CMS Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

TUESDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 22, 2024, AT 7:30 ▶ 4,467TH CONCERT

Alice Tully Hall, Starr Theater, Adrienne Arsht Stage Home of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

CALIDORE STRING QUARTET JEFFREY MYERS, violin RYAN MEEHAN, violin JEREMY BERRY, viola ESTELLE CHOI, cello

Beethoven Quartet Cycle I

LUDWIG VAN

BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

- (1798–99) ▶Allegro
 - Andante con moto
 - Allegro
 - ▶ Presto

Quartet in F major for Strings, Op. 18, No. 1 (1798–1800)

Quartet in D major for Strings, Op. 18, No. 3

- Allegro con brio
- Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato
- Scherzo: Allegro molto
- Allegro

INTERMISSION

Quartet in G major for Strings, Op. 18, No. 2 (1799–1800)

- Allegro
- Adagio cantabile
- Scherzo: Allegro
- Allegro molto quasi presto

The Jerome L. Greene Foundation is the 2024–2025 CMS Season Sponsor.

All CMS digital programming is supported by the Hauser Fund for Media and Technology.

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ABOUT TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Dear Listener,

The first thing we hear in today's concert is a moment of enormous historical significance: with a cautious leap upward by a lone violin, Beethoven puts his toe across the line and begins composing string quartets.

He waited for the right moment. He had prepared himself by composing—and successfully premiering and publishing—his three Opus 1 piano trios, in 1795. He also turned out five string trios: the three of Op. 9, plus the Op. 8 Serenade and the earlier Trio in E-flat, Op. 3. He had also composed the Op. 12 Violin Sonatas and Op. 5 Cello Sonatas. And this was only his chamber music: other works included his First Symphony, his First and Second Piano Concertos, as well as sonatas for solo piano. Beethoven, by the time he began composing string quartets, had tested his skills with all the essential genres, and had done so very successfully.

The external circumstances were also in his favor: Mozart had died in 1791; Haydn was in his mid-sixties and tiring; Beethoven had financial supporters and was already living well. He was on his way to dominating the music world for the next quarter-century, until his death in 1827.

Hearing the Op. 18 Quartets is like meeting six different people. Each one has a distinct personality; no two movements are similar. It is as if Beethoven wanted to show as many musical facets as possible within the confines of four voices, much as Haydn had done by that time in some sixty to seventy quartets. As the numbering of the quartets was dictated by Beethoven's publisher, a true chronological performance of the cycle is as you will hear it in this concert. The first quartet, Op. 18, No. 3, is on the whole polite, gentle, well mannered, almost Mozartean, except for the finale, which is a bit on the wild side. The next, Op. 18, No. 1, begins with a manic movement that is obsessed with its opening motif, which is heard over a hundred times (in the manner of his later Fifth Symphony). In addition to its lightning-fast finale (Beethoven probably broke the speed record for quartet writing here), the quartet contains the first example of Beethoven writing in his own future: the slow movement is worthy of his "late" period to come, an intensely dramatic work that seems impossible to have come from such a young composer. And to wrap up this first installment, we hear what has come to be nicknamed the "Compliments" quartet because of its almost overly polite opening movement, a gracious slow movement, the delightful scherzo, and its super-fun finale, which the composer said should be played "unbuttoned," whatever that means!

Enjoy the concert,

David Finckel ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

Wu Han

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

By Jan Swafford

Quartets for Strings, Op. 18, Nos. 1-3

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Baptized December 17, 1770, in Bonn (likely born December 16) Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Composed in 1798-1800

In 1798, Beethoven, at age 27 a rising young composer in Vienna, was commissioned by his patron, Prince Lobkowitz, for six string quartets. They became Op. 18, published in two sets of three in 1800. This was at

- First CMS performance of Nos. 2 and 3 on January 27, 1987, by the Emerson String Quartet.
- First CMS performance of No. 1 on April 14, 1978, by the Amadeus String Quartet.
- Total concert duration: 1 hour, 40 minutes

once a big opportunity for him and a daunting project, but he was prepared for it, having just warmed up with the splendid String Trios of Op. 9. In the later 18th century, string quartets were the most popular medium of

chamber music, played not in public but in the parlors and music rooms of the aristocracy and the well-to-do. Beethoven was familiar with house music because most of his career as a piano virtuoso was within that milieu. Though often there were moonlighting professionals involved, house music performers were mostly amateurs, some of them highly skilled, but still inevitably a mixed bag.

Over the years hundreds of string quartets had been written for that setting. Traditionally they were relatively light works, not too hard to play, geared for the sociable atmosphere of house concerts mounted for a small group of listeners, who during the music might be chatting, playing cards, or sampling a buffet. Often, quartets were done with no audience, for the pleasure of the players. Since the players' skills were unpredictable, quartets were largely written to feature the first violin, the other instruments in supporting roles.

