

# **CMS** Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, MAY 18, 2025, AT 5:00 ▶ 4,582ND 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 VI**

**Ludwig van  
Beethoven**  
(1770–1827)

### **Quartet in C-sharp minor for Strings, Op. 131** (1825–26)

- ▶ Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo—
- ▶ Allegro molto vivace—
- ▶ Allegro moderato—Adagio—
- ▶ Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile—
- ▶ Presto—
- ▶ Adagio quasi un poco andante—
- ▶ Allegro

## **INTERMISSION**

### **Quartet in F major for Strings, Op. 135** (1826)

- ▶ Allegretto
- ▶ Vivace
- ▶ Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo
- ▶ Der schwer gefasste Entschluss: Grave, ma non troppo tratto—Allegro

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# About Tonight's Program

Dear Listener,

This concert brings us not only to the end our Beethoven Quartet Cycle, but our 2024–25 season as well. It's been a thrill to feel the mighty presence of Beethoven throughout, as we visited him during his three stylistic periods. There is no more dramatic composer story, nor a more consequential body of work than his, which changed the course of music forever.

It's time to acknowledge the enormous contribution the Calidore String Quartet has made to CMS over the last nine months. Learning the sixteen Beethoven Quartets, and performing them all at a world-class level is not for the faint of heart. It takes almost unimaginable dedication and countless hours of practice and rehearsal to climb this mountain, but climb it they did, and we offer them our gratitude and congratulations on completing, today, CMS's seventh Beethoven cycle. As performers of the complete cycle, they follow in the footsteps of the Emerson, Orion, Takács, and Danish Quartets, and a multitude of other ensembles who have shared the quartets during a Beethoven cycle season.

This concert combines Beethoven's most sophisticated string quartet, Op. 131, with Op. 135, which provides an almost wistful conclusion to the cycle. The seven connected movements of Op. 131 follow sequentially the six of Op. 130, the five of Op. 132, and the four of Op. 127, the first of the late quartets. Op. 131, heard tonight, gathers virtually every musical inclination that Beethoven had, from the austere opening fugue harking back to the Baroque era, to the wildness of its scherzo which recalls the virtuosic thrills of his heroic period, to moments of almost childlike innocence in the sublime variations, the heart of the work. Beethoven, at the eleventh hour, throws in a new feature: the cyclic return of the initial fugue theme in the midst of the turbulent finale. And in true Beethoven form, after all the struggle, he finds a way to triumph at the conclusion, as the quartet vaults upward with a shocking C-sharp *major* arpeggio.

Words must be chosen carefully when talking about music, as it has been correctly stated that music is indeed *more* specific than words, not the other way around. And one must be especially cautious trying to pin down what Op. 135 is all about. Its disarming simplicity is deceptive: if one listens deeply, one might guess that there is more behind the notes that is implied rather than sounded. The first movement's beguiling

theme, passed between the instruments, sounds perfectly conventional, only to be immediately followed by a mysterious passage, all four instruments playing the same pitches. What does it mean? As we said in our previous Beethoven letter, his late music is more a stream of consciousness, a state of mind, yet all with structure and purpose. One must use musical instincts to decode it, and it can be interpreted many ways. Such is the endless joy of music as great as this.

We wish you a wonderful late spring, and we look forward to greeting you again for a Summer Evenings program in July.

Enjoy the concert,



David Finckel



Wu Han

ARTISTIC DIRECTORS



## Notes on the Program

By Jan Swafford

Ludwig van Beethoven

### Quartet in C-sharp minor for Strings, Op. 131

- ▶ Baptized December 17, 1770, in Bonn (likely born December 16)
- ▶ Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna
- Composed in 1825–26**
- ▶ First CMS performance on March 5, 1987, by the Emerson String Quartet
- ▶ Duration: 40 minutes

Beethoven said very little about his music, but the few things he did say speak volumes. Perhaps the most significant was this: “It is my habit always to keep the whole in view.” That he conceived of his works as a whole, a development of one train of thought in

terms of material and expression, is never more deeply expressed than in the late string quartets in general and the C-sharp minor Quartet, Op. 131, in particular.

Op. 131 begins with a keening melody on the middle strings of the first violin—its most subdued register—and in a dark-toned key with few open strings. A second violin enters with the theme; a fugue begins to take shape. As the entries work their way down to the cello the texture remains austere, moving in simple quarter and half notes. It has an archaic feel, like a Renaissance sacred work. In the late music Beethoven wanted to invest

the old genre of fugue with more emotion than it had ever possessed. Here is the climax of that investment. Richard Wagner wrote that he found this movement “the saddest thing ever said in notes.”

