

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) String Quintet in C opus 29 (1801)

Apart from the ailing Haydn, Beethoven, in the early 1800s was the undisputed master composer of Europe. Uneducated (*"I do everything badly except compose"*), rough-mannered, but with an alluringly intense personality and of undoubted musical genius, he had managed to secure the patronage of Vienna's cosmopolitan aristocracy who enthusiastically purchased his chamber works. Yet he was deeply troubled. By 1801 he was aware that medicine could do nothing for his failing hearing and his hope of domestic happiness faded when his admiring 17-year old pupil Countess Giulietta Guicciardi declined to marry below her social station. The following year in a letter to his brothers (the Heiligenstadt Testament) he expressed his fear that his deafness and other ailments would prevent him realising his artistic potential. We will never know whether his deafness impaired or enhanced his artistic expression.

In this opus 29 quintet, however, there is no evidence of anguish. His sense of humour bubbles. It is the only original string quintet he wrote (two others are transcriptions of other pieces). It lies between the early (op 18) and middle (op 59) quartets in both time and style.