

AUDIOPHILE AUDITION

BEETHOVEN: String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat Major, Op. 130; Grosse Fuge, Op. 133 and alternate ending: Allegro (1826) - Cypress String Quartet - Cypress Performing Arts

Vol. 2 of the Cypress String Quartet survey of the Beethoven cycle is devoted to the B-flat Major Quartet (1825), his "Liebquartett".



BEETHOVEN: String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat Major, Op. 130; Grosse Fuge, Op. 133 and alternate ending: Allegro (1826) - Cypress String Quartet - Cypress Performing Arts Vol. 2, 63:00 [www.cypressquartet.com] **:**

Volume 2 of the Cypress String Quartet --Cecily Ward, violin; Tom Stone, violin; Ethan Filner, viola; and Jennifer Kloetzel, cello --survey of the Beethoven cycle is devoted to the *B-flat Major Quartet* (1825), to which Beethoven referred as his "*Liebquartett*," his "precious creation" containing many of his most expressive, intimate tunes. In six movements, it already breaks with Classical tradition; and its original conclusion, the *Grosse Fuge*, adds yet another severe intellectual dimension to the demands this piece makes upon both performers and audience.

The opening *Adagio ma non troppo--Allegro*, with its angular chromatics and episodic treatment of melodic and rhythmic kernels, makes singular demands on everyone, as we feel both a compression of thought and a happy willingness to venture into harmonic realms untouched by human hands. The sojourn into G-flat seems a disembodied moment of transcendent but unnerving beauty. The late application of concertante writing for violin and viola made an immediate impression upon Dvorak, who often imitates Beethoven's instrumental colloquys. Kloetzel's 1701 Hieronymus Amati cello, too, makes its sonorous presence felt. The *Presto* takes us into the tonic minor, and its ceaseless energy reminds us of the great scherzi of the late symphonies. Glissandi and modal scales infiltrate the texture, as if to mock our classical expectations still further. The ensuing *Poco scherzoso: Andante in D-flat* the Cypress approach with a cantering gait that allows violin, cello and often buzzing accompaniment to become quite lyrical, even in spite of the harmonic intrusions into its otherwise graciously ambling contours. The Cypress' joie de vivre in this music shines through in this movement, courtesy of close miking by engineer Mark Willsher.

With the *Alla Danza tedesca in G Major* we enter a new harmonic space, simple but vastly dissociated from the tonal realms we have just traversed. The sudden pauses in the "German dance" melodic line suggest the vastness of the frontiers we confront. The first violin, Cecily Ward's 1681 Stradivarius, weaves a sweet variant on the original theme. The first four notes pass along to the various instruments in lyrical harmony before the fulcrum of this quartet closes. The great *E-flat Major Cavatina* provides another of Beethoven's sincere testaments of spiritual strength and inner faith, its top note G at the last chord a natural bridge to the massive *Great Fugue*. In the course of this titanic contrapuntal struggle, G-flat and A-flat have their day in court, yet the spirit remains abandoned and passionate in its chains: this is Beethoven's "Fern Hill." The Cypress project a feverish but delightful intensity into the mix, well aware that when Beethoven --who had scrupulously avoided the premier -- wanted this movement encored and damned the ignorant public, who insisted on "bis" merely for the *Presto* and *Alla Danza tedesca*.

The "traditional" Finale that Beethoven attached to assuage conservative voices enjoys the Cypress' earthy flair in gorgeous Technicolor. The invigorated part-writing quite scintillates individually, and the concerted passages take on a decidedly "symphonic" character. A fine album of chamber music, certainly a must for collectors of modern Beethoven surveys.

--Gary Lemco