



**FORGOTTEN MELODIES:
AN AFTERNOON OF RARELY HEARD MASTERPIECES**

Duet “With Two Obligato Eyeglasses” Wo032 **L. van Beethoven**
(1770–1827)

Ettore Causa, *viola*
Clive Greensmith, *cello*

Septet for Piano Trio and String Quartet (2008) **Ellen Taaffe Zwilich**
(b. 1939)

I. Introductions
II. Quasi una Passacaglia
III. Games
IV. Au revoir

Geoffrey Herd, *violin* Jinjoo Cho, *violin*
Max Geissler, *cello* Eric Wong, *violin*
Henry Kramer, *piano* Ettore Causa, *viola*
Clive Greensmith, *cello*

Piano Trio in D minor Op. 11 **Fanny Mendelssohn**
(1805–1847)

Allegro molto vivace
Andante espressivo
Lied: Allegretto
Allegretto moderato

Henry Kramer, *piano*
Geoffrey Herd, *violin*
Max Geissler, *cello*

– intermission –

String Quintet in C major, Op. 29 **L. van Beethoven**

Allegro moderato
Adagio molto espressivo
Scherzo. Allegro
Presto

Jinjoo Cho, *violin* Ettore Causa, *viola*
Geoffrey Herd, *violin* Eric Wong, *viola*
Clive Greensmith, *cello*

Sunday, May 23, 2021
Smith Opera House
2:00 pm

Even a composer as beloved and familiar as **Ludwig van Beethoven**, whose works were nearly ubiquitous as music lovers around the world celebrated his 250th birthday, can still offer some surprises. The ***Duet for Viola and Cello in E-flat Major***, in fact, remained entirely unknown until 1912, when the first movement, Allegro, was published for the first time. The second movement, meanwhile, was only discovered in 1948, but is rarely performed. The autograph manuscript (now held by the British Museum) bears an unusual moniker: “Duet with Two Obligato Eyeglasses.” What could Beethoven have meant by this strange title?

A possible answer can be found in contemporaneous letters between the composer and his friend, Baron Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovecz. In addition to supporting Beethoven (from gifting him wine to loaning him books), Zmeskall was an amateur cellist, and the two men often played together. In a letter of 1798, Beethoven alludes to their shared affliction of poor eyesight, jesting, “I am much obliged to you for the weakness of your eyes.” The two likely played this duet together (both wearing eyeglasses!), and the music certainly reflects this friendship: the two instruments converse, graciously trading elegant themes, supporting one another, and joining together in heartfelt, harmonic agreement. Despite the limited instrumentation, Beethoven nevertheless creates moments of great drama; an exploration of C minor resolves in a virtuosic viola solo, and further textural interest comes in the form of traded plucked and bowed passages.

Like Beethoven’s duet, **Ellen Taaffe Zwilich** explores two performing forces in her ***Septet***. Written for the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio and the Miami String Quartet in 2008, the Septet is entirely unique in its orchestration. As Zwilich describes, “I liked the idea of having two strong ensemble personalities in the mix, and I thought that there must be some sort of challenging interchange at the outset.” Indeed, the first movement, “Introductions,” features this process of reconciliation: the piano trio presents a bombastic thematic reference to Zwilich’s own *Piano Trio* (1987), which is contrasted with an eerie, unison melody intoned by the quartet, and adapted from her *String Quartet No. 2* (1998). Slowly, though, the differences between these opposing forces are musically resolved, and the septet becomes one integrated ensemble.

Throughout, Zwilich explores the unique capabilities of this combination of instruments, delighting in both the orchestral grandiosity of seven players and the intimacy of chamber music. In the second movement, “Quasi una Passacaglia,” the composer utilizes the eponymous Baroque compositional device: her modern ostinato (a repeating pattern) is introduced monophonically by the piano and cello before being traded among the instruments in various groupings. Zwilich plays too with performance practice; she alludes to the Baroque aesthetic by directing performers to play certain sections sans vibrato. Other parts, though, evolve into a full-throated, highly Romantic sound.

The third movement, perhaps in answer to these dueling styles, offers yet another option—the blues. As the title, “Games,” suggests, this movement features playful interplay of jazz-inspired motives, replete with the lowered tones characteristic of the blues scale and quasi-swung rhythms. In the final movement, aptly titled “Au revoir,” Zwilich reflects on the unique composition she’s crafted, returning to themes introduced in the first and second movements. As Zwilich herself describes, though the music comes to a quiet, A-Major conclusion, the performers are not so much saying “good-bye,” but rather “until we meet again.”

