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PROGRAM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio cantabile; Allegro
- III. Scherzo. Allegro
- IV. Allegro molto, quasi presto

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

String Quartet in F Major

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Assez vif
- III. Très lent
- IV. Vif et agité

INTERMISSION

BEETHOVEN

String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131

- I. Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo
- II. Allegro molto vivace
- III. Allegro moderato
- IV. Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile
- V. Presto
- VI. Adagio quasi un poco andante
- VII. Allegro

**Hélène Clément, former member of the Doric Quartet, is replacing Marie Chilleme on the Ébène Quartet's Spring 2026 United States tour.*

PROGRAM NOTES

by Laurie Shulman ©2026

String Quartet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2 Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

By the time Beethoven undertook his first string quartets, he was an experienced chamber composer. Prior to the appearance of Op. 18 in 1800, he had already published the three Piano Trios, Op. 1, two Cello Sonatas, Op. 5, and several string trios plus the Serenade for Violin and Viola, Op. 8, three Violin Sonatas, Op. 12, and the Mozart-modeled Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op. 16. And those are just the published works. In Bonn and during his early years in Vienna, he had also written three piano quartets, two piano trios, a wind octet, and several sets of variations for violin and piano or cello and piano.

String quartets were a different hurdle to clear. Beethoven had studied briefly with Joseph Haydn, whose monumental contribution to the string quartet literature constitutes its very foundation. Although teacher and student did not always see eye to eye, Beethoven revered the older master's accomplishments, and Haydn's hand is more evident than Mozart's in the six quartets of Opus 18.

The G major quartet sparkles with untroubled gaiety, often with barely suppressed mirth. Philip Radcliffe has described it as "coming nearest to the eighteenth century in its urbanity." Daniel Gregory Mason elaborates, alluding to the opening *Allegro* as:

... looking backward to the delicate grace of the eighteenth-century drawing rooms, where music could keep the dignity, even the formality, of a feudal court without losing its more intimate beauty. It is to this stately kind of charm that it owes its name of "Compliments Quartet."

Joseph Kerman has dismissed that peculiar sobriquet as "a name matched in idiocy only by English quartet players' 'How d'you do' for Haydn's Quartet in G, Op. 33, No. 5 — a work which may conceivably have planted the original seed for Beethoven's composition." The nickname derives from the opening paragraph of music. Beethoven's flowery theme and elegant phrases give a sense of breath and breadth, of hesitation and politesse, as if an exchange of courtly small talk were being punctuated by well-mannered silences.

If the first movement is reflective, the slow movement looks forward. More than any of the other Op. 18 slow movements, this one touches on the psychological depth so readily achieved in the slow movements of the magnificent early piano sonatas. Only in the later quartets did Beethoven approach such nobility of spirit on a regular basis.

The *Adagio cantabile* is doubly unusual for the insertion of a fast middle section; the only comparable precedent is the finale of Haydn's Quartet in C, Op. 54 No. 2. Beethoven's sketchbooks show several versions of the slow movement's theme in duple time, indicating that the movement went through several revisions before he arrived at a final version. Joseph Kerman has suggested that the insertion of the fast dance into the slow movement was an afterthought, since none of the sketches shows the music of the *Allegro*. Such a daring move is more in keeping with the unusual experiments that Beethoven began to make in the last three quartets of Op. 18, such as the *Malinconia* section of the sixth.

The Scherzo and Trio show Beethoven's razor wit at its most incisive, bordering on flippant. The middle Trio section makes hilarious use of the ascending scale; it is a classic example, with strong roots in Haydn, of making something out of nothing, building music from the simplest of materials. To conclude, Beethoven awards the cello a theme with a strong rhythmic profile. Sturdy peasant joy and dance-like character only thinly disguise its marked melodic similarity to the first movement. Not one to relinquish the zany humor so cleverly captured in the Scherzo, Beethoven capitalizes on his momentum with Haydnesque glee.

String Quartet in F major Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

In the public imagination, the names of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel are practically uttered in the same breath, dually 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. Further reinforcing the prevailing modern idea that Ravel and Debussy "go" together is the fact that so many commercial recordings pair Debussy's G-minor quartet with Ravel's Quartet in F. In a curious twist of fate, this particular pairing is the most plausible of any possibility in their respective oeuvres, for Debussy's work was a significant model to young Ravel, probably more so than in any other of Ravel's compositions, except perhaps the songs of *Shéhérazade*.

