

EMERSON STRING QUARTET

EUGENE DRUCKER, violin
PHILIP SETZER, violin
LAWRENCE DUTTON, viola
PAUL WATKINS, cello

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

Quartet No. 1 in E-flat Major, Op. 12
Adagio non troppo – Allegro non tardante
Canzonetta. Allegretto
Andante espressivo
Molto allegro e vivace
Eugene Drucker, first violin

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
(1841-1904)

Quartet No. 14 in A-flat Major, Op. 105
Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro appassionato
Molto vivace – Trio
Lento e molto cantabile
Finale. Allegro non tanto
Philip Setzer, first violin

INTERMISSION

GEORGE WALKER
(1922-2018)

Lyric for Strings
Philip Setzer, first violin

MAURICE RAVEL
(1875-1937)

Quartet in F Major
Allegro moderato
Assez vif, très rythmé
Très lent
Vif et agité
Philip Setzer, first violin

Photo by Jürgen Frank



EUGENE DRUCKER

violin

PHILIP SETZER

violin

LAWRENCE DUTTON

viola

PAUL WATKINS

cello

EMERSON STRING QUARTET

The Emerson String Quartet has maintained its status as one of the world's premier chamber music ensembles for more than four decades. "With musicians like this," wrote a reviewer for *The Times* (London), "there must be some hope for humanity." The Quartet has made more than 30 acclaimed recordings, and has been honored with nine GRAMMYs (including two for Best Classical Album), three Gramophone Awards, the Avery Fisher Prize, and Musical America's "Ensemble of the Year" award. The Quartet collaborates with some of today's most esteemed composers to premiere new works, keeping the string quartet form alive and relevant. The group has partnered in performance with such stellar soloists as Renée Fleming, Barbara Hannigan, Evgeny Kissin, Emanuel Ax, and Yefim Bronfman, to name a few.

The Quartet's extensive discography includes the complete string quartets of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bartok, Webern, and Shostakovich, as well as multi-CD sets of the major works of Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Dvořák. In 2018, Deutsche Grammophon issued a box of the Emerson Complete Recordings on the label. In October 2020, the group released a recording of Schumann's three string quartets for the Pentatone label. In the preceding year, the Quartet joined forces with GRAMMY-winning pianist Evgeny Kissin to release their debut collaborative album for Deutsche Grammophon, recorded live at a sold-out Carnegie Hall concert in 2018.

Formed in 1976 and based in New York City, the Emerson String Quartet was one of the first quartets to have its violinists alternate in the first chair position. The Quartet, which takes its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, balances busy performing careers with a commitment to teaching, and serves as Quartet-in-Residence at Stony Brook University. In 2013, cellist Paul Watkins—a distinguished soloist, award-winning conductor, and devoted chamber musician—joined the original members of the Quartet to form today’s group.

In the spring of 2016, the State University of New York awarded full-time Stony Brook faculty members Philip Setzer and Lawrence Dutton the status of Distinguished Professor, and conferred the title of Honorary Distinguished Professor on part-time faculty members Eugene Drucker and Paul Watkins. The Quartet’s members also hold honorary doctorates from Middlebury College, the College of Wooster, Bard College, and the University of Hartford. In January of 2015, the Quartet received the Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award, Chamber Music America’s highest honor, in recognition of its significant and lasting contribution to the chamber music field.

The Emerson String Quartet enthusiastically endorses Thomastik strings.

NOTES

IN BRIEF

BORN: February 3, 1809, Hamburg, Germany

DIED: November 4, 1847, Leipzig, Germany

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: January 17, 2007, Pacifica Quartet

DURATION: 23 minutes

FELIX MENDELSSOHN: STRING QUARTET IN E-FLAT, OP. 12

When we speak of Mendelssohn, it is generally with the sense that he was the most classic of the romantics. Although he lived entirely within that most romantic of eras, the first half of the nineteenth century, his genius was

Mozartean. He was a child prodigy, blessed with a fountain of melodies welling up within him and a keen instinct for large musical structures. One would have expected Mendelssohn to adhere to earlier models when he was young, and explore new horizons as he matured. Instead, his observance of classical characteristics grew stronger as he grew older. The E-flat Quartet, Op. 12 is an example of his youthful interest in cyclical structures, a ploy he abandoned in later works. Even more striking is this quartet's relationship to Beethoven's Quartet in E-flat, Op. 74, known as the "Harp." The shared tonality is not coincidental.

Though a composing prodigy, young Felix waited a long time before tackling a quartet, as had Beethoven before him. Through the 1820s, Mendelssohn was gaining expertise in composing for strings. The medium he chose, however, was the string symphony rather than the quartet. In 1821 and 1822 alone he wrote eight such works, adding another four in 1823. He finally wrote his first quartet, Opus 13, "Ist es wahr?," in 1827, and this E-flat quartet in 1829, at the ripe old age of 20.

At that age he was still a student, and as he studied, he steeped himself in music history. Mendelssohn was keenly interested not only in Johann Sebastian Bach, but also in Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and in W.A. Mozart. By the late 1820s, he had begun careful study of Beethoven's quartets and piano sonatas. The middle and late works were of particular interest to him, and it is clear from his works for solo piano and strings in the late 1820s that Beethoven's music made an enormous impression. Listeners who know the "Harp" Quartet will hear the kinship to it in Mendelssohn's slow introduction. Charles Rosen has written:

Mendelssohn, in fact, telescopes Beethoven's long phrase into three bars. Once again it is evident that Mendelssohn was not ashamed to reveal his sources: an allusion of this kind is intended to be noticed, its recognition to produce the satisfied glow that comes from being in on the secret.

Beethoven was not the only composer Mendelssohn quoted; he paid the same compliment to himself. Opus 12 is an experiment in thematic unification, and the last work in which he quoted from his own music.

Opus 12 is a lyrical piece, whose bow to Beethoven is restricted to the first movement. Otherwise it is a relatively free work, remarkably so in light of the formal conservatism Mendelssohn favored in his later chamber music. A new theme introduced in the first movement development section recurs in the coda. The same music returns in the finale, binding the entire musical structure together in an overt cyclical gesture.

Of the inner movements, the Canzonetta may be familiar even to listeners who are hearing this work for the first time. A folksong framing a scherzo in major mode, this is the most popular of Mendelssohn's quartet movements. The Andante has recitative-like passages for first violin, and proceeds *attacca* to the finale. Surprisingly, much of the last movement is in C minor. Mendelssohn does not resolve affirmatively to the home tonality of E-flat major until toward the end, at which point he re-introduces the music that concluded his opening movement.

IN BRIEF

BORN: September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves, Czechia

DIED: May 1, 1904, Prague, Czechia

FIRST PERFORMANCE: October 20, 1896, Rose Quartet (Prague)

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: October 22, 1980, Prague Quartet

DURATION: 33 minutes

ANTONÍN
DVOŘÁK:
QUARTET NO. 14
IN A-FLAT MAJOR,
OP. 105

In certain respects, Dvořák's late works were retrospective. He was trained in the Germanic school and struggled, successfully, to develop a highly personal nationalistic style.

During his final creative years, however, he was drawn to the programmatic tone poem style of Franz Liszt, which had found new energy in the more recent works of Richard Strauss. After a distinguished career with strong commitment to the forms of absolute music (music that exists for its own sake, independent of any extramusical association such as literature, art, etc.), Dvořák wrote five symphonic poems, all based on Bohemian legend and history. The parallel with his older contemporary, Bedřich Smetana (whose masterwork, *Má Vlast*, is a collection of six such tone poems), cannot be lost on us.

Before turning to these late orchestral pieces, however, he made his musical farewell to the realm of absolute music with two string quartets, published as Opp. 105 and 106. The A-flat quartet, though it bears the earlier opus number, was actually the last piece of abstract music that Dvořák completed. He began it in 1895 while in New York City, during the final month of his long stay in the United States. Enormously happy to be back in Bohemia, but exhausted from his journey, he took an unprecedented seven months leave from composing. Work on the A-flat Major quartet resumed in December 1895; Simrock published it in 1896.

Unlike the straightforward, folk-like American works, the A-flat quartet shows no influence of the New World. To the contrary, it has decidedly Czech themes and dance rhythms. After a somber slow introduction in the remarkable key of A-flat minor (which, with a key signature of seven flats, is an exceptionally difficult key for string players), Dvořák settles into a joyous Allegro appassionato in sonata form in the home key of A-flat major. The main theme, a fanfare-like flourish, is the first of several appealing melodic ideas. It is his harmonies and subtle shifts of tempo, however, that give this opening movement its rich, late Romantic texture.

Dvořák's biographers have interpreted Opp. 105 and 106 both to be expressions of the composer's thanksgiving to be back in his native land. In Op. 105, the tripartite

[A-B-A] slow movement most clearly reflects the hymn-like character one might expect from such sentiments. This elegiac *Lento e molto cantabile* in F major speaks to us with philosophy and nobility. We can hear, in its middle *minore* section, how far Dvořák's chromatic wanderings had taken him. With his return to the A-section, he embroiders his original ideas with filigree work in the middle voices. A brief coda momentarily recalls the darker B-section. With cello pedal-point as underpinning, Dvořák dispels any lingering shadows with a tranquil and reassuring conclusion.

This late work shows considerable affinity with the late quartets of Beethoven. If Dvořák was reverting to his Romantic heritage at this stage of his life, he also continued his lifelong search for novel approaches to organizing a large, multi-movement sonata form. The second movement *Molto vivace* is a *furiant*, a fast dance of Bohemian origin, whose pulse alternates between 3/4 and 2/4 time (think “America” from *West Side Story*). The finale also has a strong Czech imprint, again overflowing with the piquant harmonies and lively rhythms of Bohemian folk dance.

IN BRIEF

BORN: June 27, 1922, Washington, D.C.

DIED: August 23, 2018, Montclair, NJ

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Performed as a part of our 2020-21 Virtual Season by the Ivalas Quartet.

DURATION: 5 minutes

GEORGE WALKER:
LYRIC [LAMENT]
FOR STRINGS
(1941/6; REV.
1990)

It's difficult to imagine a musical pedigree more impeccable than George Walker's. After graduating from high school at age 14, he attended Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio, then Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, then Rochester's Eastman School – three of America's most prestigious schools of music. At Curtis, he studied piano with Rudolf Serkin, chamber music with violist William

Primrose and cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, and composition with Rosario Scalero (whose former students included Samuel Barber and Giancarlo Menotti).

Walker later refined his keyboard skills working with several internationally renowned pianists, notably France's Robert Casadesus and Britain's Clifford Curzon. He had an active career as a concert pianist in the 1940s, including appearances with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra and Reginald Stewart and the Baltimore Symphony. Increasingly, however, he focused on composition. There, too, his achievements were impressive. He earned, in succession, fellowships from the Fulbright (1957) and Whitney (1958) foundations. The Whitney award allowed him to take composition lessons with the legendary Nadia Boulanger at Fontainebleau, outside Paris, for two years.

Eleven years later, another pair of back-to-back awards came his way: a Guggenheim fellowship in 1969 and a Rockefeller Foundation grant (1970). During the 1960s he was a MacDowell Colony Fellow. He later received a second Guggenheim, a second Rockefeller Foundation grant, and a number of other awards.

Walker, an African-American, established his reputation before *Brown v. Board of Education* and sustained it through the Civil Rights turmoil of the 1960s. In 1996 he became the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize in music, for his song cycle *Lilacs* for voice and orchestra, which was premiered by the Boston Symphony under Seiji Ozawa. At Eastman, Walker had earned a doctorate in 1955. He was eventually the recipient of six honorary doctorates. Walker taught for years at Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory and Rutgers University in New Jersey.

Originally written in 1941, *Lyric* predates all of Walker's major compositions. Also known as *Lament*, it was a

memorial to his grandmother. Walker incorporated the movement into his String Quartet No. 1, subtitled “Lyric.” Both the quartet and the string orchestra movement were published in 1946. Walker revised *Lyric* in 1990. It remains his most frequently performed composition.

Lyric is often compared to Samuel Barber’s beloved *Adagio for Strings* (which was, coincidentally, drawn from Barber’s first string quartet). Tonal, warm, and direct, *Lyric* speaks to us directly from the heart, with gentle waves of sound lapping gently ashore. Each instrument has its turn at the principal melodic gesture, eventually building to an emotional climax.

IN BRIEF

BORN: March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France

DIED: December 28, 1937, Paris, France

FIRST PERFORMANCE: March 5, 1904, The Heymann Quartet (Paris)

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: September 14, 2016, Escher Quartet

DURATION: 31 minutes

MAURICE RAVEL: QUARTET IN F MAJOR

In the public imagination the names of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel are practically uttered in the same breath, both synonymous with French musical impressionism. Ravel was, in fact, half a generation Debussy’s junior and survived the older composer by nearly two decades. He developed his own highly individual musical language, whose principal affinity with that of Debussy is that ineffable quality of being French. Nevertheless, the linking of their two names persists, perhaps nowhere more firmly than with their string quartets.

Each wrote but a single quartet, both early works: Debussy’s dates from 1893, when he was in his early 30s, and Ravel’s was composed in 1902 and 1903, when he was

still in his late 20s. Both quartets employ cyclic devices to unify the musical material among movements. Debussy's work was a significant model to young Ravel, arguably more than in any other of Ravel's compositions.

