

PROGRAM

April 23, 2023

Isidore String Quartet

Adrian Steele, violin **Devin Moore**, viola
Phoenix Avalon, violin **Joshua McClendon**, cello

String Quartet No. 25 in C major, Op. 20, No. 2 (1772)

Joseph Haydn
1732-1809

Moderato
Adagio
Minuetto: Allegretto
Fuga a quattro soggetti

String Quartet No. 2 "Awakening" (2012)

Billy Childs
b. 1957

Wake Up Call
The White Room
Song of Healing

- intermission -

String Quartet No. 2 in C major, Op. 36 (1945)

Benjamin Britten
1913-1976

Allegro calmo senza rigore
Vivace
Chacony (Sostenuto-molto piu Andante-molto piu Adagio)

Program credits: The Isidore String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists
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Isidore String Quartet

Adrian Steele and **Phoenix Avalon**, violins

Devin Moore, viola

Joshua McClendon, cello

Winners of 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 members of the quartet are violinists Adrian Steele and Phoenix Avalon, violist Devin Moore, and cellist Joshua McClendon. The four began as an ensemble at the Juilliard School, and following a break during the global pandemic 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, Timothy Eddy, Donald Weilerstein, Atar Arad, Robert McDonald, Christoph Richter, Miriam Fried, and Paul Biss, while performing in venues such as Alice Tully Hall, the Kennedy Center, and at the Ravinia Festival.

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 (in 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’s 2022-2023 season will feature debut appearances in Pittsburgh, PA; Durham, NC; Burlington, VT; Kalamazoo, MI; Evanston, IL; San Antonio, TX; Laguna Beach, CA (with pianist Jeremy Denk and violinist Stefan Jackiw); and Seattle, WA (with violinist James Ehnes). The quartet will return Washington’s Kennedy Center as part of the Fortas Chamber Music Concert Series, and will also perform for Schneider Concerts at the Mannes School of Music. In Europe they will perform at Esterhazy Palace in Austria, and will spend time at the Britten Pears Arts Institute.

The quartet will be working as a resident ensemble 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. An ensemble actively dedicated to pushing the boundaries of music-making, the ISQ is the 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!

Program Notes

Joseph Haydn: String Quartet No. 25 in C major, Op. 20, No. 2

Though the Op. 33 string quartets exemplify a well-practiced and reliable compositional style, it is with the Op. 20 quartets that Haydn showcases his innovative prowess and exploration of the form of the string quartet. In this particular set of quartets, Haydn defines the true nature of the string quartet – the special interplay of instruments that Goethe refers to as “four rational people conversing.” Many of the compositional techniques often utilized by composers today were workshopped and endeavored in the Op. 20 quartets.

“This cannot be overstated”, writes Ron Drummond; “the six string quartets of Opus 20 are as important in the history of music, and had as radically a transforming effect on the very field of musical possibility itself, as Beethoven’s Third Symphony would 33 years later.” Op. 20 No. 2 is a sunny, illuminating work that traverses a landscape reminiscent of the multi-faceted journey of life and evokes a familiar sense of human empathy and compassion.

Billy Childs: String Quartet No. 2 “Awakening”

Commissioned by the Ying Quartet, String Quartet No. 2 “Awakening” depicts Childs’ emotional, physical, and spiritual journey in dealing with his wife’s serious illness and recovery. 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 his initial shock at learning of her hospitalization. *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 heartrending bi-tonal harmonies. The final movement, *Song of Healing*, is an ode to recovery and rediscovery, the viola’s melody expressing the slow process of healing and a new respect for the transient and delicate nature of life. Childs, through a unique compositional style evocative of 21st-century multigenric perspective, acknowledges and expresses the familiarity of fear, anguish, and resolution regarding the fleeting nature of life, yielding a work that speaks to the human experience.

-Notes by Adrian Steele

Benjamin Britten: String Quartet Op. 36, No. 2 in C Major

While still basking in the triumph of his second opera, *Peter Grimes*, which premiered on June 8, 1945 at London’s Sadler’s Wells Theatre, Britten set to work on several compositions of varying nature: a set of orchestral variations, a song cycle, his first chamber opera (*The Rape of Lucretia*), and his String Quartet No. 2. All of these works had a single strong link: the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the death of the composer Britten revered above all others - Henry Purcell (1659-1695).

The Quartet No. 2, first performed on the precise date of the Purcell anniversary - November 21, 1945 - was actually Britten’s third work in the form. The first, a student piece written at age 17, he suppressed for decades, finally publishing it in 1975. The Quartet listed as No. 1, Op. 25, was written while the composer was in America and premiered in Los Angeles in 1941. A fourth Quartet came in 1976.

Four string quartets and an eventual total of 16 operas are the tip of the iceberg for a composer whose immense catalog illustrates an indefatigable industry. That the quality of so many of his works reached the pinnacle of greatness places Britten in a rarefied position in 20th-century music. During his lifetime, he was regarded as one of the truly great creative giants, a musical artist admired, respected, and much honored in and out of his native England. In fact, because

of his distinction as a composer, pianist, and conductor, he was thought by many to have been one of the premier musicians of the 20th century. His achievements were officially recognized in 1976, when he was elevated to the peerage of Great Britain by Queen Elizabeth II and made a Lord, the first composer to be so honored.

In spite of his being a Britisher through and through, he didn't go the folk route of Vaughan Williams. Still, in the Second Quartet he proclaimed his Englishness by paying homage to Purcell in a final movement he gave the Purcellian title of 'Chacony.' Basing his chaconne's continuous variations on a noble theme given in unison, Britten devised 21 variations in three groups of six and a final group of three. At the end of each group of six there is a cadenza for, in turn, cello, viola, and violin. The musical grandeur of this movement, and its length - it is longer than the first two movements combined - testify to Britten's intention to glorify Purcell.

Lest one might think that the final movement overwhelms the Quartet, it should be indicated that the first movement makes a quite powerful statement and the scherzo second movement evokes a mood that is remarkable for its veiled intensity.

-Notes by Orrin Howard