Long overshadowed by her brother, **Fanny Mendelssohn** has finally been recognized as a talented composer in her own right. That the two siblings were similarly musically skilled is without doubt; in a letter of 1825, the Romantic writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe described her as Felix’s “equally gifted sister.” This quote, while complimentary, reveals two themes that would plague Fanny not only throughout her life, but also remain a constant preoccupation now, over two and a half centuries after her death: her gender, and people’s predilection for comparison with Felix. Throughout her life, Fanny was constrained by social norms of the time, which discouraged women from engaging in professional and public engagements. Both her father and her brother cautioned Fanny against publishing her compositions; she managed to present her Opus 1 (a collection of songs) in 1846, only a year before her death at the age of forty-two. While she was a skilled pianist, she performed only privately for family and friends; as her father wrote in 1820, “Music will perhaps become [Felix’s] profession, whilst for you it can and must only be an ornament, never the root of your being and doing.”

Despite the circumstances, Fanny did continue to make music; her ***Piano Trio in D minor, op. 11*** was published posthumously in 1850. Continuing the long tradition of comparison, commentators often note the similarities (in key and motive) to Felix’s own *Piano Trio No. 1, Op. 49*. To do so, though, is to detract from Fanny’s originality and creativity. The first movement, Allegro molto vivace, is harmonically and formally adventurous; while the contrast of the two main melodies (a stormy, passionate first theme versus a lyrical second theme) is typical of sonata form, her harmonic meandering is daring, and often effaces formal moments of arrival. The middle movements both recall Fanny’s penchant for song; the second, Andante espressivo, is reminiscent of song in its melody (featuring a sweeping, arch-like contour) and texture (predominantly homophonic, with the melody taking center stage). The third is actually labeled “Lied” (German for “song”), and borrows an aria (“*So ihr mich von ganzem Herzen suchet*”/“If with all your hearts ye truly seek me”) from Felix’s oratorio *Elijah*, elaborating upon and adapting his melody. The final movement, Finale - Allegro moderato, begins with an extended piano solo, which becomes the principal theme of this rondo-like movement. Marked *ad libitum*, this opening

gives the performer the freedom to truly exhibit his or her artistry; we might imagine Fanny, confined in so many other ways, taking this opportunity to show off both her compositional and pianistic prowess.

Though Mozart's five string quintets (featuring two violins, two violas, and cello) remain standard repertoire, the same cannot be said for **Ludwig van Beethoven's** contribution to the genre. Composed in 1801, the ***String Quintet in C Major, Op. 29*** falls squarely between Beethoven's early and middle periods, when the composer's youthful, Classically inflected style ceded to the famed heroism and innovation of his maturity. It predates the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, a letter to his brothers conveying his despair over his increasing deafness and emotional isolation, by only a single year. Despite its chronological and stylistic importance, however, it remains infrequently performed and unjustly overlooked. The Quintet is reflective of its compositional circumstances: paradoxically, it is at once forward-looking and retrospective, and contrasts moments of great joy with those of extreme unpredictability (not for nothing, after all, has it been nicknamed "*Der Sturm*").

Even the first movement (Allegro) has a trick up its sleeve. The sonata form begins as one might expect: Beethoven crafts a lyrical, balanced first theme in the key of C major. The second theme, though, comes as something of a harmonic surprise. It unfolds in the unanticipated submediant key (A major), rather than the classically correct dominant (G major). The second movement, an expressive Adagio, makes full use of the sonorous richness of the additional viola, as a glorious, tender melody unspools over a lush accompaniment. If this movement is reminiscent of Mozart's melodic writing, the next is more compositionally novel. In this Scherzo, Beethoven transforms a tiny three-note motive into an unceasing whirlwind, passing it amongst all the instruments and repeating it in various key areas. In its motivic concision, it foreshadows Beethoven's later compositions. The finale, a blistering Presto, is similarly original, weaving together three main themes, exhibiting Beethoven's contrapuntal prowess (now fully formed), and finally, showcasing his formal and harmonic capriciousness once more.

– Anya Wilkening

