

BEETHOVEN

Volume 2

COMPLETE

The Middle Quartets

STRING

DOVER QUARTET

QUARTETS

GEDILLE
♯

DOVER QUARTET
**BEETHOVEN COMPLETE
STRING QUARTETS**

Volume 2 The Middle Quartets

DISC 1

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

**String Quartet No. 7 in F major, Op. 59,
No. 1 (39:05)**

- I. Allegro (10:09)
- II. Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando (8:55)
- III. Adagio molto e mesto (12:12)
- IV. "Thème russe": Allegro (7:40)

DISC 2

**String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 59,
No. 2 (28:16)**

- I. Allegro (9:03)
- II. Molto adagio (12:15)
- III. Allegretto (6:45)
- IV. Finale. Presto (5:20)

**String Quartet No. 9 in C major, Op. 59,
No. 3 (30:39)**

- I. Andante con moto – Allegro vivace (10:44)
- II. Andante con moto quasi allegretto (8:55)
- III. Menuetto (5:26)
- IV. Allegro molto (5:26)

DISC 3

**String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat major,
Op. 74, "Harp" (24:03)**

- I. Poco adagio – Allegro (9:29)
- II. Adagio ma non troppo (9:31)
- III. Presto (4:55)
- IV. Allegretto con Variazioni (6:57)

**String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 95,
"Serioso" (19:50)**

- I. Allegro con brio (4:10)
- II. Allegretto ma non troppo (6:45)
- III. Allegro assai vivace ma serioso (4:23)
- IV. Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato (4:24)

TT: (2:34:35)

PERSONAL NOTE

“The recording of these middle quartets represent the last sessions that Grammy winning recording engineer Bruce Egre engineered before he succumbed to cancer. He was a kind, warm, supportive force in every session, with incredible ears. Coming to what could be a stressful endeavor, recording the Beethoven Cycle, we were so fortunate to be in his calming and comforting presence. He was a mentor to so many, and loved dearly by all who worked with him. We miss him terribly.”

—Alan Bise and the Dover Quartet (Joel Link, Bryan Lee, Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, and Camden Shaw)

Notes on the Middle Period Quartets

by Nancy November

OP. 59: GENESIS

After Beethoven composed his Op. 18 quartets (1798–1800, published in 1801), there is a gap of six years in his string quartet production. By the fall of 1804 at the latest, however, he was again considering writing new string quartets. In a letter to the Leipzig publisher Breitkopf und Härtel dated October 10, 1804, Beethoven's brother Karl made an offer. Through Karl, Beethoven proposed to supply Breitkopf with two or three new string quartets. Karl stated that the quartets were not yet finished. In fact, they seem to have been only an idea of Beethoven's at that time. The idea was possibly inspired by violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh's series of evening quartets that had been performed between 1804 and 1805. On November 3, 1804, Breitkopf answered Beethoven

himself to show his interest. Karl, however, informed the publisher on November 24 that Beethoven was very busy working on his opera, *Fidelio*. The first version of which was ready in the summer of 1805.

It was not until November 1805 that the opera was premiered. It was then revised again for two further performances on March 29 and April 10, 1806. It is likely that Beethoven did not have time for quartet compositions until then. In the upper right corner of the first page of the autograph score (Beethoven's handwritten manuscript) of Op. 59, No. 1, he noted, "Quartetto angefangen am 26^{ten} May – 1806." This is possibly the date on which he began work on that particular manuscript. Before that, he may have created sketches and first drafts.

Beethoven wrote the three quartets of Op. 59 in the context of several large-scale, "public" compositions. In a letter to his publisher dated September 3, 1806, he sought to discover whether the works would be accepted. In his letter to Breitkopf, he slyly claimed that he could send three quartets immediately. In addition, he had "a new piano concerto and a new symphony; and several other works." This refers to the Fourth Piano Concerto, Fourth Symphony, *Fidelio*, and *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. The Concerto was probably mostly completed before he began the Op. 59 quartets; he had composed *Christ on the Mount of Olives* in 1803; and he probably composed the Fourth Symphony together with or just after Op. 59. This context is useful for understanding these works' more "public" and expansive aspects (especially Op. 59, No. 1) as compared to the Op. 18 quartets.

