

MUSIC ACCORD

ANNA CLYNE

Breathing Statues (2019)

Program Notes

Anna Clyne (b. London, March 9, 1980)
Breathing Statues

Beethoven's final three years were concentrated on the string quartet, a medium in which he had not composed since 1810. The five late quartets (Opp. 127, 130, 131, 132, and 135) complete a cycle of sixteen as integral to the quartet literature as the nine symphonies, five piano concerti, and thirty-two piano sonatas are to their respective genres. Following the Opus 18 quartets, betraying a young composer still under the spell of Haydn and Mozart; and the defiant middle period quartets (Opp. 59, 74, and 95), characteristic of the composer's "heroic" style; the late quartets are transcendent, forward-looking works, which have continued to fascinate, challenge, and inspire composers two centuries hence. After hearing Beethoven's Opus 131, his immediate heir-apparent, Franz Schubert, wondered, "what is left for us to write?" For Igor Stravinsky, Beethoven's *Große Fuge* remained, in the twentieth century, "an absolutely contemporary piece of music that will be contemporary forever."

The mystical late quartets of Beethoven provide the point of departure for Anna Clyne's string quartet *Breathing Statues*. Clyne's quartet begins by quoting the enigmatic finale of Beethoven's last major work, the *String Quartet in F Major*, op. 135; Beethoven's manuscript is inscribed with the title "Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß"—The resolution reached with difficulty. Accompanying the movement's mysterious opening three-note melody are the words "Muß es sein?"—Must it be? The answer is provided by the inversion of this figure, which begins the finale's *Allegro proper*: "Es muß sein!"—It must be!

This dyad of three-note motifs, referenced at the outset of *Breathing Statues*, provides the foundation for Clyne's quartet. Also invoked are Beethoven's *Quartet in B-flat Major*, op. 130, and that work's original finale, the majestic *Große Fuge*, later published separately as the composer's Opus 133. Clyne writes, "The concept for *Breathing Statues* came from a poignant moment in the *Große Fuge* where the music stops and, in between moments of silence, breathes as it shifts from a root position E-flat major chord to a first inversion C major chord."

Similar pregnant silences halt the introspective meditation on "Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß" that begins *Breathing Statues*. This opening section gradually morphs into a strange echo of Beethoven before giving flight to music of "suppressed intensity" (per the composer's expressive marking), based on the *Cavatina* from Beethoven's Opus 130. Pulsing chords, played *sul tasto* by the lower strings, accompany the first violin melody, which Clyne marks "oppressed, stuttered breath," echoing Beethoven's own marking (*Beklemmt*). This music soon blossoms into a fanciful *cantabile*. After descending to a tentative *pianissimo*, the quartet grandly summons the *Große Fuge*.

Breathing Statues proceeds to integrate further fragments of Beethoven's Opuses 130, 133, and 135. Clyne inventively transfigures these musical ideas—indeed, in truly Beethovenian fashion—in pursuit of a broad expressive canvas, from (per the composer's instructions) "tender" to "explosive." Amid driving, fortississimo music redolent of the Opus 135 finale's most dramatic moment, the previous evocation of the *Cavatina* recurs: inverted, with the pulsing chords set above *cantabile* melody in the cello, soon thereafter joined by the viola. The quartet's furious climax subsides to a final episode of "suppressed intensity," with the *cantabile* line now set in the second violin, guiding the work to its final *pianissimo* exhalation.

Alongside Beethoven, Rainer Maria Rilke likewise haunts Clyne's quartet. The composer writes, "The concept of breath—of the music and musicians breathing—sometimes together and sometimes apart, reminded me of Rilke's poem *On Music*, from which *Breathing Statues* derives its title."

On Music

Music: the breathing of statues. Perhaps:
the silence of paintings. Language where
language ends. Time
that stands head-up in the direction
of hearts that wear out.
Feeling...for whom? Place where feeling is
transformed...into what? Into a countryside we can hear.

Music: you stranger. You feeling space, growing
away from us. The deepest thing in us, that
rising above us, forces its way out...
a holy goodbye:

when the innermost point in us stands
outside, as amazing space, as the other
side of the air:

pure,
immense,
not for us to live in now.

—Rainer Maria Rilke
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Breathing Statues

Composer: Anna Clyne

Instrumentation: string quartet

Premiering Artists: Calidore String Quartet

Duration: 19

Publisher Contact

Boosey and Hawkes USA

<https://www.boosey.com/>

Artist Contact

IMG Artists

<https://www.calidorestringquartet.com/contact/>

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