

# QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

**CRISTIANO GUALCO**, violin  
**PAOLO ANDREOLI**, violin  
**SIMONE GRAMAGLIA**, viola  
**GIOVANNI SCAGLIONE**, cello

## BASIL VENDRYES, VIOLA

**CLAUDE DEBUSSY**  
(1862-1918)

**String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10**

Animé et très décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino, doucement expressif

Très modéré

**OSVALDO GOLIJOV**  
(b. 1960)

*Tenebrae*

### INTERMISSION

**JOHANNES BRAHMS**  
(1833-1897)

**String Quintet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 111**

Allegro non troppo, ma con brio

Adagio

Un poco allegretto

Vivace ma non troppo presto

*Basil Vendryes, viola*



## QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

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GRAMAGLIA**, viola

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SCAGLIONE**, cello

Quartetto di Cremona, founded in 2000, is among the world's preeminent string quartets, noted for its lustrous sound, refined musicianship, and stylistic versatility. This season the quartet marks its 25th anniversary season with an ambitious new recording of Bach's *Art of the Fugue* (Orchid Classic, 2024) and a world tour taking them to North America, Europe, and Asia.

The "Quartetto di Cremona 25 World Tour" comes to North America in October/November 2024 and April 2025, including performances for Music Toronto, the Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, FL, Friends of Chamber Music Denver, Aspect Chamber Music Series in New York, and Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania. In Europe, they appear in Switzerland, Madrid, and Rome. In January 2025, they toured Taiwan and China and in December 2025 return to Asia with stops in Japan to perform and to teach. As the Quartetto makes their way around the world, they perform in exquisite tuxedos designed by the renowned Italian designer Brunello Cucinelli. The Quartetto di Cremona wishes to express its deepest gratitude to the Cucinelli family for their generous support and for creating these marvelous stage costumes.

Their 2020 recording *Italian Postcards* (Avie Records) features music inspired by Italy and written by non-Italian composers, including the world premiere recording of *Cieli d'Italia* by Nimrod Borenstein. Previous recordings include an all-Schubert disc with cellist Eckart Runge (Audite, 2019) and a box set of the complete Beethoven quartet cycle (Audite, 2018).

Quartetto di Cremona lead a renowned string program, currently in its twelfth year, for professional and advanced string quartets at the Accademia Walter Stauffer. The quartet also regularly participates in masterclasses while on tour throughout Europe and the United States.

Awarded the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2005, Quartetto di Cremona subsequently received the

prestigious Franco Buitoni Award in 2019 in recognition of their contribution to promoting and encouraging chamber music in Italy and throughout the world. The quartet is supported by the Kulturfond Peter Eckes, which provides the musicians with three superb instruments: violin Paolo Antonio Testore, viola Gioachino Torazzi, and cello Dom Nicola Amati. Cristiano Gualco plays his own violin Nicola Amati (Cremona, 1640). In 2015, the musicians were awarded honorary citizenship by the city of Cremona, and in 2016, were awarded a loan of the famous Paganini Quartet of Stradivarius instruments from the Nippon Music Foundation.

Quartetto di Cremona's recordings are available on Audite, Ayriel Classical, Klanglogo, and Decca. North American Representation: Kirshbaum Associates Inc., 307 Seventh Ave, Suite 506, New York, NY 10001.  
[www.kirshbaumassociates.com](http://www.kirshbaumassociates.com)

## BASIL VENDRYES, VIOLA

Basil Vendryes is the Principal Violist of the Colorado Symphony, and is a former member of the San Francisco Symphony, the New York Philharmonic, and Rochester Philharmonic orchestras. He currently serves on the faculty of the Lamont School of Music of the University of Denver. As a member of the Aurora String Quartet (1986-95), Vendryes performed recitals in New York, London, and Tokyo. From 2000-2018, Basil directed the Colorado Young Sinfonia (which he also founded), comprising some of the best young talent in the Denver area.

