

Programmes | 2027/2028

Florian Donderer | violin
Annette Walther | violin
Xandi van Dijk | viola
Thomas Schmitz | violoncello

Beethoven without Beethoven I: Conversations and Confessions

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) String Quartet in A major K. 464
Leos Janáček (1854-1928) String Quartet No. 1
Inspired by Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) String Quartet in C minor Op. 51 No. 1

Please see the program notes below

Beethoven without Beethoven II: Invention and Echo

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) String Quartet in G major Op. 77 No. 1 Hob. III:81
Jörg Widmann (*1973) String Quartet No.7 *Beethoven-Study II*

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) String Quartet No. 2 in A minor Op. 13

Tolstoy's Waltz

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) String Quartet No. 1 in F major Op. 18 no.1
OR

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) String Quartet in F minor Op. 55 No. 2 Hob. III:61
Rasiermesser-Quartett

Leo Tolstoj (1828 - 1910) Waltz (arr. Xandi van Dijk)

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) String Quartet No. 1
Inspired by Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) String Quartet in D minor D 810
The death and the maiden

Lebensmuth

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) String Quartet No. 16 in F major Op. 135
OR

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) String Quartet in F major Op. 77 No. 2 Hob. III: 82
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) String Quartet No. 2 *Intimate letters*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) String Quartet in G major D 887

Breaking the Canon

Maddalena Sirmen (1745-1818)	String Quartet in F minor Op. 3 No. 5
Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915-1940)	String Quartet Op. 8

Fanny Hensel (1805-1847)	String Quartet in E flat major H. 277
Priaulx Rainier (1903-1986)	Quartet for strings

Leoš Janáček and Vítězslava Kaprálová: Voices of desire

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	<i>Liebe</i> **
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	<i>Sodass man nicht wiederkehren kann</i> *
Leo Tolstoi (1828 – 1910)	Waltz
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	String Quartet No. 1 <i>Inspired by Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata</i>
Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915-1940)	String Quartet Op. 8

Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915-1940)	<i>Mit weißem Halstuch winkt er</i> ***
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	<i>Der goldene Ring</i> *
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	<i>Abschied</i> **
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	<i>Brieflein</i> **
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	<i>Nur blindes Schicksaal</i> *
Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)	String Quartet No. 2 <i>Intimate letters</i>

* from Leoš Janáček: Album für Kamila Stösslová, JW VIII/33 (arr: Xandi van Dijk)

** from Leoš Janáček: Mährische Volkspoesie in Liedern (arr: Xandi van Dijk)

*** from Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915-1940): Vteriny (Sekunden) op. 18 (1936-1939) (arr: Xandi van Dijk)

With Jörg Widmann | Clarinet

Broken Scherzos, Distant Hymns

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)	String Quartet in C major K 465 <i>Dissonance-Quartet</i>
Jörg Widmann (*1973)	String Quartet No. 7 <i>Beethoven-Study II</i>

Max Reger (1873-1916)	Clarinet Quintet in A major Op. 146

Program notes

Beethoven without Beethoven I: Conversations and Confessions

Mozart's String Quartet in A major, K. 464 played a crucial role in Beethoven's artistic development, serving as both a technical model and a source of long-term stylistic inspiration, especially in the string quartet genre that had been shaped earlier by Joseph Haydn; Beethoven studied K. 464 intensely, even copying parts of it by hand, and later wrote his own A-major quartet, Op. 18 No. 5, closely following its key, formal layout, variation writing, and refined balance between counterpoint and lyricism, showing how he used Mozart's work not simply to imitate but to internalize structural clarity, harmonic subtlety, and motivic discipline that would later expand into his more dramatic middle- and late-period language.

The First String Quartet by Leoš Janáček is directly linked to Ludwig van Beethoven through Leo Tolstoy and his novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Tolstoy's story was itself inspired by Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 9 ("Kreutzer"), and Janáček later composed his quartet as an intense musical response to Tolstoy's narrative of jealousy and psychological turmoil, creating a chain of artistic influence from Beethoven's music to Tolstoy's literature and back into Janáček's modernist chamber work. There are even some hidden Beethoven quotations.

