

Score Review

Franz Weiss, *Two String Quartets Op. 8 ('Razumovsky')*, edited by Mark Ferraguto. Recent Researches in the Music of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries, 90 (Middleton: A-R Editions, 2023), xxiii + 219 pp. \$280

If Ludwig van Beethoven is a composer whose abundant performing activities are usually mentioned incidentally, then Franz Weiss (1778–1830) is the reverse. Today more often known as the violist of the Schuppanzigh Quartet, which premiered many of Beethoven's most celebrated quartets, Weiss and his compositions have received scant attention in the almost two centuries since his death.¹ In a new edition edited by Mark Ferraguto, two of Weiss's most substantial string quartets are finally receiving their due. Ferraguto's edition joins others under the umbrella of A-R Editions's *String Quartets in Beethoven's Europe*, a series-within-a-series that includes newly edited editions of quartets by Louis Spohr, Ferdinand Ries, Pierre Rode, Andreas Romberg, and other contemporaries of Beethoven.

Weiss's two Op. 8 string quartets display both depth of creativity and originality within the genre, an inventiveness no doubt shaped by many years 'on the inside' as a violist in the service of Prince Lichnowsky and Count Razumovsky. As Ferraguto approvingly notes in the introduction to this edition, 'Weiss' quartets from Op. 8 onward embody many of the qualities associated with Beethoven's middle-period quartets', although he is also quick to point out that these works are by no means derivative and display a style of Weiss's own (xii). Weiss does not shy away from giving his musical ideas plenty of space to unfurl. The first movement of Op. 8 no. 2 is an expansive sonata form of 587 bars (not counting the indicated exposition repeat), full of counterpoint and suffused with a C minor mood that lives up to its *Allegro agitato* designator. Another point of interest in Op. 8 no. 2 is Weiss's use of violin harmonics, an innovation in the genre that belongs alongside the pizzicato of Beethoven's 'Harp' quartet, Op. 74 in the pantheon of striking timbral quartet effects. These flutelike harmonics are used to particular effect in the retransition of the first movement of Op. 8 no. 2, where they hover over an atmospheric ground of pizzicato in the second violin and cello and tremolo in the viola, an instance that displays Weiss's sensitivity to form and pacing, especially in what is perhaps an overlong movement. It's the kind of effect that is difficult to apprehend with harmonic analysis, but unmistakably fresh upon hearing.² The first of Weiss's two Op. 8 quartets, G major, is less weighty than its counterpart, but replete with enough tenderly lyrical moments and lightly virtuosic backflips to please any quartet player or listener.

¹ The significant exception to this lack of scholarly attention is Mark Ferraguto's chapter on Weiss's Op. 8 quartets in the context of the development of Viennese connoisseur culture in the early nineteenth century. Mark Ferraguto, 'The Other "Razumovsky" Quartets: Franz Weiss's Op. 8 and the Formation of Vienna's *Kennerpublikum*', in *String Quartets in Beethoven's Europe*, ed. Nancy November (Brookline: Academic Studies Press, 2022): 130–69.

² Readers interested in a more thorough exegesis of Op. 8 no. 2 are directed to the movement-by-movement analysis in Mark Ferraguto, 'The Other "Razumovsky" Quartets', 144–66.

Ferraguto's editing is appropriately even-handed: in many cases, editorial additions to the score are indicated by dotted lines, parentheses, brackets, and typographical emphasis, providing the performer or analyst with transparency in considering what is 'original' and what is added. Among the challenges faced in preparing this edition is the dearth of original sources. The only available historical source for Weiss's Op. 8 quartets are the original parts published by S.A. Steiner in Vienna in 1814. Early chamber music parts are notoriously error-riddled; in a critical edition of Beethoven, for instance, the first published parts would typically be found third or fourth on a long list of primary sources, preceded in priority by autographs, corrected copies, and so on. Ferraguto handles this documentary deficiency with aplomb, thoroughly noting each seemingly inadvertently missed (or added) dot, slur, and rest. Some dynamic subtleties are tacitly altered (e.g., regularized among parts or extended to the ends of phrases), a decision which, while possibly objectionable in the context of preparing an edition from more reliable sources, does have the benefit of clarity here. The result of these editorial efforts is a clean and lucid score, suitable for both study and rehearsal. Parts for these quartets are also available separately from A-R Editions, which one can only hope will be an impetus to performances both amateur and professional.

