

Santa Fe CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

51ST SEASON

Thursday
12 p.m.
JULY 18

St. Francis Auditorium in the
New Mexico Museum of Art

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the **Miami String Quartet** is unable to perform at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival this summer. We look forward to welcoming them back to the Festival next season. We're grateful to the **Calidore String Quartet** for stepping in and making their Festival debut at today's concert. For more information about the Calidore, please see p. 75 of the Festival's 2024 Program Book.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM by Eric Bromberger

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1
(1798–1800)

Beethoven worked on the six quartets that make up his Opus 18 for several years before publishing them in 1801. In the case of the String Quartet in F Major, his struggles with the quartet form can be followed in some detail.

Beethoven had become close friends with the violinist Karl Amenda, and when the latter left Vienna in June 1799, Beethoven gave him a manuscript copy of the quartet with the inscription: "Take this quartet as a small memorial of our friendship, and whenever you play it, recall the days we passed together and the sincere affection felt for you then . . ." When it came time to publish his set of six quartets, however, Beethoven realized that the F-Major Quartet had become a quite different piece of music compared to the earlier version he'd given to Amenda. He quickly wrote to his friend: "Do not lend your quartet to anybody because I have greatly changed it, having just learned how to write quartets properly." Amenda's version survived (and has been recorded), so we can hear Beethoven develop as he "learned how to write quartets properly."

The String Quartet in F Major remains the most popular of Beethoven's Opus 18 works,

largely because of its impressive first two movements. The *Allegro con brio* is an early example of Beethoven's fascination with building large structures out of simple motifs. The movement grows out of the simple turn-figure heard at the very beginning, and this figure goes on to saturate the movement as theme, accompaniment, rhythm, and the basis for complex counterpoint. The movement has a relaxed second subject that flows easily on syncopated accents, but the presence of the turn-figure (whose appearance Beethoven actually reduced in his published version) is so overwhelming that one seems to hear it even when it isn't physically present.

The second movement, which has the complex marking *Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato* (indicating a tenderly and passionately played Adagio), switches to dark D Minor. Over a pulsing 9/8 accompaniment, the first violin sings the long, grieving melody that forms the basis of this movement. When Amenda told Beethoven that the music reminded him of the parting of lovers, he replied: "I thought of the scene in the burial vault in *Romeo and Juliet*." Listeners will do well not to look for any literal depiction of Shakespeare here but to instead take the music on its own merits: it has more genial secondary material, and across its long span it rises to several impassioned climaxes.

*The Music at Noon Thursday Series is generously sponsored by the
Edgar Foster Daniels Foundation in memory of Edgar Foster Daniels.*

The combined length of the quartet's final two movements is shorter than the *Adagio* movement. With its propulsive rising main theme, the *Scherzo* has reminded many of the third movement of Beethoven's First Symphony, which was written as these quartets were being readied for print. The trio, with its grace notes and octave leaps, sends the first violin sailing along an athletic part before it swoops gracefully back into the opening strain. The concluding *Allegro* is in sonata-rondo form. Its showers of triplets at first mask the true meter (2/4), and some of the fun of this movement lies in Beethoven's contrast of triple and duple stresses. Beethoven revised this movement extensively, and his changes clarify the voicing and focus the climaxes much more effectively. An extroverted coda drives the quartet to its buoyant close.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–76)

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 36 (1945)

On November 21, 1945, a concert commemorating the 250th anniversary of the death of Henry Purcell took place at London's Wigmore Hall. One of the works performed was Britten's String Quartet in C Major, a new piece that paid tribute to the earlier master, who was considered England's first great composer.

Britten, whose opera *Peter Grimes* had been triumphantly premiered five months earlier, had a lifelong passion for Purcell's music. In the year after the anniversary concert, he went on to write his *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* based on a great Purcell theme. He also made arrangements of Purcell's vocal music throughout his career, and he created a string orchestra version of Purcell's Chaconne in G Minor.

The three-movement String Quartet in C Major is original from its first instant. Rather than adopt a standard sonata form, which opposes and contrasts material, Britten builds the opening *Allegro calmo senza rigore* on three themes, all of which are announced in the first few measures, and all of which begin with the upward leap of a tenth. The movement is centered around the key of C Major, and the first statement of the theme begins on middle C, with each successive statement rising higher in the quartet's register.

The exposition of these three themes becomes so complex that a clear division of the movement into development and recapitulation is lost, and at the climax Britten is able to make all three themes coalesce into one simultaneous statement before the music falls away to a quiet close.

The *Vivace* is a blistering and very brief scherzo in ternary form. Britten mutes the instruments throughout and moves to C Minor for the outer sections; the music feels consciously nervous—skittering and driving constantly ahead. The central section, in F Major and based on a variant of the scherzo theme, brings little relaxation; the sense of nervous energy continues even in the major tonality.

The massive final movement—nearly as long as the first two movements combined—brings Britten's tribute to Purcell. Britten calls this movement *Chacony*, the English equivalent of chaconne, in honor of Purcell's Chaconne in G Minor. A chaconne is a variation form, and Britten's *Chacony* is built on 21 repetitions of a nine-bar ground bass, which is presented in unison (in B-flat Major) at the start of the movement. Britten groups his variations imaginatively: The first six are followed by a cello cadenza, the next six by a viola cadenza, and the next six by a violin cadenza. The final three drive to a conclusion that ringingly affirms C Major.

ERIC BROMBERGER earned his doctorate in American literature at UCLA and for 10 years taught literature and writing courses at Bates College and San Diego State University. Then he quit teaching to devote himself to his first love, music. Bromberger, a violinist, writes program notes for the San Diego Symphony, the La Jolla Music Society, San Francisco Performances, the University of Chicago Presents, Washington Performing Arts at The Kennedy Center, and many other organizations. He was a pre-concert lecturer for the Los Angeles Philharmonic for more than 20 seasons.