Written by bluesever
Wednesday, 01 May 2019 21:50 - Last Updated Monday, 06 May 2019 20:32

Beethoven - Cavatina from String Quartet No.13

The last two years of Beethoven's life (1825-1827) were almost completely given over to the writing of string quartets. The project began in 1822 with a commission from Russian Prince Nicholas Galitzin, an amateur cellist who requested "one, two or three" string quartets. Once Beethoven began work in earnest, he turned out not one, two or three, but five massive string quartets that ultimately become six separate works known simply and profoundly as "Beethoven's Late Quartets". For decades, these quartets were regarded by most as strange, difficult, anomalous, quite possibly the work of a once great composer now degenerated into a deafness and insanity. It was not until the 20th century that the late quartets became widely regarded as profound and transcendent masterworks worthy of entering and if not becoming the apex of the traditional repertoire.

Beethoven - String Quartet No. 13 - V. Cavatina -Adagio molto espressivo

The third of the late quartets in the order Beethoven composed them, the String Quartet in B-flat Major Op. 130 was completed in its first version in November of 1825 , only one year after his Ninth Symphony. Beethoven and his publisher surprisingly came to agree that the finale did not sit well with the rest of the quartet movements. A bristling, difficult fugue of epic proportions was deemed "too much." The fugue was detached henceforth as a separate opus and Beethoven composed a fresh, much lighter finale to complete Op. 130 in its revised, final version. Beethoven completed the new finale in November, 1826 (after Schubert's quartet in G). It was the very last piece of music Beethoven wrote. He died shortly after in March, 1827.
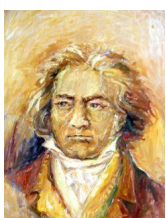
Beethoven

Parts/Movements

1   Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro 2   Presto 3   Andante con moto ma non troppo 4   Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai 5   Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo 6   Finale. Allegro

Coversheet Op. 130 as published in Berlin, 1827

Beethoven originally planned to have a highly expressive, aria-like third movement, in D flat major. His sketches reveal, however, that he became bogged down in this movement for about a month, and eventually replaced it with the present third movement, marked 'poco scherzoso' and also in D flat major. He then worked out the aria-like movement as a 'Cavatina' in E flat, using it for the fifth movement. Before it he placed a waltz-like movement entitled 'Alla danza tedesca', which had originally been written for his previous quartet (Op. 132) but had been discarded.

Beethoven

The 'Cavatina', perhaps the most beautiful movement he ever wrote, is highly charged with intense emotion, and even the composer himself was reportedly moved to tears by its sheer loveliness and profundity.

Beethoven

The *Cavatina, Adagio molto espressivo,* began with a simple rising and falling of the second violin's first notes, and then eased into hymn-like four-voiced music of heart-felt beauty. The word 'Cavatina' originally described a short song of simple character, but Beethoven re-imagined the form. The extended opening section, moving as it was, then led into one of the most deeply affecting moments in music. While the lower three voices laid down a ghostly pattern of repeated triplets, the first violin wove imploring but tentative notes far above, almost none of which coincided with the ongoing rhythm. The first violin served as a proxy for someone who seemingly had lapsed into disorientation and hopelessness. The effect was one of gathering desperation. Beethoven marked the word   '*Beklemmt'* above this passage, loosely translated as ' *oppressed'*

or
'anguished'.
The music, almost unbearable in its utterly gripping message, finally released its hold and returned us to a slightly altered version of the original material. Then the movement ended with several pulsating chords dying away in melancholy resignation. Beethoven, although deaf at the time, was said to have wept upon hearing the Cavatina in his inner ear.

Cavatina, sheet

This is the movement that can be described as being out of this world. Figuratively, the deep personal expression seems borne of that same insight Beethoven draws upon during this late period. His vision and understanding seem somehow transported beyond our sphere, into a good place that he is able portray in this music. Literally, a recording of the Cavatina by the Budapest String Quartet is travelling at this moment through the Kuiper Belt on the far edge of our solar system aboard the Voyager 7 launched in 1977. This was Carl Sagan's idea.
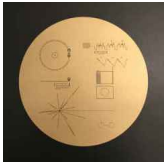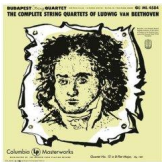

The Voyager Golden Record

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A cavatina is a short, simple song. Beethoven's, though simple and kind of short (six minutes) probes our inner most feelings, connecting his with ours. It is a meditation. It is Mahleresque. Beethoven himself said that the Cavatina cost him tears both in the writing of it and merely to revive it in his thoughts afterwards. I became fascinated by the cavatina movement in Opus 130, the Quartet in B-flat Major. I listened to it again and again. How did he do that? What is he telling me? It is beautiful.

Beethoven String Quartets by Budapest SQ

The Quartet's subtitle, "Liebquartett" ("Dear Quartet") is how Beethoven referred to the piece in his conversations books. When writing about the quartet, Beethoven knowingly stated, "Art demands of us that we don't stand still."

Beethoven by J.P. Lyser

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