

Joseph Joachim and the Reception of Beethoven's Late String Quartets*

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The reception of Beethoven's late string quartets was troubled and fascinating. Their initial reception in musical journalism was quite favorable. But in the decades following Beethoven's death, there were prominent unenthusiastic, even dismissive views maintaining that they did not compare favorably with his many beloved compositions from earlier years. Beginning in the 1850s, however, the publication of more sophisticated studies of the late works gradually engendered their more positive reception. Also, concurrent with the rise of their critical fortunes, the late quartets were performed with increasing frequency during the second half of the century.¹

Joachim was born in 1831 and died in 1907. Thus his life and career spanned and contributed to this evolution. But the negative criticism of Beethoven's late quartets never clouded his regard for them. When Joachim's parents noted his prodigious talent as a violinist during his childhood in Pest, they sent him as an eight-year-old to Vienna for further study. His mentor there was Joseph Böhm, who had enjoyed a successful career as soloist and as leader of his own string quartet. After the unsatisfactory premiere of Beethoven's Op. 127 by the

¹ Further, see Robin Wallace, "Early German-Language Reviews of Beethoven's Late String Quartets," in *The New Beethoven: Evolution, Analysis, Interpretation*, ed. Jeremy Yudkin (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020), 355–85; Kristin Knittel, "Wagner, Deafness, and the Reception of Beethoven's Late Style," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1998): 49–82; Scott Burnham, "The Four Ages of Beethoven: Critical Reception and the Canonic Composer," in *The Cambridge Companion to Beethoven*, ed. Glenn Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 272–91; and Ora Frishberg Saloman, "Origins, Performances, and Reception History of Beethoven's Late Quartets," *The Musical Quarterly* 69 (1983): 525–40.

* This paper is a revised and abbreviated version of my chapter "'Das Quartet-Spiel ist doch wohl mein eigentliches Fach': Joseph Joachim and the String Quartet," in *The Creative Worlds of Joseph Joachim*, ed. Valerie Woodring Goertzen and Robert Whitehouse Eshbach (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2021), 145–62.

Schuppanzigh Quartet in 1825, Böhm led its second much more successful performance, which he rehearsed under the composer's supervision. Just as teachers today inspire their students with personal reminiscences of prominent musicians with whom they have studied or performed, Böhm peppered his instruction of Joachim with accounts of his interactions with Beethoven, Schubert, and performers associated with them. More significantly, although Böhm no longer performed in public, he enjoyed playing quartets in his home with colleagues and advanced students. Joachim, who during his three years in Vienna lived with Böhm's family, was frequently invited to participate. Andreas Moser, in his biography of Joachim, published in 1898, explains that:

Joachim's intimate acquaintance and understanding of Beethoven's late quartets date already from his student years . . . and even now he becomes excited and eloquent when he speaks about playing quartets with his Viennese professor. The care and love with which Böhm cultivated the master's quartets had such a powerful effect on the young student that he was inspired to follow his teacher's example in order later, in an unanticipated way, to surpass him.²

In 1843, Joachim moved to Leipzig to continue his education at Mendelssohn's newly founded Music Conservatory. But after playing Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata at his audition, with Mendelssohn at the piano, the verdict was that the twelve-year-old Joachim was already so advanced that he did not need to enter the conservatory. Instead,

² "Die innige Bekanntschaft und Vertrautheit Joachims mit den späteren Quartetten Beethovens datiert demnach schon aus den Lehrjahren . . . und er wird heute noch ganz warm und beredt, wenn er auf das Quartettspiel seines Wiener Lehrmeisters zu sprechen kommt. Die Sorgsamkeit und Liebe, mit denen Böhm die Quartette der alten Meister pflegte, wirkten auf den jungen Schüler so mächtig ein, daß er sich dafür angespornt fühlte, es dem Lehrer gleich zu thun, um ihn später in ungeahnter Weise zu übertreffen." Andreas Moser, *Joseph Joachim: Ein Lebensbild* (Berlin: Behr, 1898), 31. All translations are mine.

he should frequently play chamber music with Mendelssohn and Ferdinand David, concertmaster of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, and pursue a rigorous humanistic education with a private tutor.

