



The Léner Quartet

PRISTINE
AUDIO

Beethoven Quartets, Volume 3: Late Quartets

This release concludes Pristine's critically acclaimed (*Diapason d'Or*, *Fanfare* annual "Want List") series of the complete Beethoven string quartets performed by the Léner Quartet. While the pioneering 78 rpm sets of the Beethoven symphonies and sonatas for piano, violin and cello recorded between the wars by Weingartner, Schnabel, Kreisler and Casals, respectively, have been available periodically or continually over the succeeding decades, this first complete traversal of his string quartets has been "missing in action" for most of the time, reissued complete only in Japan.

Part of the reason seems to have been the change in tastes that occurred during the ten year period (1926-36) it took for the Léners to complete their cycle. Their old-fashioned playing style, marked by the use of *portamenti*, ample string tone and highly personalized interpretation, seemed antiquated even before the 1930s were over in comparison to groups like the Schneider-led Budapest Quartet. Yet, it is precisely these features which have drawn modern listeners to their recordings in recent years as an antidote to more literal performances.

The bulk of the Léner cycle was recorded in late 1926 and early the following year, when the group set down twelve of the sixteen Beethoven quartets in the ample acoustic of Wigmore Hall in London. Opp. 127, 130 and 135 in the present release date from this period. Op. 127 was, oddly, the only quartet in this series that was not released by American Columbia; it has been transferred here from early laminated British pressings, while the remainder have come from U.S. Viva-Tonal, Royal Blue and Full-Range discs.

As Tully Potter has written, "The Léner legacy is a collector's dream, as one can accumulate several versions of some 78 rpm sides. In certain cases, individual sides were changed when sets were already in production." In his English Columbia discography, Ronald Taylor lists two versions of Op. 135 that were issued in the UK: one with take numbers 2-1-3-2-1-2, all recorded in November, 1926; and a second with takes 2-4-5-2-4-2, which incorporates remakes done in March of 1927. The American Columbia copy used here offers a third alternative (with no take number listed for the second side): 2-?-3-1-1-2. It's likely that the take used for Side 2 came from the 1926 session, as none of the later take numbers show up here. A 1935 remake of Op. 135 was used for the Japanese EMI CD set, but I have chosen to present the earlier version here.

[notes continue in next insert]

léner quartet
the beethoven quartets volume three

the late quartets:
opp. 127, 130, 131, 132, 133 "große fuge" & 135



studio recordings · 1926 - 1935

bert-Thorn

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PACM 110
CDs 1 & 2

léner quartet

beethoven string quartets, volume 3

disc one

BEETHOVEN Quartet No. 12 in E-flat major, Op. 127

1. 1st Mvt. - Maestoso - Allegro (7:01)
2. 2nd Mvt. - Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile (14:25)
3. 3rd Mvt. - Scherzando. Vivace - Presto (6:52)
4. 4th Mvt. - Allegro - Allegro comodo (6:35)

Recorded 23 & 29 November 1926 in the Wigmore Hall, London

BEETHOVEN Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 131

5. 1st Mvt. - Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo (6:59)
6. 2nd Mvt. - Allegro molto vivace (3:19)
7. 3rd Mvt. - Allegro moderato (0:47)
8. 4th Mvt. - Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile (13:47)
9. 5th Mvt. - Presto - Molto poco adagio (6:02)
10. 6th Mvt. - Adagio quasi un poco andante (1:46)
11. 7th Mvt. - Allegro (6:54)

Recorded 2 & 3 March 1932 in Abbey Road Studio No. 3, London

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, Robert Cowlin/British Library, Richard Kaplan, Charles Niss and David Schmutz for providing source material. Full discographic information is available online.
Cover picture based on a photo of the Léner Quartet (L-to-R: Smilovits, Hartman, Léner, Róth)

Total duration: **3hr 10:47**

CD1: 74:26 CD2: 50:30 CD3: 65:52

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disc two

BEETHOVEN Quartet No. 13 in B-flat major, Op. 130

1. 1st Mvt. - Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro (9:02)
2. 2nd Mvt. - Presto (1:59)
3. 3rd Mvt. - Andante con moto, ma non troppo (6:23)
4. 4th Mvt. - Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai (2:43)
5. 5th Mvt. - Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo (5:43)
6. 6th Mvt. - Finale. Allegro (7:50)

Recorded 3 December 1926 & 27 January 1927 in the Wigmore Hall, London

7. BEETHOVEN Große Fuge in B-flat major, Op. 133 (16:50)

Recorded 19 February 1930 in the Columbia Petty France Studios, London



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[notes continued from previous insert]

Of the four quartets not taken down during these early electric sessions, one (Op. 18/5) had to wait until 1936 for its first Léner recording, while the remaining three (Op. 74, on Volume 2 of our series, and Opp. 131 and 132 presented here) had only recently been issued in acoustic versions by the group. Their performance of Op. 132, at least in its earlier incarnation, has a literary connection. As Potter notes, it “achieved its niche in the hall of fame by being featured in the final chapter of Aldous Huxley’s 1928 novel *Point Counter Point*. They players were not named, but the Léner set was the only one available and Huxley’s mention of ‘four Hungarians’ put the matter beyond doubt. The description of the *Heiliger Dankgesang* and its effect on the character Spandrell, in the last minutes of his life, is a tribute to the intensity of the performance.”

The odd man out, as it were, in this series is the *Grosse Fuge*, which the Léners recorded only once. *Pace* Wikipedia, it was not the first recording of the work (the early Budapest Quartet beat them by three years); and like the 1928 remake of Op. 18/1 in our first volume, it was recorded neither in Wigmore Hall nor Abbey Road, but in English Columbia’s Petty France, London studios. The pitch drop that plagued all the original sides from the 1926-27 sessions has here been corrected using the latest computerized restoration software, and Op. 130 has been presented out of order so that it could be coupled with its original finale, the *Grosse Fuge*, on the same CD.

MARK OBERT-THORN



léner quartet

beethoven string quartets, volume 3

disc three

BEETHOVEN Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132

1. 1st Mvt. - Assai sostenuto - Allegro (9:38)
2. 2nd Mvt. - Allegro ma non tanto (7:53)
3. 3rd Mvt. - Heiliger Dankgesang. Molto adagio (18:05)
4. 4th Mvt. - Alla marcia, assai vivace - Più allegro (2:26)
5. 5th Mvt. - Allegro appassionato - Presto (6:47)

Recorded 13, 14 & 19 March 1935 in Abbey Road Studio No. 3, London

BEETHOVEN Quartet No. 16 in F major, Op. 135

6. 1st Mvt. - Allegretto (6:44)
7. 2nd Mvt. - Vivace (3:31)
8. 3rd Mvt. - Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo (5:03)
9. 4th Mvt. - Der schwer gefasste Entschluss. Grave (5:44)

Recorded 29 November 1926 in the Wigmore Hall, London

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