

ISIDORE STRING QUARTET

PHOENIX AVALON, violin ADRIAN STEELE, violin DEVIN MOORE, viola JOSHUA MCCLENDON, cello

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(1756-1791)

BILLY CHILDS

(b. 1957)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K.465 "Dissonance" Adagio-Allegro Andante cantabile

Menuetto and Trio (Allegro) Allegro

Phoenix Avalon, first violin

String Quartet No. 2 "Awakening" Wake Up Call The White Room Song of Healing

Phoenix Avalon, first violin

INTERMISSION

Quartet No. 15 in A Minor, Op. 132

Assai sostenuto – Allegro Allegro ma non tanto Molto adagio – Andante Alla marcia, assai vivace Allegro appassionato

Adrian Steele, first violin



ADRIAN STEELE violin PHOENIX AVALON violin DEVIN MOORE viola JOSHUA MCCLENDON cello

ISIDORE STRING QUARTET

Winners of a 2023 Avery Fisher Career Grant and the 14th Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2022, the New York City-based Isidore String Quartet was formed in 2019 with a vision to revisit, rediscover, and reinvigorate the repertory. The quartet is heavily influenced by the Juilliard String Quartet and the idea of "approaching the established as if it were brand new, and the new as if it were firmly established."

The four quartet members began as an ensemble at the Juilliard School. Following a break during the global pandemic, the quartet reconvened at the Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival in the summer of 2021 under the tutelage of Joel Krosnick. In addition to Mr. Krosnick, the ISQ has coached with Joseph Lin, Astrid Schween, Laurie Smukler, Joseph Kalichstein, Roger Tapping, Misha Amory, Timothy Eddy, Donald Weilerstein, Atar Arad, Robert McDonald, Christoph Richter, Miriam Fried, and Paul Biss.

Their Banff triumph brings extensive tours of North America and Europe, a two-year appointment as the Peak Fellowship Ensemble-in-Residence at Southern Methodist University in Dallas beginning in 2023-24, performances at Haydn Hall in Eisenstadt (spring 2023) and the Lucerne Festival, plus a two-week residency at Banff Centre including a professionally produced recording, along with extensive ongoing coaching, career guidance, and mentorship.

The Isidore Quartet has already collaborated with a number of eminent performers including Jeremy Denk and James Ehnes. Their 2023-24 season will feature appearances in Berkeley (Cal Performances), Boston (Celebrity Series), Washington DC (Phillips Collection), New York (92nd St. Y), Chicago, Baltimore, Ann Arbor, Denver, Indianapolis, Tucson, Phoenix, Santa Fe, La Jolla, Aspen, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and at Dartmouth College and Spivey Hall in Georgia, among many others. European highlights include Edinburgh, Lucerne, Brussels, Amsterdam, Hanover, Frankfurt, and Hamburg's ElbPhilharmonie.

Outside the concert hall the quartet has worked with *PROJECT: MUSIC HEALS US* providing encouragement, education, and healing to marginalized communities including elderly, disabled, rehabilitating, incarcerated and homeless populations—who otherwise have limited access to high-quality live music performance. They have also been resident ensemble for the Contemporary Alexander School/ Alexander Alliance International. In conjunction with those well-versed in the world of Alexander Technique, as well as other performers, the ISQ explores the vast landscape of body awareness, mental preparation, and performance practice.

The name *Isidore* recognizes the ensemble's musical connection to the Juilliard Quartet: one of that group's early members was legendary violinist Isidore Cohen. Additionally, it acknowledges a shared affection for a certain libation—legend has it a Greek monk named Isidore concocted the first genuine vodka recipe for the Grand Duchy of Moscow!

The Isidore String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists, www.davidroweartists.com.

