University of Florida Performing Arts

presents

Quatuor Parisii

Arnaud Vallin, Violin
Jean-Michel Berrette, Violin
Dominique Lobet, Viola
Jean-Philippe Martignoni, Cello

Sunday, March 2, 2008, 5 p.m.
PROGRAM

Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 2 Ludwig van Beethoven

Allegro
Adagio cantabile
Scherzo: Allegro
Allegro molto quasi presto

Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 95 (Serioso) Beethoven

Allegro con brio
Allegretto ma non troppo
Allegro assai vivace ma serioso
Larghetto
Allegretto agitato.

Quartet in F Major, Op. 135 Beethoven

Allegretto
Vivace
Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo
Der schwer gefasste Entschluss: Muss es sein? Es muss sein! Es muss sein!
Grave, ma non troppo tratto
Allegro

PROGRAM NOTES

Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 2 Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

In 1798, at age 28, Beethoven realized that he was losing his hearing. Several years later, in 1801, he wrote to his friend Franz Gerhard Wegeler, “For the past three years my hearing has been growing constantly weaker….For two years now I have ceased to attend any social function for I cannot bring myself to tell people, ‘I am deaf.’” While he was being drawn into a world of silence, Beethoven was also undergoing another kind of turmoil as he searched for new and unique forms of expression to extend his musical inheritance from Haydn and Mozart. By following the older masters and publishing his first six string quartets together in a single Opus, a departure from his previous practice, Beethoven acknowledged Haydn and Mozart as his sources of inspiration. Yet his distinctive musical personality and forward-looking musical vision infused their compositional practices with new flexibility and scope, more powerful emotional content, and an imposing monumentality.

The G major, the briefest of the Op. 18 quartets, emerges as a charming and witty work. Despite its apparent light, happy character, it is considered difficult to perform, and Beethoven’s notebooks reveal that the lightness was achieved only after a lengthy struggle, covering 32 notebook pages, to blend many disparate elements into a smooth creation.

The quartet opens with a series of short, balanced phrases followed by a gruff bridge passage that leads to the second subject. The development is devoted exclusively to material from the first subject and the bridge. The Adagio second movement features the solo violin at first, but Beethoven takes the closing cadenza figure of this section, quadruples its tempo, and sends the music scurrying off in a parody-like Allegro. The slow, gentle strains of the Adagio return, now in variation and shared by all players. In the Scherzo third movement, the two violins gleefully toss the music back and forth until the other instruments join in to introduce a more sober note. In the trio that follows, the
two contrasting moods — playful and serious — are expanded. In the transition back to the repeat of the Scherzo, the cello plays a descending scale line, and the violins, unable to contain their enthusiasm, anticipate the repeat of the first section. Beethoven referred to the last movement as “aufgeknopft” (“unbuttoned”), connoting a free, informal character. Starting with perfectly symmetrical, four-square phrases, it goes on to an impish second theme with a syncopated start and a delightful counter melody. Rollicking along lightheartedly, it builds to a brilliant conclusion.

Written between 1798 and 1800, the six Op. 18 quartets were dedicated to Prince Karl Lobkowitz, an Austrian nobleman, and their premieres were given at Friday morning musicals held at the Prince’s Viennese home. They were published in 1801.

— Program note adapted from Guide to Chamber Music by Melvin Berger.

Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 95 (Serioso) Beethoven

Beethoven’s Op. 95 quartet is the only one he supplied with a subtitle, Serioso, an obvious reference to the prevailing somber mood of the piece. The composer’s growing deafness, precarious health, frustration in love, financial insecurity, and unhappy family life had combined to make him angry, bitter, and deeply despondent. In a letter to his old friend Dr. Franz Wegeler on May 2, 1810, he wrote, “If I had not read somewhere that no one should quit life voluntarily while he could still do something worthwhile, I would have been dead long ago, and certainly by my own hand. Oh, life is so beautiful, but for me it is poisoned forever.”

Although extremely short, the Serioso, which Felix Mendelssohn called Beethoven’s most characteristic work, is not a miniature. It is a compressed, concentrated composition, highly integrated movement to movement, with an emotional range that far exceeds its limited size. Usually classified as one of the final works of Beethoven’s middle period, many of its pages anticipate the exalted third period quartets that were to follow some 14 years later.

Beethoven began the quartet late in the summer of 1810, and finished it in October of that year. His dedication to Nikolaus von Zmeskall is significant, because it is the first quartet inscribed to a friend from the middle class rather than a noble patron. The work received its premiere in Vienna in May 1814, played by the Schuppanzigh Quartet.