In the later 18th century that paradigm for the style and setting of guartets was not so much changed as amplified by Haydn, who wrote some 68 string quartets in the course of his career. In the process he enlarged the ambition of the genre, among other things making the four instruments more nearly equal in the musical discourse. Largely because of Haydn, the string guartet acquired a reputation as the most sophisticated and important chamber music genre, written mainly for the appreciation of connoisseurs, often described as a conversation of four equals, and revealing not only the composer's craft but his most refined and intimate voice. In his own time Haydn was dubbed "father of the string quartet" (and likewise with symphonies). In other words, nearly single-handedly he created the sense of a string quartet that has endured ever since. Mozart studied Haydn's work intensively before issuing his first mature ones, which he dedicated to Haydn.

That was where the genre lay when Beethoven picked it up. When he came to write his first quartets, however, the situation placed on him a particular burden: when Prince Lobkowitz commissioned them from Beethoven he also commissioned a set from Haydn. In other words, when Beethoven was writing his first quartets he knew he was going to be competing with the man who virtually invented the modern idea of them, and who appeared to be at the peak of his powers. (In fact, by that point Haydn was flagging creatively, busy with his last oratorios, and only finished two of the commissioned six quartets.) From the beginning Beethoven was not afraid of anybody, but he was also very aware, genre by genre and medium by medium, of what the competition was. Things were still more delicate because he not only knew Havdn, but a few years before had studied with him. Then and later, their relations were cordial on the surface but bristly underneath. Well acquainted with his former student's ego, behind Beethoven's back Haydn sardonically called him "The Great Mogul"-in today's terms, The Big Shot. Meanwhile as a composer Haydn was really Beethoven's only living competitor, and the younger man was not all that happy to have competitors.

So what was Beethoven going to do with his first chance at quartets? Was he going to be bold, or was he going to bide his time? In fact, in his early career he had a consistent pattern when it came to those questions. First, he generally had models: in a given genre he fixed on what seemed to him the best in the repertoire, and used that as a foundation. For symphonies, that meant Haydn and Mozart. For violin sonatas, Mozart. For quartets, Haydn. And so on. At the same time, when Beethoven was dealing with media and genres where Haydn and Mozart had been supremesymphonies, violin sonatas, and suchhe composed cautiously, not treading too aggressively when first stepping onto their turf. When he was on around where he felt his predecessors had been less ambitious and dominant-say, cello sonatas, piano trios, piano music in general-Beethoven was fearless and bold. When it came to string quartets, in 1798 he did not feel ready to challenge Haydn. That is why, on the whole, the string quartets of Op. 18 tend to sound less "Beethovenian" than, say, the echt-Beethoven "Pathétique" Piano Sonata, which is Op. 13.

All that is to say that in these works Beethoven was content to explore the medium and bide his time. Meanwhile, typically for him, he studied Haydn quartets and went to an old quartet composer in Vienna named Emanuel Förster to help get himself up to speed. In regard to that, in the middle of work he wrote about an early draft of the F major, which he had loaned a friend: "Be sure not to hand on to anybody your quartet, in which I have made some drastic alterations. For only now have I learned how to write quartets."

There is another important element concerning the history of Beethoven's quartets: from beginning to end they were largely premiered by a portly gentleman named Ignaz Schuppanzigh, whom Beethoven first met as a brilliant teenaged violinist. Schuppanzigh was the first musician in Europe to make his name primarily as a chamber music performer; he led several important groups and established the first public subscription series. In his maturity Beethoven was going to write revolutionary quartets, and his leading partner in that revolution was Schuppanzigh, who premiered most of them (and, incidentally, sat as concertmaster in the premiere of all the symphonies). Without the hefty and, for an artist, unlikely-looking Schuppanzigh, the story of Beethoven's string quartets would have been quite different, and so would have been the history of music.

So the tone of the Op. 18 quartets is largely contemporary rather than prophetic. But these are by no means apprentice works. They show Beethoven as already a master craftsman, with a mature understanding of form and proportion (though that understanding would greatly deepen over the years), who had already found much of his voice though had not fully settled into it. Still, for all their relative modesty and 18th-century tone, the Op. 18 quartets are ambitious in their way: expressive, widely contrasting in mood and color, as varied as any set by Haydn or Mozart, and full of ideas particular to Beethoven. If his one-time teacher Haydn was their main model, most of the time they sound not at all like Haydn.

