

presents...

CALIDORE STRING QUARTET

Jeffrey Myers | Violin
Ryan Meehan | Violin

Jeremy Berry | Viola
Estelle Choi | Cello

Saturday, March 8, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

BEETHOVEN

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 74 "Harp"

*Poco adagio; Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo
Presto
Allegretto con variazioni*

MONTGOMERY

Strum

INTERMISSION

SCHUBERT

Quartettsatz in C Minor, D.703

KORNGOLD

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Opus 34

*Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Sostenuto: Like a Folk Tune
Finale: Allegro; Allegro con fuoco*

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of Kathy and Martin Cohn.

Calidore String Quartet is represented by IMG Artists
Pleiades House, 7 W. 54th St, New York, NY 10019 imgartists.com



ARTIST PROFILE

The Calidore String Quartet made its San Francisco Performances debut in January 2019 and tonight appears for the third time.

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."

Throughout the 2024–25 season, the Calidore perform the complete String Quartets of Beethoven at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, 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 was released in fall 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.

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 74 "Harp"

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

Beethoven's middle-period quartets proved difficult for audiences from the very beginning. The exception is the lovely *Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 74*, long nicknamed the "Harp." In contrast to the other middle quartets, this one is full of graceful music executed with consummate technical skill. No battles are fought and won here—instead one savors the calm pleasures of what is perhaps Beethoven's most relaxed string quartet.

Yet this music was composed during a difficult time for Beethoven, the year 1809. That year, French armies under Napoleon bombarded and occupied Vienna, forcing most of the city's nobility and many of Beethoven's friends to flee (the composer himself hid in his brother's basement during the bombardment with a pillow held tightly around his head). And it was during the French occupation that Beethoven's old teacher Haydn died. Anguished, Beethoven wrote to his publishers: "We are enjoying a little peace after violent destruction, after suffering every hardship that one could conceivably endure. I worked for a few weeks in success, but it seemed to me more for death than for immortality." Beethoven's music from 1809, however, shows little trace of his anxieties: from early in that year came the noble "*Emperor*" Concerto, and after completing the quartet (probably in September 1809) Beethoven set to work on the incidental music to Goethe's *Egmont*.

The first movement of the quartet opens with a slow introduction whose chromaticism creates an uncertain tonality; from this tonal blur, the main theme of the *Allegro* establishes the unequivocal key of E-flat major. Very quickly come the pizzicatos that have earned this quartet the (not particularly appropriate) nickname "Harp." The development is quite active, and the recapitulation features a near-virtuoso first violin part that goes swirling across all four strings before the movement's vigorous close.

The *Adagio ma non troppo* can be described simply—this is lovely music. It is built on one of Beethoven's most attractive lyric ideas, which develops across three repetitions, each elaborated differently. Throughout, Beethoven constantly reminds all four performers: cantabile and espressivo.

By contrast, the *Presto* bristles with energy. It bears a strong resemblance to the scherzo movement of the *Fifth Symphony*, composed two years earlier: both are in C minor, both are built on the same characteristic rhythm, and both feature fugal writing in the trio section. Yet where the third movement of the symphony builds through a huge crescendo to a triumphant finale, Beethoven winds this movement in the quartet down very carefully, and the finale that follows seems intentionally anti-climactic. It is a variation movement consisting of an almost innocent theme, six variations, and a coda; the odd-numbered variations tend to be vigorous and fast, the even-numbered lyric and gentle. The sixth variation gives way to a coda that extends the theme and leads to a wonderful—and very appropriate—conclusion: a great rush of sixteenth notes powers the coda *fortissimo* to the very close where instead of hammering out a cadence, Beethoven concludes with two tiny and gentle chords. It is a conclusion brilliant in its understatement.

Strum

JESSE MONTGOMERY

(B. 1981)

The daughter of theater and musical artists, Jessie Montgomery learned to play the violin as a child and earned her bachelor's degree in violin performance from Juilliard and her master's in composition from New York University. She is one of the featured composers of the New York Philharmonic's Project 19, in which 19 women composers have been commissioned to write a work in celebration of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave American women the right to vote. Montgomery is currently a Graduate Fellow in composition at Princeton as well as a Professor of Violin and Composition at The New School in New York City. In 2021 she began her tenure as composer-in-residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Montgomery has prepared a program note for *Strum*:

"*Strum* is the culminating result of several versions of a string quintet I wrote in 2006. It was originally written for the Provi-

dence String Quartet and guests of Community MusicWorks Players, then arranged for string quartet in 2008 with several small revisions. In 2012 the piece underwent its final revisions with a rewrite of both the introduction and the ending for the Catalyst Quartet in a performance celebrating the 15th annual Sphinx Competition.

"Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum* I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration."

