

**signum**  
CLASSICS

CALIDORE  
STRING  
QUARTET

**BEETHOVEN**  
THE EARLY QUARTETS

# BEETHOVEN THE EARLY QUARTETS

## CD1

### String Quartet No. 1 in F major, Op. 18 No. 1

- |   |                                       |        |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | I. Allegro con brio                   | [9.33] |
| 2 | II. Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato | [9.40] |
| 3 | III. Scherzo. Allegro molto           | [3.22] |
| 4 | IV. Allegro                           | [6.39] |

### String Quartet No. 2 in G major, Op. 18 No. 2

- |   |                                 |        |
|---|---------------------------------|--------|
| 5 | I. Allegro                      | [3.12] |
| 6 | II. Adagio cantabile            | [6.23] |
| 7 | III. Scherzo. Allegro           | [4.40] |
| 8 | IV. Allegro molto, quasi presto | [5.23] |

Total timings: [53.52]

## CD2

### String Quartet No. 3 in D major, Op. 18 No. 3

- |   |                      |        |
|---|----------------------|--------|
| 1 | I. Allegro           | [7.48] |
| 2 | II. Andante con moto | [7.56] |
| 3 | III. Allegro         | [2.52] |
| 4 | IV. Presto           | [6.33] |

### String Quartet No. 4 in C minor, Op. 18 No. 4

- |   |  |        |
|---|--|--------|
| 5 | I. Allegro, ma non tanto               | [8.31] |
| 6 | II. Andante scherzoso quasi Allegretto | [7.30] |
| 7 | III. Menuetto. Allegro                 | [3.30] |
| 8 | IV. Allegretto. Prestissimo            | [4.30] |

Total timings: [49.10]

## CD3

### String Quartet No. 5 in A major, Op. 18 No. 5

- |   |                        |        |
|---|------------------------|--------|
| 1 | I. Allegro             | [7.04] |
| 2 | II. Minuet             | [4.58] |
| 3 | III. Andante cantabile | [9.46] |
| 4 | IV. Allegro            | [6.25] |

### String Quartet No. 6 in B flat major, Op. 18 No. 6

- |   |                           |        |
|---|---------------------------|--------|
| 5 | I. Allegro con brio       | [6.09] |
| 6 | II. Adagio, ma non troppo | [7.11] |
| 7 | III. Scherzo. Allegro     | [3.12] |
| 8 | IV. La Malinconia. Adagio | [8.41] |

Questo pezzo si deve trattare colla più gran delicatezza Allegretto quasi Allegro

Total timings: [53.26]

CALIDORE STRING QUARTET

[www.signumrecords.com](http://www.signumrecords.com)

We end our recorded cycle of Beethoven's quartets with the set of six that began his journey with the genre, the op. 18. Though such an order deviates from the usual presentation of this cycle, it is in many ways fitting to end at the beginning. Journeying through the op. 18's, one is aware of the musical revolution he is brewing in terms of style, development of ideas and extreme contrasts of emotion. Already from the beginning, Beethoven's musical signature is clearly legible. These qualities would eventually lead to another beginning, the foundation of an entirely new artistic movement, which we refer to as Romanticism.

Though the op. 18's are often most quartet players' first foray into Beethoven's music, they are by no means the easiest. Their transparency, elegance and robust shifts of character demand the most exacting levels of execution, poise and feeling. In the op. 18, no. 6, performers face the daringly intricate rhythmic interplay of the scherzo and in the very next movement, must grapple with the tectonic emotional shifts of the last movement's revolutionary "La Melanconia". Other thrilling conclusions, such as the finales of op. 18 no. 1 and no. 4 make technical demands equal to anything in his later work (or that of many other composers), while the wistful melodies of op. 18, nos. 3 and 5 call on their interpreters to

find a just proportion of subtlety and dynamism. Beethoven demonstrates the full powers of his imagination and depth of his feeling throughout these six works.

The op. 18 quartets lay the foundation of the entire cycle, which collectively evokes the enduring relevance of Beethoven's humanistic perspective. He was an artist who aimed to compose not for one portion of society, but rather to unite through our fundamental elements. His music's immediacy is not contingent upon the century we live in, the country we come from, the generation we belong to, the beliefs we align with or other factors that may divide us. Beethoven's quartets appeal to the emotional experiences we share in common as human beings, which are far more substantial than what may divide us. For these great works came to fruition through Beethoven's courage to face, endure and overcome his life's challenges.

