



Cover image: *Fugue (1908)* by Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet in D major op. 18 no. 3 (1798-1800)

| | | |
|---|------------------|-------|
| 1 | Allegro | 8. 15 |
| 2 | Andante con moto | 8. 10 |
| 3 | Allegro | 2. 58 |
| 4 | Presto | 7. 02 |

Anders Hillborg (b. 1954)

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|---|------------------------------|--------|
| 5 | Kongsgaard Variations (2006) | 13. 58 |
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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet in C-sharp minor op. 131 (1826)

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|----|----------------------|--------|
| 6 | Adagio | 6. 15 |
| 7 | Allegro molto vivace | 3. 14 |
| 8 | Allegro moderato | 0. 47 |
| 9 | Andante | 13. 20 |
| 10 | Presto | 5. 48 |
| 11 | Adagio | 2. 03 |
| 12 | Allegro | 7. 03 |

Total playing time: 79. 11

Calder Quartet

Benjamin Jacobson violin

Andrew Bulbrook violin

Jonathan Moerschel viola

Eric Byers cello



The inspiration for this album arose from our great love and admiration for Beethoven's string quartets. As we experienced the joy of performing the complete quartets, we found that Op. 131 held a special significance to each of us. It is incredible how many places Beethoven explores on this great adventure, and it is always hard to believe at the end of a performance that so much could have happened in just over half an hour. Representing the far reaches of his experiments with form, this quartet incorporates fugal writing, harmonic explorations, passages filled with operatic drama, and a grand set of variations into seven movements. By contrast Beethoven's first quartet, Op. 18 No. 3, is much more classical in form and serves as a starting point, evoking the break of day and beginning of a journey. The third quartet on this album is by our friend Anders Hillborg. After hearing some of his wonderful orchestral music, we were excited to discover he had written a string quartet. 'Kongsgaard Variations' is a set of variations in reverse where the theme is only divulged near the very end of the piece. For this work Hillborg takes inspiration from a California wine which displays the Arietta theme from Beethoven's last piano sonata Op. 111 on its label. We heard a sonic relationship between the openings of 'Kongsgaard Variations' and Op. 18 No. 3 as well as a link to the variation movement of Op. 131, and we felt it would be the perfect complement to these Beethoven quartets. We are grateful to have recorded these works together and hope you enjoy the album!

- Calder Quartet -

Quartets for *Kenner und Liebhaber*

Anders Hillborg is one of the most distinguished composers on the international music scene of today. His imaginative, sensual and often slightly surrealistic works are constantly in demand by top orchestras around the world. Hillborg had his first musical experiences as a chorister in Stockholm, where he studied composition at the Royal College of Music. Esa-Pekka Salonen was an early champion of his music; they have collaborated ever since.

When Anders Hillborg was commissioned by winemaker Kongsgaard of Napa Valley to compose a string quartet, he joined with Beethoven in a 200-years-old tradition. A rare exception in modern musical life! Today, string quartet compositions usually get commissioned by concert institutions or by the quartet ensembles themselves.

Ludwig van Beethoven's rich quartet production, however, was never intended for public concert use. It was solely an experience for *Kenner und Liebhaber* – the aristocratic salons of Vienna around 1800. His patrons were the wealthy land-owning princes from the vast empire, sponsoring music-making for their sojourns in Vienna. The Habsburg metropolis was certainly not a capitol of music for the general public. Concerts – so called academies – were scarce in comparison with Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden. During his life, Beethoven experienced only a handful performances of his music in Vienna.

The quartets published as his opus 18 were commissioned by the Bohemian prince Lobkovich, himself an able violinist and cellist. Beethoven was the chosen one, expected to follow the custom of Haydn and Mozart – composing a set of six well-crafted quartets marked by distinct artistic originality. (A few years earlier he had turned down a commission out of respect

for the high demands of the quartet format.) He worked on them between 1798 and 1800 and revised them carefully before final publication. The young Schuppanzigh quartet, employed by the Prussian prince Lichnowsky, gave opus 18 its first performance. A lifelong friend, from now on the name Ignaz Schuppanzigh would be synonymous with all Beethoven string quartets to come.

Quartet op. 18 no. 3 in D major was in fact the first to be composed, and the most gentle and lyrical of the set. It opens with a bold rising seventh, a graceful gesture turned to an arabesque – in fact a motivic cell for the whole first movement. The slow movement, a tender Andante coloured in warm B flat, is a rondo. A rapid Scherzo follows, marked by typical Beethoven accents, with a swirling Trio in the minor key. To finish off, Beethoven propels a swift 6/8 movement in sonata form full of Haydnesque wit.

