

Thursday Evening, December 12, 2019, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

Juilliard String Quartet

Areta Zhulla and Ronald Copes, *Violins*

Roger Tapping, *Viola*

Astrid Schween, *Cello*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) **String Quartet No. 1 in F major, Op. 18, No. 1**

Allegro con brio
Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Allegro

GYÖRGY KURTÁG (b. 1926) **6 Moments musicaux, Op. 44**

Invocatio (Un fragment)
Footfalls (... as if someone were coming)
Capriccio
In memoriam Sebők György
Rappel des oiseaux ... (Étude pour les harmoniques)
Les adieux (in Janáček's Manier)

Intermission

BEETHOVEN **Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131**

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo
Allegro molto vivace
Allegro moderato—Adagio
Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Presto
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes, including an intermission

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not permitted in this auditorium.

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Alice Tully Hall

Please make certain that all electronic devices are turned off during the performance.

Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller

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

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: December 17, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna

When, in 1792, Ludwig van Beethoven left his native Bonn to seek his fortune as a pianist and a composer in the heady cultural capital of Vienna, he was entering a world dominated by the spirit of the late lamented Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and the still living, universally revered Franz Joseph Haydn. Given the interest they had shown in the medium of the string quartet, it was inevitable that Beethoven should follow in their footsteps.

Beethoven immediately strained in new directions. Succinct themes capable of extensive development, imaginative melodic manipulation, startling dynamic contrasts: These are all evident in Beethoven's first set of six quartets, Op. 18, which he composed from the summer or autumn 1798 to summer 1800. After these, he set the genre on the back burner for several years. His Op. 18 quartets played an important part in launching his eventual renown. They were introduced at a series of private house-concerts at the Vienna home of Prince Karl Lobkowitz, to whom the set is dedicated. These performances were regularly attended by the city's cultural and philanthropic elite. Shortly after these quartets were unveiled, patrons showed increasing interest in commissioning works from this intractable but inescapable genius.

The three bound sketch books Beethoven employed for recording and working out his ideas for these quartets reveal that the pieces were composed in a different order from how they were positioned when

published, in 1801. The D-major quartet (Op. 18, No. 3) was the first to be written; the F-major (No. 1) and G-major (No. 2) followed, probably in that order; and the A major (No. 5), C minor (No. 4), and B-flat major (No. 6)—possibly not in that order—came last. Some revision took place late in the process, including major rewriting of the earliest pieces; by the time Beethoven finished penning the six, he had learned lessons he wanted to incorporate into the initial few. He acknowledged this in an 1801 letter to his violinist friend Karl Amenda, to whom he had previously sent the original version of the F-major quartet: "Be sure not to hand on to anybody your quartet, in which I have made some drastic alterations. For only now have I learned how to write quartets." (The Juilliard String Quartet recorded the early "Amenda version" of the first movement for a CD insert to Lewis Lockwood's 2008 book *Inside Beethoven's Quartets*.)

This is an overwhelmingly cheerful, optimistic piece, at least in its first, third, and fourth movements. Nonetheless, abrupt tonal shifts and textural contrasts in the opening *Allegro con brio* hint at the gruffness and unmitigated drama that would increasingly characterize Beethoven's music—but here they are only hints. The third and fourth movements pick up the sunny good humor, but the second inhabits quite distinct territory. Amenda reported that the composer told him that, in composing it, he "thought of the scene in the burial vault in *Romeo and Juliet*." The movement's dark, D-minor recesses unroll as an aria that is by turns doleful, tender, and passionate.

6 Moments musicaux, Op. 44

GYÖRGY KURTÁG

Born: February 19, 1926, in Lugos (Lugoj), Romania

Lives in Saint-André-de-Cubzac, outside Bordeaux, France

Though born in Romania and now living in France, György Kurtág is a Hungarian composer, having moved to Budapest in 1946 and taken Hungarian citizenship two years later. At the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, his teachers included Sándor Veress and Ferenc Farkas (for composition), Pál Kadosa (for piano), and Leó Weiner (for chamber music). He wanted to study with Bartók too, but Bartók's hope to return to Hungary was sidelined by World War II, and he died in 1945 while still in exile in America. In 1957, Kurtág traveled to Paris, where he studied with Olivier Messiaen and Darius Milhaud; and in Cologne, he was bowled over by the works of Stockhausen and Ligeti. Returning to Hungary, he embarked on what he considers his real career as a composer, and he joined the piano and chamber-music faculty at his alma mater. He has never taught composition per se, but he has coached many musicians privately, sometimes assisted by the pianist Márta Kurtág, his wife and artistic collaborator.

Beginning in the mid-1950s Kurtág won numerous Hungarian awards. By now, he is a much-decorated senior statesman of music, including among his honors the Ernest von Siemens Music Prize of Germany (1998), the Sonning Award of Denmark (2003), the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition from the University of Louisville (2006), the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale in Italy (2009), and the Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal in the U.K. (2013).

Kurtág has acknowledged Schumann, Stravinsky, Bartók, and Webern as exerting particular influence over his developing style. To Schumann's example we owe Kurtág's propensity for stringing together numerous short pieces into extended cycles or suites; they represent practically all of what could be called larger forms in Kurtág, who has mostly taken a pass on such time-honored genres as the symphony or concerto. Many of his works are miniatures after the manner of Webern, and even his longer movements may adhere to a Webernesque aphoristic style. Few 20th-century composers did not feel the profound impact of Stravinsky, and Bartók would, of course, loom prominently behind any modern Hungarian composer. Kurtág acknowledged him when he remarked, "My mother tongue is Bartók, and Bartók's mother tongue was Beethoven."

