Eating the next two seasons, University of Florida Performing Arts will present six exciting concerts as a part of the Beethoven Cycle. This special cycle is a relative rarity, especially outside of major metropolitan areas. The cycle will bring some of the best musicians in the world to the UF campus to perform Beethoven’s string quartets. While Beethoven cycles have been produced for more than 100 years in the United States and Europe, this is one of the only cycles that will present six different string groups performing all 16 quartets over a two-season period.

BEETHOVEN and the STRING QUARTETS

Born in Bonn, Germany, Ludwig van Beethoven was a musical prodigy whose talents were recognized early by his father, a tenor in the service of the Electoral Court at Bonn. He studied music at first with his father, an alcoholic prone to violent outbursts, and then, later, with a series of other teachers. By the time he was eight, he was studying the organ, violin and viola in addition to the piano. Beethoven began composing early but he didn’t compose string quartets until he was in his late 20s. If Haydn is the “father” of the string quartet genre and Mozart took it to newer heights, then it was Beethoven who truly transformed the genre. He composed his quartets in three distinct periods: Early, Middle and Late. When he sent a few of his early quartets to a friend, he enclosed a letter, telling him, “...only now I have learned to write quartets properly – as you will surely see when you receive them.”

In listening to his Early Quartets, one can hear that Beethoven was experimenting with a new musical genre. But don’t think these quartets are “lightweight.” Beethoven’s typical moody darkness is there as well, as evidenced by Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6. It was around this time that Beethoven first began to notice his deafness and worry about its effects on his life as a musician and composer, which certainly influenced his mood and his compositions.

The Middle Quartets were composed in Beethoven’s late 30s. The Razumovskys, so named as they were commissioned by the Russian Ambassador, Count (later Prince) Razumovsky,
are included in these quartets. It is for Razumovsky, an accomplished violinist and member of a string quartet group, that Russian themes are included in two of the compositions.

The Late Quartets were written during the final three years of Beethoven's life and were the last major works that he completed. The first three were commissioned by Prince Nicholas Galitzin from Russia. Wagner thought they represented some of the saddest music he’d ever heard. One can almost hear what Beethoven was experiencing in his own life – at odds with his nephew, completely deaf and struggling to compose, his health worsening and mortality looming on the horizon. All of it must have weighed heavily upon him. But it also allowed him to compose some of the greatest music the world has ever known.

In fact, one piece of music in particular was quite extraordinary. Beethoven originally composed the Grosse Fuge as the finale for Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130. Stravinsky thought it was the greatest piece of music ever written. However, audiences found it strange and dense, and were overwhelmed by its introspective nature. Beethoven’s publisher persuaded him to write another finale for the quartet and now the Grosse Fuge mostly stands alone. However, in this Beethoven Cycle, the American String Quartet will perform it as the composer originally wrote it, allowing audiences to experience it as Beethoven intended.

2007-08 Season

TALICH STRING QUARTET
Sunday, October 14, 2007, 5 p.m.
Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4
Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130 (Liebquartett) with Finale

PACIFICA QUARTET
Sunday, February 10, 2008, 5 p.m.
Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6
Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 (Harp)
Quartet No. 15 in A Minor, Op. 132

QUATUOR PARISII
Sunday, March 2, 2008, 5 p.m.
Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2
Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 95 (Scherzo)
Quartet in F Major, Op. 135

2008-09 Season

AMERICAN STRING QUARTET
Sunday, October 12, 2008, 5 p.m.
Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5
Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2
Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, (Liebquartett) with Grosse Fuge, Op. 133

YING QUARTET
Sunday, January 11, 2009, 5 p.m.
Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3
Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3 (Hercules)
Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127

ÉBÈNE QUARTET
Sunday, March 22, 2009, 5 p.m.
Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1
Quartet No. 7 in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1 (Razumovsky No. 1)
Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131

All performances will take place at the University Auditorium. Performance dates, times and programs are subject to change.

For more information visit www.performingarts.ufl.edu or call 352-392-ARTS (2787).