

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society

presents

The Castalian String Quartet

Sini Simonen, violin

Daniel Roberts violin

Ruth Gibson viola

Christopher Graves cello

Beethoven • Janáček • Sibelius

Sunday Afternoon

November 7, 2021 • 4:30 PM

Trinity Church Auditorium

Red Bank, NJ

ADVANCE NOTES

PROGRAM

String Quartet in D major, Op. 18 No. 3 (1801)

Ludwig van Beethoven

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante con moto
- III. Allegro
- IV. Presto

String Quartet No. 1 "Kreutzer Sonata" (1923)

Leoš Janáček

- I. Adagio – Con moto
- II. Con moto
- III. Con moto – Vivo – Andante
- IV. Con moto – (Adagio) – Più mosso

INTERMISSION

String Quartet in D minor, Op. 56, "Voces Intimae" (1910)

Jean Sibelius

- I. Andante – Allegro molto moderato
- II. Vivace
- III. Adagio di molto
- IV. Allegretto (ma pesante)
- V. Allegro

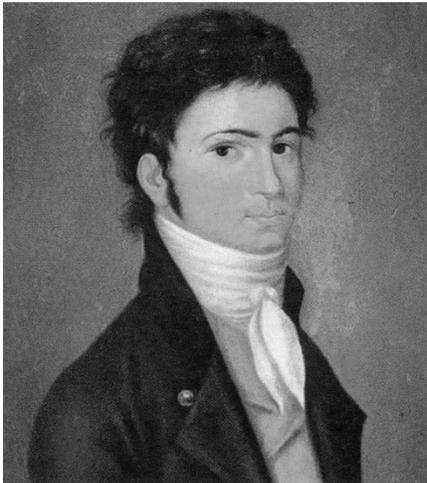
The Castalian String Quartet appears by arrangement with
David Rowe Artists.

www.davidroweartists.com • www.castalianstringquartet.com

Notes on the Program

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) String Quartet in D major, Op. 18 No. 3 (1801)

(~26 minutes)



For a composer now so closely associated with the string quartet genre, and whose cycle of sixteen compositions for this ensemble is so ubiquitous – even sacred – for chamber musicians, a young Ludwig van Beethoven was remarkably restrained in actually setting his first string quartet to paper. However, when one considers Beethoven’s own career aspirations and the long strides being made in the compositional quality and historical significance of the string quartet as a genre around the end of the eighteenth century, his hesitancy should come as no great surprise.

From childhood, Beethoven idolized W.A. Mozart, who was fourteen years his junior and at the time known primarily for being an astounding wunderkind, both as a composer and performer. A young Beethoven yearned for Mozart’s precociousness, early success, and aristocratic upbringing, none of which Beethoven himself had. To be sure, Beethoven was a gifted young pianist and composer and would, ironically, become far more revered in his own day than Mozart was in his, but Beethoven never attained the miraculous, seemingly God-given genius Mozart had as a young boy. To Beethoven, the next best thing was to study with Mozart, and though they supposedly met briefly, this never came to pass. (Anecdotal evidence states, however, that when Mozart did once meet Beethoven and heard him improvise at the piano on a theme Mozart himself had given him on the spot, Mozart then whispered to his friends in the next room: "Don't lose sight of this young man, he will one day tell you some things that will surprise you!")

In any case, Beethoven wound up studying with Europe’s most famous composer at that time, Franz Joseph Haydn, to whom he owes his music’s frequent reliance primarily on motivic development (as opposed to sheer melodic beauty). The “Father of the String Quartet,” Haydn wrote 68 string quartets over the course of his long career, and raised the genre up from unserious, background party music to the most respected and serious form of chamber music performance and composition. By the time Beethoven left for Vienna to study with Haydn in 1792, Mozart had already died, also leaving behind ten mature quartets of unparalleled mastery (six of which were dedicated to Haydn). In short, there was no way that Beethoven was going to take the composition of his first string quartet lightly.

So, finally, in 1800, Beethoven completed the six quartets of Opus 18, marking a major milestone in the composer’s early period and capping off a large number of successful early works in various chamber music forms (string trios, piano trios, violin sonatas, etc.). As a whole, the Op. 18 quartets display Beethoven’s complete mastery of the form and his marriage of the very different styles of Haydn and Mozart (though, understandably, with far greater similarities to Haydn). That being

said, they hint at the emotional turbulence and early Romanticism of Beethoven's more iconic works, and are by no means derivative or "copycat" works of quartets written by the elder masters.