The six quartets op. 18 were immediately branded as very difficult to perform, as well as far from “popular”. This was a key aspect for the Viennese high society when it came to music. The patrons of Beethoven took pride in the originality of his music, thereby distancing themselves from the general taste. Six years later, a new set of quartets was reviewed as “Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven string quartets attracting the attention of all connoisseurs. The conception is profound and the construction excellent, but they are not easily comprehended.” Again, a puzzled Schuppanzigh with his quartet were to perform, this time employed by the Russian ambassador count Razumowski.

At the time of Beethoven's last quartets, the years 1824–26, much had changed. Many grand palaces were abandoned, their owners ruined by the Napoleonic wars. The composer himself had turned stone-deaf, yet having managed to create his ninth symphony and the great *Missa Solemnis*.



The latter was first performed in Saint Petersburg, thanks to an avid Beethoven admirer, the Russian prince Galitzin. He was most probably influenced by Schuppanzigh, who had spent several years in Saint Petersburg. Galitzin urged Beethoven to return to the string quartet, commissioning three works – which were to become opp. 127, 130 and 132.

The C-sharp Minor quartet op. 131 was a sort of spin-off from this vast undertaking. Beethoven began sketching it already while finishing a Galitzin quartet. It unfolds in seven movements, starting with a deeply melancholic fugue that has mesmerized listeners ever since. Beethoven himself held it in high esteem, as did composers like Schubert, Schumann and Wagner. It seems odd that Beethoven chose to dedicate this grand oeuvre to a certain field marshal von Stutterheim. This was a token of gratitude, since Stutterheim had taken care of Beethoven's nephew Karl who had tried to commit suicide.

The op. 131 quartet is an amazing accomplishment by a very isolated man, entangled in private and medical adversities. From the dolorous opening fugue – *molto espressivo* – Beethoven turns C-sharp Minor to D Major and a jaunty dance – *Allegro molto vivace*. The contrast in mood and mode could not be greater. The third movement, in B Minor, lasts less than a minute to announce a shift of scene. A *recitativo* opens the door to a little theme in A major, innocent and simple, followed by variations and a coda. This fourth movement is the centerpiece and a kind of hub for the whole quartet – referring both to what has been and what is to come. Six variations grow more and more complex up to an elaborate coda marked by the thrills so typical for late Beethoven. More than just ornaments, could the persisting trilling have penetrated the walls that blocked his hearing? And what about the strange *sul ponticello* ending of the wild scherzo in E major? By playing with the bow close to

the bridge, the strings create an icy, glassy sound from Beethoven's inner soundscape. A new transition, an elegiac Adagio in G-sharp Minor, introduces the seventh movement. Now finally back in C-sharp minor, Beethoven closes this mighty quartet in sonata form, full of passion and outbursts. Three final chords in the major make a full stop to a journey through seven movements without any breaks.

Anders Hillborg refers quite obviously to late Beethoven in his first string quartet, *Kongsgaard Variations*, or "The Arietta String Quartet". The Arietta, of course, refers to the iconic last movement of Beethoven's last piano sonata op 111. "Why does this sonata have only two movements?", Thomas Mann lets his enthusiastic musicologist in *Doctor Faustus* ask. And he promptly delivers a proper lecture on the Arietta subject in the novel, elaborated with the help from Mann's philosopher friend Theodor Adorno.

Yes, the Arietta is enigmatic and sublime. But Anders Hillborg was more inspired by the "Arietta" wines of the Kongsgaard winery than by Mann and Adorno. The first bars of the hymn-like theme, or the little song (arietta), are featured in Beethoven's handwriting on the label of the Arietta wine. "A natural key role for the piece", according to Hillborg, who refrains from following the Beethoven model of steadily increased intensity and complexity. But he keeps the concept of variations on a theme, so frequent in Beethoven's late compositions.

With Hillborg, the Arietta variations are "more like meditations, with no directional process (...) floating aimlessly through the centuries". In the very beginning of the quartet, the Arietta emerges as yet another imaginary Beethoven variation. These opening bars will appear in various guises throughout the piece. A pizzicato in ff marks an opening of the bottle, letting the scent out. A "first taste, thoughtful"

follows, introducing a simple “folk-tune” in the first violin. A motive that will recur in the form of different little songs along the way. The viola starts “drinking”, joyfully joined by the other strings. Accompanied by sordino sighs, the cello sings a languishing solo, continued by the viola. Now the quartet seems to play backwards, gradually hinting at the Arietta theme. A beautiful chorale leads to a pizzicato stop, allowing the Arietta to reveal itself. Hillborg turns it backwards, sliding it in glissandos to a final vaporization.

Kongsgaard Variations was first performed in November 2006 by the Prazak Quartet and is dedicated to John and Maggy Kongsgaard.

Camilla Lundberg

Acknowledgments

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This album was recorded on 22-25 May 2018 in the Zipper Hall at the Colburn School, Los Angeles.

Jonathan Moerschel plays on a viola made by Gasparo da Salo in 1590 that is known as the "ex-Adam". It is on generous loan from the Stradivari Society in Chicago.

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