

***The “Galitzin” Quartets of Beethoven*, by Daniel K. L. Chua. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.**

**Review by William Kinderman**

Daniel Chua's study of Beethoven's three "Galitzin" Quartets (op. 127, op. 132, op. 130/133) seeks to locate musical analysis in a post-structuralist realm, in which a "process of increasing disintegration"—involving a resistance of the aesthetic object to rational elucidation—is interpreted as implying a radical critique of music and society. The general approach is strongly indebted to Theodor W. Adorno and Joseph Kerman, the two authors most cited in the book. As Chua puts it, Adorno's diagnosis of Beethoven's late style regards these works as "shatter[ing] the unity and coherence of the middle-period style... becom[ing] critiques of the very language that they use, pointing to some kind of failure that is ultimately traced to society" (pp. 5–6). In his well-known 1967 study, *The Beethoven Quartets*, Kerman emphasized the notion of "dissociation" in this music, particularly in the Quartet in B $\flat$  major, op. 130/133, for which Beethoven wrote a substitute finale in 1826 to replace the original final movement, the colossal "Great Fugue" (*Große Fuge*). In this context, it seems somewhat arbitrary that Chua does not analyze the two final quartets, op. 131 in C $\sharp$  minor and op. 135 in F major, especially in light of his rejection of the received opinion that these subsequent pieces embody a kind of reconstruction or "reintegration" (p. 4). Indeed, Kerman heavily stressed the notion of "integration" in his discussion of the C $\sharp$ -minor Quartet.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>It is strange that in rejecting the notion of reconstruction or reintegration in favor of the view that "the progress of the 'Galitzin Quartets' had simply reached a point of stasis" (p. 4), Chua cites negatively only an article by Amanda Glauert ("The Double Perspective in Beethoven's Opus 131," *19th Century Music* 4 (1980)) but not studies by Kerman or others that have validated the integrative features of this work. Such studies include John Edward Crotty, *Design and Harmonic Organization in Beethoven's String Quartet, Opus 131* (PhD dissertation, University of Rochester, 1986), and Donald Francis Tovey's essay "Some Aspects of Beethoven's Art Forms" in *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 271–97.

Nevertheless, Chua is surely right that the two finales of the B $\flat$  Quartet represent the “opposition of progress and history—a fundamental conflict that afflicts *all* the late quartets” (p. 4).

Any such study has empirical as well as purely analytical aspects, inasmuch as the historical sources and background of previous scholarship inevitably shape the frame of reference. The historical facts are not always related accurately here. In the very first paragraph of the introduction, for instance, Chua cites Prince Galitzin’s reaction after the first quartet “arrived at St. Petersburg in 1823” (p. 3). This is incorrect. The E $\flat$ -major Quartet, op. 127, did not yet exist in 1823 and was sent to Galitzin only in 1825—the same year that the A-minor Quartet op. 132 and the following Quartet in B $\flat$ , op. 130/133—in its original, “Galitzin” version, with the *Große Fuge* as finale—were composed. The author seems unacquainted with some relevant studies of the works in question, especially those in the German language. Two conspicuous omissions are source studies by Sieghard Brandenburg and Klaus Kropfinger that have shed new light on the genesis of op. 127 and op. 130/133, respectively. Brandenburg unearthed evidence from manuscripts that the E $\flat$  Quartet was planned in six movements, suggesting that Beethoven was already contemplating an overall formal design foreshadowing that of the C $\sharp$ -minor Quartet, op. 131.<sup>2</sup> Kropfinger examined the compositional genesis of the original “Galitzin” version of the B $\flat$  Quartet in detail, contributing thereby to the ongoing debate about the merits of each version.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Sieghard Brandenburg, “Die Quellen zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Beethovens Streichquartett Es-Dur Op. 127,” *Beethoven-Jahrbuch* X (1983: 221–76).

<sup>3</sup>Klaus Kropfinger, “Das gespaltenen Werk—Beethovens Streichquartett Op. 130/133,” *Beiträge zu Beethovens Kammermusik: Symposium Bonn 1984*, ed. Sieghard Brandenburg and Helmut Loos (Munich, 1987), 296–335. For more recent perspectives on this work and its two finales, see Barry Cooper, *Beethoven and the Creative Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 197–214; Richard Kramer, “Between Cavatina and Overture: Opus 130 and the Voices of Narrative,” *Beethoven Forum* I (1992): 165–189; and my study *Beethoven* (Oxford and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 299–307.

