

TUESDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 4, 2025, AT 7:30 ▶ 4,519TH 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 IV**

## Ludwig van Beethoven

Quartet in E-flat major for Strings, Op. 74, "Harp"

(1809)

- (1770-1827) ▶ Poco adagio—Allegro
  - ▶ Adagio ma non troppo
  - Presto—Più presto quasi prestissimo
  - Allegretto con variazioni

## Quartet in F minor for Strings, Op. 95, "Serioso" (1810-11)

- Allegro con brio
- Allegretto ma non troppo
- ▶ Allegro assai vivace, ma serioso
- ▶ Larghetto espressivo—Allegretto agitato

#### INTERMISSION

### Quartet in E-flat major for Strings, Op. 127 (1824–25)

- ▶ Maestoso—Allegro
- Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
- Scherzando vivace—Presto
- ▶ Finale

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# **About Tonight's Program**

Dear Listener,

The Book of Revelation speaks of a giant angel coming down from heaven and placing his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the earth. The Colossus of Rhodes, once one of the Seven Wonders of the World, also comes to mind as we introduce this program. Because tonight we straddle a thirteen-year period in Beethoven's life during which he produced no string quartets. With our musical feet spread so wide, how should we approach this listening experience?

Rather than a daunting challenge, this concert actually holds a wealth of opportunities to enjoy, as it poses questions and supplies its own answers. Perhaps the most obvious riddle to solve is: what stopped him from writing quartets for so long? Well, this program explains that as clearly as one could imagine. In the Op. 74 and Op. 95 quartets on the first half, we encounter Beethoven looking back into his "heroic" style in Op. 74, and forward to his "late" style with his experimental Op. 95 quartet, titled "Quartetto serioso" by the composer, and intended for private performance only as an experimental work. Worlds away from the grand statements of the earlier Op. 59 "Razumovsky" quartets of 1806, Op. 95 is terse, impulsive, brooding, forbidding, and sometimes simply wild. The first half of tonight's concert ends with the composer saying "Who am I? What am I? And, where am I to go now?"

The answer to these questions was not arrived at overnight for this composer. Distracted by a custody suit for his nephew against his sister-in-law, beset by health issues including now total deafness, and plagued by the social turmoil in Europe following the rise and fall of Napoleon, Beethoven needed a new reason to compose. He had encountered this situation once before, in the early 1800s, when, in the midst of personal crisis, he broke through and resolved to strive onwards in service of his art (hence, the "heroic" period). Now, in 1812, the most famous composer in the world was not really sure what to write. Talk about a problem! Rather than force a solution, what Beethoven did was more organic. The first inkling of it comes in the two cello sonatas of 1815, Op. 102 (we'll hear the second of them in Beethoven Trilogy III), the first works that could truly be called "late" Beethoven. Next came a historic song cycle (the first of its kind), An die ferne Geliebte, of 1816, and the monumental piano sonatas Opp. 106 "Hammerklavier," 109, 110, and 111. The Missa Solemnis and the Ninth Symphony followed, and by this time, Beethoven was ready once more for string quartet composing.

From the opening bars of Op. 127, we have the answer to our riddle. It took a lot of time and preparatory work to arrive at this completely new way of composing quartets. This work's first chord is like the foot of the angel landing on the earth, and this foot-planting episode interrupts this mostly pastoral movement two more times. In the following theme and variation movement, time itself seems to stop. Practically every imaginable human emotion is expressed, and by the end, we feel we've circled the globe and returned home. The scherzo is delightful (perhaps except for the players!) and is relentlessly acrobatic. (The manuscript of this movement sits in this building, in the Juilliard Manuscript Collection.) And the exuberant finale is in the *Ode to Joy* spirit, with an ethereal ascent to a mystical, better world at the conclusion.

Thank you for joining us for this extraordinary, consequential chapter in the quartet life of Ludwig van Beethoven, and enjoy the performance.

David Finckel

ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

Wu Han

# **Notes on the Program**

By Jan Swafford

Ludwig van Beethoven

# Quartet in E-flat major for Strings, Op. 74, "Harp"

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

### Composed in 1809

- ► First CMS performance on March 3, 1987, by the Emerson String Quartet
- ▶ Duration: 31 minutes

In 1809, a year in which Beethoven declared he produced only "a fragment here and there," appeared the warm and ingratiating String Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 74, eventually dubbed "Harp" for its striking pizzicatos. In his art Beethoven was in an in-between place. In a mammoth concert the year before he had premiered the climactic works of his Middle Period, the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and Fourth Piano Concerto. By 1809 it appears that he had come to feel the train of thought that had sustained his work in the six years since the Eroica Symphony were played out, and he did not know where he wanted to go next. He would not be sure of that for years to come. So he marked time with a string of works brilliant but in no particular direction. The first two works on this program are among them.

