

TUESDAY EVENING, JANUARY 28, 2025, AT 7:30 ▶ 4,513TH 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 III

Ludwig van Beethoven

Quartet in F major for Strings, Op. 59, No. 1, "Razumovsky" (1806)

(1770 - 1827)

- Allegro
- ▶ Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando
- Adagio molto e mesto
- ▶ Theme russe: Allegro

Quartet in E minor for Strings, Op. 59, No. 2, "Razumovsky" (1806)

- ▶ Allegro
- ▶ Molto adagio
- Allegretto
- ▶ Finale: Presto

INTERMISSION

Quartet in C major for Strings, Op. 59, No. 3, "Razumovsky" (1806)

- ▶ Introduzione: Andante con moto—Allegro vivace
- ▶ Andante con moto quasi allegretto
- ▶ Menuetto: Grazioso
- ▶ Allegro molto

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About Tonight's Program

Dear Listener,

If anyone should feel that the importance of patronage in the arts is overrated, this program is certain to change that perception.

Not only are these three quartets by Beethoven commonly identified by the name of their commissioner, Count Andrey Kirillovich Razumovsky, Russian ambassador to Vienna; this generous patron is remembered for very little else outside of Austrian and Russian historical circles. An avid amateur musician and a voracious art collector, he also founded the formation of an inhouse string quartet led by Ignaz Schuppanzigh, who had taught Beethoven the violin and premiered the composer's Opus 18 string quartets in the 1790s.

Razumovsky must have had very good taste, instincts, or both: the Op. 59 quartets made an immediate impact on the Viennese musical community. They were longer and more difficult than any quartet preceding them, in fact necessitating the formation of Schuppanzigh's group in order to handle their challenges. With these quartets, for better or worse, Beethoven took the string quartet genre out the hands of amateurs, and they never got it back.

As you are about to encounter a great deal of incredible music, let us not force too much on you right now. However, to share a couple of observations is irresistible. First, in looking for hallmarks of Beethoven's "heroic" period, from which these quartets date, we'd like to point out the way he achieved the extreme length of these works, and it's actually quite simple: everything is longer, the themes, the transitions, the major segments of sonata-form writing. You'll notice right away in the first theme of Op. 59, No. 1, which begins the program, that the theme begun by the cello is so broad that it must be taken over by the first violin. Beethoven's early quartets had themes built on fragments or motives, like individual bricks mortared together. Now, he's using gigantic beams that span and connect the whole ensemble.

The second extraordinary fact about these quartets is not only Beethoven's adaptation of the Russian themes in the first two, but what we would describe as his "tone painting" of the Russian soul and landscape which comprises the entire second movement of Op. 59, No. 3. Beethoven was never in Russia; he neither spoke the language nor read the literature, and yet, somehow, he captured the sense of space, the sadness, the endless journeys and even a touch of Russian humor with complete mastery. Russian composers would not do

as well until after Mikhail Glinka inspired native Russian classical music with his opera *A Life for the Tsar* in 1836. How Beethoven did this is simply another miracle to be added to his pile of them, whose peak sits firmly among a handful belonging to the greatest composers of all time.

Enjoy the performance,

David Finckel Wu

Wu Han



Notes on the Program

By Jan Swafford

Ludwig van Beethoven

Quartets for Strings, Op. 59, "Razumovsky"

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

Composed in 1806

- ► First CMS performance of No. 1 on April 20, 1986, by the Emerson String Quartet
- ► First CMS performance of No. 2 on February 28, 1975, by Quartetto Italiano
- ► First CMS performance of No. 3 on April 1, 1983, by the Emerson String Quartet
- ► Total concert duration: 2 hours, 10 minutes

In 1808 there appeared a review: "Three new, very long and difficult violin quartets by Beethoven, dedicated to the Russian ambassador Count Razumovsky, also attract the attention of all connoisseurs. They are deep in conception and marvelously worked out, but not universally comprehensible, with the possible exception of the third one, in C major, which by virtue of its individuality, melody, and harmonic power must win over every educated friend of music." The three quartets, Op. 59, had premiered in Vienna, maybe in violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh's short-lived public quartet series, and they had been shaped with that virtuoso ensemble in mind. Beethoven wrote them probably between April and November of 1806. In these quartets a historic turn in chamber music began, away from private amateur performance and toward programs played

by professionals in public venues. Chamber music was beginning to move out of salons and into concert halls.