In the E<sup>b</sup> Quartet, op. 127, Chua finds a "redefinition of the basics of composition—motifs, counterpoint, and form" (p. 10). Yet he does not justify this claim in terms of a substantial change in compositional technique from Beethoven's earlier works. Here, as elsewhere, the critical strategy employed is to avoid premature categorization and embrace defamiliarization in accordance with the idea that the authority of analysis is limited: "a kind of role reversal is necessary, where theory half-relinquishes its power and allows the work to control the discourse and unsettle analysis" (p. 6). "If the critical force of these quartets is to be preserved, then analysis must become a struggle between a theory that encloses the work and a work that disables theory" (p. 9). With such richly complex music, it is certainly fitting to acknowledge the limits of analytic methods and to encourage a flexible or even eclectic critical approach. At the same time, it seems evident that the limits of analysis cannot be determined *a priori* but are empirically determined and fully dependent on the nature of the music and the interests and engagement of the critic. These boundaries manifest themselves through a lack of insight or explanatory power of analysis when confronted with artistic complexity—limits arising from a resistance of the work to conceptualization and elucidation.

Such limits need to be tested and discovered, not assumed in advance. In his discussion of op. 127, Chua draws these boundaries prematurely, thereby underestimating the potential of analysis. For instance, his approach in analyzing the great *Adagio* variation movement is based almost exclusively on motivic/thematic relations and their contrapuntal unfolding. Other dimensions of the music, such as the character and formal design, are ignored, which impoverishes the critical context of the discussion. It is entirely characteristic of Beethoven that the theme opening this movement be treated not simply as a melody to be varied, but as a polyphonic entity. Significant as well is the expressive affinity of this lyrical theme to the *Benedictus* of the *Missa solemnis*, as has been pointed out by Warren Kirkendale.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Warren Kirkendale, "New Roads to Old Ideas in Beethoven's '*Missa solemnis*,'" *Musical Quarterly* 61 (1970): 690–691.

Especially distinctive in this slow movement is Beethoven's handling of tonality and form. At the center of the movement is the E-major variation, which Chua blandly describes as "reduced to the most skeletal aspects of the theme" (p. 17). In his view, "what seems to happen after the obscurities of the central variation in E major is a free play of invertible and mirror counterpoint, no longer tied to the structure" (p. 24). As critical engagement with this extraordinary music, these comments are merely formalistic and schematic, and they do not build on the current state of analytical thought on the work. What Chua misses is that the fourth variation has assumed the role of decorated recapitulation, glorified by canonic writing that is indeed very closely "tied to the structure." Furthermore, the tonal plan of the movement—with excursions to E major in Variation 3 and to D $\flat$  major/C $\sharp$  minor in a later episode—is not simply "very peculiar" (p. 25) with contrasting keys presented "as fissures in the form," since both of these passages are followed by recapitulatory variations in the tonic. The broader point is that here Beethoven has combined aspects of sonata procedure with the variation chain. The strong tonal and thematic contrast is balanced by integrating forces.

Also noteworthy is the parallel between this movement and the Finale of the Ninth Symphony, whose variation chain is similarly enriched by tonal digressions, first to the key of  $\flat$ VI, B $\flat$  major (at the "Turkish" music), and subsequently to IV, G (at "*Seid umschlungen Millionen*"). On the level of musical character and symbolism, there is a striking parallel here between the E-major variation in op. 127 and the musical setting of the very last line of Schiller's text in the Ninth symphony, alluding to the deity: "Above the stars he must dwell."<sup>5</sup> Here as in other late works by

<sup>5</sup>After this point in the Finale, Beethoven reuses earlier parts of the text, avoiding repetition of the climactic final line. For a more detailed discussion of this relationship, see my article "Tonality and Form in the Variation Movements of Beethoven's Late Quartets," in *Beiträge zu Beethovens Kammermusik*, ed. Sieghard Brandenburg and Helmut Loos (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1987), 145–150. Also see my study "Streichquartett Es-Dur op. 127," in *Beethoven: Interpretationen seiner Werke*, ii, ed. Albrecht Reithmüller, Carl Dahlhaus, and Alexander Ringer (Laaber: Laaber, 1994), 278–291.

Beethoven (such as the end of the Arietta movement in op. 111), there is an upward-reaching registral climax that demands to be heard as a gesture, not merely as a structure. This part of op. 127 is not well described as a "fissure" in the artistic work indicative of alienation, but on the contrary, is imbued with affirmative and even utopian tendencies.