The first movement of the "Harp" is compact and without formal or, for that matter, emotional ambiguities. It begins with a gentle, flowing introduction, harmonically and metrically wandering but untroubled. Then a forthright *Allegro* breaks out with an 18th-century atmosphere, until the transition to the second theme injects some pizzicatos rare for the time in being in the foreground of the music rather than an accompaniment. Beethoven kept this movement gracious, elegant, beautiful, as unassuming as everything

else in the piece. It is that quality that makes the "Harp" fresh in his work in general and his quartets in particular, especially compared to the aggressively radical Razumovskys.

All the same, he remained determined to give every work not only distinctive material but also a distinctive sonority. The pizzicatos are a way to do that simply and directly, and they were unusual enough to give a name to the quartet. In the first movement, after a cheery and only modestly eventful development and fairly literal recapitulation (though the pizzicatos are extended), there comes a surprise in the form of an enormous coda that starts with frenetic and exciting crossstring fiddling from the first violin while the main theme surges beneath; then comes a section of accelerating pizzicatos. So as usual with Beethoven, the pizzicatos are not just a color or a passing fancy, but a motif to be developed and paid off.

In his work he was searching, so he would not have known yet that one of the places he was headed toward in his late music was a poignant and broad songfulness like the Adagio ma non troppo second movement. Its main point is to present a long, lovely melody and two ornamented versions of it, spaced by two equally lyrical and barely contrasting sections. The contrast comes with the scherzo, marked Presto, a boisterous C-minor excursion. Its exhilarating rhythmic thrust comes from a nimble alternation of threebeat (2+2+2) and two-beat (3+3) divisions within the bar. The scherzo section alternates with a manically contrapuntal C-major trio, marked Più presto quasi prestissimo, that comes back twice. The movement finishes with a preparatory chord which, instead of ending the scherzo, ushers in the finale. That this is a work more conciliatory than provocative finds its denouement in Beethoven's only variation finale in a quartet. Its theme is a small bouncy *Allegretto* of unpretentious charm; the variations ornament the theme in six simple and graceful sections. The end becomes suddenly playful, then ebullient, finally *fortissimo*, only to pull back to a quiet and modest farewell.

All this is to say that the "Harp" Quartet is no lapel grabber, that for all its freshness it smacks of nothing "revolutionary." This and the other pieces of 1809–10 were intended not to make strides but to bide time. Moreover, in the procession of his quartets, Beethoven may have wanted to give the public and musicians a rest after the strenuous workout of the Razumovskys. But the next quartet boils with fury.

## Ludwig van Beethoven

# Quartet in F minor for Strings, Op. 95, "Serioso"

### Composed in 1810-11

- ► First CMS performance on January 30, 1972, by the Guarneri String Quartet
- ▶ Duration: 21 minutes

Beethoven was not a Romantic artist setting out mainly to express himself, but it is still hard not to connect his emotional storms of 1810 with the String Quartet in F minor, completed that summer and eventually published as Op. 95. It is one of the singular works of his life, a challenge and an enigma. It is one of the handful of works to which he gave titles: *Quartetto serioso*.

For Beethoven, F minor seems to have been a darkly expressive key, more raw, more nakedly tragic than the often tumultuous C minor. It is the key of the Appassionata, of the dungeon scene in Fidelio. The Serioso seems to involve something on the order of a confrontation between love and rage. A simple description of its opening may be the best representation in words. A grinding furioso phrase answered by a violent silence. An eruption of stark octaves in jolting dotted rhythms. Another glowering silence. A wrenching harmonic jump from F minor to G-flat major in a tender phrase, quickly shattered by the return of the furioso figure. After a first theme of 20 bars, which contain those three starkly contrasting ideas with only silence as transition, there is a short bridge to a second theme that sounds evanescent, breathless, unreal.

That moment of melting beauty is again invaded by the grinding figure and by an intrusion of up-rushing fortissimo scales in inexplicable keys. In this movement there is more confrontation than transition, with abrupt jumps from key to key; the sonata form is so condensed as to be desiccated. There is no repeat of the exposition before the development, because in this movement the material is always volatile, all development. At the same time, the music cannot escape from the opening furioso figure, which grinds through most of the 22 bars of a truncated development. The movement's coda rises to a scream and falls to exhaustion. The second movement is a startling jump from F minor to D major, its beginning an enigmatic lone cello stride. The main theme is of a profound but fragile beauty. In its middle comes a strange fugue whose falling chromatic subject feels like an endless descent into sorrow.