The first movement, the shortest Beethoven ever wrote, lashes out with an angry, laconic phrase, played in unison by the entire quartet. Two features stand out: the five-note opening turn and the general descending and ascending contour. A suspenseful silence follows, after which the first violin whips up and down in forceful octave jumps. After briefly expanding the opening fragment, the quieter, rolling second theme is introduced by the viola and then picked up by the others. The violins state the tender third theme to complete the very concise, and not repeated, exposition. The short development, which opens in a fury based on the first theme, leads to a truncated recapitulation. The coda reaches a climax as the viola insistently repeats the opening five-note turn until, as though exhausted by the effort, it finally fades away.

Beethoven related the second movement to the first by starting at the same soft level as the other ended and by giving the introductory cello phrase the same falling-rising shape as the quartet opening, although minus its decorative turns. The first subject then enters, a warm cantabile melody over a sinuous, weaving accompaniment. After a full stop, the viola announces the second theme, which Beethoven treats as a fugato, passing it from part to part in imitation. The fugato section is interrupted for a reminder of the cello opening before continuing with even more complex fugal treatment of the viola melody, including the addition of a countermelody, shortening the gap between entrances and inverting the theme. An abbreviated restatement of the beginning section precedes the coda ending.
The third movement continues without pause, starting with a figure drawn from both the rhythm of the octaves and the sudden, dramatic silences of the first movement. The roughness and strong propulsive energy provide a sharp contrast to the contemplative mood that Beethoven has established. The middle section, resembling at once a solemn chorale and a grim march, is probably the source of the *Serioso* in the movement and quartet titles. The lower instruments move along in grave block chords as the first violin weaves a decorative filigree around the measured tread. Beethoven then returns to the opening and finally provides brief glimpses of both parts before concluding the movement.

The finale is related to the third movement by a slow introduction based on that movement’s opening rhythmic figure. To continue the chain of interconnections, the introduction’s repeated last pair of notes is transformed into the head of the first subject of the ensuing *Allegretto agitato*. The first part of the theme is restless and anxious; the second part, weak and listless. In contrast, the following subject is blustery and violent, an evocation of a thunderstorm with flashing bolts of lightning. Unremitting restlessness and nervous anxiety pervade the movement until nearly the very end. Then, in an abrupt change of mood, Beethoven speeds up the tempo, changes mode from minor to major, and ends with a gay conclusion that attests to the indomitability of the human spirit, no matter how sorely tried by bad fortune.

— Notes from *Guide to Chamber Music*, by Melvin Berger ©1985 (used with permission).

**Quartet in F Major, Op. 135**

**Beethoven**

Op. 135, the 16th and last complete string quartet that Beethoven wrote, represents a sharp departure from the other late quartets. For one thing, the work is quite short, vying with Op. 18, No. 2 as the briefest of them all. One possible explanation of its brevity is supplied by the composer’s friend, Karl Holz, who reported that Beethoven, believing that his publisher had not paid him enough for the work, had said: “If [he] sends circumcised ducats he shall have a circumcised quartet. That’s why it is so short.”

In addition to the modest length of the quartet, the work has less emotional intensity and spirituality than the other late quartets, and a deeper sense of calmness and peaceful resignation. Those who hear in it a serene acceptance of the inevitability of death refer to a letter Beethoven sent with the quartet to his publisher, Moritz Schlesinger: “Here, my dear friend, is my last quartet. It will be the last; and indeed it has given me much trouble. For I could not bring myself to compose the last movement. But as your letters were reminding me of it, in the end I decided to compose it. And that is the reason why I have written the motto: “The difficult decision — Must it be? — It must be, it must be!”

For some listeners, Op. 135 represents a return to middle class taste, “a touch of Biedermier,” the conservative movement in the decorative arts of the early 1800s. Brevity, accessibility, and the use of more traditional compositional techniques were some of the particular qualities that Beethoven associated with music written for the bourgeoisie. The fact that Beethoven dedicated the quartet to Johann Wolfmayer, a cloth merchant, and not an aristocrat, lends some credence to this belief.

And finally, the light and humorous Op. 135 following the profundity of Op. 131 (in order of composition) seems to fit Beethoven’s penchant for turning to a more buoyant work after creating music of great depth and personal involvement. The relaxed geniality of Op. 135 probably also provided Beethoven with a much needed release from the intensity and emotional involvement with the works that preceded it.

Beethoven composed his final quartet during August and September 1826, finishing it on October 30 at his brother’s country estate in Gneixendorf, Austria. It was published in September 1827, and the Schuppanzigh Quartet gave the premiere in Vienna on March 23, 1828, almost one year to the day after the composer’s death.
The opening movement’s warm, conversational tone derives in part from its first subject group of five separate motifs, each with its own inflection and character, and tossed from instrument to instrument as though engaged in informal discourse. An ascending *staccato arpeggio* and a frolicsome descending run are pitted against each other in the second subject. With supreme confidence and assuredness, Beethoven develops the material he has introduced, brilliantly expanding the various motifs and presenting them in intriguing new guises and combinations, before bringing them back for the recapitulation. A coda based on motifs from the first subject ends the movement.

