

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn

Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3, "Hero"

Introduzione: Andante con moto; Allegro vivace

Andante con moto quasi Allegretto ~ Menuetto: Grazioso ~ Allegro molto

The subtitle "Hero" (or "Eroica") refers to the last movement of the quartet and acknowledges its truly mighty conception. Just as Beethoven's Eroica Symphony vastly expanded the scope of symphonic writing, so the grandiose finale of the third "Rasumovsky" quartet made all previous string quartets seem modest by comparison.

The eerie introduction that opens the quartet, without any forward motion and seemingly suspended in time, seems to contradict Beethoven's tempo direction, Andante con moto ("moderate speed with motion"). The jaunty first theme is, in effect, 'kicked off' by a short upbeat and long arrival note - a rhythmic figure that remains important throughout the movement. Several other first group themes gradually lead to the start of the exuberant second subject - sustained note, which is imitated in order by the viola, cello and second violin. The development section provides flashy virtuosic passage work for all the instruments with frequent reappearances of the short-upbeat/long-resolution motto. The exposition skips the first theme and deals entirely with the triumphant second melody before the arrival of a brief sparkling coda.

The second movement has variously been described as a "lament" by Vincent D'Indy, the "mystery of the primitive" by Joseph Kerman and "some forgotten and alien despair," in the words of J.W.N. Sullivan. These reactions are mostly evoked by the first theme, a heavy, despondent violin line over repeated cello pizzicato notes. The melodic interval of the augmented second, with its Middle Eastern overtones, adds to the poignancy of the effect. The dispirited opening serves as the perfect foil to the warm, frothy second theme that follows. Both themes are developed and returned according to traditional sonata form, but in a surprise move, the composer brings them back in reverse order.

Beethoven probably returned to the traditional eighteenth-century minuet style for the third movement because a brilliant scherzo would have been inappropriate before the monumental finale he had in mind. The first part is gentle and languorous, despite a great deal of inner rhythmic drive. The sharper and more penetrating trio precedes a repeat of the Menuetto and the brief coda that leads, without pause, to the finale.

The last movement starts softly, but at a very fast tempo, with the viola playing the theme alone. The second violin enters with the same melody while the viola continues with a countermelody - a fugal treatment in which one theme is successively imitated by the individual players. The cello and then the first violin join in with the original melody to bring the section to a powerful climax. As the movement proceeds, Beethoven audaciously juxtaposes homophony (accompanied melody), on the richly textured polyphony (independent voices) of the opening fugal section, with absolutely thrilling results. Beethoven endows every note, from first to last, with a force and energy that propels the musical line irresistibly forward. He also calls on the players to stretch their tonal resources to the very limit, to produce the maximum sound possible. The result is a movement of stunning impact - a triumphant conclusion to this most impressive work.

Jennifer Higdon

Voices

Jennifer Higdon (b. Brooklyn, NY, December 31, 1962) started late in music, teaching herself to play flute at the age of 15 and then beginning formal musical studies at 18, with an even later start in composition at the age of 21. Higdon makes her living from commissions and her music is known for its technical skill and audience appeal. Hailed by the *Washington Post* as "a savvy, sensitive composer with a keen ear, an innate sense of form and a generous dash of pure esprit," the League of American Orchestras reports that she is one of America's most frequently performed composers. Higdon's list of commissioners is extensive and include the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, the National Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Indianapolis Symphony, the Dallas Symphony, and the Oregon Symphony. Most recently, Higdon wrote a violin concerto for Hilary Hahn which was commissioned by the Indianapolis Symphony, Toronto Symphony, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and the Curtis Institute Symphony Orchestra. This new work was recorded during the 2008-09 season by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

She has received awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts & Letters (two awards), the Pew Fellowship in the Arts, Meet-the-Composer, the National Endowment for the Arts, and ASCAP. In addition she has received grants from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

Higdon has been a Featured Composer at festivals including Tanglewood, Vail, Norfolk, Winnipeg and Cabrillo. She has served as Composer-in-Residence with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (2005-06 season), the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra (2006-07 season), and the Philadelphia Orchestra (2007-08 season). She enjoys more than two hundred performances a year of her works. Her orchestral work *blue cathedral* is one of the most performed contemporary orchestral works in the United States, having been performed by more than 150 orchestras since its premiere in 2000.

