

# *Shropshire music 2009 - 2010*



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# SHROPSHIRE MUSIC 2009-10

*Venues are Shrewsbury & area unless otherwise stated*

Sep	Thur 24	<b>Mid Wales Opera: Figaro</b> <i>(Tickets from Theatre Severn only)</i>	<i>Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury</i>
Oct	Sun 4	<b>Wihan String Quartet: Beethoven Series I</b>	<i>Maidment Hall, Shrewsbury School</i>
	Mon 12	<b>Lunchtime: Voice &amp; Guitar</b>	<i>St. Mary's Church, Shrewsbury</i>
	Tue 27	<b>English Chamber Orchestra: William Bennett, flute</b>	<i>St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury</i>
Nov	Sun 8	<b>Wihan String Quartet: Beethoven Series II</b>	<i>Concord College, Acton Burnell</i>
	Fri 13	<b>Innovation Ensemble: Viola Quintets</b>	<i>St Mary's Church, Shrewsbury</i>
Dec	Tue 15	<b>Ex Cathedra – Christmas by Candlelight</b>	<i>St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury</i>
Jan	Sun 24	<b>Wihan String Quartet: Beethoven Series III</b>	<i>The Lion Hotel, Shrewsbury</i>
Feb	Sun 7	<b>Wihan String Quartet: Beethoven Series IV</b>	<i>Maidment Hall, Shrewsbury School</i>
	Sat 20	<b>Consort 1700 'A European Grand Tour'</b>	<i>Concord College, Acton Burnell</i>
Mar	Fri 12	<b>James Sherwood 'At the Piano'</b>	<i>The Gateway, Shrewsbury</i>
	Fri 26	<b>'A Night at the Opera'</b>	<i>Market Drayton Festival Centre</i>
Apr	Sun 18	<b>Wihan String Quartet: Beethoven Series V</b>	<i>The Lion Hotel, Shrewsbury</i>
	Tue 27	<b>ZUM 'Gypsy Tango Pasión'</b>	<i>Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury</i>
	Fri 30	<b>'Rostropovich's Birthday Present'</b>	<i>St Mary's Church, Shrewsbury</i>
May	Sun 2	<b>Wihan String Quartet: Beethoven Series VI</b>	<i>Concord College, Acton Burnell</i>
	Mon 17	<b>Lunchtime: W3 Wind Trio</b>	<i>St. Mary's Church, Shrewsbury</i>
	Sun 23	<b>Manchester Camerata: Kathryn Stott, piano</b>	<i>Holy Trinity Church, Oswestry</i>
June	Thur 3	<b>The Sixteen: Treasures of Renaissance England</b>	<i>St Chad's Church, Shrewsbury</i>

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**Jan Schulmeister-violin**  
**Jiri Zigmund-violola**  
**Ales Kasprik-cello**

**PROGRAMME**

**String Quartet Op 18 No1**

**String Quartet Op 14 No1**

**INTERVAL**

**String Quartet Op 59 No1 'Rasumovsky'**

*Meet the Artists afterwards*

<b>Complete Series</b>			
Quartet Series II	Sun 8 Nov	Concord College, Acton Burnell	3.00
Quartet Series III	Sun 24 Jan	Lion Hotel, Shrewsbury	3.00
Quartet Series IV	Sun 7 Feb	Maidment Hall, Shrewsbury School	7.30
Quartet Series V	Sun 18 Apr	Lion Hotel, Shrewsbury	3.00
Quartet Series VI	Sun 2 May	Concord College, Acton Burnell	3.00

*In association with Shrewsbury School*

## BEETHOVEN & THE STRING QUARTET

*Misha Donat*

Commentators on Beethoven's sixteen string quartets (seventeen, if we count the 'Grand Fugue' originally destined for the Quartet Op.130, but eventually issued as an independent work) invariably divide them into three groups, consisting respectively of 'early', 'middle' and 'late' works. It's true that Beethoven turned to the string quartet at all stages of his career, but those convenient labels are particularly misleading when it comes to his first works of the kind, Op.18, which can be described as early only in relation to their successors.

Beethoven was in his thirtieth year when he completed them, and he already had an impressive tally of works to his name. They included more than a third of his total output of piano sonatas, two cello sonatas, three violin sonatas, three piano trios, and no fewer than five string trios. Beethoven's hesitation in approaching the medium of the string quartet reflects his awareness of the rich legacy in this field of Haydn and Mozart. His string trios (they are masterly, and sadly neglected works) were his means of dipping a toe into string quartet waters without invoking direct comparison with his great predecessors.

