

CHAMBER IV

Happy Birthday, Ludwig!

SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 3 PM
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NOTES BY KEN MELTZER

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827) String Quintet in C Major, Opus 29 (1801)

- I. *Allegro moderato*
- II. *Adagio molto espressivo*
- III. *Scherzo. Allegro*
- IV. *Presto*

Giovanni Guzzo, violin
Benny Kim, violin
Robin Ashwell, viola
Philip Dukes, viola
Keith Robinson, cello

Piano Sonata No. 17 in D minor, Opus 31, No. 2, "Tempest" (1802)

- I. *Largo—Allegro*
- II. *Adagio*
- III. *Allegretto*

Sebastian Knauer, piano

INTERMISSION

Piano Trio in B-flat Major, Opus 97, "Archduke" (1811)

- I. *Allegro moderato*
- II. *Scherzo. Allegro*
- III. *Andante cantabile, ma pero con moto*
- IV. *Allegro moderato*

Benny Kim, violin
Eric Kim, cello
Ana-Maria Vera, piano

Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna, Austria, on March 26, 1827.

String Quintet in C Major, Opus 29 (1801)

🕒 *Approx. performance time: 35 mins.*

📅 *SMF performance history: 3/31/12*

Beethoven completed his Quintet for Strings (two violins, two violas, and cello), Opus 29, in 1801. It was a year of remarkable creativity and productivity for the German-born composer and pianist. In addition to the String Quintet, Beethoven also composed his only ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Opus 43, the Sonata

for Violin and Piano, Opus 24 ("Spring"), and four Piano Sonatas, Opus Nos. 26, 27, Nos. 1 ("quasi una fantasia") and 2 ("Moonlight"), and 28 ("Pastoral").

The String Quintet dates from the closing years of Beethoven's "early period." The "early period" compositions are notable for their synthesis of the tradition of such Classical-era giants as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) and Beethoven's teacher, Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), with premonitions of the revolutionary voice that would soon emerge in such path-breaking works as the "Eroica" Symphony, Opus 55 (1803).

Beethoven dedicated the String Quintet to his friend and patron, Count Mortiz von Fries, and sold the publishing rights to Leipzig's Breitkopf & Härtel. The first performance of the String Quintet took place in Beethoven's Vienna apartment on November 14, 1802. The work became known as the "Storm Quintet," because of music in the finale (see below). But a tempest of a quite different nature also surrounded this work.

In the fall of 1802, Beethoven learned that, in addition to Breitkopf & Härtel, the Viennese publisher Artaria & Co. had issued the String Quintet to the public. On January 22, 1803, Beethoven published the following in the *Wiener Zeitung*:

TO MUSIC LOVERS.

In informing the public that the original Quintet in C Major, long ago advertised by me, has been published by Breitkopf and Härtel in Leipzig, I declare that I have no part in the edition published at the same time by Herren Artaria and Mollo in Vienna. I am more constrained to make this declaration because this edition is highly faulty, incorrect, and quite useless to players, whereas Herren Breitkopf and Härtel, the rightful owners of this Quintet, have done all in their powers to produce the work as beautifully as possible.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Artaria & Co. (who also published several Beethoven works) instituted a legal action against the composer, demanding a retraction of his allegations against it and Mollo (a separate publishing company). The litigation extended over a period of over a few years, with adjudication in favor of Artaria and Mollo.

I. *Allegro moderato*—The opening movement, in traditional sonata form (exposition, development, and recapitulation of central thematic material),

is notable throughout for its grace and lyricism. The first violin immediately presents the initial principal theme, played over the viola's undulating figure and cello's mirror-image of the theme. The first violin once again leads the way in the initial presentation of the second, *dolce* theme. The initial theme returns at the close of the exposition, and launches the ensuing development section. The development builds to a *fortissimo* climax that resolves to the subdued opening of the recapitulation episode. In the final measures, a vigorous descending passage is capped by a trio of *fortissimo* chords.

II. *Adagio molto espressivo*—The first violin launches the Quintet's slow-tempo movement with an elaborate, flowing melody, marked *mezza voce*. The *Adagio*, teeming with lyrical beauty, finally resolves to a *pianissimo* conclusion.