Basil was born to West Indian parents and began his musical training in the public schools of New York City at the age of eleven. He received scholarships to the Manhattan School of Music and the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Sally O'Reilly, Francis Tursi, and Heidi Castleman. Basil joined the San Francisco Symphony in 1982 at the age of 21 and the New York Philharmonic two years later. Basil joined the Colorado Symphony as Principal Viola in 1993.

Basil has appeared in many festivals, including Spoleto, Buzzards Bay, Sunflower, Midsummer Mozart,



Photo: Peter Lockley

**BASIL  
VENDRYES, viola**

Interharmony, Green Mountain, Taconic, and the Grand Tetons. Working with promising talent is one of his passions, and he has given classes in viola and chamber music in Europe and throughout the United States. Basil has served as a juror for the Sphinx Competition for African American and Latino string players, the Hong Kong International Music Festival, and the Nicosia Chamber Music Competition in Faenza, Italy. In 2008 he performed the American premiere of Giya Kancheli's *Styx* with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra (under the baton of Jeffrey Kahane) to critical acclaim.

Basil has recorded for the Albany, Ariel, Cadenza Music, Centaur, CRI, Naxos, and Toccata labels in addition to his contributions as an orchestral violist for RCA, Decca, Nonesuch, Telarc, Columbia, BIS, and Hyperion. His solo recordings of Russian sonatas and music of Paul Juon have received positive reviews from *Fanfare* and *Strad* magazines. Basil plays on a viola made in 2023 by Alexander Tzankow.

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## NOTES

### CLAUDE DEBUSSY: STRING QUARTET IN G MINOR, OP. 10

#### IN BRIEF

**BORN:** August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

**DIED:** March 25, 1918, Paris, France

**FIRST PERFORMANCE:** December 29, 1893, Paris, France. Société nationale de musique, Ysaÿe Quartet

#### **MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC**

**PERFORMANCE:** March 19, 2014, Elias String Quartet

**DURATION:** 25 minutes

When the Ysaÿe Quartet played the première of this quartet in Brussels in 1893, the initial reaction was poor. Debussy had established his then-modest reputation as a composer of art songs and choral music. He tended to eschew traditional abstract forms and was inexperienced in contrapuntal writing. The quartet baffled listeners. Critics accused the young French composer of being vague and incoherent.

Debussy's biographer Edward Lockspeiser argues that Debussy was most successful when his music had an extra-musical association:

The songs show him to be the poet's musician; the best of the piano pieces, the painter's musician. With his abhorrence for professionalism, he did more than any other composer to bring music out of its own isolated world into a wider world where art, literature, and music interacted on each other freely. Is it, then, surprising that, with one exception, his examples of absolute music are failures? But that one exception is a masterpiece: it is the String Quartet.

The quartet is unique in Debussy's *oeuvre*. Widely regarded as his finest piece of chamber music, it is his sole completed effort in the realm of the string quartet, and the only composition to which he assigned a key and an opus number as part of its title. The quartet is unmistakably cyclic in its thematic organization. Between 1892 and 1894, Debussy was very close to composer Ernest Chausson. Chausson's famous teacher, César Franck, had achieved great renown with his cyclic Symphony in D minor (1888). That pioneering work, and Franck's innovative technique, exerted enormous influence on both Debussy and Chausson.

In a series of letters to Chausson from 1893, Debussy wrote of difficulties with the incomplete quartet. On July 2, he complained: "As for the last movement of the Quartet, I can't get it into the shape I want, and that's the third time of trying. It's a hard slog!" Even after its completion, he expressed dissatisfaction with its formal structure. Struggling with sonata form, he seized upon the technique of stating a germinal motive in the opening measures of the first movement, which then figured prominently throughout the entire work. Debussy reworks the motive with great rhythmic and textural ingenuity in the scherzo (*Assez vif et bien rythmé*). Vivid pizzicato writing evokes both mandolin and guitar.

Emotionally, the climax of the quartet occurs in its slow movement, which is the one section where Debussy chooses not to apply the cyclic composing technique. The finale, *Très modéré*, makes specific reference to the first two movements, quoting the germinal motive in inversion and in syncopation, as melody and as accompaniment. Debussy's contrapuntal technique in this last movement is as disciplined and traditional as in any piece he wrote. Passages with double stops for all four players result in a lush, rich sonority with the color range of a small orchestra. As in all his finer works,

Debussy paints for us in this quartet a brilliant, evocative canvas in sound.

