**MOOD: BLOG**

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**Interview: The Miró Quartet**

by Erin Yousef, Music Design

When you think of Austin music, string quartets probably aren’t what immediately come to mind, but Austin’s vibrant classical music scene is alive and thriving. The Miró Quartet is an award-winning, internationally renowned string quartet based in Austin and I was lucky enough to chat with them about their music.

The Miró Quartet has performed around the world in some of the most celebrated concert halls, including Carnegie Hall and the Lincoln Center. When they aren’t busy performing or recording, Daniel, William, John, and Joshua teach at the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas at Austin where they have served as quartet-in-residence since 2003. Describing Austin’s classical music scene as “intimate” when they first arrived in the city, they explain that it has grown significantly in their time here “because the environment in Austin embraces classical music.” They praise the fact that “the community is so supportive of musicians and classical music” as “a real testament to the city.” The Miró Quaret is certainly a fixture in Austin’s ever-expanding classical music scene.

The group’s latest offering is a recording of Beethoven’s Op. 131 string quartet, part of their Beethoven series. They’ve been recording Beethoven quartets for the past 13 years and they intend to release all of them in 2020, Beethoven’s 250th anniversary. They explain that Beethoven’s quartets were written over the course of his life and thus reflect a very personal view of his life, something they describe as “a very human journey for us as performers…sort of like living someone’s life through music.” They have performed the complete Beethoven string quartet cycle, giving several concerts over the course of 10 days and playing the pieces in chronological order, something they plan to do again in 2020. This offers a unique journey to the listener as the quartet aims “to tell the story of his life, of what he was going through, what he was experiencing, what the world was like…and connect the audience to the music that way and give them a real personal experience of this great man, great composer’s life.”

Op. 131 is particularly poignant as it was written in the last year of Beethoven’s life in the months leading up to a “climactic breakdown” of his relationship with his nephew and ward, Karl. What was once a close father/son relationship deteriorated and about a week after Beethoven finished Op. 131, Karl attempted suicide. “To have a piece of music created during the context of this kind of family relationship unfolding is a pretty unique thing and there are definitely elements of that stress, that struggle, that suffering, that pain, as well as looking for redemption, finding joy, finding humor in this Op. 131 quartet.”

Recorded in Bastyr University Chapel in Seattle, the recording process was guided by their “very salty” engineer and producer Da-Hong Seetoo, who is also a very well-trained musician and “not afraid to kind of let you have it.” With a relationship going back 15 years, the quartet places a great deal of trust in him. “He really is the arbiter of whether we sound good or not.”

Describing themselves as “four very strong personalities,” strong interpersonal skills are a must for a group of four to work so closely together and achieve continued success. “We are entirely non-hierarchical.” So many artistic decisions are at play when preparing a musical work, and to work cohesively together requires a great deal of respect and humility. They take the time to try everyone’s ideas to see what works best.

“Coming to decisions, unified decisions is tricky and it’s something that we’ve spent 23 years working on, and in the end we’ve realized that all of our goal is to just make things sound great, and when you realize that and you have respect within the group for everybody, and you respect all of your colleagues, you realize that even if they disagree with you, their goal is the same as yours.”

When asked about memorable experiences throughout their careers, they turn to the “more intimate, personal concerts” where they felt most connected to the audience. The quartet played an intimate concert for 12-13 people in someone’s home the night before a large concert in Portland and pointed to that as an example of how an intimate concert can be the most meaningful.

“Connecting directly through the music with somebody who is only four or five feet away…this music, even the most ‘high falutin’ Beethoven will do that in a very personal, intimate way, particularly in a space like that, so we’re happy to bring the music into any spaces, and to any people that want to hear it. We are always looking for new ways to bring it to people as opposed to just the concert hall or even just the recording.”

For most of us, the concert hall or recording will have to suffice. Luckily, the Miró Quartet is offering their latest album, Beethoven’s Op. 131, as a [free download](http://miroquartet.com/music/recordings/beethoven-opus-131) until May 1st. This generosity is not surprising – after speaking with them, it was clear that their passion is simply to share beautiful music.