Beethoven's string quartets Op. 18 took a long time to compose. In contrast, the three Op. 59 quartets were written in a relatively short period and with apparently less effort. Beethoven made extensive use of his manuscripts to work on structural problems of quartet writing for his Op. 59 set. However, this practice was to change: the autograph manuscripts of the late quartets are generally cleaner than the earlier quartets' autographs. It is clear that Beethoven was still dealing with questions of large-scale structure in the final stages of composing the first two Op. 59 quartets. In particular, he had to decide whether to repeat the development and recapitulation of the first movements. His final decision shows his preference for quartets with a strong sense of continuity, forward motion, and openness.

Much more than Op. 18, the Op. 59 quartets are considered well-integrated works, so much so that it has become common to refer to the set as a trilogy. Even in Beethoven's time, they were perceived as a series, and collectively referred to as the "Russian Quartets." But how exactly are these works related? The most obvious is their publication as a set with a single dedicatee. The three works were written as a result of a commission by the Russian ambassador in Vienna, Count Andreas Razumovsky. A patron of the arts, Razumovsky was soon (in 1808) to establish his own private string quartet, comprising violinists Schuppanzigh, and Louis Sina, violist Franz Weiss, and cellist Joseph Linke. Razumovsky had asked Beethoven to include a Russian theme in each quartet. Beethoven met this request by incorporating Russian folk songs in the first two quartets. In Op. 59, No. 1, the "Thème russe" (marked

in the score) is the main theme of the finale. In No. 2, a different *thème russe* is heard in the second section of the third movement. Op. 59, No. 3 contains no explicit reference to a “Thème russe.” Mark Ferraguto has convincingly argued that Beethoven drew on a popular Russian lied (“Ty wospoi, wospoi, mlad Shaworontschek”) that had been transmitted in the German musical newspaper, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (as “Singe, sing’ ein Lied” [Sing, sing a song]) in July 1804—in other words, shortly before the composition of Op. 59.¹ There are musical reasons to make this connection: the folksong is an A-minor Andantino in compound duple time, which shows similarities to the theme of the Andante con moto from Op. 59, No. 3.

Not only are the three connected by the use of folksongs, but in all three quartets we find strikingly audible, visual, and visceral gestures, notably large leaps between registers, trills, rising and scalic passages, and unisons. These gestures impart a sense of physicality, contributing to these works’ exploratory character and theatricality.

So there are manifold palpable links among the three quartets. But was Beethoven working towards a higher-level “opus idea” in Op. 59? Are these works cyclically integrated, as was to become a common procedure in large-scale musical composition in the 19th century? The answer might be a qualified “yes.” For example, there seem to be certain musical processes that play out across the set. Joseph Kerman speaks of a process of increasing end-orientation over the course of the opus.² This can be understood in terms of the tonal tendency towards C (the key of resolution/hope/happiness), and

also of the function of the coda across the work. While the first movement of Op. 59, No. 1 has an extensive coda, by the third quartet the weight of the coda has shifted clearly to the finale.

A further process that seems to develop across the opus is one whereby themes are immediately varied (“developing variations”). Wilhelm von Lenz nicely captured this process in his comments on Op. 59, No. 3: “once more a new composer and yet the same hallmark of unending fantasy.”³ This technique also manifests in the way movements tend to begin in *medias res* (“in the middle”): consider the opening of Op. 59, No. 1, which takes 19 bars to get to a perfect cadence in the home key of F major. Tonalities tend to “hover” and emerge in these works. This is especially marked in the outer movements of No. 3, both of which (as with the opening of No. 1) take some time to reach a strong cadence in the tonic. By these means, then, this sense of process-orientation emerges especially clearly in this opus.

There is also an increasingly prominent treatment of fugues across the three works, which could be heard as an important aspect of their cyclic integration. Striking in Op. 59, No. 3 is the way Beethoven makes parodistic use of fugues, contributing to the work’s theatrical aspect. Fugue is sounded as a serious element of composition in the development section of the first movement of Op. 59, No. 1; then treated with theatrical play in the third movement of Op. 59, No. 2; and finally resoundingly trumped by homophony in the finale of No. 3. This is especially apparent in the work’s final coda, where a tentative strand of polyphony gives way to a *tour de force* homophonic crescendo.

OP. 74: EARLY PERFORMANCE

As with Op. 59, the impetus for writing Op. 74 may have come from the Schuppanzigh Quartet's concert series, which took place again in the winter of 1808–1809. Johann Reichardt reported regular quartet performances with Schuppanzigh and cellist Anton Kraft, as well as Sunday quartet parties held at the home of amateur cellist Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovec, a close friend of Beethoven, when he was in Vienna.⁴

We can date the initial composition of Op. 74 to the period between May and September 1808, with the majority of the work probably written in August and September. In a letter to Breitkopf dated July 26, Beethoven complained bitterly about the disturbances and the noise caused by the French invasion and remarked of his own composition, “Since the fourth of May, little that is coherent has been brought into the world, only a fragment here or there.”⁵ The sketches for Op. 74 provide fascinating insights into Beethoven's thinking about the work, which changed radically during the compositional process. In the sketch for the first movement, for example, there is no sign of the sweeping, harp-like pizzicato that appears in the final version and seems so characteristic of that movement. The much fuller and completely altered conception of this section appears later.

Beethoven's autograph score is dated 1809 and would have been completed in the fall of that year. In a letter to Zmeskall that probably dates from November 1809, Beethoven invited his friend to a rehearsal of what was very likely Op. 74 at the house of Prince Lobkowitz. The letter is written in the cheeky tone that Beethoven sometimes adopted for his friend and sometimes adopted for Op. 74:

Cursed tipsy Domanovetz — not Count of music, but Count of gluttony — Count of dinner, Count of supper etc — The quartet is to be rehearsed at Lobkowitz's at half past ten or perhaps ten o'clock today. H[is] E[xcellency] who, it is true, is generally absent so far as intelligence is concerned, has not yet arrived — So do come along....⁶

Many of Beethoven's works were tried out in this manner, in private settings, before they were sent to the publisher. The performance probably took place shortly after the work's completion. Another letter, from Countess Anna-Marie Erdödy from Vienna to Breitkopf, dated January 4, 1812, reports of a performance on March 31, 1810 “at a public occasion in my house in the presence of all of the most excellent composers and connoisseurs of music, with a then completely new quartet by Herr van Beethoven, whereby it received, if not a greater, then nevertheless quite the same general applause.”⁷ According to Countess Erdödy, the London pianist, composer, and publisher Muzio Clementi was among those present.

Despite their very different characters, both Op. 74 and Op. 95, show links to Beethoven's incidental music to Goethe's *Egmont*, Op. 84 (1810). The connections are subtle in the case of Op. 74: he had only just begun sketching ideas for *Egmont* during that quartet's composition. The influence may even have worked more in the opposite direction, from chamber to theater: working on Op. 74 possibly helped him develop ideas for *Egmont*.

For Beethoven, a crucial text in *Egmont* was Klärchen's lied, "Freudvoll und leidvoll."⁸ The poem advocates a full experience of life and, by implication, love, entailing extremes of both pleasure and pain. It concludes with the declaration, at once challenging and comforting, that happiness belongs to those who continue to love despite and because of these dualisms:

**Freudvoll/Und leidvoll/Gedankenvoll sein/
Langen und bangen/In schwebender Pein/
Himmelhoch jauchzend/Zum Tode betrübt/
Glücklich allein /ist die Seele, die liebt.**

**[Joyful/And tearful/With care-filled brain/
Longing and fearful/In suspenseful pain/Now
on top of the world/Now cast down from above;/
Happy alone/Is the soul in love.]**

There are no readily traceable musical links between Beethoven's setting of this text and Op. 74, but Goethe's invocation of duality and transcendence was likely an important source of inspiration for the unusual variations set that forms Op. 74's finale.

These variations are paired: the odd- and even-numbered variations contrast increasingly dissociated versions, marked *forte*, with increasingly lyrical versions, marked *sempre dolce e piano*. Beethoven also moves to the median at the midpoint of the theme in each variation (except variation 6), which contributes to the "smoothing" effect in the even-numbered variations more generally. By contrast, the odd-numbered variations become increasingly dissociated, mainly in texture and register. The arpeggiated character of variations one and five and the "ping pong" octaves in variation three suggest new and highly inventive developments of the "harp" idea first heard in movement one. By contrast, the voices of the second, fourth, and sixth variations are registrally and rhythmically contained; gently swirling, largely stepwise melodic lines and extensive slurring suggest a sinking into soft, sweet melancholy song, prominent in movement two.