In this spirit, our project came together in a very "Beethovenian" way. The forced separation during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, made us dream of ways to immerse ourselves once more in our craft and to share our music with audiences around the globe. Recording was a dream we all shared from our very inception

as a quartet. And this difficult period opened the door for the possibility to make it a reality. We are grateful to the University of Delaware – where we serve as professors and Distinguished String Quartet in Residence – for providing us with the use of the magnificent Gore Recital Hall for the six recording sessions. We were also fortunate to be introduced to the legendary producer Judith Sherman, an artist whose passion for these works and uncompromising standards have made her the perfect partner in chronicling our interpretations of Beethoven.

Now, finding ourselves at the end of this endeavor, the contents of this recording project serve as a snapshot of our fourteen years of working, growing, listening and collaborating with one another. Our interpretation speaks to the influences of our teachers and the great traditions associated with this repertoire, but also to that of our own generation, contemporary research, style and experience. Though this music speaks in a language that is hundreds of years old, its message remains immediate, relevant and comforting to listeners of today and of generations to come even, and especially, in the most challenging of times.

Calidore String Quartet, September 2024

## PROGRAMME NOTES

*What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning  
The end is where we start from*  
**T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding' from *Four Quartets***

Ludwig van Beethoven struggled with beginnings and endings. This creative anxiety is documented extensively in the sketchbooks that he hoarded throughout his life. Beethoven's sketches can be read as a sort of musical diary, revealing how he returned to ideas over and over again, trying out solutions and mapping alternative possibilities until the very last moment – often after a manuscript had already been sent to a copyist, or even occasionally after publication! For instance, he drastically revised the first three of his Op. 18 string quartets after they had already been presented in manuscript form to the dedicatee, Prince Lobkowitz, in the Autumn of 1799. Beethoven's difficulty with compositional 'full stops' lasted until the end of his life. He famously replaced the sixth and final movement of his String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 130, the monumental 'Grosse Fuge', with a much shorter and comparatively straight-forward movement. This new ending was the last piece that Beethoven ever wrote, and perhaps the most drastic revision of all.

While creative endings were often provisional for Beethoven, he was also acutely aware of the importance of historical beginnings. He waited until the relatively-old age of twenty-eight to write his first string quartet, a genre that had been elevated to a hallowed status in the hands of his predecessors, Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. This late start did not go unnoticed in Viennese circles. Hans Georg Wegeler recounts how Beethoven was approached by Count Apponyi at a musical soirée in 1795 hosted by Prince Lichnowsky. Apponyi apparently "asked Beethoven to compose a quartet for him for a given compensation, Beethoven not yet having written a piece in this genre". Yet no string quartet arose from this exchange. Perhaps the stakes were too high for Beethoven at this stage in his career; Count Apponyi was, after all, the dedicatee of Haydn's celebrated sets of string quartets, Opp. 71 and 74. Or perhaps he was simply waiting for the right opportunity to make his impact. Just three years later, Beethoven responded to a commission that would place him in direct competition with his former teacher. There was certainly more than a hint of staged theatricality in Prince Lobkowitz's simultaneous commission for two sets of six string quartets: one from the great pioneer of the genre, Papa Haydn himself, and the other from his brilliant protégé, the young Beethoven.

The theatrics did not stop there. Haydn was apparently unable to fulfil the commission, composing only two string quartets of the set, later published by Artaria in 1802 as Op. 77. He also composed a third quartet around the same time, but this one remained incomplete as only two movements. Haydn allowed this fragment to be published as Op. 103 in 1803, but bearing a cryptic musical incipit taken from his chorale, *Der Greis*. It reads: 'Gone is all my strength, Old and Weak Am I'. That Haydn chose to publish an unfinished quartet as his last contribution to the genre is certainly provocative; and the inscription invites speculation. Is Haydn simply apologising for the incomplete status of his quartet? Or, in the context of Lobkowitz's simultaneous commission, is there also humour at play – even a form of concession to the younger composer? In the end there was no competition. As Haydn's career was ending, Beethoven's Op. 18 marked a new beginning: the next great composer of string quartets had entered the Viennese stage.

Viennese publisher T. Mollo released Op. 18 as two sets of three: first Nos. 1 – 3 in the summer of 1801, and then some months later in October, Nos. 4 – 6. However, Beethoven's sketches reveal that this published order was not in fact the order of composition. The quartets were most

likely composed in the following order: 3, 1, 2, 5, 4, 6. It is intriguing – and possibly reflective of Beethoven’s anxiety about beginnings – that he chose not to place his first written string quartet at the beginning of the published opus, but to position it instead as third in the set as Op. 18, No. 3. Beethoven knew that the beginning of his first opus of string quartets was important as a historical record, a means of securing his legacy alongside the Viennese masters, Mozart and Haydn. It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that the first movement of Op. 18, No. 1 is characteristically Haydn-esque with its thematic interplay and virtuosic use of motivic development across the movement. Op. 18, No. 5 is a more overt *homage*, and is clearly modelled on Mozart’s quartet in A major, K. 464 – a quartet that Beethoven had copied out himself by hand. It was only fitting for Beethoven to reference his compositional masters in each set of Op. 18, if only to show how he could surpass them.

