

THE BEETHOVEN STRING QUARTETS

Coordinator: James Smith

The string quartet is the jewel of the chamber music repertory, and Beethoven's are regarded as the acme of the genre. After a brief look at the early quartets, concentration will be on the middle and late periods. His early works were clearly derived from Haydn's and Mozart's, but by the oracular and profound late quartets he had reinvented the genre. The works combine the immediate impact of the composer's overpowering energy with the brilliance of the most interesting musical ideas and creative possibilities. All levels of listeners should find much to bewilder and to delight. We strive for insight into the features of the string quartet genre and skills for understanding what we hear.

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

The Beethoven Quartet Companion, by editors Robert Winter and Robert Martin, {University of California Press, ISBN 0520204204, \$31.95}.

Listening will be through Youtube selections.

James has taught music listening for many years, at adult education programs in Cambridge, MA, and at the IRP.

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Week 1: The String Quartet: Where did it come from? What are its features and possibilities? Quartets 1-3

Week 2: Quartets 4-6

Week 3: The Rasumovsky Quartets: What changes in Beethoven's style and form? Quartet 7

Week 4: Quartets 8 & 9

Week 5: What was Beethoven's "middle period?" #'s 10 & 11

Week 6: The Late Quartets: What is all the fuss? What is

“absolute music?” Quartet 12

Week 7 & 8: Quartet 13, Op. 130, and the Grosse Fuge: Why is the Fuge so hard to listen to?

Week 9& 10: What did Beethoven consider Op. 131 his highest achievement? Why do so many agree?

Week 11: Quartet 12: “Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity from a convalescent in the Lydian mode.”

Week 12: The Final Quartet, and a summing up.