OP. 95: “NEVER TO BE PERFORMED IN PUBLIC”

The “public occasion” to which Erdödy’s letter (quoted earlier) refers was, in fact, semi-private: the guests had been invited, there had been no ticket sales or marketing, and the event took place in a private apartment. This was the first and most common context for the performance of string quartets in this period. It may not be surprising, therefore, that Beethoven wrote the following performance instruction in a letter to George Smart dated October 7, 1816: “N.B. The Quartet [op. 95] is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public. Should you wish for some quartets for public performance I would compose them to this purpose occasionally.”⁹

And yet the work was performed in May 1814 at a public Prater matinée in Vienna. Did this performance contradict Beethoven’s seemingly explicit instruction? Probably not. In his letter to Smart, Beethoven wrote about the English market for his music and was not trying to find the “right” audience for the F minor Quartet for all times and places. Just as the complexity of Mozart’s music took a while to catch on in England, a Beethoven work strongly oriented toward the new German aesthetic would have been a difficult product for the market there. The work, which Beethoven titled “quartetto serio,” is characterized by extreme conciseness of musical material, pioneering departures

from traditional forms, and a predominantly tragic and violent tone associated with the composer’s turbulent private life in 1810.

Theodor Helm suggestively remarked that in this work Beethoven spoke with the quick-witted brevity of the true dramatist.¹⁰ And Beethoven was, in fact, working as a dramatist then: the only other major work he composed in 1810 was his incidental music to Goethe’s *Egmont*, also in F minor, a comparatively unusual key for the time. The two works were completed in close succession and have several points of contact besides the key. Perhaps most striking are their respective finales. The Victory Symphony that concludes *Egmont* is related to the quartet’s final coda in its fast tempo (*Allegro con brio* in *Egmont*, *Allegro* in Op. 95), textural build-up through polyphonic voices, considerable range of pitch, and surprising return of the tonic-major after a strong emphasis on the minor. Despite its smaller proportions, one can glimpse in the quartet’s coda something of the collective jubilation of *Egmont*, where the Victory Symphony heralds the future triumph of the Netherlands and indicates that *Egmont* did not die in vain. At the end of the quartet, one also feels the exhilaration of overcoming tragedy.

Nancy November is an Associate Professor in musicology at The University of Auckland, New Zealand and the author of numerous books including Beethoven’s Theatrical Quartets: Opp. 59, 74, and 95 (Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Cultivating String Quartets in Beethoven’s Vienna (Boydell Press, 2017).

Sources

¹ Christian Schreiber, "Etwas über Volkslieder" [On folksongs], *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 43 (1804), cols. 715–18; see Mark Ferraguto, "Beethoven à la moujik: Russianness and Learned Style in the 'Razumovsky' String Quartets," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (2014) 67/1, pp. 77–124.

² Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets* (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 134.

³ Wilhelm von Lenz, *Beethoven. Eine Kunst-Studie*, 5 vols (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe: 1855-60), vol. IV, p. 42.

⁴ See Johann Reichardt, *Vertraute Briefe: Geschrieben auf einer Reise nach Wien und den Oesterreichischen Staaten zu Ende des Jahres 1808 und zu Anfang 1809* (Amsterdam: Kunst- und Industrie-Comtoir, 1810), vol. 2, pp. 119–120.

⁵ Sieghard Brandenburg, ed., *Ludwig van Beethoven. Briefwechsel: Gesamtausgabe*, 7 vols (Munich, 1996–98), vol. 2 (1996), p. 71.

