenaciously until it was publicly exploded in court. With declining health, shattered hearing and family turmoil sapping so much of Beethoven’s energy during that time (he turned fifty in 1820), it is little wonder that that half-decade was the least productive period of his creative life. Between the two Cello Sonatas, Op. 102 of 1815 and the Piano Sonata in E major, Op. 109 of 1820, the only major works that he completed were the song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (Op. 98) and the Piano Sonatas in A (Op. 101) and B-flat, the “Hammerklavier” (Op. 106).

Beethoven never married (the thought of Beethoven as a husband threatens the moorings of one's presence of mind!), but he didn't give up trying until his later years. He was acutely infected with chronic yearning throughout his life, a disease rampant among the German Romantics, and in the spring of 1816, he captured those feelings in a cycle of songs that set six poems by the young medical student Alois Jeitteles (1794-1858), who later became a hero in his native Brünn when he left his own sickbed during a cholera epidemic to care for those who needed his help. Jeitteles' poems were published in 1815 in a collection edited by the Viennese playwright Ignaz Castelli, with whom he was a fellow member of a local literary club that Beethoven occasionally visited. Beethoven's setting of Jeitteles' verses — collectively titled *An die ferne Geliebte* ("To the Distant Beloved") — is a true cycle in both its literary and musical components, with not just a continuity of thought throughout its poems, but also direct connection of one song to the next, a purposeful progression of tonalities, a return of the opening music in the last number, and a carefully calculated balance of moods: Beethoven described *An die ferne Geliebte* as a "*Liederkreis*," literally a "*circle of songs*," and it is generally recognized as the first work of its type. The melodic lines have an almost folk-like simplicity, but Beethoven heightened the cycle's structural and musical sophistication by making the free strophic forms of the individual songs into mini-variations for the piano. In his insightful study of the composer, Maynard Solomon wrote, "*An die ferne Geliebte*, which stands at the threshold of Beethoven's third style period, occupies a special place in his life and work. It bids farewell to his marriage project, to romantic pretense, to heroic grandiosity, to youth itself. It is a work that accepts loss without piteous outcry, for it preserves intact the memory of the past and refuses to acknowledge the finality of bereavement."

Quartet in B-flat major for Strings, Op. 18, No. 6

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed in 1800.

Premiered in 1800 in Vienna.

"He was short, about 5 feet, 4 inches, thickset and broad, with a massive head, a wildly luxuriant crop of hair, protruding teeth, a small rounded nose, and a habit of spitting whenever the notion took him. He was clumsy, and anything he touched was liable to be upset or broken. Badly coordinated, he could never learn to dance, and more

often than not managed to cut himself while shaving. He was sullen and suspicious, touchy as a misanthropic cobra, believed that everybody was out to cheat him, had none of the social graces, was forgetful, and was prone to insensate rages.” Thus the late *New York Times* critic Harold Schonberg, in his book about *The Lives of the Great Composers*, described Ludwig van Beethoven, the burly peasant with the unquenchable fire of genius who descended, aged 22, upon Vienna in 1792. Beethoven had been charged by his benefactor in his hometown of Bonn, Count Ferdinand von Waldstein, to go to the Austrian capital and “receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn.” He did study for a short time with Haydn, then universally regarded as the greatest living composer, but young Ludwig proved to be a recalcitrant student, and the sessions soon ended, though the two maintained a respectful, if cool, relationship until Haydn’s death in 1809.

In a world still largely accustomed to the reserved, genteel musical style of pre-Revolutionary Classicism, Beethoven burst upon the scene like a fiery meteor. The Viennese aristocracy took this young lion to its bosom. Beethoven expected as much. Unlike his predecessors, he would not assume the servant’s position traditionally accorded to a musician, refusing, for example, not only to eat in the kitchen, but becoming outspokenly hostile if he was not seated next to the master of the house at table. The more enlightened nobility, to its credit, recognized the genius of this gruff Rhinelander, and encouraged his work. Shortly after Beethoven’s arrival, Prince Lichnowsky provided him with living quarters, treating him more like a son than a guest. Lichnowsky even instructed the servants to answer the musician’s call before his own should both ring at the same time. In large part, such gestures provided for Beethoven’s support during his early Viennese years. For most of the first decade after he arrived, he made some effort to follow the prevailing fashion in the sophisticated city, but, though he outfitted himself with good boots, a proper coat and the necessary accouterments, and enjoyed the society of Vienna’s best houses, there never ceased to roil within him the untamed energy of creativity. It was inevitably only a matter of time before the fancy clothes were discarded, as a bear would shred a flimsy paper bag.