IN BRIEF BORN: January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria DIED: December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria DEDICATION: Joseph Haydn MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE: December 7, 2005, Emerson Quartet DURATION: 30 minutes

"The quartets are, indeed, the fruit of a long and laborious endeavor," Mozart admits to Haydn in a letter dated September 1, 1785, in which he encloses six new quartets. And the many crossings-out, careful corrections, and fragments of quartet movements from this period of Mozart's life bear this out. Nowhere else did he labor so painstakingly over his music. "Please, then, receive them kindly and be to them as a father, a guide, a friend," Mozart (a generation younger than Haydn) continues. "I entreat you to be indulgent to those faults that may have escaped a

NOTES

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART: QUARTET NO. 19 IN C MAJOR, K.465 "DISSONANCE"

Program Notes Continued

father's partial eye, and, in spite of them, to continue your generous friendship towards one who so highly appreciates it."

The magnificent and disturbing C Major Quartet is the crowning point of Mozart's six "Haydn" quartets. The work is true evidence of Mozart's triumph in emulating Haydn's Op. 33 collection of quartets from 1782, and achieving a balance of structure, musical style, and emotion. Mozart began work on the six quartets not long after moving from Salzburg to Vienna. It was then that he began to hear music by Bach and Handel on a regular basis at weekly gatherings in the Vienna home of Baron van Swieten. The power of contrapuntal writing began to have a deep and increasing effect on Mozart's own writing at the time. The effect is at its most acute in the unsettling dissonances of the opening 22 measures of the C Major Quartet. They give the work a nickname ("Dissonance") and arise from a synthesis of free counterpoint and chromatic, "highly spiced" harmonies, to use a term that was often thrown at the mature Mozart. The dissonances are calculated to shock—so much so that people at first accused Mozart of releasing the printed music without having carefully proofed the parts! Even half a century later, Belgian music theorist François-Joseph Fétis proposed a "fix" to Mozart's strident harmonies by moving the first violin entry one beat earlier. Many applauded the idea, though few actually tried it. The suspense and tension created by the dissonance is released in the ensuing Allegro. The profound, aching Andante cantabile is one of the most sublime movements Mozart wrote. Throughout the chromatic minuet and serene finale, the musical invention and disciplined working-out of short motifs are exemplary.

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IN BRIEF BORN: 1957, Los Angeles, California

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE: Tonight marks the first performance of this work on our series.

DURATION: 23 minutes

Los Angeles native Billy Childs began publicly performing on the piano at the age of six and would eventually receive a bachelor's degree in composition from the University of Southern California Community College of the Performance Arts. As a performer and composer, Childs was in demand early on, collaborating with pillars of the jazz industry, signing with Windham Hill Records in 1988, and receiving commissions from prestigious soloists and ensembles (LA Philharmonic, Kronos Quartet, Ying Quartet, and others). A formative education, extensive experience, and unwavering self-conception allowed the five-time Grammy Award-winner to develop a unique voice as a pianist and composer in both the classical and jazz spheres.

Commissioned by the Ying Quartet and completed in 2012, String Quartet No. 2 "Awakening" depicts the emotional, physical, and spiritual journey in dealing with the serious illness of a loved one; it was inspired by Childs's real-life experience with his wife. She was diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism and taken into emergency care, and this three-movement work outlines their complex emotional journey, providing insight into the vulnerability of the composer.

The first movement, titled *Wake Up Call*, opens with a tremolo/trill in the second violin and viola, set against snap pizzicato in the cello, and a twelve-tone opening pronouncement in the first violin, expressing Childs' initial shock at learning of his wife's hospitalization. This cacophony of an anxiety-ridden sound-world is juxtaposed with a reflective middle section overcome with lyrical cascades of melody that accumulate throughout the quartet, evoking a sense of uncontrollable anguish, fear, and lamentation. This

BILLY CHILDS: STRING QUARTET NO. 2 "AWAKENING" brief look inside the composer's psyche dissipates as the opening material engulfs the music once again. *Wake Up Call* gives us a glimpse into both the external and internal experience of Childs in this time of uncertainty.

