The 2nd movement of the 7th Symphony is one of Beethoven’s best-loved works. There is something very contemporary and rock and roll about the simple rhythmic pulse, the repeating chord pattern (which lends itself well to looping) and the slow consistent build of intensity. It speaks to fans of both Ravel’s Bolero and Led Zeppelin’s Kashmir.
Beethoven successfully staved off the pressure of high expectations that came with writing a string quartet through much of his first decade in Vienna. It wasn’t until 1798 that Prince Lobkowitz (for whom Haydn also wrote string quartets) commissioned from Beethoven a set of six quartets that became Op. 18. The set was finished in 1801.

While each Op. 18 quartet is highly inventive, Beethoven’s equalization of part writing and his exploration of variations on a theme are particularly evident in No. 6.

No. 6 is Beethoven’s answer to “Papa” Haydn, and we can hear this in the texture of the first movement, Allegro con brio. The movement begins rather modestly, the theme’s importance growing as it moves through turn figures and elegantly dotted rhythms.

The second movement, Adagio ma non troppo, is truly exquisite – one of the most expressive of the composer’s early slow movements. Its simplicity of form and major/minor contrasts among sections hold the listener’s attention, as do
the sudden swells in dynamics, and the coda, which recalls the minor mode of the middle section.

The Scherzo starts out like the tumbling act of a circus troupe – with syncopations and quick, bouncy surges. After two movements of basically straightforward rhythmic patterns, the Scherzo is a blast of vivacity and rhythmic eccentricity. Nevertheless, the heart of the quartet is the fourth movement, labeled La malinconia: Adagio; Allegretto quasi allegro.

Perhaps the only thing that could trump the rhythmic genius of the Scherzo is the stunning harmonic spectrum of this finale. It opens with an extended slow section, operatically entitled “La Malinconia”, or “Melancholy”. Something more intense than ordinary melancholy is contained in this wandering music, which interrupts its own glassy flow with painfully stabbing chords. Resolution comes in the form of the movement’s main section; this is a rondo with a spinning, cheerful demeanor, never content to remain in one place for long. It has the quality of being compressed, or abbreviated, by the gravity of the “Malinconia”, which makes a second appearance late in the movement: there isn’t enough room for these two incompatible personalities, and they are each vying for the upper hand. Ultimately the lighter music has the final word, as a brilliant Prestissimo brings the work to a close.

-- MISHA AMORY
With this composition, I wanted to speak to the current social and cultural climate we now face. I also feel a commonality with Beethoven, who took his audiences on artistic journeys with thematic descriptions. Beethoven’s hope that his musical expression could affect change was my inspiration for this piece, which is dedicated to the late Civil Rights leader Congressman John Lewis. Its premise is described by the following words written by social activist and artist Carol Williams:

“A speech by a politician is not expected to be the equivalent of poetry, or to cast a lasting memory in popular culture; especially not one given 155 years ago. But that is precisely what the phrase, “with malice toward none, and charity for all,” has become. It is the definition of politics seamlessly intersecting with art.

So should it be any different from having music intersect with politics? Not for Beethoven, as most students of his music are already aware. Today, there is still a critical need for “socially responsible pieces of music” that can address our human failures with as much hope as it does despair.

We are together here in 2020, facing challenges old and new, internal and external. And we have reached a new low point when a People, born more American than African, have to again demand that the value of their lives be recognized. It is obvious that their lives did not matter when they were
kidnapped and brought here 400 years ago to provide free labor to a country that became the richest on Earth. Their lives did not matter during the war to set them free, when they were regarded as contraband or fugitives. Their lives did not matter when they were refused basic human dignity without enduring a century of struggle. And now their lives do not “matter” enough to allow them to choose that very word for themselves. And so continues the malice. To provide “Charity for all” would have cost nothing more than to have given them respect and equal opportunity.

But today, we celebrate those who remind us that we can speak up every time we think, breathe, talk, act, move, and live. We can use the language of music or the music of speech; we can do it from a podium at the US Capitol dome, or from a podium at a concert hall. Today, Beethoven would liberate style, modes, genres, and stereotypes with one angry eye. He would shout---not even hearing his own voice or the voices of his opposition---that it is our world to change, and that we do not need to ask permission from above. He would write us an anthem we could all stand for. And using those words of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address of 1865, we could have another chance to make them True: “With malice toward none.”