Aside from their intrinsic musical and historical worth, Weiss's quartets and biography provide an interesting case study in the immense weight of the Great Man, the quasi-gravitational pull of Beethoven. Even the way Weiss's quartets are presented – with the subtitle 'Razumovsky' – feels less a nod to their dedicatee than it is a reference to Beethoven's three Op. 59 'Razumovsky' quartets, which the composer dedicated to the same Russian nobleman seven years earlier. This subtitle for Weiss's quartets and its intended reference is not a modern invention, although its prominence in Ferraguto's edition was hardly a foregone decision. The title page for the first edition parts, helpfully reproduced in the introduction of this new edition, lavishly proclaims the works' dedicatee (xix). Ferraguto notes that this page, which includes the Razumovsky family crest and motto, was modelled after the title page of Beethoven's own 'Razumovsky' quartets (xii). Foregrounding the connection between Weiss's and Beethoven's quartets is a clever piece of marketing in both a historical and a contemporary sense (one imagines a concert or a recording programming both composers' 'Razumovsky' quartets). It is also clear evidence that Weiss's life and career are unavoidably tied to Beethoven to an unusual extent, a fact that seems to have been true in Weiss's lifetime as it is with the benefit of hindsight.

Considering the extent of Weiss's connection to Beethoven – the Schuppanzigh quartet's long-standing relationship with the composer, the dedications to Count Razumovsky, the comparative terms in which Weiss's creativity is described by writers of his time and ours – one might reasonably ask: Does the historical figure of Franz Weiss exist without the historical figure of Beethoven? It would be expedient for the project of canon-critique to say that the answer is yes, that this is yet another instance of putting Beethoven at the centre of our discussions when it need not be so. The fact is that, in the case of Franz Weiss, the answer is likely no. This fact says far more about how the music-historical record is constructed than it does about the quality of the composer's work. What documentary information we have on Weiss is thoroughly mediated by both Beethoven the man and Beethoven the music. Even Weiss's 1830 death notice (shared with his colleague Ignaz Schuppanzigh, whom Weiss predeceased by about six weeks) in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* primarily mentions the violist's relationship with

Beethoven.³ If Beethoven had not been who he was, his value not inscribed and reinscribed in two centuries of performance and reception, the likelihood that we would ever have heard of Franz Weiss or his quartets is exceedingly low. However, despite what canonicity would try to tell us, music does not accrue its value relationally: Weiss's music is neither more nor less worthwhile for its proximity or perceived indebtedness to Beethoven.

Even amidst the enormously valuable and wide-ranging scholarly efforts to decentre Great Men in our visions of musicology, to expand what is seen as worthy of study, to interrogate and perhaps dismantle the canon, we nevertheless find ourselves staring again at the plaster bust of Beethoven on the lid of the piano. One still feels that the Europe that these lesser-known masters inhabited was, as the series puts it, Beethoven's Europe. The solution to the persistence of the canon is neither to surrender wholly to its seemingly inevitable pull nor to underplay its role in the construction of what we know as 'music history'. The lesson of Franz Weiss is one about how history is written, how long-neglected gems are 'unearthed', about the efforts that must be undertaken to look beyond the canon even as we harvest its fruits. Weiss the historical figure may not exist without Beethoven, but Weiss the musician did. Perhaps the only way to meet Weiss on his own terms is to play and hear his music – an endeavour that, happily, is now more possible than ever.

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³ 'Nachrichten', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 32, no. 19 (May 12, 1830): 297. Cited Ferraguto's edition, xii.