III. *Scherzo. Allegro*—In the third movement, Beethoven exchanges the elegant minuet of Mozart and Haydn's time for the more robust *Scherzo*, here in the spirit of a country dance. Characteristic of Beethoven, the *Scherzo* is based upon the introduction and manipulation of a brief (three-note) central motif. The central *Trio* (also featuring the three-note motif) provides lyrical contrast. The movement concludes with a reprise of the *Scherzo*.

IV. *Presto*—The finale opens with music suggesting rumbles of thunder and flashes of lightning, earning the Quintet its "Storm" nickname. This serves as the basis for music of irrepressible energy and momentum. Twice, Beethoven interrupts the flurry of activity with an episode in moderate tempo, cast as a minuet, and containing striking dynamic contrasts (*Andante con moto e scherzoso*). A final return of the *Presto* music is capped by exuberant *fortissimo* C Major chords.

Piano Sonata No. 17 in D minor, Opus 31, No. 2, "Tempest" (1802)

🕒 *Approx. performance time: 23 mins.*

📅 *SMF performance history: 3/28/17, 3/24/11*

By the start of the 19th century, Beethoven had established himself as one of Vienna's most important pianists and composers. But during this period, Beethoven also began to experience difficulties with his hearing. In the spring 1802, on the advice of his physician, Beethoven abandoned the stress of life in Vienna to spend time in the beautiful country village of Heiligenstadt.

During the stay in Heiligenstadt, it appears that Beethoven experienced a further decline in his hearing. Beethoven was forced to confront the possibility—even the likelihood—that he would lose his hearing altogether. It was, of course, the cruelest joke fate could play upon Beethoven. He would soon become a pianist unable to perform in public, and a composer unable to hear his own musical creations.

It's not surprising that Beethoven spent much time contemplating the meaning of his life. One of the products of this soul-searching process was the document known as the "Heiligenstadt Testament," written in October of 1802. Addressed to his two brothers, the Testament was found among Beethoven's papers after the composer's death in 1827.

In the "Heiligenstadt Testament," Beethoven confessed:

But how humiliated I have felt if somebody standing beside me heard the sound of a flute in the distance and *I heard nothing*, or if somebody heard a *shepherd sing* and again I heard nothing—Such experiences almost made me despair, and I was on the point of putting an end to my life—The only thing that held me back was *my art*. For indeed it seemed to me impossible to leave this world before I had produced all the works I felt the urge to compose; and thus I have dragged on this miserable existence—a truly miserable existence...


The D minor Sonata, No. 17, is one of three that Beethoven composed during the year of the "Heiligenstadt Testament. The Sonatas were published by Nägeli in Zürich, collectively as Opus 31, Nos. 1-3, in 1803-4. Beethoven's friend, Anton Schindler, once asked Beethoven to explain the meaning of the D minor and "Appassionata," (1805) Sonatas. Beethoven, "in a cheerful mood," replied, "Just read (Shakespeare's) *The Tempest*." Beethoven may well have been having fun at his friend's expense, but the nickname has become forever associated with this fascinating work.

I. *Largo*—*Allegro*—The "Tempest" Sonata opens with an arresting dialogue, juxtaposing hushed arpeggios (*Largo*) with a volatile eighth-note passage (*Allegro*). This dialogue returns throughout the movement to launch various episodes in the sonata-form movement. The pervasive, restless mood finally abates in the closing measures.

II. *Adagio*—The *Adagio*, in B-flat Major, provides a reprieve from the storm and stress of the outer movements. Nevertheless, as in the opening movement, contrast plays a crucial and dramatic (perhaps even operatic) role—here, with frequent juxtapositions of the piano's upper and lower registers. The rapt lyricism established in the opening measures continues to the hushed final bars.

III. *Allegretto*—The finale opens with a repeated four-note motif. As in the case of the opening movement of his immortal Fifth Symphony (1808), Beethoven employs the motif as the basis for music of extraordinary concentration, drive, and emotional impact. And, like the Beethoven Fifth, the finale of the "Tempest" proceeds with unrelenting momentum. The closing measures, while far more subdued than their counterpart in the Fifth, are no less striking.

Piano Trio in B-flat Major, Opus 97, "Archduke" (1811)

 Approx. performance time: 37 mins.