-- KIMO AND CAROL WILLIAMS
J. KIMO WILLIAMS

J. Kimo Williams was born in Amityville, New York, and spent much of his childhood divided between Air Force bases, urban neighborhoods of Baltimore, rural Mississippi and on his grandparents’ sharecropper farm in North Carolina. Moving to Hawaii with his father in 1967, he volunteered to serve in the military and was deployed to Vietnam in 1970.
After basic training, he was sent to Vietnam where he served with the 20th Combat Engineer Battalion in Lai Khe, building roads and clearing land in the jungle. An Army entertainment service director heard him playing guitar at one of the service clubs, and suggested that he form a band to perform for troops in the field: for two months, Kimo and his group, “The Soul Coordinators”, traveled to remote areas throughout South Vietnam, setting up their drums and amplifiers in jungle mud, often with their music competing with artillery fire and his band performed in hospital corridors, in dayrooms, at officer club picnics and anywhere that would make a difference in the lives of those who were serving. Kimo received a special award directly from General Creighton Abrams for his service to the morale and well-being of soldiers fighting in Vietnam.

Under the GI Bill, he applied to and was accepted to the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston. During his four years at Berklee (starting as a guitarist who could barely read music), he developed considerable compositional talents and eventually created his harmonic concepts (“Diagonal Harmony”). He began composing music that combined jazz, rock and classical styles.

Kimo co-founded The “Lt. Dan Band”, in 2003 with actor-musician Gary Sinise (Forest Gump, CSI: NY). Their primary goal was to perform USO shows for active duty service members. Through his band, he has traveled to Afghanistan, Kuwait, Korea, Singapore, Diego Garcia Germany, and other military bases to support military members.
Kimo’s symphonic works have been performed by the symphonies of Detroit, Atlanta, Savannah, Philadelphia, Indianapolis, Alabama, Lancaster, PA, Ho Chi Minh City Vietnam, Czech Republic and others. He has been commissioned by the string quartet ETHEL and Houston-based Apollo Chamber Players.

www.kimowilliams.com
Lauded by BBC Radio as “the greatest living exponent of the electric violin”, Tracy Silverman’s groundbreaking work with the 6-string electric violin defies musical boundaries. A leader in the progressive string community, his Strum Bowing Method has been adopted by players and teachers all over the world.
Formerly first violinist with the innovative Turtle Island String Quartet, Silverman was named one of 100 distinguished alumni by The Juilliard School. He has performed as a soloist with many of the world’s finest orchestras, and is the subject of several electric violin concertos composed specifically for him by Pulitzer winner John Adams, Terry Riley, Nico Muhly, Kenji Bunch and others as well as the composer of 3 electric violin concertos of his own.

A longstanding advocate for post-classical string playing, Silverman believes “strings must evolve or they will perish.” His approach embraces the 400-year legacy of string playing while also speaking in the native tongue of our own contemporary popular musical culture: rock, jazz, hip-hop, etc.

Media highlights include a solo Tiny Desk Concert, Performance Today, CBS Sunday Morning, A Prairie Home Companion and many others. Silverman is the author of The Strum Bowing Method: How to Groove on Strings, an in-demand clinician internationally and on the string faculty at Belmont University in Nashville, TN.

www.tracysilverman.com
Houston-based Apollo Chamber Players “performs with rhythmic flair and virtuosity” (The Strad) and has “found fruitful territory” (Houston Chronicle) through innovative, globally-inspired programming and multicultural new music commissions. A recent winner of Chamber Music America’s prestigious Residency Partnership award, the quartet has twice performed for sold-out audiences at Carnegie Hall, and it holds the distinction of being the first American chamber ensemble to record and perform in Cuba since the embargo relaxation. Apollo is featured frequently on American Public Media’s nationally-syndicated program Performance Today.
A passionate advocate of contemporary music, Apollo launched a bold project in 2014 to commission 20 new multicultural works by the end of the decade. 20x2020 saw its triumphant conclusion in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic with digital world premieres and global recording collaborations. The project features a diverse roster of the world’s leading composers and instrumentalists including Jennifer Higdon, Libby Larsen, Pamela Z, Leo Brouwer, Jerod Impichchaachaaha’ Tate, and Vân Ánh Võ.

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