



BEETHOVEN  
DIALOGUES  
DUO Stephanie & Saar

# PIANO DUETS

have played a long and important role in keyboard literature. Despite the timbral and registral limitations of early keyboards, the English virginal composers Thomas Tompkins and Nicholas Carlton were already composing keyboard duets in the 16th century. Duets resurfaced prominently in the 18th century primarily for pedagogical purposes, with plenty of teacher-pupil and sibling pairings. The famous sibling duo Wolfgang Amadeus and Nannerl Mozart performed Wolfgang's Sonata in C Major, K. 19d on a two-manual harpsichord when Wolfgang was only nine years old. What better way to develop sensitive ears, great attention to harmonic balance and collaborative instincts than assembling an intricate piano duet with a master teacher or a talented sibling?

As the keyboard evolved and emerged as the preeminent instrument of the nineteenth century, four-hand playing became the fashionable social activity in every prosperous living room. Duet repertoire grew at an exponential rate. There was an obvious financial incentive: a piano transcription was the primary way a newly literate musical public could come to know – and play – new prominent works. The duet version, often times the only way to hear a composition in the absence of professional orchestras and ensembles, satiated the consumers' hungry appetites. Imagine two amateur pianists experiencing Beethoven's Fifth for the very first time in their own living room!

The nineteenth-century transcriber left nothing untouched: symphonies, string quartets and trios, clarinet and violin sonatas, opera overtures and arias, lieder and ballads, ballet music and a cappella choruses. Beethoven was extremely popular, with the complete

symphonies, string quartets, chamber works as well as Fidelio all available in four-hand format. Duet arrangements were so in demand that publishing companies employed “in-house” transcribers: Theodor Kirchner and Hugo Ulrich at Peters, Robert Keller at Simrock and Otto Singer at Universal. Hugo Ulrich (1827-1872) was one of the most notable and prolific transcribers. In these transcriptions of the Beethoven String Quartets Op. 18 Nos. 1, 4 and 6, Ulrich thinned out dense textures to achieve lucid keyboard transparency and solved problematic doubling issues, all while keeping true to Beethoven’s original creative intentions.

Why play these quartet transcriptions in the twenty-first century? Leon Fleisher, Saar’s teacher at Peabody, asked his students to study the Beethoven string quartets in four-hand format in hopes of rediscovering Beethoven beyond the iconic 32 piano sonatas. We read through the Op. 18 quartets and completely forgot that this was music intended for strings. The joy of playing the quartets on the same instrument with a “partner in crime” was beyond exhilarating. We found – and are still finding – many rewards: bravura passagework, powerful symphonic cadences, diabolical 4-part fugues and heartbreaking melodies all brought to a brand new light by our favorite instrument.

We wish to thank Professor Thomas Christensen, whose article “Four-Hand Piano Transcription and Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Musical Reception” enriched our understanding of the repertoire and provided invaluable insight into our research.

Notes by Stephanie Ho and Saar Ahuvia

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[www.oktavenaudio.com](http://www.oktavenaudio.com)

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Recorded, edited and mastered by Ryan Streber  
Photography by Masataka Suemitsu

Hamburg Steinway D provided by Arlin Harris

Dedicated to Leon Fleisher and in memory of Karl Ulrich Schnabel



# Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1

1. Allegro con brio (9:47)
2. Adagio affetuoso ed appassionato (9:39)
3. Scherzo: Allegro molto (3:39)
4. Allegro (8:02)

String Quartet in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4

5. Allegro ma non troppo (8:26)
6. Andante scherzoso quasi Allegretto (7:24)
7. Menuetto: Allegro (3:40)
8. Allegro (4:39)

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6

9. Allegro con brio (6:37)
10. Adagio ma non troppo (6:40)
11. Scherzo: Allegro (2:59)
12. La Malinconia: Adagio - Allegretto quasi Allegro (7:38)

Transcribed for Piano Four Hands by Hugo Ulrich and Robert Wittmann

DUO Stephanie and Saar  
Stephanie Ho and Saar Ahuvia, piano

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TOTAL TIME 79:12

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