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4-CD 2005 recording available

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Every year, Music@Menlo releases live festival recordings on CD. The music is top-notch. So is the sound quality -- not surprising, since the recordings are engineered by Da-Hong Seetoo, the Grammy-winning engineer and producer for the Emerson String Quartet, Daniel Barenboim and other well-known artists.

A new four-CD box set, "Beethoven: Center of Gravity," has been culled from the 2005 festival, which revolved around the music of Beethoven alongside music by composers who inspired him (Haydn, Mozart) and were inspired by him (Mendelssohn, Brahms).

There are many strong performances here. Carl Maria von Weber's "Grosses Quintett (Grand Quintet)" for Clarinet and Strings in B-flat major is especially inspired, built around the astonishing solo work of young clarinetist Anthony McGill.

But don't hesitate to try out Mendelssohn's Quintet for Strings in B-flat major, Opus 87, featuring this all-star cast: violinists Jorja Fleezanis and Ian Swensen; violists Cynthia Phelps and Geraldine Walther; and cellist David Finckel. Pianist Gilbert Kalish, always on the money, guides a deft performance of Beethoven's Piano Trio in E-flat major, Opus 70, No. 2, with Fleezanis and cellist Ralph Kirshbaum.

Lots more, too.

The box set (\$60 on the Music@Menlo Live label) is available at www.musicatmenlo.org, where recordings from the 2003 and 2004 festivals also are available. The four CDs from 2005 also are available individually; each costs \$17.

