



# BEETHOVEN

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## Complete String Quartets Vol. 8

Op. 130 in B flat major  
Grosse Fuge, Op. 133

Kodály Quartet



## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

### String Quartet in B flat major, Op.130 • Grosse Fuge, Op.133

In 1792 Beethoven left his native city of Bonn to seek his fortune in the imperial capital, Vienna. Five years before he had been sent to Vienna by his patron, the Archbishop of Cologne, for lessons with Mozart, but the illness of his mother had forced his immediate return home. Before long, after his mother's death, he had been obliged to take charge of the welfare of his younger brothers, a task that his father was not competent to discharge.

As a boy Beethoven had had an erratic musical training through his father, a singer in the archiepiscopal musical establishment, later continued on sounder lines. In 1792 he was to take lessons from Haydn, from whom he later claimed to have learned nothing, followed by subsequent study of counterpoint with Albrechtsberger and Italian word-setting with Salieri. Armed with introductions to members of the nobility in Vienna, he soon established himself as a keyboard virtuoso, skilled both as a performer and as an adept in the necessary art of improvisation. In the course of time he was to be widely recognised as a figure of remarkable genius and originality. At the same time he became known as a social eccentric, no respecter of persons, his eccentricity all the greater because of increasing deafness, a failing that became evident by the turn of the century. With the patient encouragement of patrons, he directed his attentions largely to composition, developing the inherited classical tradition of Haydn and Mozart and extending its bounds in a way that presented both an example and a challenge to the composers who came after him.

In his sixteen string quartets, the first set of six published in 1801 and the last published in the year of his death, 1827, Beethoven was as innovative as ever,

developing and extending a form that seemed already to have reached a height of perfection. It was not until 1823, after a gap of thirteen years, that he returned to the form in a remarkable final series of works, starting with the *String Quartet in E flat major, Opus 127*, completed in 1824. This was the first of a group of three quartets commissioned by Prince Nicolas Galitzin, who had to wait until March 1825 before he received the first work, after disguising any impatience he may have felt at a delay which he understood as necessary for a genius. Beethoven wrote the second of the set, the *String Quartet in A minor, Opus 132*, in the same year, and in the autumn and early winter, partially recovered from earlier illness, completed the *String Quartet in B flat major, Opus 130*. Both were sent to Prince Galitzin, in Russia, but the Prince's pecuniary embarrassment prevented any payment, at least in Beethoven's lifetime. The latter work was given its first performance in Vienna on 21st March 1826 by the quartet led by Ignaz Schuppanzigh, jocularly known to Beethoven as Falstaff.

There is a slow introduction to the *Quartet in B flat major*, its balanced opening phrase followed by a cello motif, imitated by each of the three other players in turn. The *Allegro* bursts in with rapid semiquavers, against which a rising figure is heard in counterpoint. The *Adagio* returns briefly, soon superseded by the *Allegro* that includes, after a dramatic climax, a derivative of the imitated figure of the introduction. The second subject, in G flat major, is introduced by the cello on the lowest string of the instrument. The exposition has already included some development of the material and this continues at the heart of the movement. There is a much altered recapitulation, with the material of the slow

introduction that had been used to punctuate the earlier sections now heard only in the final coda. The duple metre of the B flat minor scherzo is broken by a change to 6/4 for the major key trio. A slow ascending scale by the whole quartet is followed by descending scales of chromatic outline, twice interrupted before the return of the scherzo. The third movement, initially marked *poco scherzoso* turns out to be in D flat major, its first subject introduced by the viola, soon taken up by the first violin. There follows a movement broadly in tripartite sonata form, with a central development and final recapitulation, although such a simplification ignores the mysterious shifts of key and other felicities. A charming G major German dance forms the next movement, to all intents and purposes a second scherzo, now with two contrasting trios. Beethoven set great store by the beautiful E flat major *Cavatina*, the intensity of its feeling that comes to a head in an anguished passage of recitative a reflection, it has been said, of the difficulties Beethoven was experiencing with his nephew and ward Karl at this time. The new finale that replaced the difficult *Grosse Fuge*, the original finale, is in the spirit of Haydn and offers one possible resolution of the complexities that have preceded it.

The *Grosse Fuge* was dedicated to Beethoven's friend and pupil, the Cardinal Archduke Rudolph. The movement starts with a passage with the title *Overtura*. This introduces the theme in octaves, followed by three versions of it, to be the basis of the fugal sections built

on them. The first fugal section starts with a hushed and tentative indication of this theme, now as a countersubject, from the first violin, which then offers the forthright fugal subject, with its wide leaps and brusque rhythm, while the viola adds the countersubject. Subject and counter subject are echoed by the second violin and cello, as the music unwinds. The dotted rhythms are soon combined with triplets in a variation of the material, followed by a triplet variation from which dotted rhythms are absent. There follows a G flat major passage of *fugato* marked *Meno mosso e moderato*, now dominated by smoothly moving semiquavers, with the theme eventually introduced by the viola as a countersubject. There is a modulation to B flat major once more in a passage marked *Allegro molto e con brio*, an introduction to an A flat major fugue, with the subject heard from the second violin after a loud sustained A flat from the cello that brings in again the first theme as a countersubject. In a passage marked *meno mosso* the theme is heard from the first violin against second violin semiquavers, leading to a series of chords based on a cello trill. This brings a return to B flat major and once more to the *Allegro molto e con brio*. The conclusion of this massive, complex and often enigmatic movement brings reference to the *Overtura* and the two themes on which the whole work has been based.

Keith Anderson

## **Kodály Quartet**

**Attila Falvai, violin I • Tamás Szábo, violin II • János Fejervary, viola • György Éder, cello**

The members of the Kodály Quartet were trained at the Budapest Ferenc Liszt Academy, and two of the original players, the second violinist Tamás Szábo and viola player Gábor Fias, were formerly in the Sebestyén Quartet, which was awarded the jury's special diploma at the 1966 Geneva International Quartet Competition and won first prize at the 1968 Leo Weiner Quartet Competition in Budapest. Since 1970, with the violinist Attila Falvai, the quartet has been known as the Kodály Quartet, a title adopted with the approval of the

Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education. Recent additions to the quartet have been the cellist György Éder of the Éder Quartet and the violist János Fejervary, who took part in the Quartet's recording of Mozart Quintets. The Kodály Quartet has given concerts throughout Europe, in the then Soviet Union and in Japan, in addition to regular appearances in Hungary both in the concert hall and on television. For Naxos the Quartet has made highly acclaimed recordings of string quartets by Ravel, Debussy, Haydn and Schubert.