



LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN

The Complete String Quartets

Volume I Op.18, Nos.1-3

THE VANBRUGH QUARTET



INTIM
Musik

Beethoven String Quartet in F major Op.18, No.1

Allegro con brio

Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Allegro

Beethoven's Op.18 quartets were not written in the sequence in which they are numbered. Basil Lam in his admirable BBC Music Guide gives the following order:

1. No.4 in C minor – probably much revised after second version of No.1
2. No.1 in F (first version)
3. No.3 in D
4. (uncertain) No.5 in A
5. No.2 in G
6. No.6 in B flat

The F major quartet, published as No.1, underwent a comprehensive revision by which it became in many ways the strongest work of the set. Beethoven sent its first version to his friend Carl Amenda but two years later wrote to him "Don't let anyone see your quartet as I have greatly changed it, as only now do I know how to write quartets properly". It was a root-and-branch revision, a magnificent lesson in composition to any student (both versions can be found together in Section VI, Vol.3 of the Beethoven Edition published by Henle). The result was a work of considerable power in which the composer showed not only his mastery of structural subtlety but also a new grasp of quartet texture. Such lessons are evident in every movement.

The first movement is one of the most succinct and muscular statements in early Beethoven, and the first figure generates a remarkable range of growth. The directness and simplicity of its beginning did not come all at once; the sketches show that it had

to be hammered out, and the way its terseness serves to make room for later expansion foreshadows the extraordinary achievement of Op.95. Notice how the little turning figure in the first theme is soon overlaid by a new counterpoint and then, as the music moves to the dominant, the second group floats and expands (with gentle syncopations) in a way we might not have supposed possible in a piece with so crisp a start. In the revision the development was drastically altered in its range of modulation and the perfection of its part-writing – of all the Op.18 quartets, this shows the most democracy between the instruments.

Beethoven told Amenda that when composing the slow movement he had *Romeo and Juliet* in mind. He more than once responded to the promptings of Shakespeare, but as with the *Pastoral Symphony*, would have insisted that the result was "more an expression of feeling than painting". This passionate D minor movement has something in common with the *Largo e mesto* of the piano sonata in D Op.10, No.3. Both spaciouly express a sense of tragedy beyond the ken of any of Beethoven's predecessors except Gluck, and the quartet movement has a new refinement of sound, partly due to the way in which the composer removed many of the more vehement markings of the first version. The fining down of the dynamics makes all the more striking the intense outburst towards the end.

After this the scherzo, far from being the usual release of energy after the restraints of a slow movement, is almost soothing. This is another sign of maturity – a quality we must never underestimate in Beethoven's early masterpieces. Too often his Op.18 quartets are patronisingly treated as the promising products of a student of genius, and we must not forget that already Beethoven is active in a territory unpredictable even by Haydn and Mozart. When these works were first heard the impression was of disconcerting but dazzling mastery of novel ideas. By the time this F major quartet appeared, audiences were prepared for a fiercely aggressive Beethoven scherzo, so the quiet nature of this one provided a new

kind of surprise, not contradicted by the abrupt humour of the humorously modulating trio with its skipping octaves. In this scherzo there is, as Basil Lam says, an element of "unrest that links it with the first half of the quartet" - but it is also an easement towards the rondo finale.

When he revised it, Beethoven changed the marking for the finale from Allegretto to Allegro. This means that he first thought of a not excessive speed, but may have felt that Allegretto suggested too slow a pace. The Allegro marking does not really mean very fast (we have to remember that the literal meaning of the word is "cheerful" or "lively" - not quick) and there is great risk to the detail if the piece is rushed; its rhythmic vitality is the stronger for not being hurried. The quicksilver first subject is contrasted with singing elements that give the piece great spaciousness, and in this respect it balances the first movement. The development shows Beethoven's already great mastery of polyphony, a skill for which he has not always been given the credit. To the academics smoothness used to be the only acceptable attribute of good counterpoint.

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

Allegro

Adagio cantabile

Scherzo. Allegro

Allegro molto quasi Presto

This is a comedy, rich in wit and humour. There is no intention to search the depths, and even the slow movement is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the much more serious and beautiful slow finale of Haydn's C major quartet, Op 54 No 2.

