

HAYDN & BEETHOVEN

Saturday 6 November, 11am & 2.30pm
Woolmers Estate, Longford

Tasmanian String Quartet

Emma McGrath violin

Jennifer Owen violin

Doug Coghill viola

Jonathan Békés cello

HAYDN String Quartet in D, Op 76 No 5 (21')

Allegretto – Allegro

Largo: Cantabile e mesto

Menuetto: Allegro

Finale: Presto

BEETHOVEN String Quartet in C, Op 59 No 3, 'Razumovsky' (33')

Andante con moto – Allegro vivace

Andante con moto quasi allegretto

Menuetto: Grazioso

Allegro molto

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) was the creative force behind the rise and development of the string quartet, so it is fitting that this concert opens with a work by the genre's progenitor. Dating from 1797, the String Quartet in D belongs to a group of six known as the 'Erdödy Quartets' (Op 76), having been commissioned by Hungarian nobleman Count Joseph Erdödy. (Erdödy maintained a string quartet for his own private use and had exclusive rights to Haydn's Op 76 for two years.) While not Haydn's last quartets per se, the 'Erdödy Quartets' are among his final works in this genre. At this stage in his life, Haydn had conquered the symphony (he was still enjoying the afterglow of his second visit to London) and was turning his attention to masses and oratorios. But with a lifetime of string quartet writing behind him, Haydn retained a deft hand when it came to composing for this combination of instruments. The theme of the opening movement swings to the gentle lilt of a siciliano and forms the subject for a set of variations. The second movement, which is marked 'singing and sad' (cantabile e mesto), is in the highly unusual key of F-sharp. Composers don't choose remote keys on a whim, so Haydn is signalling an elevated level of expression for this movement. We come back down to earth with the good natured Menuetto (the theme of which is superficially related to the Largo) and the quartet comes to a close with a light-hearted and rustic sounding Finale.

Like Haydn's Op 76, the Op 59 string quartets by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) were commissioned by a nobleman – in this case Count Andreas Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna who, like Count Erdödy, maintained a private string quartet in his household. This set of three quartets was composed in 1806. Listeners might be taken aback by the severity of the Andante con moto, the first minute or so of the opening movement. Beethoven commences with strange harmonies, sudden fortes and shape shifting chords. Robert Simpson has suggested that perhaps these are the sounds of a hearing-impaired subject searching desperately for coherency. Clarity arrives at the Allegro vivace and the sudden, bright appearance of the key of C and a sprightly violin gesture to match. The second movement, which is in the key of A minor, has a mournful quality and is conventionally said to signify Razumovsky's patrimony – while not based upon a Russian folk song, it is often remarked that Beethoven's composed music in the style of one. Having jettisoned the graceful minuet for a lively scherzo elsewhere in his music, Beethoven reverts to the Menuetto in this quartet, and a very elegant one it is. The closing section of the Menuetto leads without a break into the finale which opens with a brilliant fugato, the ten-bar subject introduced by the viola. The four musicians scarcely pause for breath and the quartet comes to a thrilling and frenetic close.

Robert Gibson, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, © 2021

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