Joachim followed this plan. In 1844 he initiated his long association with England with his triumphant performance in London of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, conducted by Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn, who had arranged for this performance, also introduced Joachim to Thomas Alsager, the part-owner, financial editor, and occasional music reviewer of *The Times*. Alsager, a passionate music lover and concert promoter, invited Joachim to play chamber music informally in his home. The following year Alsager founded the London Beethoven Quartet Society for the purpose of presenting an annual five-concert series of Beethoven's quartets. The Society's 1845 series was the first complete cycle—anywhere—of them.³

In the following discussion I will quote occasionally from the 894 letters that Joachim wrote to his older brother Heinrich (and to Heinrich's wife, Ellen); the Brahms Institute in Lübeck digitized these letters in 2018.⁴ Heinrich spent his entire adult life in England, where he acquired English citizenship, became wealthy as a wholesale wool merchant, and married Ellen Smart, the daughter of a prominent family in British musical life. Heinrich frequently assisted Joachim with financial and business matters.

With his countless exegetical performances of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, Joachim is justly credited with playing a significant role in the concerto's canonization. He is also known for his long friendship with Brahms, and for his advisory role during

³ Further, see Ivan Mahaim and Evi Levin, "The First Complete Beethoven Quartet Cycles, 1845–1851: Historical Notes on the London Quartet Society," *The Musical Quarterly* 80 (1996): 500–24; and David Levy, "Thomas Massa Alsager, Esq.: A Beethoven Advocate in London," *19th-Century Music* 9 (1985): 119–27.

⁴ Joseph Joachim, Briefe-Datenbank, Brahms-Institut an der Musikhochschule Lübeck (<https://www.brahmsinstitut.de/index.php?cID=538>).

the composition of Brahms's violin concerto, which he premiered and championed.

However, Joachim's letters to his brother reveal that he was actually much more interested in playing quartets than in performing as a soloist.

In 1847 Joachim wrote from Leipzig to Heinrich proudly reporting his progress in playing quartets and expressing the desire to perform in London again. He states that, although he would be willing to appear as soloist, he "would prefer playing quartets, because they are the only thing, with the exception of the solo works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Spohr, that I enjoy playing. Perhaps I could present my own quartet concerts."⁵ Later that year Joachim's wish was fulfilled. He traveled to London, and led the quartet in two of the Beethoven Quartet Society's concerts.

Two years later the Beethoven Quartet Society was on the verge of dissolving and an initiative was conceived to create a new organization that would be directed by Joachim and violinist Heinrich Ernst. Initially, Joachim was receptive to this idea, but, on realizing that pursuing this proposal would put him in competition with the Beethoven Society, he declined, writing to his brother that he:

would not like that at all. . . . The Beethoven Society . . . is the only organization in London with real musical significance and conviction, where music is pursued for its own sake without concern for money. . . . I want very much to play there again, because it was always the only place where I performed with genuine enthusiasm and love.⁶

⁵ "und überhaupt würde ich mich mehr ans Quartettspielen halten, da es doch das einzigen ist, was ich ausgenommen die Beethoven'schen, Mendelssohn'schen u. Spohr'schen Solo=Stücken gerne spiele. Vielleicht könnte ich auch selbst Quartettunterhaltungen geben." Letter from Joachim to Heinrich Joachim, spring 1847. Brahms-Institut Lübeck, Briefe-Datenbank Sig.: Joa : B1 : 5 Inv.-Nr.: 1991.2.47.5.