Debussy dedicated the quartet to the Belgian virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931), first violinist of the quartet that first played the work.

OSVALDO GOLIJOV:  
*TENEBRAE*

IN BRIEF

**BORN:** December 5, 1960, La Plata, Argentina

**MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC**

**PERFORMANCE:** November 7, 2018, Calidore String Quartet

**DURATION:** 12 minutes

Oswaldo Golijov caused a sensation in the music world in 2001 with the Stuttgart premiere of his *La Pasión Según San Marcos* (The Passion According to St. Mark). That orchestral/vocal/theatrical score incorporates elements of Latin music ranging from Afro-Cuban *rumba* to Argentinian tango à la Astor Piazzolla, with dashes of Spanish flamenco thrown in for spice. Audience reaction was electrifying and has remained equally enthusiastic in subsequent performances of the *Pasión* and other Golijov compositions. As a result, he has catapulted into the spotlight and is now one of the busiest living composers.

Golijov was reared in an Eastern European/Jewish household in La Plata, Argentina. (His mother was a Romanian piano teacher; his father a Ukrainian doctor.) He emigrated from Argentina to Israel in 1983, studying with Mark Kopytman at the Jerusalem Rubin Academy. Golijov came to the U.S. in 1986 to pursue a doctorate in composition with George Crumb at the University of Pennsylvania. Subsequently he worked with Lukas Foss and Oliver Knussen at Tanglewood. He currently serves on the faculties of Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts; Boston Conservatory; and Tanglewood. In 2003 Golijov was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship, the so-called “genius” award, and the Vilcek Foundation awarded him its Prize for Creative Promise in

2008. The Santa Fe Opera premiered his opera *Ainadamar* in 2005. From 2006 to 2010, Golijov was co-composer-in-residence of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (with Britain's Mark-Anthony Turnage). He has worked extensively in film, composing scores for documentaries and features. Most recently, he wrote the soundtrack to Francis Ford Coppola's 2024 science fiction drama *Megalopolis*.

He composed *Tenebrae* originally for soprano, clarinet, and string quartet, and then made a second version for string quartet in 2002. His composer's note explains its impetus and a surprising connection to French Baroque music:

I wrote *Tenebrae* as a consequence of witnessing two contrasting realities in a short period of time in September 2000. I was in Israel at the start of the new wave of violence that is still continuing today, and a week later I took my son to the new planetarium in New York, where we could see the Earth as a beautiful blue dot in space. I wanted to write a piece that could be listened to from different perspectives. That is, if one chooses to listen to it "from afar," the music would probably offer a "beautiful" surface but, from a metaphorically closer distance, one could hear that, beneath that surface, the music is full of pain. I lifted some of the haunting melismas from Couperin's *Troisième Leçon de Tenebrae*, using them as sources for loops, and wrote new interludes between them, always within a pulsating, vibrating, aerial texture. The compositional challenge was to write music that would sound as an orbiting spaceship that never touches ground. After finishing the composition, I realized that *Tenebrae* could be heard as the slow, quiet reading of an illuminated medieval manuscript in which the appearances of the voice singing the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (from *Yod* to *Nun*, as in Couperin) signal the beginning of new chapters, leading to the ending section, built around a single, repeated word: Jerusalem.

In the Roman Catholic church, *Tenebrae* (Latin for darkness) is a religious service held during the three days of Holy Week before Easter Sunday. Fifteen candles, representing Christ's apostles and the three Marys who visited his tomb, are gradually extinguished. As they abandon Him, darkness ensues, symbolizing Christ's imminent crucifixion. Golijov's

## UPCOMING CONCERT

### MIRÓ QUARTET

### STEVEN BANKS, SAXOPHONE

WED, MAY 14, 2025

7:30 PM

GATES CONCERT HALL

Formed in 1995, the Miró Quartet became the first ensemble ever to be awarded the coveted Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2005. Saxophonist Steven Banks, also awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2022, is a performer and composer, championing his instrument and his compositions in the classical musical world.

