

*Brentano String Quartet  
with Mihae Lee, piano*

*January 9, 2022 • Valley Regional High School*

*Essex  
Winter  
Series*

This afternoon's concert is co-sponsored by  
JEFFREY N. MEHLER CFP® LLC and ESSEX MEADOWS

**Brentano String Quartet**

Mark Steinberg, *violin*  
Serena Canin, *violin*  
Misha Amory, *viola*  
Nina Lee, *cello*  
with Mihae Lee, *piano*

**PROGRAM**

Three Madrigals for String Quartet

Carlo Gesualdo (1566-1613)

- I. *Asciugate i begli occhi* (arr. Mark Steinberg)
- II. *Ma tu, cagion di quella* (arr. Mark Steinberg)
- III. *Beltà poi che t'assenti.* (arr. Bruce Adolphe)

String Quartet No. 16, Op. 135 (1826)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

*Allegretto*

*Vivace*

*Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo* (Variations)

'The difficult resolution' - *Grave, ma non troppo tratto* ('Must it be?') -

*Allegro* ('It must be! It must be!')

~ INTERMISSION ~

Piano Quintet in E-Flat Major, Op. 44

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

*Allegro brillante*

*In Modo d'una Marcia. Un poco largamente*

*Scherzo. Molto vivace - Trio 1 & 2*

*Allegro, ma non troppo*

with Mihae Lee, *piano*

*The Brentano String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists.*

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# Program Notes

## Beethoven: String Quartet in F-Major, Op. 135 (1826)

by Misha Amory

The String Quartet in F, opus 135, was the last complete work Beethoven composed, only a few months before his death in March 1827. It is traditionally grouped together with his other late quartets, opp. 127, 130, 131, 132 and the *Grosse Fuge*; but it's hard not to wonder what Beethoven would have thought of that grouping. Certainly opus 135 is the black sheep of this bunch. Where the other quartets are monumental in scale, sprawling in their expressive reach and scope, and often searching for a new formal basis for the quartet genre altogether, opus 135 stands apart: tightly reasoned, having an airy and transparent texture, playful and teasing in so many places, it is the work of a composer who seems to have suddenly attained some new, simple truth after miles of struggle. It is more similar in length and structure to his early opus 18 quartets than to the later ones, and yet it could not be mistaken for an opus 18 quartet: it is a greater and deeper achievement than those quartets, yet somehow less ambitious, less reaching, at the same time.

The first movement is as spare in texture as any quartet movement Beethoven ever wrote. It begins with a four-note question in the viola, colored with a mock-serious minor note in the cello; the first violin answers with a giggling echo. Right away the composer is signalling that here he will have nothing to do with the old, earnest questions of existence or fate; this is to be put aside, at least for the time being. What ensues is a genial, often Haydn-esque Allegretto in 2/4 time, which ambles along, four friends sharing a melody or two between them, breaking it into fragments so that everybody gets a piece. The movement is a typical sonata form, with all the responsible sections of exposition, development and recapitulation; but it feels more like an airy distillation of that form, with its sparseness, its fragmentation, and its economy of means. It is music that speaks to us about the process of creating, a blueprint where we see all the parts laid out before our eyes, and are given a glimpse inside Beethoven's mind as he fits them together.

The second movement is a quicksilver scherzo. The parts at the beginning stage a rhythmic comic act, ill-fitting and awkward, everyone sitting on the wrong beat, then suddenly falling heavily onto a unison E-flat that is also off the beat, stuck in the wrong meter for awhile before righting itself (sort of). This section is abruptly succeeded by a more brilliant one featuring a set of rapid upward scales in the first violin, playful and yet tense and expectant. Then an extraordinary eruption occurs, a fortissimo section where the lower instruments are stuck in an infinite whirling loop while the first violin, berserk, goes off on an impossible tangent. This eventually spirals down to a quiet unison, where, for a brief instant one hears the four simple pitches that the movement is based on. Finally the opening section returns in all its bumptiousness.