Brahms's Op. 51 No. 1 shows a deep engagement with Beethoven's string quartet legacy, especially in its serious, motivic development and dense contrapuntal texture. Like Beethoven's middle and late quartets, Brahms builds large movements from small rhythmic and melodic cells, creating a sense of organic unity. At the same time, Brahms filters this Beethovenian intensity through Classical structural discipline inherited from figures like Joseph Haydn, while also reflecting the Romantic expressive ideals encouraged by Clara Schumann, who championed Brahms's chamber works.

Beethoven without Beethoven II: Invention and Echo

In 1799, a symbolic "passing of the baton" occurred as an aging Joseph Haydn and a young Ludwig van Beethoven simultaneously composed their final and first string quartets, respectively, under the shared patronage of Prince Lobkowitz. Haydn's Op. 77 and Beethoven's Op. 18—published within months of each other—reflect a striking stylistic overlap: Haydn's late works sound forward-looking and "Beethovenian," while Beethoven's early quartets remain deeply "Haydnesque," closely modeled on his teacher's example. Although it remains unclear whether they knew each other's newest works, their quartets stand as parallel, culminating statements of the mature Viennese style at a pivotal moment of generational transition.

Jörg Widmann's 7th Quartet was written as a companion to Beethoven's late quartets. Widmann deeply engages with Beethoven's late style — intense contrasts, fragmentation, fugue writing, and structural experimentation. He writes:

"My Seventh String Quartet, the second of my "Beethoven Studies", is the first of my quartets to have a two-movement structure. The density of the texture is increased once again here, so that the opening Grave is so internally fractured that one never really knows whether it is not an Allegro movement after all.

The second movement mirrors this: it begins as a playful pizzicato allegro – tentative attempts at a calm, chorale-like melody are repeatedly thwarted by new, fast sections. Finally, a hymn sung in the highest registers prevails.”

Written in 1827 at the age of 18, shortly after Beethoven's death, Mendelssohn's String Quartet No.2 in A minor, Op. 13 is considered a direct homage to if not even a dialogue with the late Beethoven quartets.

Key influences and similarities can be seen in how Felix Mendelssohn and Ludwig van Beethoven intersect stylistically and structurally. The quartet opens with a musical question derived from Mendelssohn's song "Ist es wahr?" ("Is it true?"), which parallels Beethoven's famous "Must it be?" ("Muss es sein?") motif from his late quartets. Mendelssohn also models the work's overall structure on Beethoven's late-period style, especially the recitative-like intensity, emotional urgency, and cyclical thinking found in Beethoven's A minor quartet Op. 132. Like Beethoven's late works, the quartet employs cyclic form by weaving thematic material from the opening song throughout all four movements, ultimately integrating it into the finale to create a unified, long-range musical narrative.

Tolstoy's Waltz

There is ample historical evidence to support the claim that Beethoven had the tomb scene from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in mind when he composed this startling second movement of his otherwise youthful and energetic op 18 No.1. With shrouded, midnight gloom and the wrenching pathos of an Italian Opera aria, Beethoven conjures an extraordinary mood that seems to move from elegiac sorrow to suspense, from lyrical, tender reflection to horrible revelation with music that rises then rhythmically stabs, shot through with electric veins of agony and gaping pauses of shock, final sighs and death.

In Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata, femicide emerges through the narrator's justification of murdering his wife, portraying it as the extreme outcome of jealousy, sexual possessiveness, and patriarchal control, exposing how social norms can normalize violence against women. Similarly, in Leoš Janáček's First String Quartet—written in response to the novella by Leo Tolstoy—the music intensifies the psychological terror surrounding gendered violence, using fragmented motifs and extreme contrasts to evoke fear, oppression, and the tragic inevitability of the woman's fate, transforming the literary theme into raw emotional sound.

