

Miró Quartet to perform Beethoven Cycle for Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival

by Mike Telin



In case anyone has forgotten, 2020 is the 250th anniversary of the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven. And while COVID-19 has interrupted most of the performances that were planned to honor the composer, at least one celebration will go on. But not without some redesigns.

Beginning on Thursday, July 16 and continuing through August 8, the [Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival](#) will

present Beethoven's complete string quartet cycle as performed by the [Miró Quartet](#). The concerts will be streamed live in real time from a private venue in the Quartet's base in Austin, Texas. For a complete schedule and to purchase tickets, click [here](#).

Like most musicians and ensembles, the Miró — Daniel Ching and William Fedkenheuer (violins), John Largess (viola), and Joshua Gindele (cello) — began their unplanned hiatus in mid-March. Soon after, the Quartet began thinking about what the future held.

“We just assumed that we wouldn't play again until 2021,” Gindele said during a recent interview. “We're in a business where people have to gather in spaces and be close together, and we realized we were not going to get through this quickly. We had some meetings where we spent a lot of time thinking, asking questions, and planning how we were going to move forward.”

As a result of those meetings, the Miró came to the conclusion that they could musically contribute as long as they established rules that would keep them safe.

“We’ve worked together for 25 years,” Gindele said, “and our relationship has always been built on trust. We had a lot of discussions about what people felt their threshold was in terms of safety and where the risks were in terms of the whole group’s environment, like our families. If we had elderly people who are close to us and might need to see us for any reason. If spouses or children have any underlying health risks that may be problematic if they were to contract COVID. Whoever was the most conservative in any of these issues, we adopted their view. Except for one member, we all had external risks with family members and partners that could become problematic, so it wasn’t a hard decision to make.”

During this same time, the Quartet’s manager John Zion of MKI Artists and tech entrepreneur Gregory Pine began developing the streaming platform [Ourconcerts.live](https://www.ourconcerts.live), which allows for high-end streaming and high-definition video, as well as managing and processing ticket sales. The Orcas Island Festival will use this platform to present the concerts.

“John thought it would be an effective way to mitigate the losses of artists, series, and festivals,” Gindele said. “He knew that we’d be open to helping with tests and acting as a soundboard for what could work. Gregory Pine is violinist Rachel Barton Pine’s husband, and she was also involved in making sure this thing was functioning and working well.”

And how did the Orcas Island performances come about? “We were supposed to perform the Beethoven cycle in June,” Gindele explained. “That was cancelled, but they still hadn’t decided whether they were going to go ahead with the Festival in August. Somebody said that maybe we could still do the cycle for the 250th anniversary and maybe that could act as the Festival. It was a natural development that seemed to make sense.”

In addition to the twelve quartet-cycle concerts, Orcas Island will also include a thirteenth “Encore” performance featuring other Festival artists playing from their homes or educational institutions.

And how did it feel on June 8, when the Miró held their first rehearsal since the middle of March? “Honestly, it was as if we hadn’t left. As we’ve gone through our career, our ability to come back, be in a comfortable place, and sound good quickly gets shorter and shorter. But I do think we all breathed a collective sigh of relief the first time we heard a

chord come out of the ensemble. It wasn't just about the music, it was also about being around other people — it felt cathartic.”

When asked what listeners will gain from hearing the cycle performed in order of composition, the cellist said that it simply reveals the development of Beethoven. “It speaks to his experiences in life, from being this young hotshot pianist to becoming this king of classical music in Vienna — to the point that he’s writing music that’s not received well and is sort of ahead of its time. For us it’s like looking at Degas from his first output all the way through in the order in which his works were conceived. You can see the development, and I think with Beethoven it’s extraordinary to watch, and hear.”

Of the sixteen Quartets, does Gindele have a personal favorite? “There are moments when a certain slow movement will catch me, and I’ll listen to it for a couple of weeks. But the piece that sticks with me the most is the *Große Fuge*. I think it was and is an absolute work of genius. I also happened to write a thesis on it so I’m intimately engaged with it from a compositional standpoint.”

Gindele also relishes in the story surrounding the *Große Fuge* — it was booed at the premiere and the publisher said it shouldn’t be presented in public. “Beethoven did get it published as a separate Opus Number. And there are his great quotes like, ‘I don’t care about your silly little violin, this is music for the future.’ I just love all the lore around it.”

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