

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) String Quartet No.1 (Kreutzer Sonata) (1923)

Adagio - Con moto

Con moto

Con moto - Vivo - Andante

Con moto - (Adagio) - Più mosso

George Bridgetower was a Polish-African violinist friend of Beethoven and the original dedicatee of his tempestuous A major violin sonata "*Sonata per un mulattico lunatico*". Shortly after the first performance in 1803, Bridgetower insulted a woman-friend of Beethoven, who then changed the sonata's dedication to Rodolphe Kreutzer. Kreutzer didn't much care for Beethoven's music and never played the "*outrageously unintelligible*" sonata. The renamed Kreutzer Sonata inspired a novella (1889) by Leon Tolstoy in which a husband's jealousy is inflamed by his wife playing the sonata with an attentive male violinist. Arriving home unexpectedly one night, the husband finds the pair together in the music room and stabs his wife to death. The violinist escapes (undignified to chase him in one's socks); the distraught husband, acquitted of murder, rides the trains seeking the forgiveness of strangers.

"I was imagining a poor woman, tormented and run down, just like the one... Tolstoy describes in his Kreutzer Sonata" wrote the 69 year-old Janáček to Kamila Stösslová, a married woman 38 years his junior, with whom he was having a musically productive but one-sidedly passionate and obsessive (730 letters) relationship. The quartet was written in just a fortnight in October 1923 in Janáček's characteristic fragmentary, episodic mature style, and swings the listener violently across a huge range of emotions.