In Death and the Maiden, the symbolism centers on the confrontation between youthful life and the inevitability of death, expressed through stark musical contrasts. The slow movement, based on an earlier song by Franz Schubert, presents Death not as violent but as calm and inescapable, while the surrounding movements depict anxiety, struggle, and resistance. Together, the quartet reflects early 19th-century Romantic fascination with mortality, suggesting that death is both terrifying and strangely consoling, a release from suffering rather than only a destructive force.

In Joseph Haydn's Op. 55 No. 2 in F minor ("Razor Quartet"), the restless rhythmic drive and stark dynamic contrasts create a tense, almost operatic drama that pushes the expressive boundaries of the Classical string quartet.

Lebensmuth

Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 135 is often regarded as one of his most personal and intimate works, embodying both a reflection on his life and a sense of acceptance in the face of his impending deafness. Written in 1826, just before his death, the quartet is notable for its combination of the traditional and the revolutionary, balancing classical forms with new expressive possibilities. The final movement, marked "Der schwer gefasste Entschluss" ("The difficult decision"), reflects Beethoven's contemplation of life and death, creating an elegiac yet defiant conclusion to his string quartet legacy.

Janáček's String Quartet No. 2, "Intimate Letters" (1928), written towards the end of his life, is a powerful expression of his emotional turmoil and obsession with a much younger woman, Kamila Stösslová. The quartet is intensely personal and raw, contrasting Beethoven's philosophical resignation with Janáček's passionate, almost feverish yearning. The dissonances, rhythmic complexity, and chromaticism in this late work reflect Janáček's evolving style, where the boundaries of tonality are stretched, much like Beethoven's late quartets, yet it also retains an unmistakable emotional immediacy. Schubert's String Quartet in G major, D. 887 (1826), his last completed quartet, similarly confronts the tension between life and death, with sweeping lyricism and moments of melancholy. Its expansive form, daring harmonic progressions, and deep sense of introspection make it a fitting final statement from a composer who, much like Beethoven, was nearing the end of his life. Together, these three quartets reveal composers wrestling with their mortality, using the string quartet form to express both personal reflection and bold experimentation.

Haydn referred to his last completed String Quartet Op. 77 No. 2 as a work that he composed "with great care," expressing a sense of satisfaction in its creation. He also remarked that it was "one of the best" quartets he had written, showcasing his continued innovation even in the twilight of his career.

Breaking the Canon

Fanny Mendelssohn, Prialux Rainier, Vítězslava Kaprálová, and Maddalena Laura Sirmen were all pioneering women composers who built professional music careers in eras and environments where female composition was often discouraged or marginalized. Across different centuries and regions of Europe, they each expanded musical language in their own way—whether through Romantic song, modernist orchestral writing, nationalist-infused art music, or Classical-era instrumental virtuosity.

Leoš Janáček and Vítězslava Kaprálová: Voices of desire

Janáček's two string quartets offer an ideal introduction to themes such as desires, dreams, fulfilment and failure. Extreme emotions – from anger and passion to quiet self-reflection – characterise this musical journey. Brief insights into his folk music arrangements and fragments of an album for Kamila Stösslová, his late muse and dedicatee of the second quartet, 'Intimate Letters,' expand the narrative level of these works.

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Czech composer Vítězslava Kaprálová (1915–1940) was considered one of the greatest talents of her generation. After her early death, her music was temporarily forgotten, but it was rediscovered in the 21st century and recognised as enduringly relevant.

Kaprálová's father had studied with Janáček; she herself attended the Brno Conservatory, which emerged from Janáček's organ school. In her early twenties, she wrote her only string quartet (1935–1936). The work displays a strong character of its own, combining influences from Janáček with Moravian folk music, her father's music and impressionistic elements from French composers.

Broken Scherzos, Distant Hymns

My Seventh String Quartet, the second of my “Beethoven Studies,” is the first of my quartets to have a two-movement structure. The density of the texture is increased once again here, so that the opening Grave is so internally fractured that one never really knows whether it is not an Allegro movement after all.

Mirroring this is the second movement: it begins as a playful pizzicato allegro—initial tentative attempts at a calm, chorale-like song are repeatedly thwarted by new, fast sections. Finally, a hymn sung out to the highest heights prevails. (Jörg Widmann)