The piece did not come easily for Beethoven; there were more than six hundred pages of sketches. As it finally took shape, the quartet comprises seven numbered movements, each rising from the preceding one with little or no pause. The whole is grounded on the very beginning, the bare fugue theme. The first three notes, G#–B#–C#, form a motif that will resonate all the way to the finale. The next two bars are another motif, whose scale-wise flow will also have a long career. The first part of the theme points to sorrow, the flowing second part to resignation and hope.

No fugal movements in late Beethoven are pure fugues. Instead, each of them is a unique integration of Baroque and Classical models. The first movement of the C-sharp minor begins with a fugal exposition, but much of the rest is a contrapuntal and imitative development on the motifs of the theme, sonata-like, including a second-theme section in B major (not fugal) where the flowing motif is speeded into eighth-notes. After some exquisitely poignant echoing duets and more development, the last section before the coda is a fugue using an augmentation of the theme, each note doubled in length. In this period Beethoven often writes enormous harmonic arcs, like page-long sentences: the first clear cadence to C-sharp minor does not arrive until the end of the movement; the first truly firm cadence to that key will appear only in the finale.

Just before the final bars, the first violin reaches up aching to D, the gesture unfolding both poignance and logic: it makes a tonal transition to the second movement’s nimble and dashing gigue in D major, marked *Allegro molto vivace*. Deep darkness to light: part of the effect of the second movement’s sudden brightening is the effect of D major in the instruments, that key involving most

of the open strings. Like all the movements, the second has a memorable leading theme, blithe and liquid. It is short and nominally in sonata form, though there is little trace of a development section. A big coda builds up to a stern, three-octave declamation that resurrects the serious side of the quartet. The sound remains open and simple; this quartet will not engage in the kinds of intricate textural experiments Beethoven carried on in other late quartets.

The coda of the second movement slips suddenly from *fortissimo* to soft sighs and fragments. What comes next is marked “No. 3” as if it were a movement, but really it is a short preface to what follows. That movement is marked *Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile*, the last part meaning “very songful.” It is a set of variations on a memorable and ingenuous tune that is presented in call-and-response between the violins. All is simple and transparent, the harmony placid, the rhythm gently striding, the focus on the tune but with melodic undercurrents in the accompaniment. The theme flows into the first variation, and all flow together. The variations contrast, but gently: the first flowery and contrapuntal, the second marchlike, and so on.

Next is the scherzo, a *Presto* with a trio in the middle. Here is comedy in rambunctious staccato, the tone somewhere between folk-like and ingenuous, starting with the cello’s gruff opening gesture like a clearing of the throat. This movement is as tuneful as the others, especially the lyrical, musette-like theme of the twice-returning trio section, which has a giddy refrain that is one of Beethoven’s most childlike moments.

Just as the third “movement” was a preface for the fourth, the sixth is a preface for the seventh, in the form of a somber, aria-like *Adagio* in G-sharp minor. Though it lasts a minute and a half, it amounts to yet another fragment. Its key of G-sharp prepares the C-sharp minor finale—the first time the home key has made an appearance since the first movement—and its tone returns to the

seriousness, though not the sorrow, of the first movement. In effect it poses a question: at the end of this journey that started in grief and has taken us through dance and grace and tenderness and laughter and nursery tunes, where do we end?

We end in a fierce march, the first movement in the quartet to have a fully decked-out sonata form. It is broadly integrative, pulling together ideas from the whole work. Here again is the D-natural whose interjection into the quartet's opening fugue contributed to that movement's poignancy. The main theme's legato second section returns to the head motif of the first fugue, first inverted and then right-side up. A short but warmly lyrical second theme breaks out in a bright, breathtaking E major, its rising line recalling the trio theme of the scherzo. The driving staccato of the march recalls the staccato part of the scherzo. The keys are the leading ones

of the quartet: E and D major, F-sharp minor in the coda. The end barely makes it out of F-sharp minor to a quick, full-throated close on C-sharp major.

As an answer to the mournful first movement, the finale is driving and dynamic but not with the kind of triumph that ended the Third and Fifth Symphonies. In the C-sharp minor the transcendence is deeper. In the first movement the formality of the fugue makes it something on the order of a ceremony carried out within profound grief. Transcendence is adumbrated in the moments of hope that temper the first movement, the integral fabric that enfolds the whole quartet, the emotional journey that enfolds so much of life. As Beethoven's hard-won labors transcended the anguish of his own life, the triumph of this quartet, its answer to suffering, is the supreme poise and integration of the whole work.