⁶ "Dazu habe ich nun nicht im geringsten Lust. . . . Die Beethoven-Society . . . ist die einzige Gesellschaft in London von wirklich musikalischer Bedeutung und Gesinnung, wo die Musik rein, und mit wahrer Liebe, um ihr selbst, nicht um des leidigen Geldes willen, betrieben wird. . . . Ich wünsche sehr, wieder da zu spielen, denn es war immer der einzige Ort, an dem ich mit wirklicher Lust und Liebe Musik machte."

The full cycle, with Ernst leading the quartet, was presented again by the Beethoven Society in 1850 and 1851. However, those were the final seasons of the Society, which disbanded the following year.

Joachim's next station, Weimar, where he moved in 1850 to serve as concertmaster of Liszt's orchestra, also provided rich opportunities for chamber music. He formed a quartet with other members of the orchestra, and their performances included an all-Beethoven program (Opp. 18/5, 74, and 131) modeled on Alsager's innovative practice of presenting early, middle, and late quartets on the same concert. Corresponding again with his brother regarding possible concerts in London, he referred to quartets as his "favorite genre" and emphasized that, rather than solo appearances, he "would prefer to accept quartet engagements, because playing quartets is my true specialty."⁷

After two years in Weimar, Joachim became concertmaster of the opera and conductor of the orchestral concerts in Hanover, where he established a quartet with members of his new orchestra. Their inaugural concert was an all-Beethoven program. In 1859 Joachim again considered producing his own quartet concerts in London, and even asked his brother to explore the financial feasibility of presenting a complete Beethoven cycle there. He rhapsodized that: "Naturally I want to, especially when it would mean performing Beethoven to my heart's content."⁸ He ultimately did travel to England that

Letter from Joachim to Heinrich Joachim, 9 March 1849. Brahms-Institut Lübeck, Briefe-Datenbank Sig.: Joa : B1 : 13 Inv.-Nr.: 1991.2.49.1.

⁷ Letters from Joachim to Heinrich Joachim, 29 December 1850: "Lieblingsfach"; and 2 March 1852: "Am liebsten werde ich Quartett=Engagements annehmen; denn das Quartett=Spiel ist doch wohl mein eigentliches Fach." Brahms-Institut Lübeck, Briefe-Datenbank Sig.: Joa : B1 : 25 Inv.-Nr.: 1991.2.50.8 and Sig.: Joa : B1 : 29 Inv.-Nr.: 1991.2.52.2.

⁸ "Innere Lust habe ich natürlich, namentlich wenn es gälte Beethoven nach meiner Herzenslust vorzuführen!" Letter from Joachim to Heinrich Joachim, 12 February 1859. Brahms-Institut Lübeck, Briefe-Datenbank Sig.: Joa : B1 : 75 Inv.-Nr.: 1991.2.59.1.

year and inaugurated his London quartet with three all-Beethoven programs. Joachim returned to London again in 1862, and for the next thirty-five years he spent from one to two months in the British Isles annually, performing on the Monday Popular Concerts. His regular London quartet colleagues throughout these years were violinist Louis Ries, violist Ludwig Straus, and cellist Alfredo Piatti. Louis Ries belonged to a German musical family familiar to all Beethoven scholars. Louis's grandfather was Franz Ries, and his uncle was Ferdinand Ries. These concerts were dubbed "popular" only because, as chamber music concerts, tickets were less expensive than those for London's symphonic and operatic performances. As a result, the Monday Popular Concerts, which took place in the 2000-seat St. James's Hall, were frequently sold out. The repertoire, however, was elevated and serious, and Joachim frequently included Beethoven's late quartets on his programs.

Not until Joachim moved to Berlin in 1869 to become the founding director of the new Royal Conservatory of Music was he finally able to realize his more ambitious string quartet ideals. His first initiatives in Berlin were to engage string professors who could excel as members of his faculty quartet and to inaugurate his own concert series in the circa 800-seat Singakademie, a storied venue in the center of the city, where he presented eight concerts annually for the next thirty-eight years. He only programmed works for strings, almost always three quartets; he occasionally substituted a string trio, quintet, sextet, or octet for one of the quartets. His Singakademie concerts soon became a prominent fixture in Berlin's concert life and a central aspect of Joachim's public persona.