In some six years, between the completion of the Op. 18 quartets and the Op. 59 "Razumovsky" Quartets, Beethoven had gone from a young composer trying on voices and attempting to escape from the shadow of Haydn and Mozart, to an artist in his prime widely called their peer. In the Razumovskys he made another medium his own. With them he intended to repeat what he had done with the Eroica Symphony: make a familiar genre bigger, more ambitious, more varied, more personal. The presence of Schuppanzigh and his colleagues allowed him to take quartets wherever he wanted to go with them. The Op. 18 quartets published in 1800 had been appealing and well-crafted, but what Beethoven had learned since then in power and subtlety of expression and form is manifest in abundance.

The most immediate revolution in Op. 59 had to do with the scope of the difficulties. In scale and ambition they are the most symphonic quartets to that time, harder on both players and listeners than any quartet before, even in a medium traditionally meant for connoisseurs. There is no mystery in the slow reception these quartets received. The electricity, aggressiveness, in some ways sheer strangeness of the Razumovskys are collectively breathtaking. Even some of their beauties are strange.

But revolutionary does not always equal loud. The beginning of **No. 1** in F major is a quiet pulsation in the upper strings while the cello sings a spacious, flowing, gently beautiful tune rather like a folk song. At the time, an extended lyric line for the cello under barely moving harmony was simply outlandish. Beethoven is continuing his campaign to free the instrument from a life mainly toiling on the bass line. A melodic cello will be a steady feature of the quartet. As he had been doing in his piano sonatas, from here on Beethoven fashioned each string

quartet with a distinctive color and texture. Theme and harmony and rhythm are no longer the exclusive subjects of a work; now its very sound is distinctive, as if with each quartet he set out to reinvent the medium. The three numbers of Op. 59 are a collection of unforgettable individuals: one singing, one mysterious, one ebullient.

As Beethoven began work on the F major, he pored over a collection of Russian folk songs in order to comply with a commission requirement from his patron: he had to use a Russian theme in each piece. He picked a tuneful one for the main theme of the finale. Then he wrote the piece in some degree back to front, basing the opening cello theme, with its vaguely folk-song quality, on the Russian tune of the finale. What he picked up for that purpose from the finale theme was mainly its beginning: the first four notes of the Russian tune, C-D-E-F, became the opening notes of his first-movement theme. The first two notes, the falling step D-C, linger throughout the quartet as a primal motif.

Most of the first movement is involved with the opening theme, mainly its rising-fourth figure and its 1-2-3-4-1 rhythmic motif. The second theme extends the rising fourth scale line to an octave in another flowing theme, the cello again waxing melodic. After a gentle closing theme starting over a rustic drone, connoisseurs would hear the expected repeat of the exposition, returning to the opening cello melody. But it's a feint; there will be no conventional repeat. From that point the development section spins through a winding course involving some dozen keys, coming to rest for a moment on a bit of double fugue.

The recapitulation is as singular as the false repeat of the exposition. It arrives back in F major not with the cello theme but with the first subtheme, then wanders off harmonically. At length, a grand C-major scale brings in the recapitulation proper, but overlaps the return of the cello theme. All this deliberately blurs the moment of

recapitulation; Beethoven wanted the form of the movement fluid, suppressing the formal landmarks to make a more continuous effect. In the coda the main theme returns in glory, pealed out in high violin over droning fifths in the bass, finding a stable harmonic foundation at last.

All the movements are in sonata form. The following Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando (vivacious and always playful) was for its time the most scandalous movement of all, its personality and leading idea so eccentric that many never grasped how playful it is. (Beethoven never wrote another movement like it.) It occupies the place of a scherzo but has little to do with conventional scherzo style or form. It starts, like the first movement, with the cello alone, this time introducing a bouncing rhythm on a single B-flat, followed by a little dancing figure in the violin. Those two items will be nearly the entire subjects of a long movement, taken through a variegated course of keys and moods.

Nothing prepares listeners for the depth of the F minor *Adagio molto e mesto* third movement, *mesto* meaning "mournful." It begins *in medias res*, with a twisting, anguished aria. The second theme is a sorrowfully arching melody that begins in a spidery texture of violin and cello. In the development comes a poignant, whispering arioso, like a tentative answer to pathos, a wounded consolation.

The last movement's Russian folk tune begins an outing jaunty and ironic, verging on monothematic, and like the first and second movements beginning with cello alone. The main concern of the short development section is a sustained march toward an expansive treatment of the chattering second theme. The recapitulation begins in the wrong key, the Russian theme having to start with its first notes harmonized in B-flat until the music finds its way to F major. A racing and raucous *fortissimo* final page is interrupted by a gently chromatic adagio that recalls the atmosphere of the slow

movement; then high spirits bubble up again. So ends a quartet fresh and fascinating, one that would have a galvanizing effect on the future development of the medium.