Analytical weaknesses also mar the discussion of Beethoven's last sonatas included in chapter 2, entitled "Unity and Disunity." Chua finds that "decorative element of trills, scales, turns, and arpeggios" such as are found in the Arietta movement of the last Sonata in C minor, op. 111 are "normally empty clichés" (p. 76); the arpeggiated passages in measures 12–14 of the Sonata in E major, op. 109, "seem to be an incomprehensible gesture... in the guise of a vacuously ornamental cadenza." These glib descriptions are given little or no analytical justification. Chua's thesis that part of op. 111 contains "only a mass of ornamentation" that is "destructive of aesthetic wholeness" is not argued, only asserted here. What is not mentioned is the way that Beethoven's gradual rhythmic intensification and registral expansion prepare the "decorative elements," which are indeed structurally related to the original theme. Here again, as in op. 127, there is a climactic modulation away from the tonic, to E<sup>b</sup> major, at the unfolding of multiple trills; before a new textural and rhythmic stage is reached in the recapitulatory fourth variation. Various published studies have examined these and other related aspects of this music, but Chua makes no references to the relevant literature. His description of the beginning of the *Adagio espressivo* in the first movement of op. 109 as "a disjunction between a theme (bars 9–11) and its 'ornamental essence'" (p. 76) misses the point, and shows deficient handling of basic analytical terminology. These three measures contain not a "theme," but a fantasy-like progression highlighting the linear descending third A–G<sup>#</sup>–F<sup>x</sup>–F<sup>#</sup>; the elaboration of this idea in the following bars generates the rhythmic and harmonic momentum needed to unlock the cadence on the dominant—the structural goal that had been cut off at the outset of the *Adagio*. There is no real "disjunction" in this passage. Disjunction occurs three measures earlier at the

interrupted cadence, where the opening *Vivace* in  $\frac{2}{4}$  meter is suddenly discontinued, dovetailed with the contrasting *Adagio* material in  $\frac{3}{4}$  meter.

The most successful parts of Chua's book are probably the discussions of the Quartets in A minor, op. 132, and B $\flat$ , op. 130/133. It is here that the emphasis on discontinuities and fissures fits most convincingly with the music; Kerman wrote that the *Heiliger Dankgesang* and *Neue Kraft* sections in the middle movement of op. 132 embody "contrast more profoundly than any previous piece of music."<sup>6</sup> Still, for this reader the best available discussion of "unity and disunity" in the *Heiliger Dankgesang* is found in Kevin Korsyn's recent article "J. W. N. Sullivan and the *Heiliger Dankgesang*: Questions in Meaning in Late Beethoven."<sup>7</sup> Korsyn has a much surer grasp of the analytical and aesthetic issues and the relevant literature, and he avoids the overwriting and exaggeration that too often blemishes Chua's prose. Whereas Korsyn confines his attention only to the *Heiliger Dankgesang*, Chua does venture a provocative assessment of the piece as a whole, stressing as always a lack of connectedness or integration:

Nothing really follows anything logically; everything contrasts through non-response and non-reaction, and effects are apparently without cause. This cancellation of causality is tantamount to the cancellation of Charles Rosen's "Classical style" (p. 161).

As summary comment on the narrative design of this remarkable composition, this assessment is superficial, and the conclusion overblown. Chua himself acknowledges the impressive role of the "F-E relationship" that motivates "thematic, harmonic, and structural elements of the first movement" (p. 156), and which retains importance until the end of the quartet. As he rightly points out, the arresting violin recitative that prefaces the Finale is linked to the unstable, piercing violin

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets* (New York: Knopf, 1967), 253.

<sup>7</sup>Kevin Korsyn, "J. W. N. Sullivan and the *Heiliger Dankgesang*: Questions in Meaning in Late Beethoven," in *Beethoven Forum* II, ed. Christopher Reynolds, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 133-174.

interjection heard near the beginning of the first movement. What Chua fails to grasp is that the profound contrasts exposed at the outset of this work, in the juxtaposition of a remotely objective, contrapuntal elaboration of a cantus firmus motive in long note values (*assai sostenuto*) with the impassioned violin gesture (*allegro*), establish a basic expressive character that remains potent for the work as a whole. The dramatic character of the A-minor Quartet is tinged with anguish and laden with resignation. Resignation is reflected in the obsessive quality of the Rondo finale, whose main theme incorporates the F–E tension as an ostinato. The Finale's coda in the major mode, on the other hand, is integrated with the work in a different way. In its texture, this *Presto* conclusion recalls the trio of the second movement, whereas its stress on F $\sharp$  in the cadential phrase recalls not only the ostinato accompaniment of the rondo theme, but the expressive poignancy of this note in the first movement. The inflections of pain in the opening *Assai sostenuto* are not entirely forgotten, and even the prominent tonal stress on F throughout the quartet—from the second subject of the first movement to the Lydian "*Dankesang*"—resonates faintly in this telling melodic detail.