At the time Beethoven embarked on his six string quartets Op.18, in 1798, Haydn was working on what were to be his last completed quartets; and, as though the baton were being handed on, both sets of works had been commissioned by the same patron, Prince Lobkowitz. Beethoven completed his series two years later, after which there was a gap of six years before the appearance of the three 'Razumovsky' quartets Op.59. Those epoch-making works were followed by two isolated essays in the genre – the 'Harp' Quartet Op.74 in 1809, and the 'Quartetto Serioso' Op.95, of 1810-11. The five late quartets came right at the end of Beethoven's career, and were his main creative preoccupation during the final years of his life.

## STRING QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP.18 NO.1

*Allegro con brio; Adagio affetuoso ed appassionato; Scherzo: Allegro molto; Allegro*

The sequence of Beethoven's Op.18 quartets in their published form doesn't reflect their chronology, and the work we know as No.1 was probably the second of the six to be composed, following No.3 in D major. It may, however, have been among the last of them to reach its definitive form. In June 1799 Beethoven sent a copy of the score to his theologian friend Karl Amenda, who was a talented amateur violinist; but two years later he asked Amenda not to lend the quartet to anyone. "I have greatly changed it," Beethoven told him, "for only now have I learned how to write quartets properly." The revisions Beethoven carried out to the Op.18 No.1 quartet were particularly far-reaching in the case of its opening movement. One telling change affected the manner in which the recapitulation, at roughly the movement's mid-point, was approached. Beethoven had originally written a series of rushing *fortissimo* scales here; but his final version creates a more subtle atmosphere of subdued excitement, and reserves the crescendo for the last possible moment before the reprise of the main theme. (This is one of the composer's many works in which the quietly understated opening subject returns at this point in a startling *fortissimo*.) Also new was a dramatic passage near the end of the piece, with all four instruments striding upwards in long notes. On top of those specific changes, Beethoven generally rendered the music's texture more transparent, and reduced the number of appearances of the opening turn-like motif during the course of the piece. All the same, that motif – the very first thing we hear in the work – makes itself felt throughout the movement even in its revised form.

If Beethoven chose to place this work rather than any of its companions at the head of the set, it may well have been in view of its fine slow movement – one of the great tragic utterances among his earlier music. According to Karl Amenda, Beethoven wrote it while thinking of the scene in the burial-vault from 'Romeo and Juliet'. Amenda's claim is borne out by remarks found among Beethoven's sketches for the piece, which include "il prend le tombeau" ('he enters the tomb') and "les derniers soupirs" ('the last sighs'). The piece begins with the throbbing sound of an accompaniment played by the three lower instruments, before the first violin enters with the quiet main theme. That theme later assumes a more dramatic guise, with the aid of a rushing new figure superimposed above it; and during the final stages of the movement the rushing figure itself reaches a peak of anguish, before the music sinks to an exhausted close.

Beethoven's tempo marking for the slow movement in the revised version of the work includes the word 'appassionato' – a comparatively rare indication in his

music, and one that is conspicuously absent from the so-called ‘Appassionata’ piano sonata. (We will, however, meet with the term again in the finale of the Quartet Op.132.) Beethoven also altered the tempo indications of the last two movements: the third movement, originally a straightforward ‘Allegro’, became ‘Allegro molto’ in order to ensure that the piece would be played in genuine scherzo style; and the finale was transformed from a gentle ‘Allegretto’ into a brilliant ‘Allegro’. The last movement is, indeed, a dazzling piece, with a fugue as its centrepiece, and a closing page which brings the curtain down with unabashed symphonic grandeur.

**STRING QUARTET OP.14 NO.1**  
**(arr.Beethoven from Piano Sonata Op14/1 in Emaj)**

*Allegro; Allegretto; Rondo:Allegro comodo*

Beethoven made relatively few arrangements of his own music - an activity for which, as he told one of his publishers, he “could never have found the time, or even had the patience”. On one or two occasions, however, he did take advantage of the opportunity to revise and improve a work in the process of transcribing it for another medium. An early Octet for winds, eventually published as his Op.103, was recomposed as a string quintet (Op.4); and the Op.16 Quintet for piano and winds was issued simultaneously with a version for piano and string trio which - leaving aside the question of the music’s actual sonority – improves considerably on the texture and balance of the original scoring. Some of Beethoven’s other arrangements are clearly more utilitarian: the solo part of the Violin Concerto was hastily transferred to piano, to honour a contract with Clementi; and the Septet Op.20 was transformed into a piano trio, as a mark of gratitude to Beethoven’s doctor, a keen violinist.