Joachim's innate genius and years of experience leading quartets enabled him to set new standards of excellence in execution and interpretation. The membership of his Berlin quartet

remained remarkably stable, although, just as with modern quartets, occasional changes in personnel resulted from career moves or death of individual members (see Table 1). The quartet existed in six different constellations. But the change from one to the next always involved the replacement of only one member, and thus a high degree of continuity was maintained.⁹

Table 1 Membership of Joachim's Berlin String Quartet (see photos on pp. 16–18)

1) 1869 – 1871	Joachim, Schiever, de Ahna, Müller	(2 seasons)
2) 1871 – 1877	Joachim, de Ahna, Rappoldi, Müller	(6 seasons)
3) 1877 – 1879	Joachim, de Ahna, Wirth, Müller	(2 seasons)
4) 1879 – 1892	Joachim, de Ahna, Wirth, Hausmann	(13 seasons)
5) 1892 – 1897	Joachim, Kruse, Wirth, Hausmann	(5 seasons)
6) 1897 – 1907	Joachim, Halir, Wirth, Hausmann	(10 seasons)

The programs for Joachim's over three hundred concerts in the Singakademie reveal his repertoire proclivities. Data concerning the composers and the number of their works performed is shown in Table 2: Haydn (24), Beethoven (19), Mozart (15), and so forth. In addition to all of Beethoven's quartets, he programmed the Serenade for String Trio, Op. 8, and the Quintets, Opp. 4 and 29.

Table 2 Joachim's Repertoire in the Singakademie

Number of works performed	Total number of performances
Haydn (24)	Beethoven (323)
Beethoven (19)	Haydn (138)
Mozart (15)	Mozart (108)
Mendelssohn (9)	Brahms (73)
Brahms (9)	Schubert (63)
Schubert (4)	Schumann (44)
Dvořák (4)	Mendelssohn (40)
Schumann (3)	Dvořák (10)

⁹ Substitute players were engaged when necessary. During de Ahna's illness in 1892, his place was taken by Johann Kruse, who, after de Ahna's passing, continued as regular member. When Wirth's vision problem sidelined him for most of the 1906–7 season, Joachim's student, Karl Klingler, substituted for him. And when Joachim became ill in spring 1907, the quartet made its scheduled tour to England, but with Halir (first violin) and Klingler (second violin). After Joachim's death in August 1907, they performed in this configuration until April 1909.

The total number of performances of works by each composer reveals a similar but not identical picture, also shown in Table 2. From this perspective Beethoven dominates by a wide margin. His works were performed on all but thirty-five of the 300 Singakademie concerts, and there were thirty all-Beethoven programs (always with early, middle, and late quartets), thus resulting in a grand total of 323 performances of his music. Joachim gave virtually equal attention to the five middle period quartets (122 performances) and the five late quartets (112 performances). If the number of times he programmed individual quartets can be interpreted as indicating his favorites, they were all by Beethoven (see Table 3).

Table 3 Most Frequently Performed Quartets in the Singakademie:

Beethoven:	Op. 95 (30)	Op. 59/2 (26)	Op. 74 (21)	Op. 135 (17)
	Op. 130 (29)	Op. 59/1 (23)	Op. 127 (20)	
	Op. 131 (27)	Op. 59/3 (22)	Op. 132 (19)	
Schubert:	D. 810 d (21)	Quintet D. 956 C (17)	D. 804 a (15)	
Schumann:	Op. 41/2 (15)	Op. 41/3 (15)	Op. 41/1 (14)	

Exploiting to full advantage the faster travel enabled by the introduction of railroads in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Joachim's Berlin Quartet made numerous tours throughout Germany and most other European countries. His tour programs featured the same repertoire as those in Berlin and also included all-Beethoven programs. After the members of his London Quartet retired in 1897, he began bringing his Berlin Quartet to the British Isles every year.