The beginning of Op. 18 was also important as a means of courting favour with a paying public. There was no better person to advise Beethoven on this than the brilliant violinist, but also savvy businessman, Ignaz Schuppanzigh – a musician with whom he would form an important and lifelong friendship. Beethoven first got to know

Schuppanzigh at the musical gatherings hosted by Prince Lichnowsky at his palace. These chamber music events were not concerts in the modern sense; the listening experience was not silent and reverent, but rather thoroughly social, and likely full of lively discussion. They acted as a sort of laboratory for Beethoven to discuss ideas and take feedback from players.

It was apparently on Schuppanzigh’s advice that Beethoven placed his first quartet third in the set. Schuppanzigh’s experience of playing at such gatherings might explain why he considered Op. 18, No. 1 a more fitting beginning to the opus. Starting with an energetic motif played in octaves, Schuppanzigh would have known that this taut rhythmic vitality – enhanced by pregnant pauses between each entry – would cut through any extraneous chatter more immediately than the gently rising seventh and the subtle rhythmical ambiguity of the first violin’s suspensions at the beginning of Op. 18, No. 3. Listening ears would have surely been engaged by the *forte* repetition of the opening bars of No. 1, ready to marvel at Beethoven’s compositional prowess as the thematic gameplay with the opening motif begins: a worthy successor to Haydn indeed.

While Op. 18 begins with Haydn, it ends somewhere else entirely. Beethoven saves the dramatic crux of his Op. 18 right for the very end of the set, with the famous ‘La Malinconia’ forming the last movement of Op. 18, No. 6. It stages a sort of dialogue between two characters: one melancholic and uncertain, the other buoyant and jovial. The movement begins in 2/4 with a distant horn call, initially serene but immediately called into doubt by surprising registral leaps, dynamic plunges, and ominous rising chromatic scales. A different character soon interrupts in the form of a scherzo-like Allegretto in 3/8. The offbeat accentuation almost seems to poke fun at the melancholic character, who cannot seem to resist coming back on stage.

We have had hints of this theatrical ending in other quartets in the opus. For instance, the slow movement of Op. 18, No. 2 features a singing Adagio cantabile that is briefly interrupted by a faster scherzo-like Allegro in a different metre. The first movement of Op. 18, No. 5 also references the world of theatre, with its ‘curtain-up’ gesture in the opening bars, and multiple contrasting themes popping up in quick succession like pantomime characters. And there is nothing more theatrical than the last movement of Op. 18, No. 4, which ramps up its rhythmical velocity until the

very end of a whirlwind Prestissimo. However, just as an ongoing ambiguity between C minor and C major is not fully resolved in the final bars of this quartet, so too are we left questioning whether the Prestissimo and major key ending of ‘La Malinconia’ is enough to entirely erase the insecurity of the melancholy theme. Beethoven certainly liked provisional endings.

On 26th August 1801, a review of Mollo’s first edition of Op. 18 warned of their difficulties:

*“Three quartets provide full evidence of their art; yet they must be often and well played, as they are difficult and in no sense popular.”*

This review is an important reminder that although Beethoven’s Op. 18 quartets might seem relatively ‘light’ and even ‘easy’ in comparison with his later quartets, they were considered artful and significantly challenging when they were first published. The Calidore String Quartet’s decision to release their quartet cycle in reverse order allows us to chart nascent trends towards theatricality and end-orientated drama in Op. 18 that would be consolidated in Op. 59 just a few years later – connections that their labels ‘early’ and ‘middle’ can lead us to overlook. And of course, reaching the beginning of his

quartet career at the end of their cycle is fittingly Beethovenian. After all, in the words of Eliot, “What we call the beginning is often the end; And to make an end is to make a beginning.”

© Dr Rachel Stroud

## THE CALIDORE STRING QUARTET

**Jeffrey Myers**, violin     **Jeremy Berry**, viola  
**Ryan Meehan**, violin     **Estelle Choi**, cello

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, Brussels’ BOZAR, and at major festivals such as the BBC Proms, Verbier, Ravinia, Music@Menlo, Rheingau, and Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Always seeking new commissioning opportunities, the Quartet has given world premieres of works by Caroline Shaw, Anna Clyne, Huw Watkins and Mark-Anthony Turnage and collaborated with artists such as Anne-Sophie Mutter, Anthony McGill, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Marc-André Hamelin, Joshua Bell, Emerson String Quartet, Lawrence Power, David Finckel and Wu Han.