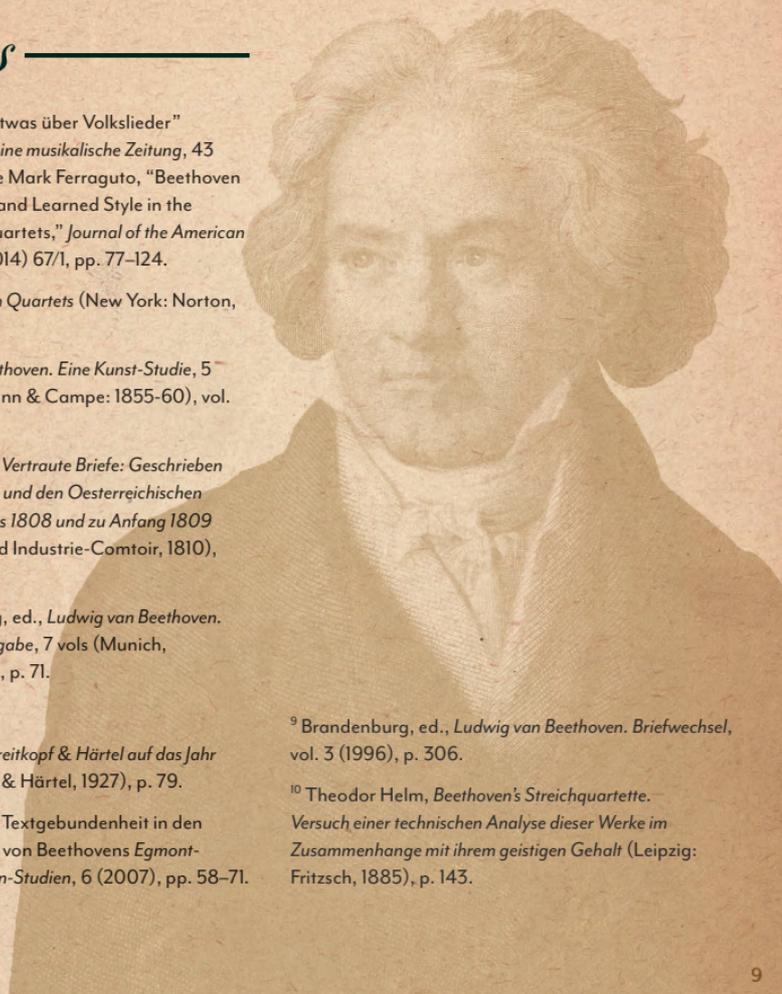
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁷ *Der Bär. Jahrbuch von Breitkopf & Härtel auf das Jahr 1927* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1927), p. 79.

⁸ See also Helmut Hell, 'Textgebundenheit in den instrumentalen Stücken von Beethovens Egmont-Musik', *Bonner Beethoven-Studien*, 6 (2007), pp. 58–71.

⁹ Brandenburg, ed., *Ludwig van Beethoven. Briefwechsel*, vol. 3 (1996), p. 306.

¹⁰ Theodor Helm, *Beethoven's Streichquartette. Versuch einer technischen Analyse dieser Werke im Zusammenhange mit ihrem geistigen Gehalt* (Leipzig: Fritsch, 1885), p. 143.





DOVER QUARTET

Joel Link, violin

Bryan Lee, violin

Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, viola

Camden Shaw, cello

Hailed as “the next Guarneri Quartet” (*Chicago Tribune*) and “the young American string quartet of the moment” (*The New Yorker*), the Dover Quartet catapulted to international stardom in 2013 with a stunning sweep of all prizes at the Banff Competition and has since become one of the most in-demand ensembles in the world. In addition to its faculty role as the inaugural Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music, the Dover Quartet holds residencies with the Kennedy Center, Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, Artsphere, and the Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival. Among the group’s honors are the Avery Fisher Career Grant, Chamber Music America’s Cleveland Quartet Award, and Lincoln Center’s Hunt Family Award. In addition to its triumphs at Banff, the Dover Quartet has won grand and first prizes at the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition.

Among its many notable recent performances, the Dover Quartet made its Zankel Hall debut in collaboration with Emanuel Ax and returned to London’s Wigmore Hall. Other recent collaborators include Inon Barnaton, Ray Chen, Edgar Meyer, Anthony McGill, the late Peter Serkin, and Roomful of Teeth. Equally comfortable with repertoire from a range of eras, the quartet has worked with some of the world’s foremost living composers, including Caroline Shaw and Mason Bates.

The Dover Quartet draws from the lineage of the distinguished Guarneri, Cleveland, and Vermeer quartets. Its members studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music, where they were mentored extensively by Shmuel Ashkenasi, James Dunham, Norman Fischer, Kenneth Goldsmith, Joseph Silverstein, Arnold Steinhardt, Michael Tree, and Peter Wiley. It was at Curtis that the Dover Quartet formed, and its name pays tribute to *Dover Beach* by fellow Curtis alumnus Samuel Barber.

The Dover Quartet plays on the following instruments and proudly endorses Thomastik-Infeld strings.

Joel Link: Jean Baptiste Vuillaume, Paris, 1845, on loan from Desirée Ruhstrat

Bryan Lee: Riccardo Antoniazzi, Milan, 1904; Samuel Zygmuntowicz, Brooklyn, 2020

Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt: unknown maker from the Brescian School, early 18th century

Camden Shaw: Frank Ravatin, Vannes, 2010

doverquartet.com

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