



Daedalus Quartet

Opus

By Michael Hollinger

After this, what's left to write?

An exploration of Beethoven's late masterpiece

Staged reading of Michael Hollinger's *Opus*, Directed by **Dr. Marcia Ferguson**
Beethoven's *Quartet no. 14 in C# minor, Op. 131*

Min-Young Kim violin
Matilda Kaul violin
Jessica Thompson viola
Thomas Kraines cello

Sunday, February 4 @ 3 PM

Harold Prince Theatre

New York premiere produced by Primary Stages in New York City, July 2007.

(Casey Childs, Founder and Executive Producer; Andrew Leynse, Artistic Director; Elliot Fox, Managing Director).

Originally produced by the Arden Theatre Company, Terrence J. Nolen, Producing Artistic Director, Amy Murphy, Managing Director, in Philadelphia, PA and City Theatre Company, Tracy Bridgen, Artistic Director, Greg Quinlan, Managing Director, in Pittsburgh, PA. The coproduction opened in Philadelphia, January 2006 and in Pittsburgh, March 2006.

Music courtesy of the Vertigo String Quartet (Jose Maria Blumenschein, Johannes Dickbauer, Lily Francis and Nicholas Canellakis) and recorded by Jorge Cousineau for the Arden Theatre Company in Philadelphia, PA, where *Opus* had its world premiere.

Opus is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.



This performance is co-presented by Annenberg Center Live, the University of Pennsylvania Music Department, the Penn Theatre Arts Program and the Wolf Humanities Center.

PROGRAM NOTES

Ludwig van Beethoven completed his *Op. 131 quartet in C-sharp minor* in 1826, in the last year of his life and close on the heels of his *Op. 130 quartet in B-flat major*. His previous three quartets, Opp. 127, 132 and 130 (ending with the *Great Fugue*), had been commissioned by Prince Galitzin. But Beethoven was so inspired during the writing of those three that he kept on going. The second violinist of the Schuppanzigh Quartet, Karl Holz, reported on the conversations he had with Beethoven during this time: "My dear friend, I have just had another new idea," he used to say, in a joking manner and with shining eyes, when we would go out for a walk." It is easy to understand why Beethoven was so excited.

The music scholar Joseph Kerman describes *Op. 131* as highly integrated, in sharp contrast to the dissociated *Op. 130*. There is a strong motivic unity to the piece, which traverses seven numbered movements without a real break. We hear the kernel of the work in the first four notes of the fugal first movement: in scale degrees, they are 5-7-1-6, two sets of half steps a major third apart, incorporating between them the expressive interval of an augmented second. No doubt Beethoven was inspired by J.S. Bach in the creation of this fugue subject. Bach, the master of fugue, used the same pitch relationships in the final fugue of his *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which Beethoven copied out on four staves (as if for string quartet) in 1817. We hear this kernel (or slight variations on it) throughout the piece, but it is especially poignant when it resurfaces in the last movement as 1-7-6-5, with the augmented second on clear display in the middle.

The opening fugue also acts as a key prognosticator. After C-sharp minor (the key of movement seven), it traverses E major (movement five), G-sharp minor (movement six), B major (the parallel major key of movement three), A major (the key of movement four), and D major (movement two). In addition, the instruments which are featured in future movements are often the ones with fugue subjects in the keys of those movements. For example, the cello, which starts movement five, plays the subject in E major; and the viola, which takes on the melody in movement six, plays the subject in G-sharp minor. The mood created by the expressive pitch intervals and wandering keys, one of inner anguish, is enhanced by swells in the dynamics which usually reach their peak on the fourth note, the flat sixth scale degree, of each statement of the subject.

We never really recover from the ground-shifting move to the Neapolitan key of D major at the start of movement two. The whole movement, on its surface a light-hearted sort of sea shanty, feels like it is hovering a half step above the doom of C-sharp minor. Fate knocks in movement three, a short recitative (with virtuosic melismatic flourishes in the first violin) that leaves us at the dominant chord of movement four, in A major.

This next movement, in variation form, presents another side of the piece. Here, the kernel has been transformed to 1-7-4-3 (the augmented second has been banished), and the variations range in mood from sweet to playful to philosophical to rustic to heavenly. Trouble lurks around the corner, though, as demonstrated by the loud cello interruptions in the heavenly sixth variation. After we pass through truncated versions of the theme, disguised as rhapsodic cadenzas for each instrument and the nostalgic sounds of a distant marching band, the cello interruption resurfaces to begin the scherzo.

Movement five employs the rough humor that we associate with Beethoven's scherzos: jarring outbursts, startling key and tempo changes, a hushed statement of the theme, awkward pauses, and the like. But it also incorporates some brand new elements. In the trio, the inner voices whirl through bizarre leaps and ten of the twelve possible pitches in a section that would have made Arnold Schoenberg proud. And at the end of the movement, Beethoven instructs the players to place their bows on the bridge of their instruments, producing a raspy version of the theme.

Coming out of that sound is one of the great moments of the piece: accompanied by a crescendo, it is like watching something huge rise to the surface of a lake, and we're not sure if we should be excited or scared. The brutal modulation to G-sharp minor clinches it, and anguish sets in again for movement six, which serves as a slow introduction to movement seven.