The String Quartet in F was Ravel's first large scale composition, and the work that first established 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 piece 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 vigor (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 strongly 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.

BEETHOVEN: THE LATE QUARTETS

In *Beethoven: The Last Decade*, Martin Cooper describes Beethoven's late works as written in a style

... in which nothing is conceded to the listener, no attempt is made to capture his attention or hold his interest. Instead the composer communes with himself or contemplates his vision of reality, thinking (as it were) aloud and concerned only with the pure essence of his own thoughts and with the musical processes from which that thought itself is often indistinguishable.

Such descriptions are potentially off-putting to those who approach the late quartets with an awe bordering on apprehension. George Marek has noted that "each of the five [late] quartets is an experience which makes one break out in perspiring superlatives." Is such music beyond the grasp of the average listener?

Hardly. The late quartets are actually chock full of fascinating listening.

String quartets dominated Beethoven's final years, from summer 1824 to November 1826; he died in March 1827. A 14-year hiatus followed his Quartet No. 11 in F minor, composed in 1810-11 and published in 1816 as Op. 95. Then he received a letter from the Russian Prince Nikolas Galitzin requesting "one, two, or three quartets" in 1822, prompting him to return to the genre.

Beethoven took his time in fulfilling the commission, eventually producing Op. 127 in E-flat (completed February 1825), Op. 132 in A minor (July 1825), and Op. 130 in B-flat (November 1825), the last including the *Grosse Fuge*. As with so many projects in his life, he had hardly exhausted the supply of musical ideas. Although he was very ill and his health forced him to suspend work on the quartets several times, the late sketchbooks show that he had resumed intense creativity after a lengthy gap during which he produced relatively little music.

Each of the late quartets inhabits its own sound world. It is clear that Beethoven found a spiritual outlet in these pieces. Writing music was both a necessity and a form of therapy for him. The quartets were a way to reach for heaven, to achieve redemption, to regain spiritual and perhaps even a measure of physical health. They are at once intensely personal and all-inclusive in their appeal and breadth. Collectively, these five late quartets and the *Grosse*

Fuge are the crown jewels of the string quartet literature and take their place proudly among Beethoven's supreme artistic achievements.

More than 180 years after they were written, Beethoven's late-harvest chamber works continue to confound, mystify, and enrapture us. The five final quartets are both concentrated and expansive, the ultimate absolute music, pregnant with a philosophy words cannot express.

String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131 Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven worked on the C-sharp minor quartet from November 1825 through July 1826. During the previous two years, his stormy relationship with his nephew Karl had reached a critical point. In summer 1826, Karl tried to kill himself. Beethoven was shattered and remorseful. He was also keenly aware that his nephew's professional future was in serious jeopardy, for attempted suicide was considered a heinous offense under Austrian law. Thanks to the intervention of Stephan von Breuning, the Austrian field marshal Baron Joseph von Stutterheim agreed to take in Karl as a member of his military regiment. Karl's (and his uncle's) disgrace was thereby alleviated, and Karl's professional stability and future were ensured, at least short-term. In gratitude, Beethoven dedicated the C-sharp minor quartet to von Stutterheim.

In light of the emotionally charged circumstances surrounding the quartet's birth, it is hardly surprising that the work reflects passion and deep feelings. This was not always the case in Beethoven's music; the sunny Second Symphony is contemporary with the tortured Heiligenstadt Testament, for example, and the lighthearted Eighth Symphony dates from the time of his rift with brother Johann, Karl's other uncle. With Op. 131, however, Beethoven turned inward after the two large-scale, somewhat more extroverted quartets, the A minor (Op. 132) and especially the B-flat (Op. 130). If all these late quartets were Beethoven's exploration of the sublime and infinite in music, Op. 131 is their collective catharsis.

The C-sharp minor quartet consists of seven movements that are numbered, rather unusually, in Beethoven's score. The movements proceed without a break, each leading logically to the next, diminishing any sense of choppiness. While the quartet is certainly conceived on a large scale, taking upwards of 40 minutes in

performance, three of its movements are quite brief. The second, a lilting jig-like scherzo that grows directly out of the opening fugue, elapses in three minutes. It leads directly to the third, *Allegro moderato*, an accompanied recitative which — at only 11 bars — is over in the blink of an eye. The sixth, *Adagio quasi un poco andante* is not significantly longer at 28 bars. Effectively it functions as an introduction to the finale.

The work's heart thus lies in its pivotal movements, those anchoring the giant arch of its structure: Nos. 1, 4, and 7. Nominally the quartet is in C-sharp minor. Only its opening and closing movements are in that dark key (for which, incidentally, there is a sole precedent in all Beethoven: the Piano Sonata Op. 27, No. 1, "Moonlight"). Beethoven cast the intervening movements in a rainbow of tonalities, moving from C-sharp minor successively to D major, B minor, A major, E major, and G-sharp minor, before returning to C-sharp minor for the closing *Allegro*.

The fugue thus raises the curtain on a drama with seven scenes. This panoply of entertainment ranges from the profound to the lyrical, from the offhand to the intensely expressive. Perhaps because of its extraordinary range, Beethoven considered Op. 131 to be his greatest quartet.

As listeners, we travel on an extraordinary musical journey that begins with this *Adagio* fugue (Richard Wagner insisted that it revealed "the most melancholy sentiment ever expressed in music") and arrives at the rhapsodic finale, which is at once highly individual and quite characteristic of Beethoven's late works. Only two of the late quartets contain fugues. One is hard-pressed to think of two movements more distant in spirit and approach from one another as this opening movement and the *Grosse Fuge!* Unaccompanied violin in the opening measures suffuses the air with mournful sadness. Beethoven sets up an enormous emotional challenge through his introspection. As the counterpoint unfolds, occasional diminution yields a chorale effect that underscores the quasi-religious/spiritual atmosphere permeating this quartet.

Beethoven made a fulcrum of his fourth movement, a splendid theme and set of seven variations that is closely linked to those of the late piano sonatas Op. 109 in E major and Op. 111 in C minor. After a humorous *Presto* that lightens the mood, and the brief 28-measure *Adagio*, he concludes this *magnum opus* with a return to C-sharp minor. Paradoxically, this is the first movement in the entire quartet that can truly be called sonata form. Beethoven has

thus reversed the normal order, or if you will, returned full circle to the beginning. The closing words of the Latin choral Magnificat, "*Sicut erat in principio, et nunc et semper et in secula seculorum*" — "As it was in the beginning, as it was and is now, and ever shall be, world without end," are curiously appropriate. But what a world we have traveled through in order to arrive home to sonata form and C-sharp minor.

Ébène Quartet



Julien Mignot

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ÉBÈNE QUARTET (QUATUOR ÉBÈNE)

After studying with Quatuor Ysaÿe in Paris and with Gábor Takács, Eberhard Feltz, and György Kurtág, Quatuor Ébène's unprecedented and outstanding victory at the ARD Music Competition in 2004 marked the beginning of its rise to prominence, leading to numerous further prizes and accolades.

Alongside traditional repertoire, the quartet regularly explores other musical genres. What began in 1999 as a bit of fun for the four young musicians at university — improvising on jazz standards and pop songs — became Quatuor Ébène's trademark. To date, the quartet has released three albums in these genres: *Fiction* (2010), *Brazil* (2014) and *Eternal Stories* (2017).

A major milestone in their career was the complete recording of Beethoven's 16 string quartets. Between May 2019 and January 2020, the quartet recorded this cycle across six continents in a globe-spanning project. With this achievement, the four French musicians celebrated their 20th anniversary as a quartet, crowned with complete Beethoven cycles in leading venues such as the Philharmonie de Paris and Alte Oper Frankfurt. Their schedule also included appearances at Carnegie Hall in New York, the Verbier Festival, and the Wiener Konzerthaus.

In January 2021, the quartet was appointed by the Munich University of Music and Performing Arts to establish a string quartet class as part of the newly founded Quatuor Ébène Academy. Since the 21/22 season, the quartet, together with the Belcea Quartet, has been curating a concert series at the Vienna Konzerthaus. In the 23/24 season it was resident ensemble at the Philharmonie Luxembourg, and from 22/23 to 24/25 it held the post of *Quatuor en résidence à Radio France*, with three concerts per season in Paris. In January 2026, the Ébènes opened the String Quartet Biennale at the Philharmonie de Paris — again together with the Belcea Quartet — and concluded it with *Absolute Jest* by John Adams, performed with the Orchestre Français des Jeunes.

To mark the 40th anniversary of Suntory Hall, the quartet is set to present the complete Beethoven string quartet works in Tokyo. They will also begin new Beethoven cycles at venues including the Berlin Philharmonie, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, and Wigmore Hall in London.