The third movement: a dark hymn, a whispered prayer. In early sketches, Beethoven designated it “Süsser Ruhegesang oder Friedengesang”, a sweet song of calm or peace. It is one of the half-dozen slow movements that stand at the pinnacle of his late-period achievement, and it serves as the expressive center of gravity for this quartet. In fact it is a theme with four variations, but they unfold in such a continuous fashion that this is not immediately obvious. Set in D-flat major, it feels a universe away from the sunny F major key of the rest of the quartet; we have been pulled out of the public eye and find ourselves hearing an intimate confession. The theme is in the lowest register for all four instruments, husky and sorrowing. The first variation lifts us higher up, visiting some painful harmonic moments, but maintaining much of the tone of the original. In the second variation, we are taken to the minor key; the flowing rhythms of the earlier music are lost, and replaced with stony, halting steps. This is one possible answer to the prayer, an unthinkable rejection, a bereft state. Some measure of relief comes in the final two variations, as we return to the major, and the cello reassuringly takes the melody. The last variation is the most extraordinary part of the movement: the first violin, winged, hints at the theme in gentle, gasping rhythms, while the other instruments describe simple upward arpeggios. It is a movement that overflows with forgiveness and love, but is also full of great sadness.

The final movement bears a strange inscription: “Der schwer gefasste Entschluss”, or “The Difficult Resolution.” The slow introduction, which features a rising minor-key question in the lower instruments, is marked “Muss es sein” – must it be? Here we have the Beethoven who poses difficult questions, literally. This brief introduction reaches an anguished climax before subsiding. Then follows the main Allegro section, joyful and affirmative, marked “Es muss sein!” – it must be! Two-thirds of this movement then unroll with barely a cloud on the horizon. All is happiness, high jinks, carefree melody, playfulness. It is all the more shocking when the minor-key introductory question – muss es sein – returns gigantically, terrifyingly, and almost without warning. It is one final struggle; and this time, it appears, the beast is tamed, the doubts laid to rest. The music dances away through the coda, teasing, pianissimo, and is crowned by one final boisterous affirmation.

There has been endless debate about just what this “difficult resolution” was, and many theories have been advanced. Is it about facing and accepting death? Is it another weighty philosophical question? Is it the laundry bill that has to be paid? Beethoven’s note to his publisher hints that it might simply be the necessity of finishing the composition, and bidding farewell to a favorite genre: “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. But as your letters were reminding me of it, in the end I decided to compose it. And that is the reason why I have written the motto: “The difficult resolution – Must it be? – It must be, it must be!”

## Schumann: Piano Quintet in E Flat Major, Op. 44 (1842)

by *Barbara Leish*

Schumann's Piano Quintet was the first great chamber-music work that paired the piano with a string quartet. In the year he wrote it, he was on a typical-for-Schumann emotional roller coaster. Married less than two years, he hated it when Clara was on tour, but he also hated traveling with her and being in her shadow. At home and miserable while Clara was in northern Europe early in 1842, he passed the time studying counterpoint and the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. But he was depressed, drinking too much, and unable to compose. Robert blamed Clara. In their household book he wrote, "You deprive me of all my ideas right now. I can't even put a single song together. I don't know what's wrong with me." He quickly revived after she returned home, however. By the end of the year he had written three string quartets, a piano trio, a piano quartet, and the glorious Piano Quintet, his most famous chamber work. It took Schumann less than three weeks to finish the Quintet, which he wrote for and dedicated to Clara. Not surprisingly, given Clara's brilliance as a pianist and his own love of the instrument, the piano is front and center for much of the Quintet. But the work is also very much a lush exploration of the sonorities produced when piano and strings work together.

From the outset, the Quintet is marked by what Ronald Taylor describes as "verve, enthusiasm, serenity, charm, and above all a sense of utter conviction, the feeling ... that Schumann saw its entire course from the very moment of its joyful opening bars." Schumann launches the work with a bold unison opening that will reappear in a surprising way at the end of finale. In one of Schumann's magical transformations, this opening motif melts almost immediately into an expressive song. Next the cello and the viola present an equally disarming second theme. Virtuoso piano runs in the development section and a satisfyingly big sound at the end are among the highlights of a movement marked by Schumann's melodic gifts and his sense of high drama.

