The Beethoven Experience
Speaking to God: Beethoven's Spirituality, Explored & Expressed

Don't miss a note of our 48 concert virtual festival: VIEW FULL CONCERT SCHEDULE
THE PROGRAM

STRING QUARTET NO. 2 IN G MAJOR, OP. 18 NO. 2
I. ALLEGRO
II. ADAGIO CANTABILE - ALLEGRO - TEMPO I
III. SCHERZO: ALLEGRO
IV. ALLEGRO MOLTO, QUASI PRESTO

STRING QUARTET NO. 8 IN E MINOR, OP. 59, NO. 2 "RAZUMOVSKY"
I. ALLEGRO
II. MOLTO ADAGIO
III. ALLEGRETTO. MAGGIORE - THEME RUSSE
IV. FINALE. PRESTO

THE BORROMEO STRING QUARTET
NICHOLAS KITCHEN, KRISTOPHER TONG, VIOLINS;
MAI MOTOBUCHI, VIOLA; YEESUN KIM, CELLO
The Beethoven Experience III: Speaking to God

"Most heavenly music! It nips me unto listening, and thick slumber hangs upon mine eyes." - Shakespeare, Pericles

The first book ever devoted entirely to the subject of Beethoven's string quartets appeared in 1885, from German musicologist Theodor Helm. It was titled "Beethoven's String Quartets: An Attempt at a Technical Analysis of these Works in Association with their Spiritual Content.

"The title may sound quaint in modern times, where it has become fashionable for contemporary music theorists to disdain the interpretations of their 19th-century predecessors as "Solemn Germans breathing philosophical hot air." Yet in Beethoven, a true child of the Enlightenment, (which is to say a believer in Christianity but not theocracy), there is a surprisingly powerful thread of spirituality and faith that runs throughout his sixteen quartets. All the more striking because the genre of the string quartet, then as now, was viewed as the most cerebral (and implicitly, secular) of musical expressions.

Take for example, the beautiful Adagio cantabile second movement of the String Quartet No. 2 in G major, Op. 18, No. 2. The opening measures evoke a sturdy German hymn, with all four instruments moving in a steady, prayerful pace. But as if not to take things too seriously, a lively Allegro section suddenly breaks up the solemnity. It's as if the musicians have stepped out onto the sidewalk for a smoke before heading back inside to complete the service, as indeed the thoughtful mood returns, this time with far more embellishments and flourishes from the four instruments. Although he was no churchgoer in his adult life, Beethoven was intimately familiar with the church's liturgies, rites and rituals. He started working as an assistant organist in the court chapel in Bonn when he was just 11 years old!

If the Adagio movement in the second quartet is the only truly serious episode in a piece that otherwise is a playful jab at 18th-century musical mannerisms, the String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2 occupies an entirely different realm. The overall work has been described as "tense and inward-looking," at times lyrical, tragic, passionate, and there's even a whiff of religious fervor. Beethoven pledged to include a Russian folk song in each of the three "Razumovsky," in tribute to the quartets' dedicatee, Count Andrey Razumovsky. In the third-movement Allegretto, the "Thème Russe" that Beethoven chooses is the Russian hymn "Glory to Thee, Creator On High," a fast fugal treatment that NPR critic Ted Libbey calls "fantastic and unforgettable." The same tune will turn up again to powerful effect in the Coronation Scene from Modest Mussorgsky's Boris Gudunov.
Nicholas Kitchen

Heifetz 2020 Cello Faculty; Ensemble in Residence (Borromeo Quartet)

Hailed by the New York Times for her “focused intensity” and “remarkable” performances, cellist YeOonesun Kim enjoys worldwide acclaim as a soloist, chamber musician and teacher. A founding member of the Borromeo String Quartet, Ms. Kim has performed in over 20 countries, and in many of the world’s most illustrious concert halls and Festivals. Ms. Kim is a graduate of the Curtis Institute for Music, as well as the New England Conservatory of Music. Nicholas has taught at the New England Conservatory of Music and won prizes at the Evian International Quartet Competition and the Young Concert Artists Auditions. The Quartet also received the Cleveland Quartet Award and the Seoul Young Artists Award for achievement in music and academics. Ms. Kim currently performs on a Peregrino Zanetto cello, circa 1576, one of the oldest in the world.

YeOonesun Kim

Mai Motobuchi

Heifetz 2020 Viola Faculty; Ensemble in Residence (Borromeo Quartet)

Mai Motobuchi has earned distinction as a soloist, chamber musician, and teacher in her native Japan and the United States. Currently Motobuchi is on viola faculty at the New England Conservatory and Tenriko Institute of Music in Japan. She has collaborated with many esteemed musicians including, Yo-Yo-Ma, Seiji Ozawa, Leon Fleischer, Kim Kashkashian, and many others. She joined the Borromeo String Quartet in 2000 and since then has toured extensively with them. She has won numerous awards throughout her career including the All Japan MBS Youth Music Competition in 1989, the Henri Kohn Memorial Awards from the Tanglewood Music Center, and while she was a student at Rice University received the John and Sally Cox Award, the E. Dell Butcher Awards, and the Willie Muery Award, in addition to being named an Alice Pratt Brown Scholar. Motobuchi began playing violin and studied at the Tenriko Institute of Music in Japan during her formative years. She eventually went on to study viola at Michigan State University and Rice University in Houston where she earned her Master of Music. She followed with an advanced performance diploma from the Internationale Meisterkurze Koblenz in Koblenz, Germany. She currently performs on a Moes and Moes viola dated from 1988.

Mai Motobuchi

Kristopher Tong

Heifetz 2020 Violin Faculty; Ensemble in Residence (Borromeo Quartet)

Considered on the most exciting musicians emerging today, Kristopher Tong has been praised for his depth of insight, virtuosity, and creative flair. Tong has appeared under the baton of some of the world’s most premiere conductors including Christoph von Dohnanyi, Kurt Masur, Paavo Jarvi, Charles Dutoit, Mstislav Rostropovich, and James Levine. He served on faculty in 2005 at the Yellow Barn Festival and from 2002-2004 was the Principal Second Violin of the Verbier Festival Orchestra. Tong began studying violin when he was 11 in a public elementary program and when he moved to Utah became a student of Leonard Bauza. He received his Bachelors degree at Indiana University Bloomington, where he studied with The late Franco Gulli, Miriam Fried, and Yuval Yaron. He completed his Masters Degree at the New England Conservatory of Music under Ms. Fried.

Kristopher Tong