



# The Léner Quartet

PRISTINE  
AUDIO

## Beethoven Quartets, Volume 2: Middle Quartets

In the wake of the Great War, two influential chamber ensembles emerged from the ranks of the Budapest Opera Orchestra. The first, the Budapest String Quartet, began with three Hungarians and a Dutchman, and gradually moved to an all-Russian band by the mid-1930s with a radically different sound and approach. The other, the Léner String Quartet, kept its original Hungarian personnel and Romantic-era *portamenti* for over two decades. During their heyday, they were arguably more successful than the Budapest, having been awarded a gold record in 1935 for a million discs sold, a remarkable achievement in any era for a chamber group. Yet after World War II, they were considered a stylistic anachronism. Their records were no longer collectable, nor were they reissued for decades.

Why should this be? As an article in the *All Music Guide* put it, "[b]y 1950, the Léner Quartet recordings, mostly made in the 1920s, must have seemed ancient by comparison as the group favored a broad, fat string tone more readily associated with arch-Romantic performance practice. Nonetheless, this is precisely why some of the Léner Quartet recordings are being revived on CD more than 50 years after they were largely regarded as obsolete artifacts belonging to a bygone era."

During a recording career that extended from 1922 to 1939, the Léner Quartet waxed some 450 sides for English Columbia. Their repertoire on disc was greatly expanded by the label's observance of the centennial of Beethoven's death in 1927. Between September and November of 1926, the ensemble recorded twelve of Beethoven's sixteen string quartets in sessions held in the warm acoustic of Wigmore Hall in London. (What about the other four? Three of them - Op. 74, 131 and 132 - had only recently been issued in acoustic versions by the Léners, and would be remade electrically in the 1930s. The fourth, Op. 18, No. 5 featured in Volume 1, was only first recorded by the group in 1936, finally completing their cycle.)

Five of the sets were on the market by March of 1927, with the remainder being issued the following month. However, either because Columbia had not arranged for the ensemble to hear the test pressings prior to issue or, as Tully Potter speculates, the group's touring schedule precluded careful auditioning of the discs, several of the sides in the issued albums had to be re-recorded. In the case of Op. 18, No. 1, the quartet's objections were wide-ranging enough that an entirely new recording was made two years after the first and issued under the same catalog numbers. This is the one presented in Volume 1.

Shortly after the initial release of Op. 59, No. 1, all but the first two sides were re-recorded, which accounts for the noticeably faster tempo of the reprise of the opening theme at the beginning of Side 3. In 1938, a new version of Op. 59, No. 2 was made, and that one was included an earlier Japanese EMI CD reissue. I have chosen to present here the 1926 recording.

The pitch drop that affected every side of the 1926 recordings has now been fixed, and the best commercially-issued American Columbia copies (Viva-Tonal, Royal Blue and Full-Range pressings) have been employed in the transfers.

MARK OBERT-THORN

PRISTINE  
AUDIO

PACM 109

# léner quartet

the beethoven quartets volume two

the middle quartets:  
op. 59, nos. 1-3 'rasumovsky' · op. 74 'harp' · op. 95 'serioso'



studio recordings · 1926 - 1932

**Obert-Thorn**

# léner quartet

## beethoven string quartets, volume 2

### disc one

**BEETHOVEN** Quartet No. 7 in F major 'Rasumovsky',  
Op. 59, No. 1

- 1st mvt. - Allegro (10:40)
- 2nd mvt. - Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando (8:02)
- 3rd mvt. - Adagio molto e mesto - *attaca* (10:25)
- 4th mvt. - Thème russe. Allegro (7:59)

Recorded 26 October 1926 & 2 March 1927 in the Wigmore Hall, London

**BEETHOVEN** Quartet No. 8 in E minor 'Rasumovsky',  
Op. 59, No. 2

- 1st mvt. - Allegro (7:52)
- 2nd mvt. - Molto adagio. Si tratta questo pezzo  
con molto di sentimento (11:22)
- 3rd mvt. - Allegretto - Maggiore (Thème russe) (7:07)
- 4th mvt. - Finale. Presto (4:59)

Recorded 5 & 7 November 1926 in the Wigmore Hall, London

**BEETHOVEN** Quartet No. 9 in C major 'Rasumovsky',  
Op. 59, No. 3

- 1st mvt. - Introduzione. Andante con moto - Allegro vivace (7:37)

### Léner String Quartet

Jenő Léner (violin I) - Josef Smilovits (violin II) - Sándor Róth (viola) - Imre Hartman (cello)

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: **Mark Obert-Thorn**

Special thanks to Nathan Brown, Charles Niss and David Schmutz for providing source material

Full discographic information available online

Cover picture based on a photo of the Léner Quartet (L-to-R: Smilovits, Hartman, Léner, Róth)

Total duration: 2hr 32:53

CD1: 76:04 CD2: 76:49

© 2020 Pristine Audio - [www.pristineclassical.com](http://www.pristineclassical.com)

### disc two

- 2nd mvt. - Andante con moto quasi allegretto (9:41)
- 3rd mvt. - Menuetto. Grazioso - Trio (5:10)
- 4th mvt. - Allegro molto (6:48)

Recorded 7, 8 & 29 November 1926 in the Wigmore Hall, London

**BEETHOVEN** Quartet No. 10 in E-flat major 'Harp', Op. 74

- 1st mvt. - Poco adagio - Allegro (8:45)
- 2nd mvt. - Adagio ma non troppo (10:48)
- 3rd mvt. - Presto - Più presto quasi prestissimo -  
Tempo I - *attaca* (6:25)
- 4th mvt. - Allegretto con variazioni (7:28)

Recorded 10 & 14 March 1932 in Abbey Road Studio No. 3, London

**BEETHOVEN** Quartet No. 11 in F minor 'Quartetto serioso',  
Op. 95

- 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (5:01)
- 2nd mvt. - Allegro ma non troppo - *attaca* (6:21)
- 3rd mvt. - Allegro assai vivace ma serioso (4:58)
- 4th mvt. - Larghetto espressivo - Allegretto agitato - Allegro (5:24)

Recorded 4 & 5 November 1926 in the Wigmore Hall, London