Each of the movements that follows is dazzling in its own way. The solemn second movement has the air of a funeral march, although both a lyrical second subject played over a restless piano and an agitated middle section affect the opening mood. The instruments chase one other up and down the scale in the acrobatic Scherzo, which features two trios, the first a lyrical inversion of the first movement's opening theme, the second a whirl of motion. The Quintet ends with an exultant Allegro that sweeps to a thrilling coda: a fugue whose subjects are the first theme of the opening movement and the main theme of the finale.

Clara was ill for the Quintet's first private performance, so Felix Mendelssohn sight-read the demanding part. That must have been quite an evening.



### Brentano String Quartet

Mark Steinberg, *violin*

Serena Canin, *violin*

Misha Amory, *viola*

Nina Lee, *cello*

*with Mihae Lee, piano*

Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. “Passionate, uninhibited and spellbinding,” raves the London Independent; the New York Times extols its “luxuriously warm sound [and] yearning lyricism.”

Within a few years of its formation, the Quartet garnered the first Cleveland Quartet Award and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award and was also honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut. Since then, the Quartet has concertized widely, performing in the world’s most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall in New York; the Library of Congress in Washington; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House.

In addition to performing the entire two-century range of the standard quartet repertoire, the Brentano Quartet maintains a strong interest in contemporary music, and has commissioned many new works. Their latest project, a monodrama for quartet and voice called “Dido Reimagined,” was composed by Pulitzer-winning composer Melinda Wagner and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, and will premiere in spring 2022 with soprano Dawn Upshaw. Other recent commissions include the composers Matthew Aucoin, Lei Liang, Vijay Iyer, James Macmillan, and a cello quintet by Steven Mackey (with Wilhelmina Smith, cello.)

The Brentano Quartet has worked closely with other important composers of our time, among them Elliot Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. They have also been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman, mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, and pianists Richard Goode, Jonathan Biss, and Mitsuko Uchida. The Quartet has recorded works by Mozart and Schubert for Azica Records, and all of Beethoven’s late Quartets for the Aeon label. In 2012, they provided the central music (Beethoven Opus 131) for the critically-acclaimed independent film *A Late Quartet*.

Since 2014, the Brentano Quartet has served as Artists-in-Residence at the Yale School of Music. They were formerly the Ensemble-in-Residence at Princeton University, and were twice invited to be the collaborative ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

The Quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved”, the intended recipient of his famous love confession.

**Mark Steinberg** is an active chamber musician and recitalist. He has been heard in chamber

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music festivals in Holland, Germany, Austria, and France and participated for four summers in the Marlboro Music Festival, with which he has toured extensively. He has also appeared in the El Paso Festival, on the Bargemusic series in New York, at Chamber Music Northwest, with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and in trio and duo concerts with pianist Mitsuko Uchida, with whom he presented the complete Mozart sonata cycle in London’s Wigmore Hall in 2001, with additional recitals in other cities, a project that continues for the next few years. Mr. Steinberg has been soloist with the London Philharmonia, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Kansas City Camerata, the Auckland Philharmonia, and the Philadelphia Concerto Soloists, with conductors such as Kurt Sanderling, Esa-

Pekka Salonen and Miguel Harth-Bedoya. Mark Steinberg holds degrees from Indiana University and The Juilliard School and has studied with Louise Behrend, Josef Gingold,



and Robert Mann. An advocate of contemporary music, Mr. Steinberg has worked closely with many composers and has performed with 20th century music ensembles including the Guild of Composers, the Da Capo Chamber Players, Speculum Musicae, and Continuum, with which he has recorded and toured extensively in the U.S. and Europe. He has also performed and recorded chamber music on period instruments with the Helicon Ensemble, the Four Nations Ensemble, and the Smithsonian Institute. He has taught at Juilliard's Pre-College division, at Princeton University, and New York University, and is currently on the violin faculty of the Mannes College of Music.

Violinist **Serena Canin** was born into a family of professional musicians in New York City.