The year of the completion of the six Op. 18 Quartets — 1800 — was an important time in Beethoven’s development. He had achieved a success good enough to write to his old friend Franz Wegeler in Bonn, “My compositions bring me in a good deal, and may I say that I am offered more commissions than it is possible for me to carry out. Moreover, for every composition I can count on six or seven publishers and even more, if I want them. People no longer come to an arrangement with me. I state my price, and they pay.” At the time of this gratifying recognition of his talents, however, the first signs of his

fateful deafness appeared, and he began the titanic struggle that became one of the gravitational poles of his life. Within two years, driven from the social contact on which he had flourished by the fear of discovery of his malady, he penned the Heiligenstadt Testament, his *cri de cœur* against this wicked trick of the gods. These first Quartets stand on the brink of this great crisis in Beethoven's life.

The string quartet, perfected by Haydn, was a favorite form of musical entertainment in the salons of Vienna at the turn of the 19th century. As early as 1795, Count Anton Georg Apponyi had suggested to Beethoven that he undertake some works in the form, but the proposal did not bear fruit until three years later, when the Op. 18 set was begun. In 1798, Beethoven was closely associated with the noted composer and theorist Emanuel Alois Förster, perhaps as a student. (Beethoven later referred to him as his "old master.") Förster was one of the era's foremost composers of string quartets, and his influence may have inspired Beethoven to undertake his first works in the genre. Beethoven, at that time of his life still determined to impress the aristocracy, probably wished to have his name attached to the most elegant musical form of the day. At any rate, the Quartets were begun in mid-1798 (though some sketches apparently date back to the early 1790s), mostly composed the following year, and completed in 1800. They were first played by the ensemble of Ignaz Schuppanzigh either (reports differ) in the home of Förster or in the Viennese palace of Prince Karl Lobkowitz, to whom they were dedicated upon their publication in 1801. Lobkowitz was so pleased with the Quartets that he pledged Beethoven an annual stipend of 600 gulden. With their respectful renewal of the Classical style and technique of Haydn, the Quartets enjoyed a good (though, as was always the case with Beethoven's works when they were new, not unanimous) success, and were frequently heard during the composer's lifetime. Looking back on Op. 18 in 1811, a critic for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* wrote, "In them the loveliest melodies appeal to the feelings, and the unity, the supreme simplicity, the particular and firmly sustained character in each individual piece making up those Quartets raise them to the level of masterworks, and join Beethoven's name with the revered names of Haydn and Mozart."

Though the B-flat Quartet was apparently the next-to-last number of Op. 18 to be composed, Beethoven chose to publish it at the end of the set because of its extraordinary finale, subtitled *La Malinconia*, which Joseph Kerman called "an arresting premonition of achievements to come." As if to serve as a foil for the daring ending of the work, the first two movements, for all their characteristically Beethovenian energy and ingenuity, are conservative in form and idiom. A vigorous, leaping melody in the first violin serves as the main theme of the opening movement. Long ribbons of scales provide the transition to the second theme, an amiable strain of limited range in dotted rhythms. The

leaping main theme and the scalar transition motive are explored in the development. A long preparation that finally settles on a quiet, held chord ushers in the recapitulation. The *Adagio*, built in a simple three-part form, begins with a suave theme presented by the violin above a sparse accompaniment in the lower strings; the center section is initiated by an attenuated line given in unison by the first violin and cello. The *Scherzo* is an elaborate, almost quirky, exploration of the ways in which triple-meter measures can be divided into unusual rhythms and ambiguous groupings through syncopations and cross accents; the tiny *Trio* is occupied by a flippant melody for the violin. The finale, like a number of movements from the compositions of Beethoven's last period, is constructed in several continuous but highly contrasted sections. It begins with a slow introduction, almost a movement in itself, labeled *La Malinconia* — “*Melancholy*” — which Beethoven instructs is to be played “with the greatest delicacy.” So advanced is the harmony of this passage that Philip Radcliffe suggested that, reworked for orchestra, it would not be out of place in a Wagner opera. Daniel Gregory Mason wrote, “These measures carry us into new regions of musical expression. In this strange half-light, this mystical atmosphere of trance and the sense of something unknown impending, we are far indeed from the gay sunlight of 18th-century finales.” The main body of the movement, in rondo form, is fast and cheerful, though the pensive strains of the slow opening are recalled before a furious dash to the end closes the Quartet.