

# San Jose Mercury News

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## FEATURES



### **MUSIC@MENLO LAUDS BEETHOVEN**

The annual chamber music festival will present two weeks of his works. | **Full story on 1C**

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GERALDINE WALTHER



CHAMBER MUSIC FEST  
ZEROES IN ON THE WORK  
OF ONE COMPOSER AND  
THOSE HE INFLUENCED



ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

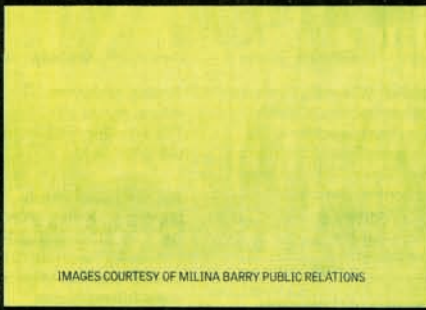


CHRISTOPHEREN NOMURA



IAN SWENSEN

# BEETHOVEN @MENLO



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CYNTHIA PHELPS



WU HAN, DAVID FINCKEL

**Music@Menlo**  
The third season  
**This year's focus:** Beethoven's music, with performances by the Emerson, St. Lawrence, Miró and Miami string quartets, among other performers  
**When and where:** July 27-Aug. 12 at venues in Atherton and Palo Alto  
**Tickets:** \$28-\$65; (650) 725-2787, [www.musicatmenlo.org](http://www.musicatmenlo.org)

By Richard Scheinin  
*Mercury News*

Two years ago, for its inaugural season, the Music@Menlo chamber music festival built its programs around historical eras: baroque, classical, romantic. Last year, it divided music along geographic fault lines: composers of Russia, France, Vienna.

This year, Menlo is zeroing in on the music of one composer: Beethoven. Who would argue?

"Beethoven's struggles in life are told through his music," says cellist David Finckel, who directs the festival with pianist Wu Han, his wife. "It's one of the great stories of all time. So this year, it's like we've picked this one spot on the planet of chamber music, and we're zooming in, like on MapQuest.

"And the great thing about picking a spot with Beethoven's name on it is that when you finally land in Beethovenville, you've got a whole world of music to explore. It's so rich."

From July 27 to Aug. 12, Music@Menlo will present two weeks of Beethoven's music, alongside music by composers who inspired him (Haydn, Mozart) and who were inspired by him (Mendelssohn, Ives). Along the way, the complete cycle of Beethoven's 16 string quartets will be performed in intimate venues in Ath-

erton and Palo Alto by eminent and upcoming ensembles, including the Emerson, St. Lawrence, Miró and Miami string quartets.

Wu Han calls the 2005 festival "an inch wide and a mile deep. We're concentrating on something that's the greatest in our literature."

The talent pool at this year's festival grows deeper: It includes violinists Jorja Fleezanis, Joseph Silverstein and Ian Swensen; violists Cynthia Phelps and Geraldine Walther; clarinetist Anthony McGill; French hornist William VerMeulen; baritone Christopheren Nomura; and pianists Claude Frank, Derek Han, Jeffrey Kahane, Gilbert Kalish and Wu Han.

There are a lot of distinguished names on that list, but Finckel and Wu Han have a lot of friends and a lot of pull: They also are artistic directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York and have built contacts through years of touring. As a result, Music@Menlo quickly has developed a national reputation and has sold out most of its concerts since Day One.

The music, by the way, has been excellent. As in past years, the 2005 festival will feature mul-

As in past years, the 2005 festival will feature multimedia lectures.

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# MENLO | Festival to focus on Beethoven

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timedia lectures by musicologists (Robert Greenberg, Michael Steinberg, Robert Winter) and Carnegie Hall artistic adviser Ara Guzelimian. Concerts, mostly held at the Menlo School's Stent Family Hall in Atherton and at Palo Alto's St. Mark's Episcopal Church, will include performances by talented youngsters studying in the festival's summer workshop.

And they *are* talented: Pianist Joyce Yang, 19, was just named silver medalist in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, the Olympics of piano face-offs.

The festival will be divided into three periods, charting Beethoven's musical life: "The Early Years: Arrival in Vienna 1790-1800," "The Heroic Period: Crisis and Triumph 1800-1810" and "Into Eternity: Music Transfigured 1810-1827."

It also will feature a pair of Sunday "Carte Blanche Concerts," each stretching over the course of an entire day at Stent Family Hall, where the listeners in the front row can practically touch the performer.

On July 31, Kahane will perform J.S. Bach's "Goldberg Variations" and Beethoven's "Diabelli Variations." On Aug. 7, Kalish will perform Beethoven's "Grosse Fuge" (Wu Han will help out on the composer's piano arrangement for four hands) and Charles Ives' Piano Sonata No. 2, the "Concord."

Finckel thinks it will be



VILLA MONTALVO

The Miró String Quartet is to perform early Beethoven Op. 18 quartets on July 30 at St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

"amazing to hear the Ives and the 'Grosse Fuge' next to each other; they're probably not going to sound that different," he says, meaning that both pieces remain ruggedly modern in sound and outlook. In fact, he points out, "Stravinsky called

the 'Grosse Fuge' of Beethoven the first true piece of modern music which still sounds modern. And the Ives is almost the same thing, a century later. So to have these two pieces on the same program is going to be ..."

He can't find the word to finish the sentence, so Wu Han gives it to him: "wild."

A few other highlights:

■ The Miró String Quartet performs a number of Beethoven's early Op. 18 quartets on July 30 at St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

■ The Miami String Quartet performs Beethoven's mid-period "Razumovsky" quartets, Op. 59, on Aug. 5, also at St. Mark's Episcopal Church.

■ The St. Lawrence String Quartet performs a pair of Beethoven's late quartets, Op. 127 and Op. 131, Aug. 9 at St. Mark's.

■ The St. Lawrence quartet performs another late quartet, Op. 135, Aug. 10 at Stent Family Hall. On the same program, the quartet will join with Finckel for Schubert's Quintet for Strings in C major, and Frank, a distinguished Beethoven interpreter, will perform the composer's Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111.

■ The Emerson String Quartet performs two more of Beethoven's late quartets, Op. 130 and Op. 132, Aug. 11 at St. Mark's. Finckel prevailed on his friends in the Emerson quartet "to break their traditional vacation time to come and play this concert," he says. "I wanted to wait for the festival to really get on the map before I started to bother them to get out of their vacation."