Ludwig van Beethoven

## Quartet in F major for Strings, Op. 135

### Composed in 1826

- ▶ First CMS performance on January 11, 1981, by the Cleveland Quartet
- ▶ Duration: 24 minutes

Beethoven did not expect the String Quartet in F major, Op. 135, to be his last completed piece, but he did intend it to be his last string quartet. As such it is a look back, retrospective and in tone essentially comic. Written in a time when his body was sliding toward his final collapse, the quartet is full of laughter and irony as Haydn expressed them, and in the middle lies a soulful song. Its laughter is not exactly carefree, but rather a performance by an artist old and tired, a final smiling doff of the cap, and an ironical exit from the stage. Not long after, as Beethoven lay dying, nearly his last words were: "Applaud, friends, the comedy is over."

The F-major Quartet begins with a couple of questioning fillips, answered by *pianissimo* hiccups. The fillips condense toward a graceful theme, but it is interrupted by a mock-solemn incantation in octaves. What has been established is a tone wry and quirky, a texture lucid and open as in Mozart and Haydn—and the early Beethoven quartets. The much longer second-theme section, with its parade of small themelets, adds up to a more sustained, lighthearted, dancing stretch. After a short and unrepeatable exposition comes a short development in which earlier ideas are woven together, all of it marked by the tipsy upswamp.

The middle two movements are about as contrasting as contrast gets. The scherzo, placed second, is another of his short, minimal, verging on absurdist ones, the humor here perhaps the driest of all. It involves

# DER SCHWER GEFASSTE ENTSCHLUSS.



simple lines that seem to be devoted to three different downbeats. Occasionally an errant E-flat blurs in on the offbeat, without explanation. The absurdity reaches its denouement in the trio section, which begins racing crazily, traces keys upward from F to G to A (the notes of the scherzo's theme), and reaches a boggling moment when, under a screeching folk tune in the violin, the other instruments blare a swirling manic figure in three octaves, unchanged, 50 times. The effect is outlandish, and intended to be. The slow movement that follows is a transcendently songful theme and four gentle variations, all flowing together.

By the time he reached the finale, Beethoven was badly ill and weary of quartets. He confessed to his publisher, "Here, my dear friend, is my last quartet. It will be the last; and indeed it has given me much trouble. For I could not bring myself to compose the last movement . . . And that is the reason why I have written the motto: The decision taken with difficulty—Must it be?—It must be, it must be!" That is one explanation of the mysterious inscription on the finale, but not the only explanation. There is a story behind it. Beethoven heard that a wealthy music lover wanted to have the B-flat major read over at his house, but when it came out that the gentleman had neglected to buy a ticket for the premiere of the C-sharp minor, Beethoven sent word that he would not supply the parts until the man shelled out the price of the ticket. Hearing this, the victim groaned, "Must it be?" Hearing about that response, Beethoven gave a laugh and dashed off a canon on "It must be! Out with your wallet!"

That joke was what came to him to solve his finale problem in the F major. It accounts

for its mysterious preface, headed *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss*, "The Hard-Won Resolution." Under it lies a grave musical question of G–E–A $\flat$ , noted as *Muss es sein?*, "Must It Be?" Then a laughing allegro phrase is noted, *Es muss sein! Es muss sein!* Neither of these phrases is to be played; together they are a preface and program for the finale. The solemn introductory music around the played *Muss es sein?* introduction is part of the joke: it is the rhetoric of tragedy applied to comedy. The allegro that follows is all swirling, dancing gaiety, the *Es muss sein!* figure its motto. There are two delicious themes, one legato and the other bouncing, all of it laid out in lucid textures and equally lucid sonata form.

In his early and middle music Beethoven wrote a great many memorable pieces without particularly striking themes. In the late quartets and much other music of his last years, he produced one splendid melody after another. The end of the F major is a smiling pizzicato reminiscence of the bouncing second theme, the first violin then taking up the bow to render a squeaky version of it high above the staff, followed by a lusty final cadence. Whether or not Beethoven planned it this way, the retrospective, puckish, Haydnesque quality of the quartet rounded his career in the genre. With Op. 18 he had begun his journey with string quartets grounded in the 18th century. With Op. 59 he put the stamp of his maturity on the genre. In the late quartets he reached for the future, but ended his journey with a profoundly wise look back at the beginning.

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

# About the Artists

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## 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 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. They are alumni of CMS's Bowers Program.

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.

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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*Updated on April 9, 2025*

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