I digress briefly from my chronological organization to discuss the celebration in Vienna of Beethoven's centennial in 1870. Wanting to engage the most distinguished performers in Europe for the event, the organizers sent flattering invitations to Wagner (to conduct the Ninth Symphony), to Liszt (to conduct the Missa Solemnis), to Clara Schumann (to perform a piano

concerto), and to Joachim (to lead a performance of Op. 131). Their selection of Joachim, who had only just begun his position in Berlin, documents that he had already established a reputation as a leading interpreter of Beethoven's quartets. All four of the invitees, however, ultimately declined to participate: Wagner (because Hanslick was on the organizing committee); Liszt (because he opted to accept an invitation from Budapest instead); Clara Schumann (because it was not clear who would conduct her concerto); and Joachim (because he did not think that Liszt was a suitable choice to conduct the *Missa Solemnis*).¹⁰

The celebration in Vienna did feature these works, but with local musicians. Op. 131 was performed by the Helmesberger Quartet, the preeminent Viennese ensemble. For forty years, from 1849 to 1889, Josef Helmesberger presented twelve concerts per season in the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*. Unlike Joachim, Helmesberger programmed all genres of chamber music, including works with piano, winds, and voice, and he also cultivated more composers. While Beethoven's works, including the late quartets, were prominent, Helmesberger performed them only about half as many times as Joachim.¹¹

Joachim's intense passion for string quartets, especially Beethoven's, was fueled and facilitated by factors beyond their innate musical value. These factors included political events as well as current social and educational traditions. The opportunity and impetus for Joachim's move to Berlin arose as a result of the unification of the autonomous German states. He was tremendously excited about this momentous development. Although he regretted that his

¹⁰ Further, see Barbara Boisits, "Monumentales Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität: Die Wiener Beethoven-Feier von 1870," in *Music in der Moderne*, ed. Federico Celestini, Gregor Kokorz, and Julian Johnson (Vienna: Böhlau, 2011), 37–54.

¹¹ Further, see Beatrix Borchard, *Stimme und Geige: Amalia und Joseph Joachim. Biographie und Interpretationsgeschichte* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 537–42, and the appendix on the accompanying CD-Rom.

employers, the royal family in Hanover, would be deposed as a result of Prussia's annexation of Lower Saxony, in 1866 he wrote to his brother that:

The small states have only had the negative influence of inciting, to their own advantage, petty jealousy between Prussia and Austria; retaliation has now arrived, and I am happy that the more cultured and protestant power has won supreme authority. Prussia and with it, Germany, have a great future, and I hope that Bismarck, now that he has achieved his great goal with the military, is sufficiently judicious to expand Prussia's parliamentary governance, and after the conquests with blood and iron, he will not neglect ethical principles. He is a great patriot.¹²

Awareness of Joachim's intense nationalistic stance reveals that he harbored an ambitious goal for his Singakademie concerts—nation building. By cultivating the great heritage of German music, he aspired to nurture the public's sense of national identity and thereby contribute to the bonding of newly united Germany. Achieving this by performing string quartets might appear to be an unrealistic, even quixotic, dream, but given the context, it was quite rational. In the immediate aftermath of the creation of modern Germany, there was general nationalistic euphoria in Berlin, the capital of this new country. The governing authorities were anxious to enhance the image of the city, which included invigorating its musical life by establishing a "Königliche Hochschule für Musik."¹³ The official founding documents of the

¹² "Die kleinen Staaten haben nur negative Macht gehabt die Eifersüchtelei von Preußen u. Oesterreich zum eignen Vortheil zu schüren; die Nemesis ist jetzt für sie gekommen, und ich meines theils muß mich freuen, daß die jedenfalls gebildeten Macht, und die protestantische die Obermacht gewonnen. Preußen und mit ihm Deutschland hat eine große Zukunft, und ich hoffe, daß Bismarck einsichtsvoll genug sein wird, da er seinen großen Zweck durch die Militair: Organisation erreicht hat, den Konstitutionalismus Preußens weiter auszubilden, und nach den Eroberungen durch Blut und Eisen, die moralischen nicht zu gering anzuschlagen. Ein großer Patriot ist er." Letter from Joachim to Heinrich Joachim, 3 August 1866. Brahms-Institut Lübeck, Briefe-Datenbank Sig.: Joa : B1 : 182 Inv.-Nr.: 1991.2.66.9.