Beethoven's first movement starts with a delightful exchange of phrases that

deceptively adopts eighteenth century manners. But we must take care about this - the second phrase turns up again in the scherzo of the late C sharp minor Quartet! As we shall see, Beethoven was able throughout his life to use the simplest material to the profoundest ends. In this case any profundity lies in the subtlety with which he is able to manipulate light-textured matter - perhaps we are apt to forget that a mosquito has unfathomable such profundities! Be that as it may, Beethoven does not altogether eschew emotionally deeper suggestions, as in the pianissimo change to Eb in the development, with a mysterious fugato; but it is abruptly dismissed, and the movement resumes its witty course, coming soon to an astonishingly concentrated yet broad approach to the recapitulation.

The C major Adagio is plain-sailing, if one can so describe the concertante decorations of the 1st violin, joined by the cello in the reprise. Harmonically it avoids "expression" like the plague. The plainness recalls the Haydn slow finale already mentioned, not least because Haydn also interrupts his slow music with a presto that sounds like another movement, the interruption suggesting the slow movement to have been a protracted introduction to a quick finale which, however, quickly evaporates, leaving the Adagio in full possession to the end. In the second movement of a four movement quartet Beethoven makes his quick section pose as the premature arrival of a scherzo, and in returning to the slow music he does not aspire to the immense gravity of Haydn. Perhaps Beethoven's light-hearted, even sardonic allusion slightly misfires if we draw too close a parallel, and so long as we are not expecting a deep slow movement (of which we know Beethoven to be capable even in his early period) we can accept this piece as an easy going relaxation during a comedy.

The real scherzo is brilliantly unpredictable, thematically and harmonically, with a C major trio employing sparkling triplets, from which a link leads back to the return. Beethoven's early scherzos show amazing variety and resource, the answer to Haydn's wistful, "I wish someone would show us a new way to write minuets". Some of them would not surprise us if they had appeared in much later works.

Beethoven's finale shows that he has learnt from Haydn, who would greatly have admired what it makes of manifold witty inversions and diminutions of its first three notes. This vividly humorous movement also shows what can be done by constant flexibility in contrasting textures and phrase-lengths in music that nothing can hinder as it hurtles by. In the finale of the G major string trio, Op.9, No.1 we find Beethoven using groups of three notes with astonishing resource, and although one of its themes could easily have occurred in the quartet, he does not repeat a single device from the earlier work.

Beethoven String Quartet in D major Op.18, No.3.

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro

Presto



The D major quartet is one of the gentlest of Beethoven's earlier works, certainly in its first three movements, and its subtlety will not be noticed by those who tend to patronise his first quartets. Take the very opening, for instance – the first two notes of the violin and their continuation in quietly flowing quavers over a very deliberate chordal accompaniment could easily be the start of a slow movement. We realise only after a while that the motion belongs to an allegro. Beethoven's control of movement shows already a high degree of maturity, clearly proved in an opening to which no parallel can be found in Haydn or Mozart. It is a

beautiful beginning and the rest of the movement fulfils its promise. The part-writing in later quartets produces greater democracy than here, but the music itself could hardly be bettered in the ease and certainty of its flow, while the sidelong approach to the dominant in the second group (through C major and A minor) has unobtrusive originality. The development is not long, but its approach to the recapitulation is unexpectedly dramatic, through the dominant of F sharp minor, later powerfully intensified in the Second Symphony (in the same key).

The easeful B flat Andante is a rondo. As Basil Lam points out in the BBC Music Guide to the Beethoven quartets, the twelve-bar theme "is constructed with great subtlety; the melody, begun by the second violin, is taken over and repeated by the first before the statement has been completed." The smoothly flowing figuration of the theme is prominent in most of the movement, and Beethoven's use of contrasting harmonic areas prevents this fact from preempting the always welcome returns of the theme itself. At the centre is a rich development.

Quietly flexing strong muscles, the scherzo is unaggressive and its D minor trio decorates a four-note descending bass. Sustained brilliance in this quartet is reserved for the finale, in a fast six-eight time. Its keys and rhythms create the temptation to compare it (of course unfavourably!) with the finale of Mozart's D major quintet – but in this case it must be Beethoven who wins the palm for sheer mastery of movement. Mozart's theme sits down with dangerous regularity, while Beethoven's flies at once into the sky, alighting when and where it wishes, and the length and size of Beethoven's paragraphs and the energy with which they are infused can be found only rarely with other composers. Here it also generates rich and vigorous polyphony in the overwhelmingly energetic development.

Dr Robert Simpson

THE VANBRUGH QUARTET

Gregory Ellis • Elizabeth Charleson • Simon Aspell • Christopher Marwood

The Vanbrugh Quartet is entering its second decade firmly established as one of Europe's finest and most successful quartets. Since winning the Portsmouth (now London) International String Quartet Competition in 1988, they have built up a thriving career, annually presenting around a hundred concerts, together with radio and television broadcasts, in Europe, the Americas and the Far East. This series of recordings marks their first collaboration with Intim Musik, following seven previous CDs covering a wide range of repertoire.

