

Humanities Seminars
The String Quartets of Beethoven
Spring 2021

Dates and Time:

February 1, 8, 15, and 22 (four Mondays)
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Instructor:

Jay Rosenblatt
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Fred Fox School of Music
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Course Description:

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) was one of the great masters of the Classical and Romantic eras in music, and no genre summarizes his achievement better than the string quartet. In this course, we will examine his sixteen string quartets, works that are spread evenly throughout his early, middle, and late style periods. The focus will be primarily on the music, beginning with the forms and techniques of the classical style that Beethoven inherited and tracing the tremendous changes he brought to music during these years.

The first class session will survey Beethoven's life and career. Topics will include his training and musical background, his important contemporaries Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), and the practical aspects of his profession — patronage and publishing. Musical considerations will cover the development of the quartet as a genre and the forms that were in common use, alongside the expectations of listeners and players. Class sessions two through four will each be devoted to a style period — early, middle, and late. The first hour will be an overview of the quartets from that period, while the second hour will consider a single quartet in greater depth.

Predominantly a lecture format, there will be time for questions. Beethoven's music will be experienced through recordings and videos, and the ability to read music is not required. This course was last taught by Dr. Rosenblatt in Fall 2014.

Dr. Jay Rosenblatt is currently Associate Professor of Music History at the University of Arizona, where he has taught since 1995. He has offered four courses for the Humanities Seminars, covering the operas of Verdi and Wagner, the life and works of Franz Liszt, and the string quartets of Beethoven, and he has team-taught three classes, two on the music of Mozart and one on Beethoven. His scholarly research focuses on music of the nineteenth century, in particular, the music of Liszt. He recently completed a book on the twentieth-century British composer, Madeleine Dring.

Required Text (available as a download through the course Box folder):

Barry Cooper, editor, *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* (Thames and Hudson, 1991) — "Chamber music for strings alone," pp. 232–239.

Useful Books on Beethoven and his String Quartets:

- Barry Cooper, editor, *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* (Thames and Hudson, 1991) — excellent reference book on the composer.
- Elliot Forbes, *Thayer's Life of Beethoven* (Princeton University Press, 1991) — revised and updated edition of a classic nineteenth-century biography, with extensive detail on Beethoven's life.
- Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets* (W.W. Norton, 2013) — first published in 1966, one of the most detailed and insightful discussions of the quartets (musical knowledge required).
- Lewis Lockwood, *The Music and Life of Beethoven* (W.W. Norton, 2003; also available as a Kindle edition) — good scholarly biography with commentary on the music.
- Lewis Lockwood and members of the Juilliard String Quartet, *Inside Beethoven's Quartets: History, Performance, Interpretation* (Harvard University Press, 2008) — chapters on the quartets alongside conversations with the Juilliard String Quartet on performing these works. Includes examples of annotated scores and a CD.
- Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven*, 2nd rev. ed. (Schirmer Books, 2001; also available as a Kindle edition) — perhaps the best one-volume biography of Beethoven, but discussion of the music is limited.
- Jan Swafford, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014; also available as a Kindle edition) — well-researched, thoughtful biography with discussion of the music. Perhaps less scholarly than Lockwood's biography but more approachable for those with less background in music history.
- Robert Winter and Robert Martin, editors, *The Beethoven Quartet Companion* (University of California Press, 1995; also available as a Kindle edition) — excellent chapters on the historical background of the quartets and a discussion of each work (musical knowledge required for the latter).

It is also recommended that each member of the class purchase a recording of Beethoven's string quartets. There are many excellent ones available, with several that are very inexpensive.

Session One (February 1): Beethoven and the String Quartet.

Topics to be discussed:

- Haydn and Mozart's Chamber Music
- Beethoven's Patrons
- Publishing in the late 18th and early 19th centuries
- Concerts ("Akademie")
- Standard forms and practices (sonata form, rondo form, theme and variations)

Works to be discussed:

- String Trios, Op. 9

Session Two (February 8): First Stylistic Period.

Topics to be discussed:

- Strategy in Beethoven's first publications
- Musical Organization of Op. 18
- Why transcribe a piano sonata for string quartet?

Work to be discussed:

- String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, no. 1

Session Three (February 15): “Heroic” Period.

Topics to be discussed:

Beethoven’s “New Style”

Commissions

Count Andreas Razumovsky

Ignatz Schuppanzigh

Work to be discussed:

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, no. 1

Session Four (February 22): Late Stylistic Period.

Topics to be discussed:

Transition to the Late Style

Beethoven and His Nephew

Characteristic of the Late Style

Prince Nikolas Galitzin

Work to be discussed:

String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131