



Cowles Commons
Friday, June 28, 2019

KREISLER The Old Refrain

BEETHOVEN String Quartet in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2

- I. Allegro
- II. Molto adagio
- III. Allegretto
- IV. Finale - Presto

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) composed 16 string quartets during his lifetime, all of which were highly acclaimed. Beethoven published String Quartet in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2 in 1808, shortly after he published his third symphony. During this time, Beethoven wrestled with increasing deafness and alienation, yet he continued to experiment greatly with musical form, inspired by space and looking beyond the struggles of life on Earth.

Count Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna, commissioned this work from Beethoven. The members of Razumovsky's quartet were highly accomplished musicians, which encouraged Beethoven to stretch the difficulty of his composition and tackle more ambitious musical concepts.

The first movement of the string quartet begins dramatically with two full chords, before immediately dropping to silence and then a soft E minor arpeggio. This abruptness continues, exploring different keys, until the first violin comes in with the main melodic line. The second movement moves to E Major, and is slow and serene. Beethoven notes in the music that he wants musicians to play this movement with "lots of feeling." The third movement starts in E minor, and then moves to a trio that features a theme similar to a Russian tune. The final movement is faster and more light-hearted, beginning in C Major before finally landing in the E minor key that is so prevalent throughout the piece.