

**Parker Quartet**

Daniel Chong, violin  
Ken Hamao, violin  
Jessica Bodner, viola  
Kee-Hyun Kim, cello

*Homunculus*

Esa-Pekka Salonen  
(b. 1958)

Quartet No. 2, Op. 56, M64

Karol Szymanowski  
(1882-1937)

Moderato, dolce e tranquillo  
Vivace scherzando  
Lento

- INTERMISSION -

Quartet in A minor, Op. 132

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

Assai sostenuto  
Allegro ma non tanto  
Molto adagio  
Alla marcia, assai vivace  
Allegro appassionato

Parker Quartet is represented by MKI Artists; One Lawson Lane, Suite 320, Burlington, VT 05401.

Recordings: Naxos Records, Nimbus Records, and Albany Records

[www.parkerquartet.com](http://www.parkerquartet.com)

[www.sacms.org](http://www.sacms.org)

## Program Notes

### ***Homunculus***

Esa-Pekka Salonen

Homunculus is a short (circa 15 minutes) work for string quartet, which I wrote during the autumn months of 2007 for the Johannes Quartet.

I wanted to compose a piece that would be very compact in form and duration, but still contain many different characters and textures. In other words, a little piece that behaves like a big piece.

In Homunculus the four main characters (in order of appearance) are “Scherzo”, irregularly pulsating, jagged music; “Slow movement”, continuous metamorphose of an easily identifiable slow phrase; “Main movement”, intricate mid-tempo web of four voices densely woven together, and “Chorale”, a static, somewhat melancholy progression of chords. These characters, which in a traditional string quartet form would each form their own movement, are here interrupted by each other, and interspersed throughout the single movement of Homunculus. They keep developing and changing throughout the piece however, so when a character reappears it is rarely, if ever, an exact repetition of a previous appearance.

At the end the “Scherzo” music brings the piece to a violent climax on a C major chord in an impossibly high register followed by a long glissando down. All the other characters appear one more time. Homunculus ends with a prolonged chorale which in my ears sounds somewhat sad and deeply nostalgic.

The title of the piece refers to the arcane spermists’ theory, who held the belief that the sperm was in fact a “little man” (homunculus) that was placed inside a woman for growth into a child. This seemed to them to neatly explain many of the mysteries of conception.

I decided to call my piece Homunculus despite the obvious weaknesses of the 17th century theory, as my goal was to write a small scale piece that would nevertheless contain all the elements of a “fully grown” string quartet.

*--note by Esa-Pekka Salonen*

### **Quartet in A minor, Op. 132**

Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven produced relatively few compositions from 1813 until the early 1820s. However, some work from this period, such as the Op. 102 Cello Sonata and Op. 106 *Hammerklavier* Piano Sonata, shows that it was one of creative renewal rather than a hiatus. In 1822 he wrote to his publisher, “I feel I am on the threshold of great things,” and from 1823 until his death he completed many of his greatest masterpieces, among them the *Missa Solemnis*, the Ninth Symphony, and the five late string quartets.

Beethoven’s last five quartets were written between May 1824 and November 1826. The first three—Opp. 127, 132, and 130 with the Great Fugue—fulfilled a commission from Prince Nikolai Galitzin, a Russian nobleman. The others—Opp. 131 and 135—he wrote without commission. Audiences were bewildered. Beethoven had entered a new aesthetic realm, reaching back to older techniques of counterpoint and recitative and experimenting radically with late-18th-century forms and proportions. As professor Robert

Winter has observed, there is a sense that while some of the music is intended to please or engage the audience, much of it turns inward and the audience is forgotten while Beethoven wrestles alone with musical ideas. The late quartets were rarely performed for fifty years after Beethoven's death.

Op. 132 opens with the first movement's four-note main theme played slowly by the cello—a rising half-step followed by a large leap and a descending half-step. A tiny eight-bar fugue is constructed from these intervals as the other voices enter one by one. This austere *cantus firmus* is suddenly interrupted by an impassioned *arpeggio* in the first violin, the first of many extreme contrasts in the quartet. Contradicting the first theme's dark mood, the second theme is sweetly lyrical with etched rhythmic undercurrents. These disparate themes and their musical elements rub against each other in an unsettled atmosphere throughout the movement.

The dancelike second movement, sounding relatively simple despite its intricate contrapuntal structure, seems open and direct after the emotionally complex first movement.

The heart of the quartet is the great "*Heiliger Dankgesang*" ("Holy Song of Thanks to the Godhead from a Convalescent, in the Lydian mode"), Beethoven's expression of thanks for his recovery from serious illness in April 1825. Contrasts of feeling and musical texture are especially profound in this movement. The slow modal chorale, ethereal and intensely spiritual in character, is interrupted by sections of elaborate dancelike music that Beethoven marks "feeling new strength."

A marchlike dance movement follows the "*Heiliger Dankgesang*" in startling contrast to its emotional intensity and thematic refinement. After a cry of recitative in the first violin, the final movement begins. Marked *Allegro appassionato*, it is a rondo recalling many passages from earlier movements. The lyrical main theme opens with a rolling accompaniment containing part of the first movement's painful opening four-note motif. Rather than unfolding sequentially, contrasting elements are pressed together. Poignant inflections enter the main theme, and the rhythmic underlying voices grow in strength. After a quiet fugal section, the main theme and accompaniment merge into the rapid, highly rhythmic concluding section. Now in the 'wrong' key of A major, the frenzied music is stripped down to a series of quick chords and the quartet's closing cadence.

—note by Robert Strong