In his discussion of the *Große Fuge*, the original finale of the Quartet in B $\flat$ , Chua's language is heavily peppered with metaphors of "disintegration." On page 234, for instance, we read that "the disconnection... becomes more chaotic;" elsewhere Beethoven is "deliberately destroying counterpoint... by pursuing a rhythmic process to utter disorder..." In the central A $\flat$  fugue, the "rhythmic disintegration is matched by a thematic disintegration," whereas what Kerman describes as "thematic transformation" Chua regards as "thematic deformation" as "it becomes increasingly disfigured." Unfortunately, this relentless overwriting obscures rather than clarifies the important points under discussion. More thorough copy-editing was needed.

As a critical assessment and extension of Adorno's ideas on late Beethoven, this book cannot be recommended. Concerning Adorno, Chua states that "this book cannot possibly explore, let alone endorse, every complicated twist of his mind. What it

shares with Adorno is the idea of the *quartets as critiques* and the *critique of analysis*" (p. 10). In effect, the signpost references to Adorno are used to validate the rather simplistic thesis that "Beethoven's language undergoes a self-searching progress towards an abstraction that forces the emotional and technical content of the music to break down in violence" (p. 3). Adorno's actual ideas may have "complicated twists," but they are altogether more stimulating and convincing than what is presented here. A much more thorough application of Adorno's ideas to late Beethoven is offered in Jürgen Uhde and Renate Wieland, *Denken und Spielen: Studien zu einer Theorie der musikalischen Darstellung*.<sup>8</sup>

What Chua seems to be driving toward, if one looks beyond the serious shortcomings of his writing and analysis, is the fascinating issue of artistic paradox, a subject in which interdisciplinary parallels can be revealing. A more compelling treatment of this topic is a new book by Sylvia Imeson, *'The time gives it proof': Paradox in the Late Music of Beethoven* (New York, 1996). Imeson examines the A-minor and B♭-major Quartets in a richer aesthetic context, placing these works squarely within the history of ideas, while also underlining the perception that these works are grappling with deep issues of meaning. Chua's book, by comparison, seems caught in a vicious circle: since he is so obsessed with countering "unity," his preoccupation with "disintegration" takes on an artificial, unbalanced character.

At the conclusion of his book, Chua admits that

there is no stability in any of the readings—just possibilities and tensions between them. If the analysis in this investigation has overstated the critical

<sup>8</sup>Jürgen Uhde and Renate Wieland, *Denken und Spielen: Studien zu einer Theorie der musikalischen Darstellung* [Thought and Performance: Studies Toward a Theory of Musical Interpretation] (Kassel and New York: Barenreiter, 1988). A discussion of this book in English is contained in my review in *19th Century Music* 15 (1991): 64–68. Uhde and Wieland offer detailed discussion of Adorno's stimulating writings on Beethoven that reached publication only in 1993 (Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: Philosophie der Musik: Fragmente und Texte: Fragment gebliebener Schriften*, I, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp)).



procedures and suppressed the constructive elements, it has done so as a corrective to commentaries on these works that merely seek to impute a unity to them or assert their retrospective Classicism (p. 248).

It is doubtful whether we need such overcorrection. Chua's book tackles a vitally important issue but fails to do it justice, partly because the basic scholarly virtues of clarity and persuasion are consistently undermined here by polemic exaggeration and a lack of thoroughness. This problem has also afflicted the so-called "postmodern" or "new" musicology, which has so often singled out "positivistic" theory or "unity" in analysis as a target for attack.<sup>9</sup> More and more, this seems to be a false target: theorists today are often less dogmatic than those "new" critics claiming to liberate the discipline from its "positivistic" bondage. Less dogmatic, too, was the most important aesthetic theory of Beethoven's age, such as that of Friedrich Schiller or E. T. A. Hoffmann, which envisioned the successful artwork as a rich, synthetic unity, a blend of the sensuous and rational. Enlightenment aesthetics had little use for totalizing or tautological concepts of unity in art.<sup>10</sup> It is high time to rehabilitate the notion of the unity of sensuous and rational—expression and structure—without which we would be unable to appreciate the narrative continuity in Beethoven and to confront aesthetic dimensions that reach into the symbolic, mythic, or paradoxical.

<sup>9</sup>For one example, see *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1989), especially the introduction, "On Analyzing Opera," by the editors, Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker. For an alternative approach that seeks to integrate historical and analytical concerns, see *The Second Practice of Nineteenth-Century Tonality*, ed. William Kinderman and Harald Krebs (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup>For a recent defense of Enlightenment aesthetics and a critique of the positions of Lawrence Kramer and Gary Tomlinson on "postmodern" musicology, see Joel Galand, "The Turn from the Aesthetic," *Current Musicology* 58 (1995): 79–97, esp. 86. Also see my study *Beethoven* (Oxford and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1–14, 313–15.