For all Beethoven’s pride in his skill as an arranger, his string quartet version of the Sonata Op.14 No.1 is a fairly straightforward affair. The most radical change Beethoven made was to transpose the Sonata from E major into F - a less awkward proposition for string players, and one that enables the cello’s ‘open’ C string to underpin the dominant chord (C major) of the new key. Listeners familiar with the piano original will notice that the left-hand arpeggios running through the first movement’s central stage are replaced with more idiomatic string tremolos; and that the finale’s rondo theme is supplied with a new syncopated inner part. Moreover, the finale’s first contrasting episode is completely rewritten, with the piano’s rising arpeggios replaced with a ‘running’ first violin part, while an inner part (second violin and viola in octaves) now ties in the material of the episode with the rondo theme itself.

## STRING QUARTET IN F MAJOR OP.59 NO.1 ('RAZUMOVSKY')

*Allegro; Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando;  
Adagio molto e mesto – Thème russe: Allegro*

Beethoven's three quartets Op.59 have become inseparably linked with the name of Count Andreas Kirillovich Razumovsky. He was the Russian ambassador in Vienna, as well as one of the city's foremost musical patrons. It was to Razumovsky and Prince Lobkowitz that Beethoven jointly dedicated his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies. From 1808 until 1814, when his palace burned down, the Count employed a permanent string quartet led by the well known player Ignaz Schuppanzigh, and he was himself a competent enough violinist to take a place in the ensemble from time to time. It was in homage to Razumovsky that Beethoven included a Russian folk tune in the first two of his quartets Op.59.

The three 'Razumovsky' Quartets were composed in what for Beethoven was an unusually short space of time, from April to November 1806. This was altogether an extraordinarily prolific period, and the same year also saw him compose his Fourth Piano Concerto, Fourth Symphony and Violin Concerto. In addition to those six large-scale new masterpieces, Beethoven was busy with the first revision of his opera, 'Fidelio', for which he wrote one of the most thrilling of all his orchestral scores - the overture known as 'Leonore' No.3.

Only six years separate the 'Razumovsky' Quartets from Beethoven's first set of string quartets, Op.18, but in the intervening period his style had changed almost beyond recognition. Just as, in 1803, the 'Eroica' Symphony had irrevocably changed the face of symphonic thought, so the Op.59 string quartets issued a similar challenge to the traditional notion of chamber music. Not only did their extreme technical demands render them patently unsuited to domestic performance by amateurs, but the breadth of their canvas was such that it had been exceeded among Beethoven's instrumental works only by the 'Eroica' itself. Not surprisingly, of the three quartets only less forward-looking C major last work was at all favourably received by Beethoven's contemporaries, and the view of the pieces as reported by the Leipzig *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung's* Vienna correspondent on 27 February 1807 is one that was likely to have been shared by the majority of his readers:

*"Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven violin quartets dedicated to the Russian ambassador, Count Razumovsky, are attracting the attention of all connoisseurs. They are profound in conception and admirably written, but not generally comprehensible - with perhaps the exception of the 3rd in C major, which through its individuality, melody and harmonic strength cannot fail to win the favour of every cultured music lover."*

The scope of the piece is actually reduced by the lack of the traditional exposition repeat, but Beethoven had at one stage intended to have the much longer second

half repeated instead: six bars leading to such a repeat, plus the instruction *La seconda parte due volte* ('The second part twice'), were deleted from the manuscript. Beethoven had actually carried out an analogous plan in the finale of his famous 'Appassionata' piano sonata, but in the quartet it would clearly have resulted in a piece of unmanageable proportions.

