Incredible Decades (2019) Disc 3.

1–3 **Quintet in E-flat Major for Winds and Piano, op. 16** (1796)
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
Grave – Allegro, ma non troppo
Andante cantabile
Rondo: Allegro, ma non troppo

STEPHEN TAYLOR, *oboe*; TOMMASO LONQUICH, *clarinet*; PETER KOLKAY, *bassoon*; KEVIN RIVARD, *horn*; GILBERT KALISH, *piano*

4–7 **String Quartet in F Major, op. 135** (1826)
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
Allegretto
Vivace
Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo
Der Schwer gefasste Entschluss: Grave, ma non troppo tratto – Allegro

ESCHER STRING QUARTET: ADAM BARNETT-HART, BRENDAN SPELTZ, *violins*; PIERRE LAPOINTE, *viola*; BROOK SPELTZ, *cello*

Disc III contrasts early and late chamber masterworks of Ludwig van Beethoven. The Quintet for Winds and Piano, op. 16, dates from the composer's early years in Vienna. The Quintet, with its sophisticated conversational language, reveals young Beethoven still beholden to the Classical style inherited from Haydn and Mozart, which he would extend with his audacious later works. At the end of his life, Beethoven turned to the string quartet as the medium for his deepest musical thoughts. The quartets to which Beethoven devoted his final years represent the pinnacle of the composer's mighty creative powers and infinite imagination. In his final complete work, String Quartet in F Major, op. 135, Beethoven surpassed all precedent for the expressive capabilities of music, as if transcending this world and composing for the listeners of all future generations.

Liner notes by Patrick Castillo © 2019

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
Quintet in E-flat Major for Winds and Piano, op. 16 (1797)

Ludwig van Beethoven's Quintet for Winds and Piano, op. 16, bears specific debts to Mozart. The Quintet is modeled after Mozart's own Quintet for Piano and Winds in E-flat Major, K. 452 ("I myself consider it to be the best thing I have written in my life," Mozart wrote to his father following its premiere). When the Opus 16 Quintet was published, it appeared with an alternate version for piano quartet.

The Quintet is cast in three movements. The first movement begins with a slow introduction in the French overture style, marked by stately dotted rhythms. The piano commences the *Allegro* proper with a melodious sixteen-bar theme, very much in the spirit of Mozart. Winds soon join in, enlivening the proceedings with a brilliant splash of color. As each voice engages in dialogue with one another, a magical quality comes to the fore—one, frankly, lost in the arrangement for strings. Each instrument's timbre gives it a unique identity, like distinct personalities in conversation: the mellow clarinet, answered in turn by the jocular bassoon, the bellowing horn, the insistent oboe, with the piano moderating all the while.

A similar dynamic governs the lovely *Andante cantabile*. The tender melody is introduced, *dolce*, by the piano, then given luxurious voice by the full ensemble. Two contrasting minor-key episodes feature expressive solo lines in each of the wind instruments: a mournful tune sung by the oboe and later a solo turn by the horn—its brass timbre ideally suited to express a dignified melancholy.

The galloping *Rondo* that concludes the Quintet shows off the full ensemble in all its splendor. The finale combines elements of rondo form (in which a central refrain alternates with contrasting episodes) and sonata form (based on thematic development). After the first episode, the pianist plays a short cadenza—after which, the opening refrain returns but now transformed into an angry outburst. The clouds part soon enough, and the Quintet proceeds to its conclusion in high spirits.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
String Quartet in F Major, op. 135 (1826)

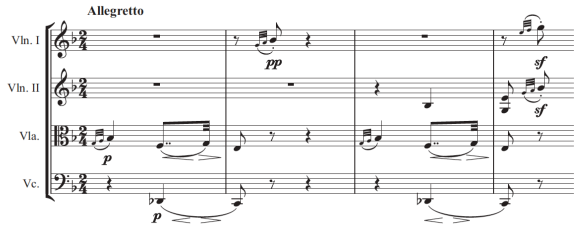
After completing what would be his last symphony and piano sonata, Ludwig van Beethoven turned once again after a twelve-year hiatus to the string quartet as the medium for his deepest musical thoughts. The quartets to which Beethoven devoted his final years represent the pinnacle of the composer's mighty creative powers and infinite imagination. In these five late quartets, Beethoven surpassed all precedent for the expressive capabilities of music, as if transcending this world and composing for listeners of all future generations.