The swift and scintillating *Vivace* functions as the *Scherzo* movement; it is propelled forward by its pointed syncopations and cross accents. A rising scale in the viola and cello and a repeated note accompaniment introduce the contrasting middle section, which continues the breakneck tempo and sends the first violin out into death-defying acrobatic leaps while the others doggedly repeat an *ostinato* measure a full 47 times! The movement closes with a shortened reprise of the opening section.

The *Lento assai* is a sublime example of Beethoven’s most inspired “interior music.” It was added as an afterthought to the originally conceived three-movement quartet. Over sketched for the simple main melody, in the key of D flat major, which Beethoven associated with the expression of sentiment, he wrote: *Susser Ruhigesang, Friedengesang* (“sweet restful, peaceful song”). Simply and lovingly, Beethoven puts this eight-measure, stepwise moving melody through four variations played without pause that never rise above piano (“soft”) dynamic level to create a section of rich, satisfying beauty and repose.

The final movement, *Der Schwer gefasste Entschluss* (“the difficult resolution”), asks the question *Muss es sein?* (“must it be”). The answer is the ringing affirmation, *Es muss sein!* *Es muss sein!* (“It must be! It must be!”). Although in his letter to Moritz Schlesinger, Beethoven assigns a profound meaning to the exchange, its origins were simple, even humorous. Presumably, Beethoven refused to give Ignaz Dembscher, a government official and friend, a copy of his quartet, Op. 130, because Dembscher had not attended the premiere performance. Wanting to set matters right, Dembscher asked Karl Holz to intervene. Holz suggested that Dembscher send Schuppanzigh, whose quartet had the first performance, the cost of the subscription, 50 florins. Dembscher asked, “*Muss es sein?*” and Holz replied “*Es muss sein!*” When Holz recounted the story to the composer, Beethoven burst into laughter and immediately sat down to compose a canon on the dialogue. Later Beethoven expanded the musical material of the canon into the quartet’s last movement. In slow, solemn tones the two lower stings pose the question, a setting of the words, *Muss es sein?* And in forceful, joyful musical phrases, the two violins deliver the exultant response with which Beethoven may indeed avow his triumph over death.

— Notes from *Guide to Chamber Music*, by Melvin Berger ©1985 (used with permission).
BIOGRAPHY

Quatuor Parisii
Arnaud Vallin, Violin
Jean-Michel Berrette, Violin
Dominique Lobet, Viola
Jean-Philippe Martignoni, Cello

Formed in 1984 by four prize-winning graduates of the Conservatoire National Superieur de Paris, the Quatuor Parisii won early acclaim with its triumphs at three major international competitions: Banff (1986), Munich (1987) and Evian (1987). Invitations followed from the major concert halls and festivals of Europe, and the Parisii has since toured regularly throughout Europe and the United Kingdom. Highlights of the Parisii’s recent European seasons include concerts in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Edinburgh, Lausanne, Barcelona, and Madrid. Much in demand in Paris, the Parisii has been featured in a presentation of all the Haydn quartets at the Opéra Bastille, performed all of the Beethoven string quartets at the Salle Gaveau and appeared frequently at the Musée d’Orsay.

In January 1995 the ensemble made an extraordinarily successful 17-concert debut tour of the United States. Subsequent North American tours have included appearances in Washington, New York, Toronto, Baltimore, Cleveland, St. Louis, New Orleans, Miami, San Diego and Los Angeles. The Parisii made its debut in East Asia in the fall of 1993, with concerts in Hong Kong, Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo, and has returned to the Far East twice since then. The quartet has also made several tours of South America.

Noted for its performances of distinctive and unusual repertoire of the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, the Parisii has distinguished itself with award-winning recordings of intriguing works by such French composers as Menu, Pierné, Tailleferre, and Reynaldo Hahn, as well as the complete works for string quartet by Anton Webern. The Parisii has recently recorded the 16 string quartets of Milhaud, which won the Grand Prix Charles Cros, and made the first-ever recording of Le livre pour quatuor by Pierre Boulez.

Quatuor Parisii is sponsored by SPEDIDAM

SPEDIDAM (Society of Receipt and Distribution of the Royalties for Artists in Music and Dance) is an artist society that manages the rights of artists (including musicians, members of choruses, or dancers) in recording, broadcasting, and the use of recorded performances.