 SMF performance history: 3/31/16

Beethoven completed his final piano trio (piano, violin, and cello) in 1811. Beethoven dedicated the work to Rudolph, Archduke of Austria (1788-1831), the youngest son of Emperor Leopold II. Rudolph, Beethoven's longtime pupil, cherished friend, and generous patron, was the dedicatee of such pieces as the Fourth and Fifth ("Emperor") Piano Concertos, the Piano Sonatas Opus 81a ("Les Adieux"), 106 ("Hammerklavier"), and 111, the *Grosse Fugue* for string quartet, and the choral masterpiece, the *Missa solemnis*. In addition, Beethoven composed the keyboard part of the Concerto for Piano, Violin, Cello and Orchestra in C Major, Opus 56 ("Triple") for Rudolph.

Beethoven was the pianist for the premiere of the "Archduke" Trio, which took place at the Vienna Hotel Zum Römischen Kaiser on April 11, 1814. The violinist was Ignaz Schuppanzigh, and Joseph Linke played the cello part. By this time, Beethoven's hearing had greatly deteriorated. While that did not stop the iron-willed Beethoven from occasionally attempting to perform in public, the results were inevitably tragic. Composer Louis Spohr recalled Beethoven's rehearsal of one of the piano trios:

It was not a treat; for one thing the piano was badly out of tune—something that did not disturb Beethoven because in any case he could not hear it—and for another

thing his deafness had robbed him of nearly all his once-celebrated virtuosity. At *forte* passages the poor deaf fellow banged the keys so vigorously that the strings twanged, while in the *piano* passages he played so softly that whole groups of notes went unheard and one lost the thread unless one could look into the music at the same time. The thought of his hard fate plunged me into deep depression. It is a great misfortune for anyone to be deaf, so how can a musician endure it without despair? I was no longer puzzled by Beethoven's almost perpetual melancholy...

Sources differ as to whether Spohr was describing a rehearsal of the "Archduke," or the Trio Opus 70, No. 1, "Ghost" (1808). But his observations are confirmed by Ignaz Moscheles, who attended the premiere performance of the "Archduke": "His playing, aside from its intellectual element, satisfied me less, being wanting in clarity and precision..."

Despite Beethoven's tragic circumstances at the time he composed the "Archduke" Trio, there is no trace of the "almost perpetual melancholy" Spohr observed in the composer's demeanor. The "Archduke" Trio is brimming with melody, inventiveness, humanity, and the irrepressible spirit that steeled Beethoven to surmount the most daunting challenges. As in the case of Beethoven's final piano concerto, symphony, string quartet, and piano sonata, the "Archduke" Piano Trio is a fitting culmination of an incomparable composer's achievements in the genre.

I. *Allegro moderato*—The keyboard immediately sings the noble first principal theme, marked both *piano* and *dolce*. The melody is soon incorporated by the remainder of the ensemble. A vibrant episode leads to the second principal theme, a sprightly descending motif first played by the piano. A vaulting theme, introduced by the first violin, and immediately echoed by the cello, rounds out the exposition. The extended development, for the most part subdued and mysterious, focuses on portions of the principal themes, with a three-note extraction from the initial melody given special prominence. The piano's more decorated version of the opening theme launches the recapitulation section. That theme predominates in the closing measures, capped by the ensemble's grand flourish.

II. *Scherzo. Allegro*—The cello introduces the puckish central theme of the second-movement *Scherzo*. The ensuing trio episode opens in

hushed mystery, but soon takes on a decidedly boisterous character. A reprise of the *Scherzo* ensues. In Beethoven's time, such a movement ended with this repetition. But Beethoven provides further reprises of the trio and *Scherzo*. The final *Coda* includes echoes of both elements.

III. *Andante cantabile, ma pero con moto*—The "Archduke" Trio's beautiful slow-tempo movement is based upon a solemn melody, introduced by the piano. Five variations on the melody ensue. The finale follows without pause.

IV. *Allegro moderato*—The piano sings the carefree melody that serves as the recurring basis of the rondo finale. High spirits prevail throughout, especially in the melody's brilliant 6/8 *Presto* transformation that brings the "Archduke" Trio to a rousing close.