



Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

BEETHOVEN STRING QUARTETS

Diamonstein-Spielvogel Initiative

for Music and Community Engagement

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2024, AT 4:00

Dr. S. Stevan Dweck Cultural Center, Brooklyn Public Library

Calidore String Quartet

Jeffrey Myers, violin

Ryan Meehan, violin

Jeremy Berry, viola

Estelle Choi, cello

**Ludwig van
Beethoven**
(1770–1827)

Quartet in A major for Strings, Op. 18, No. 5 (1799–1800)

- ▶ Allegro
- ▶ Menuetto
- ▶ Andante cantabile
- ▶ Allegro

Quartet in C minor for Strings, Op. 18, No. 4 (1799–1800)

- ▶ Allegro ma non tanto
- ▶ Scherzo: Andante scherzoso quasi allegretto
- ▶ Menuetto: Allegretto
- ▶ Allegro

—INTERMISSION—

Quartet in B-flat major for Strings, Op. 18, No. 6 (1800)

- ▶ Allegro con brio
- ▶ Adagio ma non troppo
- ▶ Scherzo: Allegro
- ▶ La Malinconia: Adagio—Allegretto quasi allegro

PLEASE TURN OFF CELL PHONES AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES.

Photographing, sound recording, or videotaping this performance is prohibited.

ABOUT TODAY'S PROGRAM

Dear Listener,

CMS is thrilled this season to bring chamber music direct from Lincoln Center stages to local venues in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. Our programs for 2024–25 showcase the diversity of the art form: you will experience chamber music composed in the 21st century featuring piano, winds, and percussion; music spanning the Romantic era of the 19th century; as well as entire concerts featuring the immortal string quartets by Beethoven, performed by the Calidore Quartet, which this year performs all 16 Beethoven quartets as part of the CMS season theme.

As Artistic Directors, we could not be more grateful for the generosity of the Diamonstein-Spielvogel Initiative for Music & Community Engagement, which allows CMS and our presenting partners to offer these concerts to the public free of charge. Performances take place at the Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture, the Brooklyn Public Library, and the Stone Circle Theatre. We are committed to spreading the joy of chamber music listening far and wide, and our musicians are doubly excited to perform for new audiences in new spaces.

We hope you enjoy these concerts, the music, and our marvelous performers.

With very best wishes,



David Finckel
ARTISTIC DIRECTORS



Wu Han



Notes on the Program

BY JAN SWAFFORD

Ludwig Van Beethoven

Quartets for Strings, Op. 18, Nos. 4–6

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

Composed in 1799–1800

- ▶ Approximate concert duration: 1 hour, 40 minutes

Beethoven wrote the quartets of Op. 18 over two years, interspersed with other pieces, learning and growing as he went, though in the whole set he kept these pieces grounded in the Classical string quartet as his teacher Haydn had defined it: a dialogue of four voices, written for largely amateur performers in private concerts. As usual, the six quartets were issued in two editions as a set, with a concern for a variety of moods and keys. In a set there would usually be one or two in a minor key. That is to say that in the generally optimistic Classical frame of mind, minor keys were not on par with major; they were special. And with Beethoven already, the key of C minor was going to be the most distinctively special: the tonality of the *Pathétique* Sonata, the Fifth Symphony, and a row of important works tending to dark unto demonic.

Quartet No. 5 in A major begins with a delicately wispy theme. That tone and texture persist through a mostly soft movement, though there is a discreet touch of tension, partly resulting from an unexpected E-minor second theme—the only really unexpected thing in the movement. The A-major second movement is a *Menuetto*, that genre displaced from its usual third slot in a work. Carrying on from the first movement it begins quietly, with a gentle duet of violins. The gentleness persists, except for a sudden

aggressive *fortissimo* that has no particular repercussions. The trio, unusually still in A major, is a lilting and placid dance. Then follows the surprise of the quartet, an *Andante* theme and variations nearly twice as long as any of the other movements, its theme another placid one. While generally sticking to that vein, the variations get into faster rhythms and busier textures than have been heard so far—but still whispery, with hardly a *forte* in sight until the suddenly boisterous fifth variation, after which the music returns to *pianissimo*.