Everything comes to a head in this final movement. Themes and keys from the past are revisited, reworked, resolved and transformed. Beethoven once intended the music from the slow movement of what would be his *Op. 135* quartet to end *Op. 131*: a beautiful, healing melody in D-flat major. Instead, the piece ends in violent triumph with three very strong chords in the enharmonic key of C-sharp major. Perhaps it is relevant that Beethoven's nephew and ward, Karl, attempted to kill himself as the piece was being completed.

The violinist Karl Holz claimed that Beethoven considered his *Op. 131* quartet his greatest. Beethoven told him, "You will find here a new kind of voice-leading, and as to imagination, it will, God willing, be less lacking than ever before!" The quartet broke new ground in many ways, but it is most striking for its unity of purpose, despite Beethoven's claim that it was "pilfered together from various odds and ends." Each movement plays its role. Together, they tell a story to make us soar.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Michael Hollinger (Author, *Opus*)

Hollinger is the author of *Ghost-Writer*, *Opus*, *Tooth and Claw*, *Red Herring*, *Incorruptible*, *An Empty Plate in the Cafe Du Grand Boeuf* and *Tiny Island*, all of which premiered at Philadelphia's Arden Theatre Company. These plays have enjoyed numerous productions around the country, in New York City, and abroad. Hollinger's musical *A Wonderful Noise* (co-authored with Vance Lehmkuhl) received the Frederick Loewe Award for Musical Theatre, the "In the Spirit of America" Award from the Barbara Barondess MacLean Foundation, and a developmental production at Creede Repertory Theatre. His translation/co-adaptation (with Aaron Posner) of *Cyrano De Bergerac* premiered in 2011 at the Folger Theatre in Washington, D.C. Other awards include a Harold & Mimi Steinberg New Play Citation from the American Theatre Critics Association, a Roger L. Stevens Award from the Kennedy Center's Fund for New American Plays, a Mid-Atlantic Emmy® Award, an Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award, the F. Otto Haas Award for an Emerging Theatre Artist, three Barrymore Awards for Outstanding New Play, a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award, nominations for Lucille Lortel and John Gassner Awards, and fellowships from the Independence Foundation, Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, and Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Hollinger is an Associate Professor of Theatre at Villanova University, and a proud alumnus of New Dramatists.

Dr. Marcia Ferguson (Director, *Opus*)

Ferguson is a faculty member in the Theatre Arts Program at the University of Pennsylvania (which she directed from 2013-2016). At Penn, she has directed plays by Sophocles, Aeschylus, Gozzi, Synge, Inge, Churchill, Howe, Marnich and Fornes, among others. She co-devised and performed in original work at Fringe festivals in Edinburgh and Philadelphia, and most recently directed *#CocktailPlays* for the 2017 Philadelphia Fringe Festival (Juniper Productions). In addition to directing new and classical plays, she is dedicated to an interdisciplinary approach to theatre. At the Arthur Ross Gallery in 2016, she had the pleasure of directing a multi-disciplinary performance featuring the Daedalus Quartet, *Jealousy*, *Infidelity*, and *Transfiguration*. She is delighted to have another opportunity to work with the quartet on this extraordinary play, which brings together accomplished artists from diverse disciplines.

The Daedalus Quartet

Praised by *The New Yorker* as “a fresh and vital young participant in what is a golden age of American string quartets,” the Daedalus Quartet has established itself as a leader among the new generation of string ensembles. Since winning the top prize in the Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2001, the Daedalus Quartet has impressed critics and listeners alike with the security, technical finish, interpretive unity and sheer gusto of its performances.

The Daedalus Quartet has won plaudits for its adventurous exploration of contemporary music, most notably the compositions of Elliott Carter, George Perle, György Kurtág and György Ligeti. Works the ensemble has premiered include Huck Hodge's *The Topography of Desire*, commissioned by the Fromm Foundation; David Horne's *Flight from the Labyrinth*, commissioned for the Quartet by the Caramoor Festival; Joan Tower's *White Water*, commissioned by Chamber Music Monterey Bay; and Fred Lerdahl's *Third String Quartet*, commissioned by Chamber Music America, as well as Lerdahl's *Chaconne*, commissioned by New Music USA.

Among the highlights of the Daedalus Quartet's 2016-17 season were the sold-out performance of *Black Angels* at the Penn Museum; the premiere of Fred Lerdahl's *Chaconne* in celebration of the Quartet's 15th anniversary; and a presentation of the group's *Kreutzer* program, centered on Leo Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata* and the writings of Sofia Tolstoy, for the Schubert Club in St. Paul, MN, with actress Linda Kelsey. The 2017-18 season is an exciting one, and will include a collaboration across the University of Pennsylvania to present the complete Beethoven String Quartets; a performance of Mendelssohn's *Octet* with the Brentano Quartet, to mark the series finale concert for Newtown Friends of Chamber Music in Connecticut; two tours of the West Coast, including an engagement with the Festival of New American Music in Sacramento, CA; a 22-concert tour of Germany in the spring of 2018; and the world premiere of a new work by Vivian Fung for clarinet and string quartet, with clarinetist Romie de Guise-Langlois, at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.