

## Miró Quartet to visit Oberlin's Artist Recital Series on March 10

by Mike Telin



“Northeast Ohio is an important place for the quartet. We’ve spent a lot of time there,” Miró Quartet cellist Joshua Gindele said during a telephone conversation from his studio at the University of Texas Butler School of Music, where the ensemble is Quartet in Residence. “We formed the original group in 1995 when we were students at Oberlin. Then we studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music and later taught at Kent State University, so we know a lot of people in the area.”

On Thursday, March 10 at 8:00 pm in Finney Chapel, Gindele and his current [Miró Quartet](#) colleagues — violinists Daniel Ching and William Fedkenheuer, and violist John Largess — will return to the area for a performance on the Oberlin Artist Recital Series. The program will feature Beethoven’s three Op. 59 “Razumovsky” Quartets.

In addition to teaching, the Miró keeps a busy concert calendar as well: over the next few weeks, the quartet will be presenting concerts in Phoenix, Philadelphia, Edmonton, Indianapolis, and Kalamazoo. On April 7 they will perform the three string quartets of Alberto Ginastera at the Rose Studio for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

Gindele said that the quartet is looking forward to the Oberlin program. “It’s a program we’ve been doing for a number of years. It’s really interesting to hear the Razumovskys back-to-back-to-back. Although they were written in a similar timeframe, with similar ideals in mind — the Russian themes and such — all three quartets are incredibly different from one another. Because of that, the program doesn’t come off as being dogmatic or repetitive.”

Gindele also credits Beethoven's Op. 59 quartets for providing him with a job. "These are the pieces that made the professional string quartet possible. At the time they were written, they were so difficult that performing them required professional players who had the time and energy to rehearse on a regular basis. So I do attribute our entire career to these works."

Thursday's program will open with the *Quartet in F Major*, Op. 59, No. 1. "When Beethoven wrote it, it was the longest quartet ever written," Gindele pointed out. "He was experimenting with form and harmony, and creating different textural things that harkened back to some of his earlier works while still being revolutionary." The program will continue with the *Quartet in E Minor*, Op. 59, No. 2, which Gindele described as dark and full of tension, as well as a little frantic. He said the concluding work, *Quartet in C Major*, Op. 59, No. 3, is the "most classical" of the three. "It's the shortest, and it has a 'proper' minuet and trio. There's a fugue in the final movement, which is something that Haydn did a lot. It actually reminds me a lot of Mozart's quartet K. 387. They're similar in structure and sound quality."

Does Gindele think the Razumovsky works foreshadow the composer's late quartets? "I think Beethoven set out to do something revolutionary with these pieces. He started with something that he thought was symphonic and epic, but then turned back to his classical roots. I find that Op. 127, which is the first of the late quartets, reminds me a lot of Op. 59, No. 1. So I do think there are some similarities between them. The C# minor Op. 131, with its driving rhythm in the last movement, is almost identical to Op. 59, No. 2."

Like the composer's piano sonatas, Gindele said that you can trace Beethoven's life and his changes in compositional style through his cycle of quartets. "That's one of the things that makes playing the entire cycle such a rewarding experience: you really get to hear his development as a human — and sometimes even his regression as a composer. But you hear his life differently in the quartets than you do in the piano sonatas."

Gindele believes those differences stem from the fact that Beethoven was a keyboard player. "This may sound a little contrarian, but I think the quartets were his way of expressing his most intimate feelings. I don't think he felt as personally connected to the string quartet as he did to the piano, so he wrote what he wanted to, not necessarily what he thought was possible. I find this to be true of a lot of composers: they write very idiomatic, affected works for their own instrument — sometimes to a fault — but they write more personal works for the instruments that they know but they don't play themselves."

Currently in their 14th year at the Butler School of Music, Gindele said the quartet is now entrenched in the culture of the city. “When we arrived, Austin was known as a music city, a real hotbed for musicians, but that was mostly country, singer-songwriter, and rock and roll, so there was a lot of potential for growth in the classical music scene. It’s been fun because we’ve really been able to establish a great core audience here. As a result, the level at the school of music has really grown, as has the support for young musicians. Austin still has that grit it’s famous for, but I think that’s a good thing.”

One event that really brings Austin to life each year is the annual South by Southwest festival. “It’s the best time to be in Austin. It is a fantastic festival and the weather is always beautiful. I would have loved to go this year, but unfortunately we’ll be out of town next week. I have gone and spoken at the festival a few times.”

It’s fitting that the quartet ended up in Austin, as Gindele has performed with several country stars. “That was in a former life during my student days,” he joked. “But there is a little intersection in the quartet because Will Fedkenheuer, our second violinist, was a former National Fiddling Champion of Canada. He use to travel around the world performing with country stars in bars and clubs and concert halls, even in 30,000-seat arenas. He and I joke about that all the time. So I wouldn’t say it has completely disappeared from our lives, but it certainly has diminished.”

Josh Gindele said that he looks forward to Thursday’s concert and for the opportunity to be back in Oberlin. “It’s one of those special places. I’ve always loved it and extolled its virtues. I was lucky enough to be there at an extra-special time. A lot of phenomenal groups originated during that period — the Pacifica Quartet, eighth blackbird, also Jenny Koh — just a lot of really great artists. I think we all kind of fed off of each other’s energy and that’s what made it such a special environment.”

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