The finale is a lighthearted and scampering but still quiet *Allegro* with much tossing around of figures among the instruments. It is in sonata form rather than the usual last-movement rondo. Just when we wonder if it will ever break out of its restraint, the development section is a mock-ferocious stretch that actually builds to *fortissimo*. The end of the piece rises to *forte*, but at the last second, as if mocking our expectations, it comes to rest on a mild, soft chord. Thus ends a work that has been an exercise in understatement.

Quartet No. 4 in C minor is the only minor-key work in Op. 18, this one more aspiring to than attaining the fierce dynamism of what came to be called Beethoven's C-minor mood. Beginning with a passionate theme on the dark-toned G string of the first violin, moving to stark across-the-strings chords, the opening movement is serviceable but perhaps more interesting as a prophecy of his C-minor works to come. The prophecy includes the “da-da-da dum” rhythm of the first two bars, which will be a motif throughout the

quartet; it is an early appearance of that figure that will haunt the Fifth Symphony, but also give the Fourth Piano Concerto some of its lilting grace. The C-major second movement is titled *Scherzo*, with the tousled tempo marking *Andante scherzoso quasi allegretto*, presumably meaning that it's a lighthearted movement that is actually kind of deliberate but should have the effect of being faster than it is. In the end the temper of the movement is quite original, not a usual scherzo at all, its mood describable as ironically gracious.

As it turns out, that singular movement is replacing the usual slow movement, because it is followed by a *Menuetto* whose theme in mood and color recalls the opening of the first movement, and it also has something like the stark chords of that movement. From a shaded C minor there is a turn to a breathless A-flat major for the trio. The finale is another original sort of movement: a rondo, the C minor here intricately scampering, with short repeated segments that make for a bit of a relentless effect. For contrast, the B theme of the rondo is flowing and elegant; those sorts of contrasts mark the music throughout. A *Prestissimo* coda winds up the most dynamic and interesting of the four movements. Its droll closing gesture tells us that we are not required to take it all too seriously.

No. 6 in B-flat major was written last of the set. Here more overtly and eloquently than in any of its Op. 18 neighbors, Beethoven showed his hand in setting out to say something beyond music, going manifestly into the stuff of life. To that end, he shaped a narrative both personal and universal. The brilliance of this quartet is the way it joins the expressive and the formal over the course of the work. Meanwhile it provides a prophecy of places Beethoven is headed in his full maturity.

The B-flat Quartet begins on a striding, muscular theme, a touch generic and

foursquare. It is a Haydnesque theme, and Beethoven is going to play a Haydnesque game with it: set up the listener's expectations, then subvert them. Whereas Haydn usually pursued that game with a wink for the connoisseurs who would get it, Beethoven plays it in earnest. What the listener expects after that beginning is for the music to remain in uncomplicated, 18th-century high spirits. Accordingly, the tone of the second theme is elegant and refined, the rhythm with a hint of marching tread. Then something intrudes, a shadow: the elegant march strays into unexpected keys, arriving with a bump on the chromatic chord called the Neapolitan, a harmonic effect that often has something unsettling about it. After a few seconds the shadow seems to pass, the music shakes itself back into F major, all is well again. Nothing really troubles the movement further until the recap, except that in the development the jolly tone gets sometimes slightly edgy, and in a couple of places the music trails off strangely into silence, as if it has lost its train of thought.

The second movement begins in a blithe and galant mode, but that is made to be spoiled. In the middle part the music slips into E-flat minor, one of Beethoven's most fraught keys, usually implying inward sorrow. Here it is an eerie, spidery, keening whisper based on a twisting motif. Then, as in the first movement, there is a sudden clearing back to the elegant mood of the opening. With intricate cross-accents that defy the listener to find the meter or even the beat, the scherzo plays another Haydn game, his fool-the-ear rhythms. Yet as the music goes on, the tone begins to feel excessive unto obsessive: not innocent but rather manic gaiety. So it is not entirely an intrusion when, at the end of the trio, the music falls for a moment into a strange, shouting B-flat minor before the repeat back into the scherzo.