¹³ Further, see Dietmar Schenk, "Aus einer Gründerzeit: Joseph Joachim, die Berliner Hochschule für Musik und der deutsch-französische Krieg," *Die Tonkunst* 1 (2007): 232–46.

new conservatory—in the drafting of which Joachim was involved—stipulate that public concerts were vital to its mission. They state that the Joachim Quartet should function not only as a “model for the students and for enjoyment by the public, but at the same time as a means to educate and develop the nation,” and that the conservatory should contribute to the “strengthening of the German national character.”¹⁴ How did the Prussian officials (and Joachim) arrive at this astonishing and grandiose mission statement?

The linking of instrumental music with nationalism was not a new concept. In the mid-eighteenth century, Moses Mendelssohn had postulated that instrumental music, because it is free from texts, was a universally understood language that could transcend racial and cultural differences. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, both Carl Friedrich Zelter, director of the Singakademie, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, educational reformer, and founder of the University of Berlin, had published essays promoting the positive influence that music could exert on the formation and development of Prussia. For them, the cultivation of music was more than a private, individual initiative; it became a significant issue for social concern and public welfare, because “if music is incorporated into a collective educational system, common ground is established on which men and women, Jews and non-Jews, aristocrats and citizens can meet.”¹⁵

¹⁴ “Vorbild für die Schuler und zum Genuß des Publicums dienen, sondern gleichzeitig als Mittel zur Bildung der Nation.” “Festigung des deutschen Nationalcharakters.” See Borchard, *Stimme und Geige*, 542.

¹⁵ “Wenn Musik in ein kollektives Bildungsprojekt eingebunden ist . . . öffnet sie ein gemeinsames Terrain, auf dem sich Männer und Frauen, Juden und Nichtjuden, Adelige und Bürger begegnen können.” See Beatrix Borchard, “Von Joseph Joachim zurück zu Moses Mendelssohn: Instrumentalmusik als Zukunftsreligion?” in *Musikwelten – Lebenswelten: Jüdische Identitätssuche in der deutschen Musikkultur*, ed. Beatrix Borchard and Heidy Zimmermann (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009), 31–57, here 57.

This raised the question of whether vocal or instrumental music was more effective for this purpose. Also, the materials of music (melody, harmony, form, etc.) do not have the innate power to transform society or to strengthen national consciousness. This power must be ascribed to it. One of the most influential voices to postulate instrumental music's ability to promote these goals was the prolific professor at the University of Berlin, Adolf Bernard Marx. Initially, as editor of the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, and later, in his many publications both for professionals and for the lay public, Marx launched a campaign championing symphonic music, especially Beethoven's, "as a national treasure and the symphony concert as an edifying experience," and he proposed that the populace should listen to symphonies not only for "the music itself but also for themselves as a nation."¹⁶ Thus, the imbedded history of coupling music, especially instrumental music, with national interests played a significant role not only in shaping the Prussian authorities' mission documents for their conservatory, but also in their choice of Joachim, a violinist and orchestral conductor, as its founding director, and in their explicit support of his string quartet.

By striving with his concerts in the Singakademie to establish a canonic quartet repertoire, it appears that Joachim envisioned accomplishing with (and for) string quartets what Marx had done, or at least aspired to do, with (and for) symphonies. Joachim's practice of performing the same major works, especially Beethoven's, year after year exemplifies Marx's insistence that multiple hearings are a prerequisite for them to be understood. Accounts of the Joachim Quartet's total absorption in the music and their lack of distracting mannerisms conform with Marx's assertion that this style of deportment is essential in order to ensure that the music, rather than the performer, is the focus of attention.