There is no slow movement, nor a scherzo or minuet. In meter and tempo, the third movement stands in place of a scherzo. So there can be no mistake about its import, it is marked *Allegro assai vivace ma serioso*, very lively but seriously. The movement has an aggressive drive, with relentless dotted

rhythms and blunt silences. In contrast, the two trios are lyrical and soaring, recalling in their tone and keys (G-flat and D-flat) the tender moments of the first movement. A softly poignant phrase introduces an Allegro agitato finale that is nearly as tight and taut as the first movement. Its main theme begins curt, desiccated, half made of rests, until it reaches a surging, quietly agitated song. The penultimate page dies into silence, stasis, whispers. Then, as perhaps the strangest stroke of all, comes a coda that seems intended to wipe away all sadness. It is a burst of F-major ebullience like the end of a comic opera, yet still short and curt, ending with an up-rushing scale that recalls the peculiar ones in the first movement. If the coda is a resolution to hope, it is an oddly choked-off one—but hope all the same.

In 1810 Beethoven had experienced a devastating marriage rejection. Whether the fury and the tenuous moments of hope in the Serioso represent his state of mind that year is an open question. In any case he knew that this quartet was going to be a puzzle for listeners, perhaps enough so to harm his career. He did not publish it for six years, and in 1816 made an extraordinary declaration: "The Quartet is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public." In any case, if in fact the Serioso is a cry from the soul that seemed to him too intimate to be made public, it is a tightly disciplined cry, a systematic experiment with the musical norms and forms he inherited. In that respect it amounts to something he could not have understood yet: a prophecy of music he was going to be writing a decade later.

Ludwig van Beethoven

# Quartet in E-flat major for Strings, Op. 127

## Composed in 1824-25

- ► First CMS performance on March 3, 1987, by the Emerson String Quartet
- Duration: 37 minutes

In 1825, as the first of a commission for three quartets from Russian Prince Nikolai Galitzin, Beethoven finished the E-flat major, Op. 127. It is part of his quest in the late music for fresh ways of putting pieces together and, in keeping, for new shades of feeling. Among other developments as he made his way through these works, he veered further from the norms of logic and continuity he had learned from the Viennese Classical tradition, delving further into effects of juxtaposition and discontinuity. Here is a new intensification of his art, reaching toward conceptions that were to galvanize composers into the next century.

Op. 127 is a study in lyricism expressed in the most delicate and amiable passages—but

they are new kinds of delicacy and amiability, with little trace of the 18th century. It begins with six bars of robust, bouncing chords in rich double-stops that in the first measures fool the ear about the meter-we hear a downbeat in the middle of the actual first beat. Before the first theme proper, those six introductory bars embody another of Beethoven's games of these years with familiar formal functions: is this opening a theme or a micro-introduction? In practice it is more or less the latter, but it turns up a couple of times further in the movement, so it might better be called some sort of motto passage. The first theme appears, warm and flowing, in a violin line, handed off to viola, of fine lyrical charm. The rich contrapuntal web of these bars is going to return in various guises and permutations some two dozen times.

In the late music Beethoven is still thinking in terms of sonata form and the other traditional outlines, but the landmarks of the forms are receding into more of a sense of fantasia and improvisation. In a compact exposition, the G-minor second theme flows lyrically like the first, and soon makes its way back to the first-theme idea. After a brief closing section we find ourselves returned to the opening "introduction," as if the exposition has made the usual repeat back to the beginning. But the introductory idea is now in G major, and it ushers in the development without the usual repeat of the exposition. The development slips almost imperceptibly back into a transformed recapitulation, as if the recap were a continuation of the development. The coda, almost as long as the other sections, is pensive, to prepare the slow movement, which will be nearly as long as the other three combined. That movement begins with a long, slow-arching theme as subject for five gently beautiful variations. Here Beethoven's intensified focus on part writing comes to the fore: unlike anything before, these verge on texture variations, some of those textures made of distinct superimposed figures in the instruments.

The third movement is another of Beethoven's sui generis outings. Marked *Scherzando vivace*, lively and playful, it is therefore a scherzo, and in scherzo–trio–scherzo form. Otherwise it sounds nothing

like a scherzo, or a minuet either, though it is in  $\mathbf{\hat{q}}$  and in minuet rather than faster scherzo tempo. All of it is based on a bouncing and ironic tune that goes in and out of fugue, like a parody of a fugue extended to the point of seeming endless. The trio comes on in breathless triple one-beat, like a manic scherzo.

In the finale, after another short, sortof introduction (which characterizes the beginning of all the movements), the first theme of the sonata form is again tenderly lyrical, like most of the quartet, and manifestly derived from the first theme of the first movement. Here, lines in long, flowing phrases alternate with dancing figures in delicate staccato. As in the first movement, a compact exposition slips without repeat into a compact development that continues unbroken into a highly varied developmental recapitulation, and finally into a long coda. There is something magical about this coda, which transforms the main theme into passages that recall the liquid last variation of the slow movement. The quartet ends with the kind of heart-filling warmth that has marked it from the beginning.

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-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.

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