This season, the Calidore returns to the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the University of Delaware to perform the complete String Quartets of Beethoven; and to the Colburn School to play the complete cycle of Korngold



© Marco Borggreve

String Quartets. Other highlights of the 24/25 season include appearances with San Francisco Performances, the Celebrity Series of Boston, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, the Warsaw Philharmonic and BBC Radio at London's Wigmore Hall; and premieres and performances of works by Han Lash, Sebastian Currier, Xavier Foley, and Gabriela Montero.

In their most ambitious recording project to date, the Calidore is set to release the final two volumes of Beethoven's complete String Quartets for Signum Records in the 24/25 season. 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." Their previous recordings on Signum include *Babel* with music by Schumann, Shaw and Shostakovich, and *Resilience* with works by Prokofiev, Janáček, Golijov and Mendelssohn.

The Calidore String Quartet was founded at the Colburn School in Los Angeles in 2010. Within two years, the quartet won grand prizes in virtually all the major US chamber music competitions,

including the Fischhoff, Coleman, Chesapeake, and Yellow Springs competitions, and it captured top prizes at the 2012 ARD International Music Competition in Munich and the International Chamber Music Competition Hamburg. The Quartet first made international headlines as the winner of the \$100,000 Grand Prize of the 2016 M-Prize International Chamber Music Competition and was the first and only North American ensemble to win the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship. The Calidore was also named a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist and in 2018, was awarded the Avery Fisher Career Grant, having won the Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award a year prior. The Calidore is currently in residence with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York.

The Calidore String Quartet serves as the University of Delaware's Distinguished String Quartet in Residence. In this capacity they direct the UD School of Music's Graduate String Quartet Fellowship and serve as artistic directors of the University of Delaware Chamber Music Series. Prior to taking this position, they 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, Andre Roy,

Arnold Steinhardt, David Finckel, Günter Pichler, Guillaume Sutre, Paul Coletti, and Ronald Leonard.

The Calidore String Quartet plays the following instruments: 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 Giovanni Battista Ceruti c.1811, owned by a private benefactor and a 1903 Umberto Muschietti viola and plays a bow by Pierre Simon. Estelle Choi plays a cello by Charles Jacquot c.1830

We'd like to thank the University of Delaware and Donald J. Puglisi and Marichu Valencia for their support of this project.

---

Recording Dates:

Op. 18 No. 1 recorded 19-20 June, 2022  
Op. 18 No. 2 recorded 1-2 July, 2021  
Op. 18 No. 3 recorded 7 June, 2023  
Op. 18 No. 4 recorded 6-7 February, 2021  
Op. 18 No. 5 recorded 20-21 June, 2022  
Op. 18 No. 6 recorded 6 June, 2023

Recorded at Gore Recital Hall in the Roselle Center for the Arts, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716, United States  
Produced and engineered by Judith Sherman  
Engineering and editing assistant: Jeanne Velonis  
Mastered by Jeanne Velonis and Judith Sherman

Cover Image – © Bridgeman Images  
Design and Artwork – Woven Design [www.wovendesign.co.uk](http://www.wovendesign.co.uk)

© 2025 The copyright in this sound recording is owned by Signum Records Ltd  
© 2025 The copyright in this CD booklet, notes and design is owned by Signum Records Ltd

Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording of Signum Compact Discs constitutes an infringement of copyright and will render the infringer liable to an action by law. Licences for public performances or broadcasting may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd. All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission from Signum Records Ltd.

SignumClassics, Signum Records Ltd., Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middlesex, UB6 7LQ, UK. +44 (0) 20 8997 4000  
E-mail: [info@signumrecords.com](mailto:info@signumrecords.com)  
[www.signumrecords.com](http://www.signumrecords.com)

# ALSO AVAILABLE ON SIGNUMCLASSICS



SIGCD733

## WINNER BBC Music Magazine Chamber Award

★★★★★ *Performance* ★★★★★ *Recording* "Meticulously detailed performances...with playing of quite remarkable technical accomplishment: I'm not sure, for instance, that I've ever heard the tremendously challenging Op. 133 Fugue... done with greater precision and clarity...the Calidore players penetrate right to the heart of the music, giving warm and intensely lyrical accounts...[the players] have produced performances that can stand comparison with the best"

**BBC Music Magazine**



SIGCD872

## Recording of the Month (October)

"What cannot be denied is the sophistication and sheer polish - in tuning, rhythm and ensemble - of the Calidore's Beethoven...A performance of such fearless attack and rhythmic precision... [Coda] a miniature tour de force that sets the seal on Beethoven-playing of rare vividness and technical plomb"

**Gramophone**

Available through most record stores and at [www.signumrecords.com](http://www.signumrecords.com) For more information call +44 (0) 20 8997 4000

SIGCD883