



Isidore String Quartet

FRIDAY, MARCH 28, 2025

7:30 PM

MAHANEY ARTS CENTER, ROBISON HALL



Isidore String Quartet

Adrian Steele, Violin (*first on Childs and Beethoven*)
Phoenix Avalon, Violin (*first on Mozart*)

Devin Moore, Viola
Joshua McClendon, Cello

Program

String Quartet in C Major, KV 465 “Dissonance” (1785)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756–1791)

Adagio-Allegro
Andante cantabile
Menuetto (Allegretto)
Molto allegro

String Quartet No. 3 “Unrequited” (2015)

Billy Childs
b. 1957

Intermission

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127 (1825)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Maestoso-Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Scherzo. Vivace -- Presto
Finale: allegro con moto



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in memory of Dr. F. William Sunderman Jr. and Dr. Carolyn Reynolds Sunderman,
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Program Notes

String Quartet in C Major, KV 465 “Dissonance” (1785)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born in Salzburg, Austria, January 27, 1756; died in Vienna, December 5, 1791

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“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 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 in his 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 part-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; few went along with it. Today, were the opening to be played with this crass insensitivity to Mozart’s boldness, it’s certain that the stone statue of the *Don Giovanni* Commendatore would appear on stage to sort things out. 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.

String Quartet No. 3 “Unrequited” (2015)

Billy Childs (b. 1957)

Program note by Billy Childs

“Unrequited,” String Quartet No. 3, was conceived as a commentary on the story of String Quartet No. 2, “Intimate Letters,” by Leoš Janáček. The first thing—the only thing, really—that popped into my mind was the tragedy of unrequited love (hence the name Unrequited). When I first heard Janáček’s “Intimate Letters” performed live, the emotion of the piece jumped out at me: the wild shifts of tempo, the beautiful and plaintive melodies, the stark dynamic contrasts. I wanted to illustrate my perspective on this strange relationship between Janáček and Kamila Stösslová, by telling the story of a man who goes through different phases of emotion, before finally coming to terms with the fact that his love for her is one-sided—it will never be

returned the way he would like. I sought to compose “Unrequited” so that it moves, like the five stages of grief, through a variety of emotions—from romantic, pure love, through paranoid, obsessive, neurotic possessiveness, arriving finally at despondent acceptance.

This piece was commissioned by Madelyn, Jerald, and Lee Jackrel and is dedicated to and premiered by the Lyris Quartet.

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127 (1825)

Ludwig Van Beethoven

Born in Bonn, Germany, baptized December 17, 1770; died in Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827

Program note by Connor Buckley

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) was a decade into what critics call his late period when he composed his String Quartet No. 12 in E-flat Major, Op. 127. It had been 15 years since he wrote his Quartet No. 11, a work he deemed so radical that he didn’t want it performed. Money from a commission convinced him to revisit the genre, setting off a late-life sequence of quartets even more iconoclastic. This quartet is perhaps the most lyrical of the set and, coming off the composition of his great celebration of joy in the 9th Symphony, the most exuberant.

The beginning *maestoso* chorale appears simple, but it is incredibly ambitious, offering the listener the most basic form of four-part writing that every student learns, as if to say, this quartet will contain everything. It is also an affirmation, as is what follows. Beethoven, though often considered the Classical to Romantic bridge, wanted to reclaim his classically inclined aesthetic in this period. An oversimplified tenet for the Romantics is that content dictates form. For Beethoven, form was a primary driver in the creation of his best writing. Commentary often focuses on the radicalism of the late quartets, and of course, they are radical, but the paradox is that their originality emerges from Beethoven’s impulse toward conservatism, a retreat from certain contemporary trends to expand and loosen formal constraints. In this quartet, the retreat is toward Bach, Handel, and the baroque, with an emphasis on contrapuntal writing and heightened clarity of form.

The quartet promptly gets on with the business of restless counterpoint. In the context of the *maestoso*, each new theme sounds as if it has been gathered from a disassembled chorale and scattered across the Haydn-esque sonata-allegro form. Typical of Beethoven’s late quartets, shifts are abrupt and transitions are unceremonious, creating moments of comprehensive disintegration and unease in preparation for resolution.

The second movement is a theme and variations, a form Beethoven was somewhat obsessed with in his late period. The six variations, unlike some of Beethoven’s related works from this period, do not reach for higher and higher levels of virtuosity, but simply and steadily unearth the inherent depth of one of the most beautiful melodies the composer ever wrote.

The buzzing scherzo contains the most intricate contrapuntal writing of the piece. It is a masterclass in anticipation and deception—just when a phrase feels that it is settling in, it will stop abruptly, or a unison shout will compel it to a new section.

The final movement does not reconvene themes from the previous movements, as is often the case, but introduces two fresh themes: a flowing melody whose shape is reminiscent of the first theme of the piece, and a joyous march that propels with its decisive articulation and wide-open harmonic accompaniment. The great pleasure of this movement is its ending: a contrasting coda in a shifted key and meter announced suddenly by a violin trill—the same technique that brought the quartet out of the *maestoso* at the start. It is Beethoven’s classicism shining through: clarity and unity, from beginning to end.



Ensemble Biography

Isidore String Quartet

Adrian Steele and Phoenix Avalon, Violins
Devin Moore, Viola
Joshua McClendon, Cello

“A polished sonority and well-balanced, tightly synchronized ensemble with nearly faultless intonation....it is heartening to know that chamber music is in good hands with such gifted young ensembles as the Isidore Quartet”

—*Chicago Classical Review*



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 quartet began as an ensemble at the Juilliard School, and has coached with Joel Krosnick, Joseph Lin, Astrid Schween, Laurie Smukler, Joseph Kalichstein, Roger Tapping, Misha Amory, and numerous others. They are currently completing their final year as Peak Fellowship Ensemble-in-Residence at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

In North America, the Isidore Quartet has appeared on major series in Boston, New York, Berkeley, Chicago, Ann Arbor, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Durham, Washington, D.C., Houston, Toronto, and Montreal, and has collaborated with several eminent performers including James Ehnes, Jeremy Denk, Shai Wosner, and Jon Nakamatsu. Their 2024–25 season includes performances in Salt Lake City, Buffalo, Kansas City, Portland (OR), Louisville, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Memphis, Vancouver, San Francisco, and many other cities across the U.S. and Canada. In Europe, they will appear at Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, in Bonn (Beethoven Haus), Stuttgart, Cologne, and Dresden, among many others.

Over the past several years, the quartet has developed a strong connection to the works of composer and pianist Billy Childs. His String Quartet No. 2, “Awakenings” was among the repertoire that delivered the Isidore their Banff victory, and this season they will play Childs’ Quartet No. 3, “Unrequited.” In the 2025–26 season, they will premiere a new Childs quartet written expressly for them.

Both on stage and outside the concert hall, the Isidore Quartet is deeply invested in connecting with youth and elderly populations, and with marginalized communities who otherwise have limited access to high-quality live music performances. They approach music as a “playground” and attempt to break down barriers to encourage collaboration and creativity. 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!

<https://www.isidorestringquartet.com/>

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