—Jessie Montgomery

Quartettsatz in C Minor, D.703

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797–1828)

Schubert composed the *Quartettsatz*—that title, which did not originate with Schubert, means simply "quartet movement"—in December 1820, when he was just a few weeks short of his twenty-fourth birthday. He had apparently planned to write a standard four-movement quartet but completed only the first movement and a 41-measure fragment of what would have been an *Andante* second movement. No one knows why he set so promising a work aside and left it unfinished, but—like the "*Unfinished*" *Symphony*—what survives is significant enough by itself to stand as a satisfying whole.

Curiously, the *Allegro assai* opening movement of this quartet is similar to the first movement of the "*Unfinished*" *Symphony*: both feature the same sort of double-stroked opening idea in the first violins, both are built on unusually lyric ideas, and both offer unexpected key relations between the major theme-groups. In fact, the key relationships are one of the most remarkable aspects of the quartet: it begins in C minor with the first violin's racing, nervous theme, and this quickly gives way to the lyric second idea in A-flat major, which Schubert marks *dolce*. The quiet third theme—a rocking, flowing melody—arrives in G major. As one expects in Schubert's mature music (and the 23-year-

old who wrote this music was a mature composer), keys change with consummate ease, though one surprise is that the opening idea does not reappear until the coda, where it returns in the closing instants to hurl the movement to its fierce conclusion.

Listed as the twelfth of Schubert's 15 string quartets, the *Quartettsatz* is generally acknowledged as the first of his mature quartets. The first 11 had been written as *Hausmusik* for a quartet made up of members of Schubert's own family: his brothers played the violins, his father the cello, and the composer the viola. Because he was writing for amateur musicians in those quartets, Schubert had kept the demands on the players relatively light—his cellist-father in particular was given a fairly easy part in those quartets. But in the *Quartettsatz* and the three magnificent final quartets Schubert felt no such restrictions. The *Quartettsatz*, which makes enormous technical demands (including virtuoso runs for the first violin that whip upward over a span of three octaves), was clearly intended for professional performers.

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Opus 34

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD

(1897–1957)

Few child composers have been as precocious as young Korngold. At age ten, his cantata *Gold* amazed Mahler, and those impressed by his talent included Richard Strauss and Puccini, who said: "That boy's talent is so great, he could easily give us half and still have enough left for himself!" His opera *Die tote Stadt*, composed when he was 20, received simultaneous premieres in Hamburg and Cologne, and in the 1920s Korngold was one of the most admired young composers in Europe.

And then his career took an unexpected turn. Invited to Hollywood to help score a film, Korngold found his romantic idiom ideally suited to film music, and when Hitler came to power Korngold moved his family to Hollywood, where he achieved his greatest success with swashbuckling music for Errol Flynn movies like *Captain Blood*, *Robin Hood*, and *The Sea Hawk*. As soon as the war was over, Korngold put films behind him to return to "serious" music but could never escape his Hollywood reputation, particularly since he used themes from many of his film scores in his classical works; the most successful

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of these is the 1945 *Violin Concerto*, championed by Heifetz.

Korngold's *Third String Quartet* dates from that same year. One of the most striking features of this music is its stylistic range: from an elegant lyricism to the chromatic bite of its themes, from the slashing brilliance of some of the writing (more suited to concertos than chamber music) to the gentleness of its quiet moments, this is extremely varied music. It is also quite difficult, requiring players of the greatest skill.

While the *Allegro moderato* opens in D major, the chromatic freedom of its ideas almost suggests Schoenberg. From this gentle beginning, the music presses

ahead, sometimes changing meter every measure, to an agitated middle section before falling away to end quietly on its opening theme, now gracefully elongated. The viola introduces the lively rhythmic kernel of the *Scherzo*, a figure that will recur in many shapes throughout the movement. It is a mark of Korngold's classical roots that the form of this movement is so traditional: the opening section leads to a flowing trio and a da capo repeat.

Korngold mutes all four instruments in the lyric third movement, which he specifies should sound "Like a Folk Tune." The opening gives way gradually to an animated center section: Korngold has the players remove their mutes in turn as the tension rises to a climactic *Appassionato*, then has them put the mutes back on as

the movement winds to its quiet close. A six-measure introduction kicks off the finale, which Korngold aptly marks "with fire." This is almost a *moto perpetuo* in its non-stop energy; along the way, Korngold alternates pizzicato and bowed passages, refers in passing to some of his film scores, and even subjects his main theme to brief fugal treatment. At the end, he offers fleeting reminiscences of earlier movements before the blistering rush to the concluding unison D.

Korngold dedicated his *Third Quartet* "in admiration and friendship" to the conductor Bruno Walter, who had led the premiere of his opera *Violanta* in 1916.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger