

## ENCORE Chamber Music: Calidore Quartet to make their Cleveland debut on June 25

by Mike Telin



2016 has been a good year at the office for the young Calidore String Quartet. In February they won England's Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, becoming the first North American ensemble to receive the £20,000 award in the foundation's history. During May, violinists Jeffrey Myers and Ryan Meehan, violist Jeremy Berry, and cellist Estelle Choi made their Carnegie Hall debut, and won the \$100,000 grand prize at the inaugural M-Prize Chamber Music Competition.

On Saturday, June 25 at 8:00 pm at Our Lady Chapel on the campus of Gilmour Academy, the [Calidore String Quartet](#) will make their Cleveland area debut as part of [ENCORE Chamber Music](#)'s "Virtuoso Series." Their program titled "Forbidden Voices: Censorship and Propaganda of WWII" will include music by Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Felix Mendelssohn. And on Sunday, June 26 at 3:00 pm, the Calidore will join ENCORE faculty members for a performance of the Mendelssohn *Octet* as part of the "Sunday Unplugged" series. The program also includes music by Joseph Haydn and Claude Debussy. Listeners can purchase a picnic lunch beginning at 2:00 pm.

"We're feeling pretty lucky for all of the wonderful things that are coming our way," second violinist Ryan Meehan said during a telephone conversation while traveling by car with his quartet colleagues to a performance at Bard College.

The ensemble formed in 2010 at the Colburn School in Los Angeles, and Meehan joined one year later. From that moment the Calidore have been on a fast-track to success in the competitive world of professional chamber music. "I think it's because we never turn down an opportunity," Meehan said. "Even if it seems impossible, we always just do it

and see what happens. For example, when I joined the group they had already been entered in a competition, and although that competition accepted the change in personnel, it meant that we had to learn six quartets in two weeks. That kind of set a precedent for our craziness, and our eagerness to do anything and everything that we could.”

During their first two years the Calidore entered seven competitions. “A lot of them went really well, and that helped us to get a jump start in terms of getting our name out there and playing concerts. After 2013 we thought we would stop doing competitions, but when the M-Prize was announced we thought that we really couldn’t pass it up.”



Things can be financially difficult for a young quartet, even with a busy concert schedule. How will the Calidore use these cash awards to advance their career? One way is recordings, another is commissions. “As you know, the recording industry is not what it used to be: nobody gives you money to make a recording,” he said. “But we feel that is still a valuable way of spreading your name and artistry. We’d also like to do some commissioning with the composers that we know, and maybe even combine that with a recording project.”

The Quartet also recently completed a two-year residency at SUNY, Stony Brook, where they coached undergraduates, taught private lessons, performed works by student composers, and did outreach on behalf of the school. The experience also gave them the opportunity to be mentored by the Emerson Quartet and cellist David Finckel.

“That had a profound impact on our development, both artistically and professionally,” Meehan noted. “We’ve performed the Mendelssohn *Octet* with them a number of times, and they’ve put together a program where we’ll play some pieces together at festivals. Not only have they have been incredibly helpful, they’re the most wonderful people and we look up to them so much.”

Another quartet the Calidore consider as mentors is the Quatuor Ebène, who they worked with during their early days at the Colburn School. “One of the first competitions we did was the ARD competition in Munich, and their cellist Raphaël Merlin was on the jury. A few months after that competition the Ebène began a residency at Colburn, so we had the opportunity to work with him extensively on the things he observed over the course of four rounds of the competition. What’s special about them is that while they are fantastic musicians, they are equally fantastic teachers, which is kind of rare.”

Meehan said that they are excited to have the opportunity to mentor the students at ENCORE, and to work with Jinjoo Cho, whom they first met at the Banff Centre in 2013 during a chamber music residency. “We’ve always admired Jinjoo’s playing, and when we saw her and Hyun Soo we were like star-struck fans. But it turned out that she’s the nicest, most humble person in the world and we became fast friends. A couple of months after we left Banff, we found out that she had called a major presenter in Korea on our behalf and arranged our Korean debut concert. We’re still indebted to her for doing that, and for inviting us to ENCORE. We’re so happy to pass along whatever we have learned to the younger generation of quartet players.”

I asked Meehan about Saturday’s program, “Forbidden Voices: Censorship and Propaganda of WWII.” He pointed out that Prokofiev’s *Quartet No. 2 in F*, which opens the program, was commissioned by the Soviet government at the time when he and other well-known artists had been evacuated from Moscow to Nalchik.

“The government wanted Prokofiev to write a quartet that would incorporate the Kabardino-Balkar folk music of the Nalchik region. It’s a piece that celebrates the Russian Republic. Also written during WWII was Shostakovich’s *Quartet No. 2 in A*. This is one of his more uplifting quartets, and speaks to what the government wanted the people to feel and believe.”

How does Mendelssohn’s *Quartet No. 4 in e* fit into the program’s theme? “Because of Mendelssohn’s Jewish descent, his music was banned by the Nazis, and it’s only recently that his quartets have come back into vogue.”

Wrapping up our conversation, I asked Ryan Meehan how the quartet is dealing with the non-musical side of international touring. “We all have great senses of humor,” he said. “That helps a lot when inconvenient situations arise, like flight delays, missing trains, or trying to find hotel rooms late at night.”

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