They were not composed in the order in which they are numbered; Op. 18 no. 3 is actually the first of the six Haydn composed (so completed probably closer to 1798 than 1800). When one hears the work's opening bars and then compares them to the opening of Op. 18 no. 1, however, one understands why Beethoven chose to number the six quartets of Op. 18 this way (after all, he did want his music to sell!). While Op. 18 no. 1 is confident, strong, and somewhat predictable, Op. 18 no. 3 begins ambiguously and searchingly, with a lovely, limpid theme that takes a while to find clarity in its rhythm or harmonic direction. And while this work certainly has its moments of turbulence, its general character is one of gentle, graceful, easygoing charm.

A richer Romantic texture is hinted at in the opening of the second movement, providing an occasionally operatic, Mozartian drama to the work. But we are squarely back in Haydn-esque territory for the third movement Scherzo (rather than a Mozartian Minuet) and the lickety-split Finale, which is brimming with harmonic and rhythmic surprises, closing with a motivic whisper that would undoubtedly have made the Father of the String Quartet smile, or even chuckle.



Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

String Quartet No. 1 "Kreutzer Sonata" (1923)

(~18 minutes)



It is hardly a stretch to claim that the Czech composer Leoš Janáček developed one of the most unique and personal compositional styles of any composer. Inseparable from, and indeed, informed by the speech patterns of his native Czech tongue, the rhythmic eccentricities, exotic ostinatos, and blindsiding character shifts found in his music make Janáček's music instantly recognizable.

Leoš Janáček's first quartet was inspired by Tolstoy's novella "The Kreutzer Sonata," which was inspired by Beethoven's most famous violin sonata, the so-called "Kreutzer" Sonata, Op. 47. For Janáček, the work is his musical representation of obsession and Tolstoy's observations on carnal love and marriage. In the novella, a man becomes obsessed with his and his wife's "animal desires," and "swinish life," believing the concept of monogamous

romantic love between a man and a woman to be flawed and unnatural. This results in periods in their marriage of passionate love and vicious fights, represented musically by near-schizophrenic changes in timbre, character, and tempo. Gorgeous, sumptuous passages are interrupted by biting ponticello scraping and quickly undulating, often manic ostinatos.

Like the Tolstoy novella, this work is terse and compact, and culminates in the final movement, a

musical depiction of the climactic scene in the story: The man returns early from a trip and finds his wife, a pianist, in the arms of a violinist with whom she had been performing Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata. He brutally murders her, allowing the violinist to escape. The "stabbing" is unmistakable in the musical material (a stark, solo viola is offset from the group with this abrasive figure), as well as the suspenseful "travel" music (or, perhaps, "running away" music) in the work's Finale is as chilling as it is terribly exciting. In Tolstoy's novella, the man complains that some music is powerful enough to change one's internal state to a foreign one (in this case, Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata). Janáček's own masterwork is, at the very least, a reminder of music's visceral power and its ability to shock and surprise us, even when we believe we have heard just about everything.



Jean Sibelius (1865 -1957)
String Quartet in D minor, Op. 56, "Voces Intimae" (1910)

(~32 minutes)



One tends to associate the music of Jean Sibelius with big orchestral textures in pieces that convey broad landscapes with a sweeping color palette. And indeed, this is true of the bulk of his output, and he is certainly not known as a composer of chamber music. A reasonably decent violinist, he wrote a number of chamber works in his early, student years including at least three string quartets and individual movements for this combination of players, but his so called "Voces Intimae" is the only work for string quartet dating from his maturity, and the only one performed with any frequency.

Sibelius composed "Voces Intimae" during the period between his Third and Fourth Symphonies, two works that sharply differ in character (the Third being markedly bright in comparison to the brooding Fourth). "Voces Intimae" has far more in common with the overarching character of the Fourth Symphony, and while there are certainly some big, even orchestral moments, the quartet favors the sparse, spare textures offered through the more "intimate" nature of chamber music making. That being said, this music is absolutely recognizable as Sibelius – rarely in a hurry to "arrive" anywhere and often deeply (and unexpectedly) profound and touching, the inspiration of the stark, snow-covered, wide open country of rural Scandinavia one inevitably associates with Sibelius' music are never far from one's mind when hearing this work.

The work's title itself likely has to do with the natural intimate aspect of chamber music making, but the character of the music itself suggests deep introspection on Sibelius' part in the composition of this often-cryptic piece. Indeed, during the years of its composition, Sibelius grappled with a crippling smoking and drinking problem that took such a toll on his health that he was hospitalized a number of times, eventually resulting in a (fortunately) successful throat operation. Sibelius vowed from then on to neither smoke or drink alcohol. This frightening brush with death may

indeed be responsible for the remarkably personal, dark, and understated quality of this quartet as a whole.