¹⁶ Further, see Sanna Pederson, "A. B. Marx, Berlin Concert Life, and German National Identity," *19th-Century Music* 18, no. 2 (Autumn 1994): 87–107, here 89 and 96.

Berlin's long-established salon culture was also propitious for realizing Joachim's and the conservatory's mission. Personal growth was to be achieved through creative or critical encounter with others in an environment that required feelings and ideas to be expressed and shared. Salons, therefore, were considered an ideal context and opportunity for furthering one's education, one's full potential or *Bildung*.¹⁷ The educational aspect of Joachim's quartet concerts was augmented by his practice of having miniature scores of the works being performed available for purchase at the Singakademie (see concert program on p. 18). This practice, which he first experienced with the London Quartet Society, promoted the audience's recognition of music as an art form equal in stature to literature and the visual arts. Musical performances are ephemeral, but scores, because of their permanence, facilitate and encourage the public's intellectual engagement with musical compositions as works of art.

Throughout his life Joachim enjoyed informal music making, including participation in salons everywhere he lived. Contemporary accounts describe his promotion of a relaxed salon-like atmosphere in the Singakademie. As regular subscribers, many in the audience were mutually acquainted, and the quartet members joined them in friendly conversation before and after the concerts. While performing, however, Joachim presided over these cordial gatherings with great solemnity. Violinist Leopold Auer, for example, "always felt as though Joachim were a priest, thrilling his congregation with a sermon revealing the noblest moral beauties of a theme, which could not help but interest all humanity."¹⁸ The Singakademie audience came to represent

¹⁷ Further, see Robert Eshbach, "The Joachim Quartet Concerts in the Berlin Singakademie: Mendelssohnian Geselligkeit in Wilhelmine Germany," in *Brahms in the Home and the Concert Hall: Between Private and Public Performance*, ed. Katy Hamilton and Natasha Loges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 22–42.

¹⁸ Leopold Auer, *Violin Playing as I Teach It* (New York: Dover, 1980), 6.

“a kind of ritual ingathering of the faithful who came to experience elevation and renewal,” and the concerts became “the spiritual home of Berlin’s musical, artistic, and political elite.”¹⁹

When the Beethoven-Haus Association in Bonn was founded in 1889, Joachim was elected honorary president. His only official role was to curate a biennial chamber music festival consisting of five concerts on consecutive days in May. Beethoven was always prominent, but he also programmed works by Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. Joachim always featured his Berlin Quartet, but he also included chamber music with piano, wind instruments, and vocalists, and guest performers regularly participated. He clearly considered the fourth concert, which was the final evening concert, to be the most important and honored event (see Table 4). Without exception it was an all-Beethoven program with his Berlin Quartet and occasional guests. The late string quartets were always highlighted, sometimes with two or even three on the same concert (as shown in 1893, 1897, and 1901).²⁰

Table 4 The Fourth Concert of the Chamber Music Festivals in Bonn (1890–1907)

1890	Opp. 59/1, 95, 130	[other concerts: Opp. 74, 131]
1893	Opp. 59/2, 135, 131	[other concerts: Opp. 127, 132]
1897	Opp. 127, 135, 131	[other concerts: Op. 59/2, Op. 95]
1899	Opp. 18/3, 74, 130	
1901	Op. 132, Piano Sonata Op. 111 (Paderewski), and Op. 130	[other concerts Op. 95]
1903	Complete Cycle of Beethoven’s Quartets over five consecutive days	
	1. Opp. 18/1, 59/2, 127	3. Opp. 18/4, 18/2, 95, 135
	2. Opp. 18/3, 59/3, 130	4. Opp. 18/6, 59/1, 132
		5. Opp. 18/5, 74, 131
1905	Piano Quintet with Winds Op. 16, Quartet Op. 18/2, Piano Sonata Op. 78, Quartet Op. 131	
1907	Piano Trio Op. 70/2, Quartet Op. 95, Piano Sonata Op. 101, Quartet Op. 130	

¹⁹ See Eshbach, “The Joachim Quartet Concerts,” 24.