The omission of the exposition repeat was an idea Beethoven had already tried in the C minor middle work from his set of three violin sonatas Op.30, as well as the opening movement of the 'Appassionata'; but in Op.59 No.1 the short-cut is highlighted through an *implied* repeat, in the shape of an exact reprise of the movement's opening bars, before the music strikes out along new paths, and the central development section is under way. Beethoven resorted to the same deliberate deception again in the finale of his Eighth Symphony and the first movement of the Ninth, and the idea is one that exerted an influence on a host of composers to come, including Mendelssohn, Brahms, Dvorak and Mahler.

The second movement – a scherzo in character, though not in tempo or clearly discernible form – presents a kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of contrasting material. For all its initial impression of a patchwork of ideas, however, the movement is rigorously constructed; and in its propensity for passing unaccompanied melodic lines rapidly from one instrument to another, it seems to anticipate the world of Beethoven's late quartets.

The slow movement, in the minor, is one of Beethoven's great tragic pieces, its pervasive atmosphere of grief enhanced by the retention of the minor for its second subject. Beethoven's sketches for the piece contain the curious inscription "A weeping willow or acacia tree on my brother's grave"; and the heading of the movement includes the word *mesto* (sad) - an indication more readily associated with the melancholy side of Chopin and Tchaikovsky. Beethoven used the same marking on only one other occasion: the sombre slow movement of his Piano Sonata Op.10 No.3.

An elaborate violin cadenza provides a link to the finale, with its Russian main theme – which, as was to be the case with its counterpart in the second 'Razumovsky' quartet, Beethoven treats with a wilful disregard for its inherently solemn character. (The original melody is a soldier's lament on his return from the wars.) As in the opening subject of the first movement, the theme is given out by the cello beneath a harmonically static accompaniment - . - in this case, no more than a violin trill. At the end of the exposition, Beethoven renews the link between slow movement and finale with a reprise of the same cadenza, now scored for the full quartet, and leading back to the repeat - the only section of the work that is marked to be played twice; while shortly before the end, the Russian tune is momentarily heard in a tempo more in keeping with its original mood, before it is brushed aside with an abrupt gesture of impatience.

## WIHAN QUARTET

The Wihan Quartet, formed in 1985, are heirs to the great Czech musical tradition. The Quartet's outstanding reputation for the interpretation of its native Czech heritage and of the many classical, romantic and modern masterpieces of the string quartet repertoire is widely acknowledged.

They have developed an impressive international career, which includes visits to major festivals in Europe and the Far East. They visit the United States and Japan regularly and have had highly acclaimed tours of Australia and New Zealand. They are frequent visitors to the UK and can often be heard on BBC Radio 3 as well as in concert at Wigmore Hall, Bridgewater Hall, the South Bank and many other venues throughout the country.

The Wihan Quartet has won many International Competitions including The Prague Spring Festival and the Osaka 'Chamber Festa'. In 1991, they won both the First Prize and the Audience Prize in the London International String Quartet Competition.

During 2008 the Quartet completed the first ever cycle of Beethoven Quartets in Prague and also repeated this cycle at Blackheath Halls, London. "Their unanimity of conception was admirably and readily apparent in the opening concert" Musical Opinion." "This was an outstanding recital. The performance of the first of the expansive Razumovsky Quartets, Opus 59 was inspired and gripping from beginning to end." Musical Pointers

Their landmark series of Beethoven concerts in Prague was recorded for release on CD and DVD on the Nimbus Alliance label. The Independent said of the release of the Late Quartets: 'these [performances] are excellent: their fiery interpretations do full justice to Beethoven's final masterpieces.' and International Record Review 'beautiful clarity....the Wihan's capacity for lightness of touch well suits op.127....the Presto (op.131) is played with splendid vigour'. Full details of the Quartet's available recordings can be found on their website: [www.wihanquartet.com](http://www.wihanquartet.com)

The Wihan are Quartet in Residence at Trinity College of Music, London, and for several years have taught many of the UK's gifted young Quartets at Pro Corda in Suffolk. The Quartet are great supporters of the work of the *CAVATINA* Chamber Music Trust, giving inspirational concerts and master classes to young people in many parts of the country.

Leoš Čepický plays on a 2003 prize-winning violin by Jan Spidlen, owned by the violin dealer Mila Strnad. Jan Schulmeister plays on a Jan Baptista Dvořák violin (1879) and Jiří Žigmund's viola is a 1659 Andrea Hieronimus Amati, on permanent loan from the Czech State collection. Aleš Kaspřík's cello was made in Paris in 1890 by Henri Thouvenel.

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