The Quartet is based in Cork, on Ireland's south coast, where they hold the position of Resident Quartet to Radio Telefis Eireann, the national broadcasting service; they are also Artists in Residence to University College, Cork, and founders of the internationally acclaimed West Cork Chamber Music Festival. In 1995 they were presented with Ireland's National Entertainment Award for Classical Music. Beethoven's String Quartets have been central to the Vanbrugh Quartet's repertoire throughout their career, and they have performed the complete cycle on a number of occasions both in the UK and in Ireland. Most recently, in April 1996, the Quartet performed all seventeen quartets in a single weekend to launch the Vanbrugh Quartet Scholarship Fund, a fund to help further the studies of Ireland's aspiring young chamber musicians; a proportion of the proceeds of these recordings will be donated to the Fund.

The members of the Vanbrugh Quartet play on a fine set of instruments on loan from collections at the Royal Academy of Music, London, and the Maggini Foundation, Switzerland.

For further information on the The Vanbrugh Quartet Scholarship Fund, please contact:
Vanbrugh House, Castle Treasure, Douglas, Cork, Ireland.

DAS VANBRUGH QUARTET

Gregory Ellis • Elizabeth Charleson • Simon Aspell • Christopher Marwood

Das Vanbrugh Quartett ist nun schon seit mehr als zehn Jahren eines der vorzüglichsten und erfolgreichsten Quartette Europas. Seitdem es 1988 den Internationalen Streichquartett-Wettbewerb von Portsmouth (jetzt London) gewann, hat das Quartett eine glänzende Karriere gemacht, aufgrund de-

rer es jedes Jahr rund hundert Konzerte in Europa, in Nord- und Südamerika und im Fernen Osten geben konnte, und darüber hinaus fanden zahlreiche Übertragungen im Rundfunk und Fernsehen statt. Diese Reihe von Aufnahmen kennzeichnet die erste Zusammenarbeit des Vanbrugh Quartetts mit Intim Music, im Anschluß an sieben vorherige CDs, die ein sehr umfangreiches Repertoire umfassen.

Standort des Quartettes ist Cork an der Südküste Irlands, wo es sowohl beim nationalen Rundfunksender "Radio Telefís Éireann" als "Resident Quartet" als auch an der Universität von Cork eine feste Anstellung hat. Darüber hinaus sind die Quartettmitglieder Gründer des West Cork Kammermusik-Festivals.

Während der Karriere des Vanbrugh Quartetts haben Beethovens Streichquartette schon immer den Mittelpunkt des Repertoires gebildet, und das Quartett spielte bei zahlreichen Gelegenheiten im Vereinigten Königreich und in Irland den vollständigen Zyklus. Noch vor kurzem, nämlich im April des Jahres 1996, wurden an einem einzigen Wochenende alle siebzehn Quartette aufgeführt, um damit den "Vanbrugh Quartet Scholarship Fund" zu lancieren, ein Fonds zur Unterstützung von jungen, irischen Kammermusikern. Ein Teil des Erlöses dieser Aufnahmen kommt dem Fonds zugute.

Die Mitglieder des Vanbrugh Quartettes spielen auf vortrefflichen Instrumenten, die ihnen leihweise aus Sammlungen der Royal Academy of Music, London, und der Maggini-Stiftung, Schweiz, zur Verfügung gestellt wurden.

LE QUATUOR VANBRUGH

Le Quatuor Vanbrugh qui entre dans sa deuxième décennie, s'est fermement établi comme étant l'un des meilleurs quatuors d'Europe. Depuis qu'il a remporté le concours international des quatuors à cordes de Portsmouth (maintenant de Londres) en 1988, le Quatuor a fait une très belle carrière, donnant annuellement près de cent concerts, et faisant des émissions radio et télévision, en Europe, Amérique, et Extrême-Orient. Cette série d'enregistrements marque sa première collaboration avec Intim Music, après avoir fait sept CDs couvrant un vaste répertoire. Le Quatuor est basé à Cork, sur la côte sud d'Irlande, et c'est le quatuor en résidence de Radio

Telefis Eireann, le service de radio-télévision national; les membres du quatuor sont également les artistes en résidence de l'université de Cork et les fondateurs du prestigieux Festival International de la Musique de Chambre de l'Ouest de Corc. En 1995, le Quatuor a reçu le trophée national d'Irlande pour la musique classique.