This program begins with Op. 18, No. 3 in D major, the first to be written, which is to say that it is, as far as we know, the first complete quartet of Beethoven's life. It is relatively conventional, easygoing from the first movement's genial opening featuring the first violin, the central development section uncharacteristically short and undramatic for Beethoven. But the movement also has a tendency to slip into a pensive mood. That mood takes over in a poignant and introspective slow movement in the distant key of B-flat major, which branches into deep-flat keys including the rare and esoteric E-flat minor, a dusky tonality that Beethoven liked. The third movement is neither the traditional minuet nor exactly the faster and usually jollier scherzo that Haydn invented and Beethoven would favor. For one thing, despite its bright key of D major it again has the pensive atmosphere that marks the quartet. All that vanishes in the *Presto* finale, an effervescent romp full of jokes and Haydnesque rhythmic quirks.

After reading through the quartets with his group, violinist Schuppanzigh advised placing the F major, the second composed, as No. 1 in the published set. Beethoven agreed—it made for a more energetic start. (Quartets were usually issued in collections, but that does not mean they were planned to be performed together. Still, a variety of keys and moods were expected among the pieces.) The F major has the most arresting opening of the group, and may be the most consistent throughout. An edgy first movement is driven by an obsessive repetition of a single figure whose significance is rhythmic as much as melodic. In the first measures of the F major, the figure is presented blankly in a quiet unison, then in a yearning phrase, then in a more aggressive *forte*. Which is to say that the theme is a blank slate on which changing feelings are going to be written throughout the movement. The opening idea also presents the leading motif of the whole quartet, a turn figure. Between the published version of the F major and the original version, with advice from old hand Emanuel Förster, Beethoven went back and made dozens of changes in details large and small: extending thematic connections, tightening proportions and tonal relations. In the process he trimmed the appearances of the first-movement turn figure from 130 repetitions to 104.



Op. 18, No. 1

An edgy first movement is driven by an obsessive repetition of a single figure. The theme is a blank slate on which changing feelings are going to be written throughout the movement.

The second movement of the F major is one of the most compelling stretches in Op. 18. Beethoven played over a draft of the movement for a friend, who said it reminded him of the parting of two lovers. Beethoven replied that it was based on the ending of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, where the lovers die. The movement is in D minor, a key in which Beethoven tended to find a kind of singing tragic quality. The movement is slow and warmly impassioned. the main theme a long-breathed, sorrowful song. In the middle a new figure intrudes, like the whirling of fate, and that figure swells relentlessly to a deathly conclusion. There follow a brilliant and delightful scherzo and a briskly dancing, a bit wispy finale that leaves listeners pleased, if perhaps puzzled as to how all this adds up.

The next guartet in the set, No. 2 in G major, is essentially jaunty and ironic from beginning to end, starting with the three distinct gestures of its opening, each like a smiling tip of the hat to the 18th century in general and Haydn in particular. Still, after a genial exposition the development section gets into some more shadowed and intricate places, and that leads to a recapitulation that amounts to a further development. In short, in material and expression the opening movement of the G major is more involved than the playful beginning would suggest, and its ending is quiet and ambiguous. The slow movement starts in an elegantly galant tone, in $\mathbf{\hat{2}}$, but that is punctured

by an eruption of mocking $\frac{2}{3}$ serving as trio. From there the complexities continue: the nominal return of the opening material is invaded by filigree recalling the opening of the first movement. Meanwhile in much of the quartet and this slow movement in particular, rather than being relegated to the bass line the cello is a full participant in the dialogue. For the third movement Beethoven again writes not the traditional minuet but a jovial scherzo. The dashing finale, led off with a pert tune by the cello alone, leaves behind the emotional vacillations that shaded the first two movements, ending the story with fun and games.

Thus the first three Op. 18 quartets were on the surface lodged in the 18th-century quartet tradition, not the Beethoven the new generation would embrace for his boldness and innovation: the Romantic generation exalted revolutionaries. But the pieces are masterful, appealing, often moving works within their context, and part of that is their attention to the rich voice of the cello. Haydn had begun to emancipate the cello, making the quartet more nearly a dialogue of equals. In his habitual fashion of taking the past and expanding and intensifying it, Beethoven through the immense iourney of his string quartets would take that idea to its conclusion.

Jan Swafford is a composer and writer who lives in western Massachusetts.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



CALIDORE STRING QUARTET

The Calidore String Quartet is recognized as one of the world's foremost interpreters of a vast chamber music repertory, from the cycles of quartets by Beethoven and Mendelssohn to works of celebrated contemporary voices like György Kurtág, Jörg Widmann, and Caroline Shaw. For more than a decade, the Calidore has enjoyed performances and residencies in the world's major venues and festivals, released multiple critically acclaimed recordings, and won numerous awards. The *Los Angeles Times* described the musicians as "astonishing," their playing "shockingly deep," approaching "the kind of sublimity other quartets spend a lifetime searching." The *New York Times* noted the Quartet's "deep reserves of virtuosity and irrepressible dramatic instinct," and the *Washington Post* wrote that "four more individual musicians are unimaginable, yet these speak, breathe, think and feel as one."