The work begins as an introductory dialogue between the first violin and cello, setting up a movement of contrasts: murmuring figurations interrupted by muscular chords. The quartet has two scherzos (the second and fourth movements), but they are quite different in character and function. While the first is a brief, capricious, even Medelssohnian bridge between two very weighty movements, the second Scherzo is more of a minuet (albeit a highly Romanticized one) that recalls the mood of the first movement and restates its thematic material more noticeably.

At the center of the five-movement work is the Adagio di molto, the longest of the five and the emotional heart of the work. It has been called a “soulful quest for serenity” (John Henken) in a work that is alternately stoic and restless. Three separated, E minor chords appear near the movement’s opening, and bear no relationship to the rest of the movement harmonically. It is over these chords that Sibelius inscribed the words “Voces Intimae,” suggesting some sort of personal reference. Perhaps their detachment from the rest of the movement relates to Sibelius’ own deep introspection during this time in his life.

After the aforementioned “heavy” scherzo/minuet, the Finale provides some relief, returning somewhat to the lightness of the first scherzo but adding some figures and effects that suggest country fiddling, creating an often rustic character. The tempo of the movement gets incrementally faster, and by the time the end comes the audience (and the players) are left breathless with a dramatic, brilliant conclusion.

Program Notes by Luke Fleming

The Red Bank Chamber Music Society is happy to welcome our musicians and members to in-person concerts.

Based on your responses to our membership survey, most of our members have been vaccinated COVID-19, but for everyone's safety, **we are requiring that all attendees wear masks** while inside the Trinity Church building.

As a favor to your fellow concertgoers, **please remember to turn off your cell phones**. If you feel you might have a cough coming on, please try to unwrap any lozenges before the concert begins or between movements.

For those who might not be comfortable attending a live concert, we also plan on video recording all our concerts for broadcast on the Brookdale Community cable channel and for posting on YouTube.

The recording of the Castalian Quartet concert is scheduled to be broadcast on Sunday, December 5, 2021 at 4:30 PM, with re-broadcasts on Monday, December 6, 2021 at 2:30 PM and 8:00 PM. The recording will premiere on YouTube starting Sunday December 5, 2021 at 4:30. You can access the YouTube recording at www.rbcms.org

Enjoy the concert!

Artists

In the decade since its formation, the London-based Castalian Quartet has distinguished itself as one of the most dynamic, sophisticated young string quartets performing today. Recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's 2019 Young Artists Award, the Quartet also received the prestigious inaugural Merito String Quartet Award and Valentin Erben Prize in 2018, has won a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship Award, and is beginning to gain international acclaim as they take their talents abroad. The Castalian Quartet will have their debut performances in Seattle, San Francisco, New York, Atlanta, Vancouver, and many other cities across North America in the 2021-22 season.

In February 2019, the Quartet was joined at Wigmore Hall by guest artists Stephen Hough, Cédric Tiberghien, Michael Collins, Nils Mönkemeyer, Isabel Charisius and Ursula Smith to perform the chamber music of Brahms and Schumann. The Guardian (UK) raved, "To hear this music, so full of poetry, joy and sorrow, realised to such perfection, felt like a miracle." Other pre-Covid highlights included debuts at the Paris Philharmonie and Vienna Konzerthaus; performances of the complete Haydn Op.76 Quartets at Wigmore Hall; concerts in the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Heidelberger Frühling, East Neuk, Zwischentöne Festival in Engelberg, Neuchatel Chamber Music in Switzerland and Banff International Festivals. Further afield they undertook tours of China and Colombia.

Formed in 2011, the Castalian Quartet studied with Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartet) at the Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media, graduating with a Master's degree. In addition to the above, awards include Third Prize at the 2016 Banff Quartet Competition and First Prize at the 2015 Lyon Chamber Music Competition. The Quartet was selected by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2016. They have received coaching from Simon Rowland-Jones, David Waterman and Isabel Charisius. Ruth Gibson makes her debut with the quartet this season.

Their name is derived from the Castalian Spring in the ancient city of Delphi. According to Greek mythology, the nymph Castalia transformed herself into a fountain to evade Apollo's pursuit, thus creating a source of poetic inspiration for all who drink from her waters. Herman Hesse chose Castalia as the name of his futuristic European utopia in *The Glass Bead Game*. The novel's protagonist, a Castalian by the name of Knecht, is mentored in this land of intellectual thought and education by the venerable Music Master.



The Finnish violinist **Sini Simonen** enjoys an active international career as a chamber musician and soloist. She is the leader of Castalian String Quartet and the violinist of Calvino Piano Trio.

Simonen has won top prizes in several major international violin competitions including the Flesch, Lipizer and Cremona competitions. She has also won prizes in the Brahms, Lyon, ARD, Banff and Citta di Pinerolo chamber music competitions.