The evening will include Steven Banks's arrangement of two Caroline Shaw songs, *Other Song*, and *And So*, and his arrangement of Golijov's *Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, all commissioned by Friends of Chamber Music Denver. The program also includes the Colorado premiere of Steven Banks's new string quartet with saxophone, *What's Old is New*, commissioned by Arizona Friends of Chamber Music.

*Tickets are \$50 each; \$15 for patrons under 30; and \$5 for students (with ID)*

music captures the solemnity of the service. *Tenebrae* unfolds in a state of suspended, surreal animation that suggests both pulsating heartbeats and the wavering light of candles. Despite some unease in the piece's central section, the conclusion resolves in a more positive vein. Elements of minimalism fuse with the serenity of Renaissance polyphony to close the work with a benign perspective.

JOHANNES BRAHMS:  
STRING QUINTET  
NO. 2 IN G MAJOR,  
OP. 111

IN BRIEF

**BORN:** May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany

**DIED:** April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

**FIRST PERFORMANCE:** November 11, 1890, Vienna, Austria

**MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC**

**PERFORMANCE:** October 2, 2013, Jupiter String Quartet

**DURATION:** 30 minutes

In the spring of 1890, Johannes Brahms traveled to Italy with his long-time friend Joseph Widmann, a Swiss poet, playwright, and critic who lived in Bern. As was his custom, he spent the summer in the mountains, this time in Ischl, which was his preferred holiday venue from 1889 on. There he composed the String Quintet Op. 111, intimating to friends after its completion that it would be his last composition. Although only 57, Brahms was feeling his age, and the next project he commenced was the drafting of a last will and testament.

When writing chamber music, Brahms was more comfortable when piano was part of the ensemble. He claimed to have abandoned and destroyed more than 20 string quartets before allowing his first two completed quartets to be published; they appeared in 1873 as Op. 51. Most critics consider the duo sonatas, piano trios, piano quartets, piano quintet, and the late clarinet works to be on a higher artistic level than Brahms's string quartets, although they are quick to qualify that at this level of genius, such discrimination is subjective. That stated, the two late string quintets—Op. 88 in F (1882) and the work that closes this program—are a revelation.



Their richness of texture and continuity of mood lift them to a higher plane than any of the string quartets, yet they have immediacy, warmth, and drive. As Brahms's biographer Peter Latham writes, "Except in the assurance of the style there is nothing middle-aged in this music, which breathes the freshness of Vienna in springtime."

We know comparatively little about the circumstances of the second quintet. Brahms probably wrote it at the request of the great violinist Joseph Joachim, who sought a companion piece to the Op. 88 Quintet. Brahms plays no favorites with the violins, however. To the contrary, he offers an abundance of musical material for lower strings. The ebullient opening is a famous challenge for the cellist, who must sail forth fearlessly in order to project over the busy tremolo activity of the upper four instruments. After this vigorous start, the lilting Viennese lyricism of the second theme makes for wonderful contrast.

Both of Brahms's inner movements are in minor mode. The slow movement is a dark D Minor *Adagio* with a passionate outburst in the middle. Using mournful chromatic sighs, Brahms slips in and out of different keys, leaving us with a feeling of tonal uncertainty. Is he questioning the certainty of life? He keeps us wondering in *Un poco Allegretto*, a nervous waltz in G Minor that echoes the subtle modulations of the slow movement.

The quintet concludes with a brisk Eastern European dance. It has musical cousins in Brahms's Hungarian Dances and the early Piano Quartet in G Minor, Op. 25. The Czech influence of his friend and contemporary Antonín Dvořák, however, cannot be discounted, for Brahms knew and admired Dvořák's chamber music. The finale is noteworthy for its deceptive beginning, momentarily implying B Minor before establishing the tonality of G. It closes with a presto *csárdás*, a *tour de force* that elevates the Gypsy fiddler from the folkloric to the sublime.

*Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2025*

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**Miró Quartet**

**Steven Banks, saxophone**

Wed, May 14, 2025 | 7:30 pm

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