Kurtág wrote his *6 Moments musicaux* (the title derives from Schubert's short piano pieces) from 1999 to 2005, drawing in part on earlier works—most prominently from pieces in his ongoing "pedagogical performance pieces" for piano that he collects under the title *Játékok* (Games). Musical and aesthetic salutes lurk in these brief soundscapes. The late pianist György Sebők is explicitly honored in the fourth movement and the composer Leoš Janáček in the last. The fifth movement, "Rappel des oiseaux ... (Étude pour les harmoniques)"—a piece dedicated to violist Tabea Zimmerman—certainly alludes to Kurtág's teacher Messiaen; and the second, "Footfalls," which borrows its title from Samuel Beckett, is accompanied in the score by a bleak, even funereal poem by the turn-of-the-20th-century Hungarian poet Endre Ady.

Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

No listener at the premieres of Beethoven's Op. 18 quartets could have conceived that anyone would ever write the sort of music that pervades his late string quartets. By the time he embarked on his final five (plus the *Grosse Fuge*), Beethoven was pretty much surviving on a planet of his own, cut off by deafness from the hearing world, wrapped up utterly in his uniquely advanced compositional technique and emotional expression.

The first three of his late quartets were written at the urging of the composer's Russian patron Prince Nikolai Galitzin. Beethoven finished the third of them in November 1825 but was so captivated by the possibilities of the genre that he immediately began to sketch another, with no commission attached. This would become the C-sharp minor quartet (Op. 131) which, along with his final quartet (Op. 135), he would complete the following summer. As a group, these late quartets embrace both the highly personal and the broadly universal, plumbing depths of emotional expression while reveling in arcane technical devices. We need not play favorites when it comes to Beethoven quartets, but—without insisting too much on what may have been meant as a casual comment—the composer did suggest to his friend Karl Holz that he loved this one most of all. He sent this work to his publisher (who had annoyingly specified that he expected an "original" work) with a note attached: "Scrambled together with pilferings from one thing and another." This sent the publisher into a panic, but a week later Beethoven restored order into the relationship by writing to assure him that the quartet's music really was new.

In his late works, Beethoven often played fast and loose with traditional forms. Here he expands the standard four-movement layout to a seven-movement structure—or, perhaps more accurately, a single vast movement of seven discrete sections with no protracted breaks between. Or is seven too many? Perhaps one should say there are only six, since the third is only 11 measures long and can easily be viewed as a mere prelude to the fourth, just as the sixth can be seen as an introduction to the seventh—at which point we would find ourselves in the general neighborhood of a Classical quartet layout after all. Yet even those short movements pack a punch: The listener feels as if the entire weight of a full-scale movement has been packed into these dense supernovas, which might explode at any time. The traditional sonata-allegro form is not discarded entirely, but here Beethoven holds its drama in reserve for the final movement. Where one would have expected a sonata form in the opening movement we find instead a restrained but imposing, widely modulating slow fugue (which we might have guessed Beethoven would have used in his finale) emerging bit by bit out of silence to proclaim its melancholy. Nothing in this work is predictable, on through to the concluding movement, rugged and gruff overall but often changing character before it reaches its final, crashing chords.

James M. Keller is the longtime program annotator of the New York Philharmonic (Leni and Peter May Chair) and the San Francisco Symphony. His book Chamber Music: A Listener's Guide (Oxford University Press) is available in hardcover, paperback, and e-book formats.



About the Juilliard String Quartet

With unparalleled artistry and enduring vigor, the Juilliard String Quartet (JSQ) continues to inspire audiences around the world. Founded in 1946, JSQ draws on a deep and vital engagement to the classics while embracing the mission of championing new works, a vibrant combination of the familiar and the daring. Each performance is a unique experience, bringing together the four members' profound understanding, total commitment, and unceasing curiosity in sharing the wonders of the string quartet literature.

The 2019–20 season brings JSQ to concerts in Amsterdam, Vienna, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Sarasota, among others, in addition to its annual appearances at the chamber music societies of Detroit and Philadelphia. The quartet also visits the newly established Tianjin Juilliard School, giving master classes. In keeping its mission of supporting the creation of invigorating new repertoire, JSQ has commissioned German composer Jörg Widmann (Advanced Certificate '95, clarinet) to write two quartets for the ensemble

to premiere in 2020–21 alongside late quartets by Beethoven, and recently premiered *One Hundred Years Grows Shorter Over Time* by Lembit Beecher.

Adding to its celebrated discography, an album of works by Beethoven, Bartók, and Dvořák is set to be released by Sony Classical during the 2019–20 season. In 2018, JSQ released an album on Sony Classical featuring the world premiere recording of Mario Davidovsky's *Fragments* (2016), together with Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 95, and Bartók's Quartet No. 1. Celebrating one of the great collaborative relationships in American music, Sony Classical's reissue of the quartet's landmark recordings of the first four Elliott Carter string quartets together with the 2013 recording of Carter's Quartet No. 5 traces a remarkable period in the evolution of both the composer and the ensemble. The quartet's recordings of the Bartók and Schoenberg quartets, as well as those of Debussy, Ravel, and Beethoven, have won Grammy Awards, and in 2011 JSQ became the first classical music ensemble to receive a lifetime achievement award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences.

Juilliard

Devoted master teachers, the members of the Juilliard String Quartet offer classes and open rehearsals when on tour. JSQ is string quartet in residence at Juilliard and its members are sought-after teachers on the string and chamber music faculties.

Each May JSQ hosts the five-day internationally recognized Juilliard String Quartet Seminar. Each summer JSQ works closely on string quartet repertoire with students at the Tanglewood Music Center.

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