Her works have been recorded on over two dozen CDs. In Spring of 2003 Telarc released *blue cathedral* with the Atlanta Symphony (Robert Spano conducting) on a disc that made the Classical Billboard charts. In 2004 the Atlanta Symphony released the Grammy-winning *Higdon: Concerto for Orchestra/City Scape*. December 2006 saw the release of a compact disc of Higdon's chamber music on Naxos, as well as a Grammy-winning recording with eighth blackbird. During the 2008-09 season, Telarc released Higdon's *Dooryard Bloom* and Koch released a recording of Higdon's flute and chamber works. The 2009-10 season will feature the release of *The Singing Rooms* on the Telarc label as well as Higdon's *Short Stories* by the Anca Saxophone Quartet. She currently holds the Milton L. Rock Chair in Composition Studies at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

Her string quartet *Voices*, dedicated to the Pacifica Quartet, is a three-movement work that has captivated audiences with its accessibility and emotion. The first movement, "Blitz," is wild and rhythmic, mesmerizing in its energy. "Soft Enlacing" is intricately written and beautiful, while the third movement, "Grace," is particularly moving. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* wrote of *Voices* that "the work is communicative and deeply moving, as well as a splendid challenge for an audacious young ensemble."

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

String Quartet in a minor, Op. 41, No. 1

Introduzione: Andante espressivo; Allegro ~ Scherzo Presto; Intermezzo
Adagio ~ Presto

While Schumann prepared to write his quartets by studying the quartets of Mozart, Beethoven, and Haydn, he also spent time absorbing Bach's contrapuntal techniques. And it is the Bach influence that we hear most clearly in the introduction to the strangely impersonal a minor quartet, a highly contrapuntal section that Schumann added after the movement was finished. A brief transition leads from the polyphonic introduction to the homophonic, pianistic Allegro (curiously in F major instead of the expected A minor) with its easy, fluid theme. Schumann spins out this theme before giving the subsidiary subject, an obvious derivative of the first theme, to the second violin with saucy comments from the first violin. Very neatly Schumann then works through the two themes in order and brings them back little changed for the recapitulation and the quiet ending.

The theme of the Scherzo appears in starkly contrasting guises - Florestan and Eusebius. At times, it is lighter and delicate, much like a Mendelssohn fairyland scherzo; other times it is forceful and energetic, more in the manner of a charging cavalry brigade. The sweetly sentimental trio, a foil to the two facets of the Scherzo, acts as a brief, lyrical interlude before the return of the first part. Three recitative like measures lead to the principal theme of the Adagio, a beautiful love ballad that moves from spirituality to ecstasy as it is eloquently sung, initially by the first violin and then by the cello. After the two statements of the theme, an agitated middle section, based on the viola's accompaniment figure from the first part, intrudes. The interruption is followed by a final presentation of the main theme, and the movement ends with a recitative similar to the opening.

The entire last movement springs from the emboldened theme - rhythmically, short-short-long followed by a rapid run - heard at the very outset. The second theme merely turns the melodic direction of the first theme upside down and combines it with rising chains of eighth notes heard earlier. The exciting development section features a wide variety of sonorities, including some that are almost orchestral in effect. The recapitulation starts with an even more forceful return of the opening; the second theme, in its turn, now appears right side up. Then, in a brilliant stroke of imagination, Schumann suddenly cuts the tempo and presents the eight-note chains in a slow-motion, bagpipe treatment, followed by a solemn chorale like episode. The high spirits of the principal theme will not be denied, though, and the lively gaiety quickly reestablishes itself in a brilliant coda.