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An accomplished chamber musician, Ms. Canin was twice invited to the Marlboro Music Festival and has toured the United States with Music From Marlboro, the Brandenburg Ensemble, and Goliard Concerts. In New York, she has made frequent appearances on the Continuum Series at Alice Tully Hall and at the Mannes Beethoven Institute. Ms. Canin has taught chamber music to young musicians at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the Chamber Music Center of New York. She holds degrees from Swarthmore College and the Juilliard School, where her principal teachers were Burton Kaplan and Robert Mann. She lives in Manhattan with her husband, pianist Thomas Sauer, and their two sons.

Since winning the 1991 Naumburg Viola Award, **Misha Amory** has been active as a

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soloist and chamber musician. He has performed with orchestras in the United States and Europe, and has been presented in recital at New York's Tully Hall, Los Angeles' Ambassador series, Philadelphia's Mozart on the Square festival, Boston's Gardner Museum, Houston's Da Camera series and Washington's Phillips Collection. He has been invited to perform at the Marlboro Festival, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, the Vancouver Festival, the Chamber Music Society at Lincoln Center and the Boston Chamber Music Society, and he has released a recording of Hindemith sonatas on the Musical Heritage Society label. Mr. Amory holds degrees from Yale University and the Juilliard School; his principal teachers were Heidi Castleman, Caroline Levine and Samuel Rhodes.

Himself a dedicated teacher, Mr. Amory serves on the faculties of the Juilliard School in New York City and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

An active chamber musician, **Nina Lee** has collaborated with many artists such as Felix Galimir, Jaime Laredo, David Soyer, Nobuko Imai, Isidore Cohen and Mitsuko Uchida, and has performed at the Marlboro and Tanglewood Music Festivals. She has toured with Musicians from Marlboro and has participated in the El Paso International Chamber Music Festival. She is the recipient of a Music Certificate from the Curtis Institute of Music, and Bachelor's and Master's degrees in music from the Juilliard School, where her teacher was Joel Krosnick. Ms. Lee teaches at Princeton University and Columbia University.

Praised by *Boston Globe* as “simply dazzling,” Artistic Director and pianist **Mihae Lee** has captivated audiences



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throughout North America, Europe, and Asia in solo recitals and chamber music concerts, in such venues as Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Jordan Hall, Berlin Philharmonic, Academia Nazionale de Santa Cecilia in Rome, Warsaw National Philharmonic Hall, and Taipei National Hall. An active chamber musician, Mihae is a founding member of the Triton Horn Trio and was an artist member of the Boston Chamber Music Society for three decades. Her recordings of Brahms, Shostakovich, Bartok, and Stravinsky with the members of BCMS were critically acclaimed by *High Fidelity*, *CD Review*, and *Fanfare* magazines, the reviews calling her sound “as warm as Rubinstein, yet virile as Toscanini.” Mihae has appeared frequently at numerous international chamber music festivals including Dubrovnik,

Amsterdam, Groningen, Medellin Festicamara, Great Woods, Seattle, OK Mozart, Mainly Mozart, Music from Angel Fire, El Paso, Arizona Friends of Chamber Music, Chamber Music Northwest, Rockport, Sebago-Long Lake, Bard, Norfolk, Mostly Music, Music Mountain, and Chestnut Hill Concerts. Mihae has been a guest artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Bargemusic in New York and Speculum Musicae; has collaborated with the Juilliard, Tokyo, Muir, Cassatt, and Manhattan string quartets; and has premiered and recorded works by such composers as Gunther Schuller, Ned Rorem, Paul Lansky, Henri Lazarof, Michael Daugherty, and Ezra Laderman. Mihae is often heard over the airwaves on National Public Radio’s “Performance Today,” and on WNYC and WQXR in New York City, WGBH in Boston, and other stations around the country. A native of Korea, she is a graduate of The Juilliard School and the New England Conservatory studying with Martin Canin and Russell Sherman. Mihae has released recordings on the Bridge, Etcetera, EDI, Northeastern, and BCMS labels, and since 2016 she serves as Music Director of the Sebago-Long Lake Music Festival in Maine.