Tout au long de l'existence du Quatuor Vanbrugh, les quatuors à cordes de Beethoven ont fait régulièrement partie de son répertoire, et ils ont été joués en entier un bon nombre de fois, en Grande-Bretagne comme en Irlande. En avril 1996, le Quatuor a joué les dix-sept quatuors en un seul weekend, pour le lancement de la "Bourse du Quatuor Vanbrugh" – une bourse permettant d'aider de jeunes musiciens Irlandais à continuer leurs études; une partie des bénéfices de ces enregistrements sera versée au compte de la Bourse.

Les membres du Quatuor Vanbrugh jouent sur de très beaux instruments, en prêt de collections de l'Académie Royale de Musique de Londres et de la fondation Maggini de Suisse.

EL VANBRUGH QUARTET

El Vanbrugh Quartet acaba de entrar en su segunda década. Se ha establecido ya como uno de los mejores cuartetos de Europa. Desde que ganaron en el año 1988 el Primer Premio del Concurso Internacional de Cuartetos de Cuerda de Portsmouth (hoy en día de Londres) han ido prosperando, dando aproximadamente unos 100 conciertos al año en Europa, Estados Unidos y Oriente lejano, así como grabando programas colaboración con Intim Musik, habiendo grabado ya con otras casas 7 CDs que cubren un ampilo repertorio.

El cuarteto está basado en Cork, en la costa del Sur de Irlanda, siendo Cuarteto Residente de Radio Telefis Eireann, el servicio nacional de radio; son también Artistas residentes del Colegio Universitario de Cork y fundadores del Festival de Música de Cámara internacionalmente aclamado: West Cork chamber Music Festival. En 1995 fueron nominados para el National Entertainment Award para la música clásica.

Los Cuartetos para Cuerda de Beethoven han sido uno de los ejes centrales del repertorio del Vanbrugh Quartet en su carrera. Han interpretado el ciclo completo varias veces tanto en Inglaterra como en Irlanda. En Abril de 1996 el Cuarteto interpretó los 17 curtetos en un sólo fin de semana con motivo del lanzamiento del Vanbrugh Quartet Scholarship Fund, una fundación cuyo propósito es

ayudar en sus estudios a los jóvenes júsicos de cámara de Irlanda. Una parte de las ventas de estas grabaciones será donada a la Fundación.

Los miembros del Vanbrugh Quartet tocan sobre preciosos instrumentos prestados por la Royal Academy of Music de Londres y la Maggini Foundation de Suiza.

ヴァンブルー弦楽四重奏団は、現在ヨーロッパに於いて十年強もの演奏活動し素晴らしい成功を収めている。1988年の国際ポートマス（現ロンドン）弦楽四重奏コンクールで優勝し、それ以後力強いキャリアを伸ばしている。

現在ヨーロッパ、アメリカ、アジア、又 ラジオ、テレビでのレコーディングを含め年間百余りのコンサトを行っている。インティン、ミュージックとのレコーディングを始め既に幅広いレパートリーで7枚のCDを製作した。

この弦楽四重奏団は、アイルランド南岸のコーク市をベースにしてテレビ、フェイスリオン ラジオ国際放送サービスに所属している。コーク大学内での指導の傍ら初めてコーク室内楽フェスティバルを開催した。1995年には、クラシック界のナショナル エンターテイメントの最優秀賞を獲得し国際的にも称賛を浴び始めた。

1996年四月には、アイルランドの若い演奏家達を支援する企画としてヴァンブルー奨学基金を設立するためにベートーベンの17曲全ての室内楽曲を週末コンサートにて全奏した。

使用している楽器は、ロンドン ロイヤルアカデミー 及び スイスのマギーニファンデーションからのコレクションである。

Dr Robert Simpson (programme notes)
Brita van Munster Richter (German translation)
Art et Musique, Madrid (Spanish translation)
Masayo Matsuo (Japanese translation)

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Gregory Ellis

Simon Aspell

Elizabeth Charleson

Christopher Marwood



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LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN

String Quartet in F major Op.18, No.1

1	Allegro con brio	9:27
2	Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato.....	9:05
3	Scherzo: Allegro molto.....	3:22
4	Allegro.....	6:16

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

5	Allegro	7:48
6	Adagio Cantabile	6:20
7	Scherzo Allegro	4:30
8	Allegro molto quasi Presto.....	5:36

String Quartet in D major Op.18, No.3

9	Allegro.....	7:55
10	Andante con moto	7:50
11	Allegro.....	2:58
12	Presto	6:27

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