ARTISTS
Danish String Quartet
Frederik Øland, violin
Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen, violin
Asbjørn Nørgaard, viola
Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin, cello

Exclusive Representation:
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PROGRAM
Rolf Wallin: *Swans Kissing* for String Quartet (2016)

Andante
Adagio
Moderato
Allegro

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven: String Quartet No. 9 in C Major, op. 59, no. 3, *Razumovsky* (1806)
Introduzione: Andante con moto – Allegro vivace
Andante con moto quasi allegretto
Minuetto: Grazioso – Allegro molto

The Danish String Quartet has recorded for ECM, Dacapo, and CAvi-Music/BR Klassik.

PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE. Please be considerate of others and turn off all phones, pagers, and watch alarms, and unwrap all lozenges prior to the performance. Photography and recording of any kind are not permitted. Thank you.
ROLF WALLIN (B. 1957)
SWANS KISSING FOR STRING QUARTET
(2016)

The abstract paintings of Hilma af Klint, the Swedish visionary painter, predate Kandinsky’s first abstract work by five years. As with many other abstract pioneers, her path was a spiritual one, coming from an urge to reveal the deeper truth that lies behind the reality we perceive with our senses. She never showed her paintings in public and painted “on commission” from spirits.

Her series of large paintings named The Swan (1914) is a set of increasingly abstract variations on a striking figurative picture: one white swan flying down from above on a black background (the night sky?) and one black swan flying up from below on a white background (a frozen lake?). Their beaks meet with a kiss in the middle of the picture. In the following paintings one can see echoes, in curves and shapes, of the original image.

Swans Kissing, just as these canvases, is split in two. Two bodies of music mirror each other exactly in some aspects but differ vastly in character. The first body flows slowly and viscerally upwards, the second pushes downwards with a relentless pulse. They meet with a “kiss” halfway through the piece.

In these paintings, Hilma af Klint combines a strong, “masculine” constructivist geometry with “feminine” dream-like sensuality, resulting in visionary work of striking precision. This has inspired me to revisit an earlier path of my own, combining fractal mathematics and geometry with a playful, sensual attitude.
—Rolf Wallin

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)
STRING QUARTET NO. 2,
INTIMATE LETTERS (1928)

In 1917, on holiday at a spa in Moravia, Leoš Janáček, then 63 years old, met Kamila Stösslová, a young woman of 26. Their chance meeting led not only to some of the greatest, most passionate music of the 20th century but also to one of the most extraordinary love affairs to be sought by a composer. For the next 12 years until his death, Janáček poured out his love for the young woman in some 700 love letters. The music she directly inspired includes four operas, the Sinfonietta, the Glagolitic Mass, two piano concerti, the song cycle The Diary of One Who Disappeared, and the string quartet to be played tonight, subtitled Listy důvěrné (Intimate Letters). The love letters, published in 1990 and translated into English shortly afterwards, show a lonely man, unhappily married, channeling all his passion and creative energies into a complex, sublimated, “spiritual” love affair with a married woman. She inspired some of his most passionate and poignant music. “All my works, all my operas contain one passion,” he wrote. His letters are unselfconscious and intimate, starting with polite requests for a meeting and ending with dreams of marriage and children. Stösslová, for her part, was married to an antiques dealer and, although, at her insistence, Janáček burnt the majority of her responses, she seems to have tolerated his written declarations of love without rancor, even keeping his quest for love alive. Indeed, Janáček, living in a form of court-authored separation from his wife for a decade, was on holiday with Stösslová, her husband, and young son in 1928 when he caught the pneumonia that was to lead to his death.

The String Quartet No. 2 is Janáček’s clearest and most intense declaration of love—“both real and imagined,” in the composer’s words. “I have begun to write something beautiful,” he wrote. “Our life will be contained in it. It will be called Love Letters...In this work I shall be alone with you.” The title Love Letters was changed to Intimate Letters and Janáček’s original idea of featuring the dark-toned and poetically named Baroque viola d’amore as a symbol of his love was dropped, although the viola part of the string quartet retains its particular importance. The first of the four “letters,” characterized by two strongly contrasting themes, describes his love on first encountering the young woman. The second, opening with a tender melody on viola, describes their first meeting. The third, the emotional climax of the work, portrays the fervor and intensity of their love and Janáček’s desire that they have a child, as the music dissolves into “a vision which would resemble your image, transparent, as if in the mist.” The finale travels through the many complex emotions associated with their relationship. “I want [this] to be a great love—a great composition,” Janáček wrote after the first performance of the quartet, his last completed work. He continued:

I listened to their playing today [and asked myself] did I write that? Those cries of joy, but what a strange thing, also cries of terror after a lullaby. Exaltation, a warm declaration of love, imploring, untamed longing. Resolution, relentlessly to fight with the world over you. Moaning, confiding, fearing...Oh, it’s a work as if carved out of living flesh. I think that I won’t write a more profound and a truer one.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
STRING QUARTET NO. 9 IN C MAJOR,
OP. 59, NO. 3, RAZUMOVSKY (1806)

Beethoven had recently completed the Waldstein and Appassionata piano sonatas when the Russian Count Razumovsky commissioned three quartets that now bear his name. It was a time of tremendous confidence for Beethoven, despite encroaching deafness. He wrote the three Razumovskys when he was at work on the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, the Fourth Piano Concerto, and the Violin Concerto. The string quartets were without precedent. Critic Joseph Kerman recently called them “a trio of sharply characterized, consciously differentiated individuals, beside whom the earlier quartets look, regrettably, like pasteboard.” The Viennese public and musicians, however, had a difficult time with them. “The three new, very long Opus 59 quartets are profoundly conceived and finely
worked out, but they are not intelligible to the general public,” wrote an anonymous critic from the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung. The opening of the first movement of the C major quartet adds fuel to the fire. Strange and otherworldly, the harmonies of its first 29 measures probe far and wide, taking us everywhere, it seems, except to a clear C major. It’s as though Beethoven’s experience of the onset of deafness finds expression in music. In his sketches for the finale, he wrote the line: “Make no secret of your deafness, in Art as well as in Life.”

In between the two outer movements comes a forlorn, rather bleak Andante that restlessly echoes the themes of the opening movement. Its melancholy landscape may be an example of Beethoven adding a Russian element to the score to complement the two Russian themes he worked into the two earlier quartets of the set, at Razumovsky’s request. After this extraordinary, almost Schubertian Andante, the backward-looking Minuetto acts as the perfect foil. The finale finds Beethoven at his most extroverted and assertive. The music is a rhetorical, often exuberant fugal movement of tremendous energy, the very antithesis of the opening of the quartet and a compelling conclusion to the collection.

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DANISH STRING QUARTET
Embodying the quintessential elements of a fine chamber music ensemble, the Danish String Quartet has established a reputation for its integrated sound, impeccable intonation, and judicious balance. Since making their debut in 2002 at the Copenhagen Festival, the musical friends have demonstrated a passion for Scandinavian composers, who they frequently incorporate into adventurous contemporary programs, while also giving skilled and profound interpretations of the classical masters. The New York Times selected the quartet’s concerts as highlights of the season during its Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center CMS Two Residency, and in February 2016 the ensemble received the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, provided to support outstanding young artists in their international endeavors, joining an illustrious roster of past recipients.

The Danish String Quartet’s 2016–2017 season includes debuts at the Edinburgh Festival and Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall. In addition to over 30 North American engagements, the quartet’s robust international schedule takes the artists to their home country of Denmark, throughout Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Poland, and Israel, Argentina, Peru, and Colombia. As champions of contemporary music from Scandinavian composers, the quartet premieres Swans Kissing by Rolf Wallin, titled based on the series of paintings by Swedish painter Hilma af Klint. This work was commissioned by the quartet for its world premiere in London’s Wigmore Hall this season. In October it presents its 10th annual DSQ Festival, a four-day event in Copenhagen that brings together artists the quartet has met on its travels.

The ensemble’s recent debut recording on ECM Records features works by Danish composers Hans Abrahamsen and Per Nørgård and English composer Thomas Adès, receiving five stars from the Guardian and debuting at number 16 on the Billboard classical chart. In addition to its commitment to highlighting Scandinavian composers, the quartet derives great pleasure from Nordic folk music.

In 2009, the Danish String Quartet won first prize in the 11th London International String Quartet Competition, as well as four additional prizes from the same jury. This competition is now called the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, and the quartet has performed at the famed hall on many occasions. The ensemble received the 2010 NORDMETALL Ensemble Prize at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival in Germany and, in 2011, won the prestigious Carl Nielsen Prize. Through its vibrant interpretations and intense musicality, this ensemble compels audiences and critics and brings them to their feet.