The White Room, the second movement, conveys the powerlessness and urgency he experienced waiting at her bedside through the use of a plaintive melody set against bi-tonal harmonies. Utilizing extended techniques (false harmonics, glissandos, Bartok-like pizzicatos), Childs manifests the feeling of being in the sterile, unwelcoming hospital room with its white walls and repetitive machinery noises. The mechanical landscape eventually spills into two cadenzas in the viola and first violin that seem to spew rage, anger, and torment. The doubled sixteenth note figure that pervades the movement, resembling a heartbeat, rises and falls as the emotional arch takes shape, eventually settling into a state of numbness and fatigue.

The final movement, *Song of Healing*, is an ode to recovery and rediscovery, with the viola's introductory melody expressing the slow process of healing and a new respect for the transient and delicate nature of life. The centerpiece of this movement is a conversation that occurs between the first violin and cello, signifying the real-life conversation between Childs and his wife as the two began to understand the impact that this event has had on their relationship. We can feel the love, trust, and unencumbered expression of emotion as this duo rejoins the quartet and the movement comes to a close. There is a sense of healing, or at least a willingness to heal, as the final chord, a hopeful A major, dissolves into silence.

Through a unique yet familiar compositional style evocative of 21st-century perspective, Childs acknowledges and expresses the familiarity of fear, anguish, and resolution regarding the fleeting nature of life, yielding a work that speaks directly to the human experience.

Note by Devin Moore

IN BRIEF BORN: December 17, 1770, Bonn, Germany DIED: March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria FIRST PERFORMANCE: November 6, 1827, Schuppanzigh Quartet MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: April 29, 2012, Pacifica Quartet

DURATION: 44 minutes

The five string quartets and *Grosse Fugue* that Beethoven composed during the last five years of his life mark the pinnacle of his chamber music. Ideas from one spill over to the next. The A Minor Quartet was the second of the sequence to be completed and was originally laid out in four movements. Then, in the spring of 1825, Beethoven fell seriously ill. Towards the end of May, he began to recover and the change in his physical well-being had a profound impact on the quartet.

A central slow movement was the immediate result. Beethoven marked it "Sacred Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity from a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode" (Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart). It is one of the most sublime pieces of music ever written-and one of the longest quartet movements, at almost half the length of the quartet itself. Its contemplative stillness is enhanced by the conscious use of the ancient Lydian mode. Beethoven mentions it in the score, as if to remind us that the old church modes, with their spiritual, often mystical and tonally ambiguous connotations, were a deep source of inspiration in his late works. The slow movement's successive alternations of Adagio and Andante bring new expressions of relief from the composer. These are noted in the margin of his score as "Feeling new strength" and "You returned my strength to find me in the evening," and, in the final section, "With the most intimate feeling." Because of the generally dark character of much of the quartet, this transcendental slow movement seems to radiate inner release from outward suffering.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN: QUARTET NO. 15 IN A MINOR, OP. 132 Beethoven made this slow movement the centerpiece of a vast, arch-like structure. The quartet opens with an Allegro built around two contrasting themes and presenting a thread of unresolved contradictions. The movement departs from conventional form as does the substantial scherzo that follows. Its central pastoral episode, nominally a trio section, begins with a folk-like theme with drone, high on the first violin. It continues with a country dance theme, which Beethoven had written down in his sketchbook when he first went to Vienna many years earlier. After the sublime, heavenly slow movement, the mood is abruptly broken by a march, which brings us back to earth with a bump. As in the Ninth Symphony, an instrumental recitative leads to the finale. Its impassioned, waltz-like theme, which gives way to an unequivocal feeling of joy, was in fact originally designed to be the finale of the Ninth before Beethoven decided on a choral ending for the symphony. Both works end with a feeling of transcendence and triumph.

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In "Every Good Boy Does Fine," Denk shares the most meaningful lessons of his life and tries to repay a debt to his teachers. He also reminds us that we must never stop asking questions about music and its purposes: consolation, an armor against disillusionment, pure pleasure, a diversion, a refuge, and a vehicle for empathy.



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