Then comes the most arresting and significant page in Op. 18, a slow passage

serving as extended introduction to the last movement. Over it Beethoven placed an Italian title: *La Malinconia*, “Melancholy.” More than a small movement, striking in itself, this is the heart of a narrative that began with a few passing shadows in movement one, expanded to a mysterious, spidery whispering in movement two, and sent the scherzo reeling nearly out of control.

Beethoven’s portrait of melancholy’s devious onset begins mildly, in B-flat major. It is an echo of the second theme in movement one, with a smoothing out of the same marching figure, the mood again elegant, the same little turn figure like a gesture with a lace handkerchief at an aristocratic ball. Then the cello begins to sink chromatically; as in the second theme of movement one, there is a sudden darkening. This time the darkness lingers. The music falls into a slow, steady tread, the little turn comes back, keys drift aimlessly. A new section begins, its theme a lugubrious version of the twisting motif in the middle of movement two. The once-elegant little turn comes back, whispering and crying over and over like some inescapable *bête noire*, the harmony oozing around it.

All this is to say that in rhythm, harmony, and melody, *La Malinconia* had been foreshadowed from the beginning, starting with a darkness that shadows the second

theme of the first movement. After the scherzo, when we are expecting an allegro finale, melancholy seems to arise suddenly. But it had been lurking even in the blithe moments, as melancholy does in life. In the music it is present in strange diversions in harmony, thoughts trailing off, things manically exaggerated.

The *Malinconia* movement ends with a high cry and a dying sigh. The finale breaks out immediately, with a driving, dancing gaiety that we take for an escape from melancholy. Yet something is subtly off; the color and the rhythm are wrong. The main theme is carried in the first violin mostly on the milder and darker middle strings rather than on the bright and brilliant E string. The accompaniment, rather than flowing with the meter, has lurching accents on the offbeats.

Suddenly, a crashing halt. *La Malinconia* returns with its deathly tread, its nasty little turn figure, its convulsive cries. It recedes, the dance tries to start up again, fails. Melancholy takes another step, pauses, waits. Tentatively, searching for the right key, the dance tries again until it finds the movement’s proper key of B-flat. It will not be stopped this time, or not quite: before the end there is a slowing, a few turns quiet and hesitant, inward. Then a fierce rush to the cadence, *fortissimo*. Melancholy is banished for the moment, but



Op. 18, No. 6

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only for the moment.

Melancholy was an old, familiar companion to Beethoven. After his mother died when he was 16, he wrote in a letter that he had asthma, but also that “I have been suffering from melancholia, which in my case is almost as great a torture as my illness.” He knew the demon of melancholy like he knew the arcana of harmony and counterpoint. He knew that in the midst of dancing and gaiety, the demon can always come back.

For Beethoven, Op. 18, No. 6 is, in both its technical and psychological dimensions, a manifestly mature work and a gathering of prophecies musical, dramatic, and expressive. The long-range psychological unfolding in the B-flat Quartet will be repeated in works to the end of his life. To mention one, its prophecies will play out in the way a middle

movement returns to trouble the triumphant finale of the Fifth Symphony.

All the same, on the whole, Op. 18 was not intended to challenge anything or anybody. If by 1800 Beethoven had known where he wanted to take the genres of symphony and string quartet, he would have taken them there. But he did not know yet where he wanted to go with them, so he proceeded warily, trying one thing and another, one voice and another, and biding his time. When he returned to the string quartet, six years later, he would transform the medium once and for all.

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 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 Fischhoff, 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-in-residence 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 François 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 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 three-season 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 Saturday and 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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The Wadsworth Legacy — honoring CMS's founding artistic director with vocal legends **Kathleen Battle** and **Frederica von Stade**.

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