No. 2 of the Razumovsky set is a contrasting work in E minor. What surprises in this generally surprising opus is the intensity of the contrast. Where No. 1 is expansive and extroverted, the beginning of No. 2 paints a character inward and unpredictable: two slashing chords by way of introduction, then keening wisps of melody falling into silences to start a compact exposition. On the second line a passionate theme breaks out only to go up in smoke, starts again only to be erased by a fortissimo outburst. The feeling of the minor mode here is not tragic but mysterious, with startling harmonic jumps. The opening whispered E-minor figure moves, after a rest, to the same figure a half step higher, on F major. So we start with a jump from E minor to F with only silence as transition. That half-step harmonic motion will mark the whole quartet.

So will silences. Beethoven was as much a master of the expressive pause as of expressive notes. The rests here are fraught and questioning. And the overall progress of the quartet is not a clear dramatic narrative but something more intangible, abstract, even esoteric. The G-major second theme is contrasting, gracious, sustained, the exposition's closing theme a burst of ebullience. After a brief development, the music reaches the home key of E minor several bars before the recapitulation proper, so the development flows unbroken into the recapitulation. In the coda, the attempts at a sustained theme heard on the first page flower into a passionate stretch of melody that rises to a fortissimo peak and sinks back to stillness.

Carl Czerny recalled Beethoven saying that the E-major second movement came to him "when contemplating the starry sky and thinking about the music of the spheres"—for Beethoven an evocation of the divine. It is a sonata-form movement of tender.

long-breathed melodies in a poignant E major. The future would see this stretching for the ethereal and sublime as a prophecy of his late music. The theme of the droll and quirky scherzo smacks the second beat, giving the music an off-kilter tread. There are recollections of ideas from the quartet's opening, and the second period makes the quartet's trademark jump from E minor to F major. A droll and fugal trio gives another Russian tune a whirl.

In tonal terms, call the sonata-rondo finale ironically perverse: the rondo theme is in the wrong key, C major. It is a romping and raucous march with some sort of exotic overtone. Against that C major the proper key, E minor, struggles to assert itself. In the developmental middle section a fugue pops up, its quick entries and mock-learned inversions of the theme reinforcing the comic mood. The overall tonal point is going to be, in the coda, a grand resolution, belatedly, to E minor. Yet at the beginning of the coda, the rondo theme turns up yet again in its C-major effrontery until the theme settles on the right key in a frenetic E-minor peroration. In a way, the games with keys in the finale amount to comedy for connoisseurs, who recognize an unusual tonal leap when they hear one, and who know that a rondo theme is supposed to end up in the home key.

The introduction of the last of the Op. 59 quartets, **No. 3** in C major, seems to announce the strangest, most charismatic piece of the set: wandering harmonies suggesting no key at all. Yet that introduces an *Allegro vivace* that could serve as a definition of *vivace*, "lively," and of C major in its most ebullient mood. Connoisseurs of the time would immediately identify where this paradoxical juxtaposition came from: Mozart's famous quartet nicknamed the "Dissonant," because it has the same effect of a chromatic and gnarly introduction to a largely carefree

C-major movement. In the context of the Razumovsky set, it is as if with this high-spirited and ingratiating outing Beethoven offered a panacea for players and listeners boggled by the first two quartets.

After the introduction, the Allegro vivace starts with a sharp little pickup, creating much energy with a flick of the pen. Upbeat figures mark most of the themes, with steady variations on the idea. A long solo for the first violin presages a movement with concertolike overtones, bravura solos handed around generously. The beginning is rambunctious with a loping rhythm; the second theme debuts in the conventional key, here G major. All this is to say that this is going to be a lively piece that is meanwhile the least searching, least eccentric member of Op. 59. There appears to be no quote of a Russian tune in the piece, but the second movement may have what Beethoven thought of as an evocation of a slow Russian song or dance. It is one of those sui generis pieces he pulled out of the air now and then, haunting and beautiful in its rocking rhythm, its quiet obsessiveness. The tone is muted and brooding rather than tragic, with a suddenly optimistic C-major second theme.

In the third movement Beethoven looked back to the past in terms of his own present with a *Menuetto grazioso*. It is a minuet without lace, with only a distant echo of the old courtly tone, its mellow and unassuming gracefulness nearly as singular as the previous movement. For the *Allegro molto* finale he leaps into a madcap quasi-fugue, continual variations of its quirky and comical opening theme dashing through keys in company with a series of countersubjects. It is one of his less substantial but most effervescent finales, a movement skating headlong on its own constantly renewing energy.

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 Prokofiey, 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-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 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 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.

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