²⁰ See Rainer Cadenbach, “Joseph Joachim’s Programme: Die grosse Zeit seiner Bonner Kammermusikfeste von 1890 bis 1907,” *Neue berlinische Musikzeitung* 10 (1995): 40–57.

In 1903 Joachim envisioned realizing for the first time his dream of performing a complete cycle of Beethoven's quartets. The festival committee at the Beethoven-Haus expressed strong reservations about the public's enthusiasm for a festival with so little variety, but he prevailed. The cycle proved tremendously popular with audiences, and also, because the concerts were sold out, a financial success for the Beethoven-Haus. Moreover, critics considered it a high point in Bonn's musical history. They applauded Joachim for making Beethoven's chamber music especially the late works "at home" in the concert hall, and lauded the preeminence of the Joachim Quartet's interpretation of the five last quartets. As in previous years, many international guests attended the festival, which led to engagements in the coming years for them to perform the cycle in Paris, Brussels, Rome, London, and Vienna.

In the last year of his life, Joachim participated in a popular social practice called "Erkenne dich selbst" (know thyself). It involved providing succinct answers to a list of twenty-five questions regarding one's character and preferences. The responses were then sent as an intimate present and honor to the subject's close friends and associates. The questions included: Who are your favorite writers? His response: Goethe, Shakespeare (in spite of Tolstoy); but also Eichendorff, Hermann Grimm, and others. Your favorite pastime? His response: playing quartets. Your favorite composers? His response: "Our great masters who command form, who nevertheless have not sacrificed depth of expression and the free flight of fantasy."²¹

Joachim declined to name specific composers. Indeed, his broad description fits all of the canonic composers he cultivated. I am confident, however, that if pressed he would have given pride of place to Beethoven, especially his late quartets.

²¹ "Die Formbeherrscher, welche dadurch nichts an Tiefe des Gemüts, am freien Flug der Phantasie eingebüßt haben, unsere großen Meister." See Cadenbach, "Joseph Joachims Programme," 56.

Joseph Joachim, Robert Hausmann, Emanuel Wirth, Karl Halir



The Joachim Quartet in the Singakademie



Beethoven-Fest in Bonn, 11-15. Mai 1890.



Handwritten musical notation and signatures:
Robert Schumann
Joseph Joachim
Friedrich Wille
Hermann Wille
Hermann Wille

Quartett-Abende
Joachim, de Ahna, Wirth, Hausmann.
 Sonnabend den 10. Januar 1891, 7½ Uhr
 in
SAAL DER SING-AKADEMIE
1. Abend (II. Cyclus)

PROGRAMM.

Beethoven . . Quartett A-dur, op. 18.
 Allegro
 Menuetto
 Andante cantabile (Variazioni)
 Allegro.

Beethoven . . Quartett F-moll, op. 95.
 Allegro con brio.
 Allegretto ma non troppo
 Allegro assai vivace ma serioso. — Più Allegro.
 Larghetto espressivo — Allegretto agitato —
 Allegro (alla breve).

Beethoven . . Quartett Cismoll, op. 131.
 Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo (Fuga)
 Allegro molto vivace
 Allegro moderato
 Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile (con
 variazioni).
 Presto
 Adagio quasi un poco andante
 Allegro.

Während der Musik bleiben die Thüren geschlossen.
 Kleine Partitur-Ausgaben an der Kasse.

2. Abend (II. Cyclus) Sonnab., 24. Januar 1891, 7½ Uhr.
 Quartette von Mendelssohn (Es-dur, op. 12), Schumann (A-dur, op. 41),
 Beethoven (F-dur, op. 59).