She studied in Sibelius Academy, Musikhochschule Hannover and Musik-Akademie Basel with Lara Lev and Rainer Schmidt among others. Masterclasses and collaborations with Ferenc Rados,

Gerhard Schulz, Sir Andras Schiff, Miriam Fried, and Ursula Smith provided important influences.

From 2013 to 2017, Sini was a violinist of Esbjerg Ensemble, one of Denmark's oldest chamber groups. The ensemble is comprised of a string quartet, wind quintet and percussion, and it is known for its innovative programmes combining contemporary and classical music.

She has appeared as a concerto soloist with orchestras including Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, Cologne Chamber Orchestra, Göttingen Symphony Orchestra and Trondheim Symphony Orchestra. Her cd recordings as a soloist include Bach's double violin concerto with Helsinki Strings (Warner) and Vivaldi's concerto for 3 violins (tacet).

Her chamber music partners have included Ferenc Rados, Robert Levin, Midori and Steven Isserlis.



Daniel Llewellyn Roberts (b.1987) studied with Nigel Murray and Jan Repko. He is a graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, holds Masters degrees from the Royal College of Music, London (as a Yehudi Menuhin Scholar), and the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien, Hannover, and has twice been a Leverhulme Chamber Music Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music, London.

As a soloist, Daniel has appeared in Hong Kong City Hall, the Queen's Hall, Edinburgh, the Hindemith Cabinet, Frankfurt, and the Sudler Recital Hall, Yale University. He was the recipient of the 2009 Musicians Benevolent Fund 'Emily English' Award for 'most outstanding violinist', and the 2010 Philharmonia Orchestra MMSF 'John E. Mortimer' prize.

Alongside his role as violinist with the Castalian String Quartet, he performs internationally as a chamber musician and has collaborated with musicians such as Simon Rowland-Jones, Tom Poster, Levon Chilingirian and the Primrose Piano Quartet.

Daniel is in demand as both a violin and chamber music teacher, previously holding positions at Birmingham Conservatoire and St. Paul's Girls' School, London, and giving masterclasses at St. Mary's Music School, Edinburgh, and in various music schools and conservatoires in China. He teaches on the Xenia Chamber Music Course in Italy.

Daniel is a Yeoman of the Worshipful Company of Musicians and is extremely grateful to them for the loan of a fine violin by Joseph Guarneri filius Andrea of 1705.



As an internationally recognised chamber musician and soloist, Irish born **Ruth Gibson** has appeared at the world's leading concert halls, including Wigmore Hall, Lincoln Centre, Het Concertgebouw, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Berlin Konzerthaus.

As soloist she has performed under Sir John Elliott Gardiner with the Bournemouth Symphony

and has broadcasted for BBC4. Recent performances include Woolrich's *Ulysses Awakes* for Solo Viola and Strings at Nurnberg International Chamber Music Festival and Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* with Dmitry Sitkovetsky at Barry Douglas' *Clandeboyne* Festival in Belfast. In 2015 she became a Park Lane Group Solo Artist and performed the viola works of Pendercki at the Purcell Room in London.

Ruth is a laureate of numerous prizes. As a member of the Finzi Quartet she was a Prize Winner of the 2010 Royal Over Seas League Competition and the 5th Trondheim International String Quartet Competition in Norway. Other notable awards include the Tillett Trust, the Tunnell Trust, the Kirkman Concerts Society, the Swiss Global Artistic Foundation, the Hattori Foundation Awards and the Park Lane Group Award.

Ruth is a tutor in Viola at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and was the founder and artistic director of the String Quartet Collective at the Royal College of Music in London from 2012–2016.



Christopher Graves studied the cello with Melissa Phelps at the Royal College of Music and with Johannes Goritzki at the Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana. He studied chamber music with Oliver Wille at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien, Hannover. His other teachers have included Bernard Greenhouse and Kate Beare. During his studies he was awarded scholarships by the Countess of Munster Musical Trust, the Musicians Benevolent Fund, and the Martin Musical Scholarship Fund.

Aside from his activities with the Castalian Quartet he has performed widely as a chamber musician in the UK and abroad, at venues such as the Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall and Kings Place, and played at festivals such as the Middelburg International Festival and Kings Place Festival. As a soloist he has been heard on BBC Radio 3 playing in the BBC Proms Plus festival with an RCM chamber orchestra, and has given recitals in the UK and Europe.

As a teacher he has coached chamber ensembles at the Royal College of Music, Birmingham Conservatoire and Chethams Music School. He has played principal cello with orchestras such as Scottish Opera and Sinfonia Cymru and worked with other orchestras including the Philharmonia.