The String Quartet in F was Ravel's first large scale composition, going far toward establishing his reputation in French musical circles. Ironically, it was counted against him in one of his several failed attempts to win the coveted Prix de Rome. Even his teacher Gabriel Fauré (to whom the quartet is dedicated) disliked the finale, criticizing its lack of balance. It was Debussy who came to Ravel's defense, purportedly writing to the younger composer: "In the name of the gods of music and of my own, don't touch a thing you have written in this quartet."

No program is associated with Ravel's quartet. At this stage of his career, it was unusual for him not to employ an extramusical idea of some sort, but with the quartet he established a pattern of absolute music that remained constant in his chamber works. Counterpoint is a lesser priority than sheer beauty of sound. Norman Demuth has observed that "Ravel took the line that the four string instruments called for sweetness rather than vigour (although the scherzo has this element)." He emphasizes color, at the same time exploiting with great ingenuity the virtuosic potential of four string players.

The Quartet is marked by grace and charm throughout. Its characteristic sonority is the melody doubled at the octave or a wider interval, sometimes the tenth, sometimes the 13th or 15th. The second movement scherzo is particularly noteworthy for its contrasts of pizzicato and the lyrical theme. Modal sonorities recall the Javanese *gamelan* orchestra that had such a powerful impact on Debussy following the Parisian Exposition of 1889.

A rhapsodic slow movement re-introduces melodies from the opening movement, and the finale is even more dependent on the opening *Allegro moderato* for its material. *Tremolo* sections, arpeggios, wide chords, and metric switches between 5/8, 5/4, and 3/4 combine with brilliant, flashy string writing to conclude this marvelous piece.

Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2022

FREE FAMILY CONCERT

SUN, OCT 23

1:00 PM

Ensemble Fauchaux

Denver School of the Arts

7111 E. Montview Blvd.,

Denver



Enjoy a family-friendly concert that celebrates music's power to connect our diverse community!

This event is free to the public, and will be held in the auditorium at Denver School of the Arts, 7111 E. Montview Blvd. **No tickets or reservations required.** Following the concert, stay to meet the musicians and enjoy free refreshments.

FCM is pleased to bring back Denver-based Ensemble Fauchaux, led by Colorado Symphony violist, Catherine Beeson. Ensemble Fauchaux is dedicated to celebrating the diversity of our community and drawing people together through community-based music performances, workshops, and special projects.

FCM is committed to sharing the beauty of chamber music and making it accessible throughout the community. Generous grants and donor gifts make these events possible.

MUSIC IN THE GALLERIES

SUN, OCT 9, 2022

**11:00 AM and 1:00 PM (identical concerts)
Pegged Quartet with vocalist Kali Paguirigan**

Clyfford Still Museum
1250 Bannock Street, Denver

Five Denver-based musicians will collaborate on this program of women composers inspired by song. Featuring the string quartet, *Pegged* (Leena Waite and Erik Peterson, violins; Phillip Stevens, viola; Chloe Hong, cello) and vocalist Kali Paguirigan, the program will include three songs (*Unravel*, *Hunter*, and *Hyperballad*) by Icelandic singer Björk (quartet arrangements by the Brodsky Quartet), and *Entr'acte* and *And So* by American composer, violinist, and vocalist Caroline Shaw. The string quartet will also perform two movements from *String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor* by Florence Price, a 20th century Black composer whose music was inspired by African American spirituals and gospel music.

Two identical concerts at 11 am and 1 pm (please note new Music in the Galleries performance times – a break will occur from 12–1 pm) Performances are included with museum admission. For tickets purchased online, FCM patrons receive \$2 off adult and senior tickets with code MUSIC.

Seating is limited and first come, first served. The music may be enjoyed from any gallery.



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Gates Concert Hall



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Wed, Nov 30, 2022 | 7:30 pm

Will Liverman, baritone

Wed, Dec 14, 2022 | 7:30 pm

Skride Piano Quartet

Sun, Feb 5, 2023 | 4:00 pm

Leila Josefowicz, violin

Wed, Mar 22, 2023 | 7:30 pm

Pacifica Quartet

Anthony McGill, clarinet

Wed, Apr 26, 2023 | 7:30 pm

Imani Winds

Wed, May 10, 2023 | 7:30 pm

PIANO SERIES

Sir András Schiff, piano

Sun, Oct 16, 2022 | 4:00 pm

Leif Ove Andsnes, piano

Mon, Jan 23, 2023 | 7:30 pm

SPECIAL EVENTS

MUSIC IN THE GALLERIES

Pegged: string quartet and voice

Sun, Oct 9, 2022

11:00 am & 1:00 pm (identical concerts)

Clyfford Still Museum

1250 Bannock Street, Denver

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Ensemble Fauchaux

Sun, Oct 23, 2022 | 1:00 pm

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