

# The New York Times

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## Beethoven Studied Through Varied Lenses

The Metropolitan Museum is taking an unusual approach to the Beethoven string quartets this season. Instead of having a single ensemble work its way

**ALLAN  
KOZINN**  
MUSIC  
REVIEW

through the set, the museum has engaged six ensembles, each to play a program drawing on music from different periods in Beethoven's life.

In a way, it is less a cycle than a quartet series with a theme. That might have been a serious objection 30 years ago, but these days we get a traditional Beethoven cycle nearly every season. We get plenty of unrelated quartet rings a refreshing variety to the Beethoven works and imposes a unifying purpose on the parade of quartets.

In the fourth installment of the series, on Thursday evening, the Leipzig String Quartet made an

### Leipzig String Quartet

Metropolitan Museum of Art

inarguable case for chronological mixing and matching. Starting with the gracefully intimate Quartet No. 3 in D (Op. 18, No. 3) and moving through the more extroverted No. 9 in C (Op. 59, No. 3) to the grandeur of No. 12 in E flat (Op. 127), the players gave a compressed but dramatic overview of Beethoven's steadily expanding harmonic and structural canvas.

To do that, this flexible ensemble reconfigured its sound for

each work: the distance was vast between the comfortably warm, rich tone it brought to the early D major Quartet and the otherworldly glow it drew from the finale of Opus 127. But the performances had interpretive points in common as well: the quartet's signature, in a sense. Its playing is nimble, fluid and finely nuanced, and it moves through technical difficulties as if they were no big deal.

The group was at its most magical in the slow movement of Opus 127, a dark-hued Adagio that in this reading seemed to have an unusual split focus. If you listened to the ensemble's beautifully balanced performance, you heard the movement as a gradually unfolding chord progression; but if you listened to the players' shapely, singing accounts of the individual lines, you

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*The Metropolitan Museum's Beethoven series continues with the Borealis String Quartet on April 2; (212) 570-3949, metmuseum.org.*

MELVIN  
KAPLAN  
INCORPORATED

115 COLLEGE STREET  
BURLINGTON, VERMONT 05401  
(802) 658-2592  
MUSIC@MELKAP.COM