The New York City-based Calidore String Quartet has appeared in venues throughout North America, Europe, and Asia, including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, London's Wigmore Hall, Berlin's Konzerthaus, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, BOZAR in Brussels, and at major festivals such as the BBC Proms, Verbier, Ravinia, and Music@Menlo. The Quartet has given world premieres of works by Caroline Shaw, Anna Clyne, Gabriela Montero, Sebastian Currier, Han Lash, Mark-Anthony Turnage, and Huw Watkins, and has collaborated with artists such as Anne-Sophie Mutter, Anthony McGill, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Marc-André Hamelin, Joshua Bell, Emerson String Quartet, Gabriela Montero, David Finckel and Wu Han, and many more.

Throughout the 2024–25 season, the Calidore perform the complete String Quartets of Beethoven at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and at the University of Delaware, and bring the complete cycle to the five boroughs of New York City through the Diamonstein-Spielvogel Initiative for Music and Community Engagement—a newly launched series dedicated to bringing chamber music into diverse neighborhoods and communities across New York City. The quartet also returns to their alma mater, the Colburn School in Los Angeles, to play the complete cycle of Korngold String Quartets. Other highlights of the 2024–25 season include return appearances with San Francisco Performances, the Celebrity Series of Boston, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Spivey Hall in Atlanta, the Warsaw Philharmonic, and London's Wigmore Hall; and premieres and performances of works by Han Lash, Sebastian Currier, and Gabriela Montero.

In their most ambitious recording project to date, the Calidore is set to release Beethoven's complete String Quartets for Signum Records. Volume I, containing the late quartets, was released in 2023 to great critical acclaim, earning the quartet *BBC Music Magazine*'s Chamber Award in 2024. The magazine's five-star review noted that the Calidore's performances "penetrate right to the heart of the music" and "can stand comparison with the best." Volume II of the cycle comes out in the fall of 2024. Their previous recordings on Signum include *Babel* with music by Schumann, Shaw, and Shostakovich, and *Resilience* with works by Prokofiev, Janáček, Golijov, and Mendelssohn.

Founded at the Colburn School in Los Angeles in 2010, the Calidore String Quartet has won top prizes at major US chamber music competitions, including the Fischoff, Coleman, Chesapeake, and Yellow Springs. The quartet won the \$100,000 Grand Prize of the 2016 M-Prize International Chamber Music Competition as well as the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship. The Calidore has been a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist and recipients of the Avery Fisher Career Grant and the Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award.

The Calidore String Quartet serves as the University of Delaware's Distinguished String Quartet in Residence. They have also served as artist-inresidence at the University of Toronto, University of Michigan, and Stony Brook University. The Calidore is grateful to have been mentored by the Emerson Quartet, Quatuor Ébène, André Roy, Arnold Steinhardt, David Finckel, Günter Pichler, Guillaume Sutre, Paul Coletti, and Ronald Leonard.

Jeffrey Myers plays on a violin by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini, c. 1775, "Eisenberg," owned by a private benefactor and bows by Dominique Peccatte and Francois Tourte. Ryan Meehan plays a violin by Vincenzo Panormo, c.1775, and a bow by Joseph Henry. Jeremy Berry plays a viola by Umberto Muschietti, c.1903, and a bow by Pierre Simon. Estelle Choi plays a cello by Charles Jacquot, c.1830.

ABOUT THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

Founded in 1969, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (CMS) brings the transcendent experience of great chamber music to more people than any other organization of its kind worldwide. Under the artistic leadership of cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han, the multi-generational and international performing artist roster of 140 of the world's finest chamber musicians enable us to present chamber music of every instrumentation, style, and historical period.

Each season, we reach a global audience with more than 150 performances and education programs in our home at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and the Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Studio at CMS and on tour with residencies worldwide.

We offer a wide range of learning formats and experiences to engage and inform listeners of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of musical knowledge through our education programs. The Bowers Program, our competitive threeseason residency, is dedicated to developing the chamber music leaders of the future and integrates this selection of exceptional early-career musicians into every facet of CMS activities.

Our incomparable digital presence, which regularly enables us to reach millions of viewers and listeners annually, includes our weekly national radio program, heard locally on WQXR 105.9 FM on Monday evenings; radio programming in Taiwan and mainland China; and appearances on American Public Media's *Performance Today*, the monthly program *In Concert with CMS* on the PBS ALL ARTS broadcast channel, and SiriusXM's Symphony Hall channel, among others. The PBS documentary film "Chamber Music Society Returns" chronicles CMS's return to live concerts at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and on a six-city national tour. It is currently available to watch on PBS Passport. Our website also hosts an online archive of more than 1,700 video recordings of performance and education videos free to the public.

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Updated on September 20, 2024

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