The impetus for the late quartets was a commission from the Russian prince Nikolai Galitzin, himself an amateur cellist, who asked Beethoven for "one, two, or three quartets, for which labor I will be glad to pay you what you think proper." After fulfilling

Galitzin's commission for one, two, or three quartets, Beethoven had conceived so many musical ideas that he needed to continue. The resulting works are the String Quartet in c-sharp minor, op. 131, and the String Quartet in F Major, op. 135. The latter of these would be Beethoven's final complete work.

After the increasing structural innovations of the first four late quartets (in order of composition, Opuses 127, 130, 132, and 131—which comprise, respectively, four, five, six, and seven movements), Opus 135 returns to a standard four-movement architecture, similar to the Opus 18 quartets composed when Beethoven was in his late twenties. But within this guise of Haydnesque simplicity is contained the unmistakable depth of Beethoven's musical imagination.

The Quartet begins with a quiet conversation between the individual voices of the ensemble; the four instruments enter tentatively, as if looking around the room to see whether it's safe to begin.



Just when the Quartet finds its footing, a mysterious, disjointed melody follows, uttered in quiet octaves—but this quickly leads to a more extroverted passage. A warmer musical idea follows and then yet another subject: this one the most assertive yet, juxtaposing playful triplet figures with an ascending staccato statement. What sounds like a closing figure to the exposition leads to a reminiscence of the quiet introduction. Within just these opening minutes of the Quartet, Beethoven weaves together a staggering quantity of distinct musical ideas, each with its own character—yet despite their disparate characters, the music unfolds with an uncanny logic. For example, in the movement's development section, Beethoven extends, fragments, and combines his various materials with remarkable mastery and imagination.

The *Vivace* second movement functions as the quartet's scherzo but shares a certain enigmatic quality with the first movement. The movement opens with a straightforward syncopated figure, but as soon as the music settles into a rhythm, Beethoven interjects a strange, angry interruption of hammered E-flats, which yields immediately back to the sunny opening. What are we to make of this? What does it mean? Of course, there's no clear answer—indeed, the psychological complexity of this and much of Beethoven's late music, and that we can never get to the bottom of it, is what makes it timeless. The stunning *Lento assai*, one of Beethoven's most moving slow movements, offers a sublime contrast to the extroverted *Vivace*.

Opus 135 is perhaps most famous for its final movement, on the manuscript of which Beethoven inscribed the title *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss*—"The resolution reached with difficulty." And then, accompanying the movement's mysterious opening three-note melody are the words "*Muss es sein?*"—"Must it be?" The answer is provided by the inversion of this figure, which begins the *Allegro* and under which Beethoven wrote, "*Es muss sein!*"—"It must be!" Beethoven apparently intended this musical dialogue as a joke. An amateur musician named Ignaz Dembscher had missed the Schuppanzigh Quartet's premiere of the Opus 130 String Quartet and requested free copies of the work from Beethoven for a performance in his home. Offended by the request, Beethoven sent word that Dembscher should pay Schuppanzigh the price of admission for the concert he had missed. Dembscher asked the violinist Karl Holz (who at this time was working as Beethoven's secretary), "*Muss es sein?*" The story goes that Beethoven replied with a four-voiced canon on these words, from which the immortal theme was eventually drawn.

Recorded July 17 and 19, 2019, The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton. Recording producer and engineer: Da-Hong Seetoo. Steinway grand pianos provided courtesy of ProPiano. Photos by Anna Kariel. Booklet design by Nick Stone. CD production: Jerome Bunke, Digital Force, New York. Production manager: Libby Seidner. Music@Menlo 2019 was made possible by a leadership grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Additional support provided by the Koret Foundation, Bank of America Private Bank, and the many individuals and organizations that share the festival's vision. American Public Media was the official radio and new-media broadcast partner of Music@Menlo 2019.