

# LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770 - 1827)

## STRING QUARTET IN C MAJOR OPUS 59 NO. 3 'RASUMOVSKY'

*Introduzione. Andante con moto - Allegro vivace*  
*Andante con moto quasi allegretto*  
*Menuetto. Grazioso*  
*Allegro molto*

It was five years after the publication of his set of Opus 18 String Quartets, before Beethoven returned to writing in this genre again. During that time, Beethoven's style had evolved considerably, a consequence of continually expanding the boundaries of composition and also, finally, accepting his increasing and irrevocable deafness.

The three Opus 59 Quartets, were commissioned by Count Rasumovsky, the Russian ambassador in Vienna at the time. He was an amateur violinist who also maintained his own string quartet.

Interestingly, each of the 'Rasumovsky' Quartets is twice as long as their Opus 18 predecessors, but the first and second in the set, did not find favour with Beethoven's contemporaries, because of their 'progressive' sound. Only the third Quartet was received more favourably, because unlike its companions, it glances back to the music of the past.

An 1807 review of the 'Rasumovsky' Quartets reads as follows:

*'...they are not easily comprehended-with the possible exception of the Third in C major, which cannot fail to appeal to intelligent lovers of music, because of its originality, melody, and harmonic power...'*

The first movement of the C major Quartet begins with an unnerving dissonant chord and continues in this uncomfortable vein until the joyous *Allegro vivace* interrupts in an almost Mozartian style.

The second movement is full of Slavic mystery and agitation, intensified by cello *pizzicati* and melodic repetition.

Unlike other string quartets of the period which have a *Scherzo* as a third movement, this *Menuetto* and its following Trio, seem to almost step straight out of the scores of Mozart or Haydn, exuding Classical politeness and charm. It is followed in the final movement by an effervescent *fugue* which is full of fizz and sparkle.

Beethoven sent the 'Rasumovsky' Quartets to the violinist Felix Radicati who was not impressed but records the following exchange:

*'...I said to him, that he surely did not consider these works to be music? To which he replied, '...Oh, they are not for you, but for a later age...'*