

Beethoven's string quartets are so popular, they are regularly performed as a full cycle and are a staple of string repertoire. Yet, who were the performers who brought these pieces from the private salons of Vienna's upper class to public concert halls around the world? At the turn of the 19th century, performances were mostly concerned with an exclusive upper class tradition, supported and maintained by the imperial court and members of the nobility. It was in these circumstances that Beethoven's first set of quartets, Opus 18, were premiered at Prince Lichnowsky's palace. The ensemble consisted of Ignaz Schuppanzigh 1st violin, Louis Sina 2nd violin, Franz Weiss viola and Nikolaus Kraft cello. Schuppanzigh is a figure that is closely linked with Beethoven's quartets. He was most likely Beethoven's violin teacher around 1794 and also premiered most of Beethoven's string quartets. Beethoven had a jovial relationship with Schuppanzigh, calling him "Falstaff" and even writing a choral piece in 1801 titled *Lob auf den Dicken* (*Praise to Fatness*), due to Schuppanzigh's portly appearance. In late 1804, Schuppanzigh formed a professional quartet with the aim of presenting public concerts, a Viennese first. These early concerts, where Op 59 was premiered, were still held in private houses or restaurant halls, with audiences only numbering around 100. The relative difficulty of the Op 59 quartets led to an increase in the role of professional performers, but amateur ensembles soon took up the challenge. Similar reactions were seen in the reviews of Op 74 and Op 95. Schuppanzigh is also credited with increasing Beethoven's popularity internationally. In 1816 he moved to St Petersburg, Russia, where he successfully introduced Beethoven's chamber music and orchestral works to the public. After his return to Vienna, he was left with the task of premiering Opuses 127, 130, 132 and 135 at his subscription concerts, the final quartet being premiered after Beethoven's death.

Post 1827, the late quartets (Op 127-135) became increasingly popular as new quartet ensembles were established. Karl Möser established a string quartet in Berlin and his concert series were popular from 1825 to 1843, regularly playing Beethoven quartets. The Gewandhaus concerts that took place in Leipzig were another popular series that featured Beethoven quartets. At the Gewandhaus, audience sizes numbered up to 1000 from 1780 to the 1860s. It was here that Ferdinand David (1810-1873) headed a string quartet, regularly playing Beethoven quartets in concert circumstances similar to today. Modern links can be made with David, through his student Joseph Joachim, who in turn influenced Adolf Busch, founder of the Busch Quartet. Historic recordings of the Busch Quartet performing Beethoven date from the 1930's, when they recorded the entire string quartet cycle. Other notable recordings that have been made of the complete cycle include those by the Hungarian and Amadeus String Quartets as well as the Lindsay, Alban Berg Quartets and the Quartetto Italiano. The earliest recording of Beethoven string quartets that can still be found today are those made in 1926 by the Lener Quartet.

In Russia, one of the earliest examples of playing the entire Beethoven string quartet cycle comes from the first half of the nineteenth century. Prince Kastriot of Mogiljev had a domestic string quartet ensemble, consisting of young players who were given the task of studying and performing all sixteen quartets, including Op 133. The growing popularity of Beethoven's quartets can also be seen in the number of arrangements made and publicly performed. In 1832, Chopin heard the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra's strings play a Beethoven quartet, while in Dresden, 1837, chamber musician F. Kummer presented an orchestral symphony arrangement of Op 74. Richard Goldner, the Romanian violinist who founded Musica Viva in Australia, also carried on this tradition and used a 17-member string orchestra to play string quartets. The first chamber group of note to perform Beethoven music in Australia was that of John Deane's, founded in Hobart in 1824, and located in Sydney from 1836. However, the Austral String Quartet and the Verbrugghen Quartet, both founded in the early twentieth century, established the professional concert series of chamber music that are enjoyed today. The Sydney String Quartet and the Melbourne String Quartet both have performed the complete cycle. Australian audiences have also heard the cycle played by international ensembles, including the Tel Aviv, Hungarian, Smetana and more recently, Chilingarian Quartets. Today, the Beethoven cycle of quartets are

regularly heard by thousands across the world, many who would agree with Beethoven when he wrote “I know no greater enjoyment in the country than quartet music” (July, 1813).