

# Bring on Brentano

String quartet will perform in Nicosia as part of their European tour

**T**he Pharos Arts Foundation is hosting the Brentano String Quartet who will perform at The Shoe Factory, Nicosia on March 11 as part of its European tour.

The quartet, formed in 1992 by four Juilliard graduates, has been singled out for its technical brilliance, musical insight and stylistic elegance. From its first appearance at the Wigmore Hall, the quartet received the accolade from the Royal Philharmonic Society for outstanding debut in 1997.

It was also the first quartet-in-residence at Princeton University in 1999 and was selected by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Centre to participate in the inaugural season of Chamber Society Two, designed for outstanding emerging artists and chamber musicians.

Comprising violinists Mark Steinberg and Serena Canin, violist Misha Amory and cellist Nina Maria-Lee, the quartet

has an extensive repertoire from Renaissance and early music pieces to secular works by Josquin des Pres as well as collaborations with living composers.

Steinberg explained: "we wish to go beyond the boundaries of the standard string quartet repertoire and for our tenth anniversary, commissioned ten composers who wrote a piece inspired by and to be interwoven with excerpts of Bach's Art of Fugue.

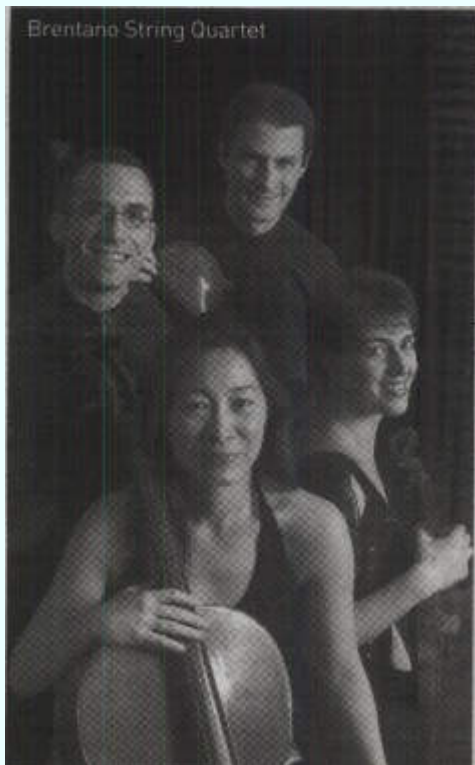
"Beethoven's music is undoubtedly very important to the ensemble and is actually named after Antonie Brentano whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven's Immortal Beloved, the intended recipient of his famous love confession. Cellist Nina, who has played in the quartet since 1998, believes the goal, is "to be as close as possible to the composer's vision. I so often wish I could just speak to Beethoven and ask 'Is this what you meant?'"

Interestingly, Nina, after starting her

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studies at the Curtis Institute, left to attend Boston University to become a biologist.

“Getting back to music was quite a cool story. I attended a chamber concert where one of the musicians was Mark Steinberg and was blown away by how the musicians communicated with each other. I just knew that that was what I wanted to do and years later had the chance to tell Mark how he changed my life. Now, I play quartets with him!”

Nina also explains that there is a good sense of camaraderie in the quartet, which is essential as they travel extensively throughout Europe, Japan and Australia.

“We are good friends and I cannot imagine not getting along with the others. We all read a lot while travelling. As a musician, but also a mother to two small children, it’s nice to have down time.”

The programme in Cyprus will include two of Beethoven’s Quartets - his No 2, Op 18 and his last complete quartet, his Op 135 which was conceived in the aftermath of his nephew Karl’s suicide attempt and his own impending death. The little epigraph Beethoven wrote in his sketchbooks translates roughly as the difficult decision which has led to some scholars theorising about its meaning. They have ranged from an exchange where the composer tried to avoid paying his rent, to a performer trying to purchase the rights to one of his quartets, or even his annoyance at having to write a finale at all.

Bartok’s String Quartet No 4 was written during the academic break between July and September of 1928 and was spurred on by his win in the string quartet competition sponsored by the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia. He and Italian composer Alfredo Casella won first prize jointly but papers in Budapest reported that Bartok was the sole winner of the \$6,000 prize. It was only a few days later that Bartok heard he was only to receive half that amount. He was nonetheless appreciative of the publicity gained from the success.

The early performances were given by the Hungarian Quartet who premiered the work on BBC radio later that year and helped to contribute to Bartok’s growing reputation as a “cutting edge” composer. Bartok in his rather neutral analysis of the work describes the third movement as the “kernel of the work” and around which, the other movements are arranged. It is here that we hear the sounds of nature which Bartok loved and frequently included in his music. The music then becomes more open-sounding and we hear his Arabic influences as well as from his own native Hungary.

Book tickets online [www.pharostickets.org](http://www.pharostickets.org) or 7000 9304.

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