INSTRUMENTS

They all have the honor of performing on Stradivarius instruments.

Pierre Colombet plays a violin by Antonio Stradivari from 1717, the "Piatti," kindly loaned to him by a generous sponsor via the Beares International Violin Society.

Gabriel Le Magadure, Marie Chilleme, and Yuya Okamoto perform on instruments generously loaned by the Stradivari Foundation Habisreutinger-Huggler-Coray: Gabriel plays the violin "King George" (1710), Marie the viola "Gibson" (1734), and Yuya the cello "De Kermadec-Bläss" (1698).

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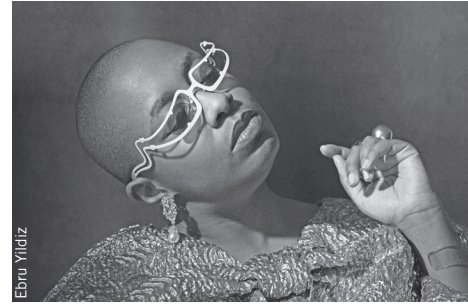
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Photo by Mark Mobley

Why I Give ...

Meet Malcolm and Priscilla Sumner. He is a retired UGA Regents' Professor of crop and soil sciences who did 20 years of international consulting. She is a former nurse and chair of the Athens Area Emergency Food Bank, where she volunteered for more than 30 years. They were at the PAC's opening gala performance by soprano Jessye Norman in 1996, and have now lived in Athens longer than in their native South Africa. This season they supported the November appearance by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO).

Malcolm Sumner: When we came here, this was a cultural desert. There was nothing here. We started supporting the music school. When the PAC started, we decided to contribute to it because we are both fans of classical music.

Priscilla Sumner: We are so lucky to have these artists come to Athens. For the size of this little town, it never ceases to amaze me. Yo-Yo Ma came to Athens! It's mind-boggling. And he's been here twice!

Malcolm: We love the ASO when they come to Athens. Oh, man. Sweet music! They love coming to Athens because of the acoustics.

Priscilla: The acoustics in the PAC are famous.

Malcolm: We've enjoyed every performance but maybe one or two in the period of 30 years. The quality has been excellent. The PAC is the best addition to Athens there's ever been, it's my humble opinion.



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HELPFUL INFORMATION

Guest artists, programs, dates, times, ticket prices, and service fees subject to change.

BOX OFFICE

Open Monday-Friday, 10:00 am-5:00 pm and one hour prior to performances. Tickets to all performances presented by UGA Presents, Hugh Hodgson School of Music, Dept. of Dance, and UGA Theatre are available in person at the UGA Performing Arts Center (PAC) Box Office, by calling (706) 542-4400, or online at pac.uga.edu. Tickets purchased from other outlets cannot be guaranteed and may not be honored. For exchange/refund policy, visit pac.uga.edu/policies.

WILL CALL

Tickets purchased in advance and left for collection at "will call" will be available for pick up at the PAC Box Office during regular business hours or beginning one hour prior to the start of the performance, including off-site locations.

FEES

Georgia 8% sales tax and restoration fees (PAC events only) are included in all ticket prices. Additional service fees for online or phone orders and ticket delivery apply.

PARKING

Through an arrangement with UGA Parking Services, complimentary parking for all UGA Presents performances is available in both the PAC surface lot and the PAC parking deck. For performances at the Fine Arts Theatre, please use the Hull Street Deck, the Tate Center Parking Deck (payment required), or other UGA surface lots in the area. For questions regarding parking, please call UGA Parking Services at (706) 542-7275. For information about parking at The Classic Center, please visit classiccenter.com.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND RECORDING

Unless noted otherwise, photography, video, and/or audio recording of any kind are strictly prohibited during all performances.

USE OF LIKENESS

Patrons may be photographed, filmed and/or recorded for archival, promotional, and/or other purposes. By entering any of our venues, you consent to such photography, filming and/or recording and to any use, in any and all media in perpetuity, of your appearance, voice, and name for any purpose whatsoever in connection with this venue. You understand that all photography, filming, and/or recording will be done in reliance on this consent given by you by entering this area. If you do not agree to this, please contact the house manager.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Please silence all mobile phones and other noisemaking devices. Texting during performances is prohibited.

LATE SEATING

Late seating is subject to the discretion of the house manager. Late patrons may be reseated in an alternate location.

CHILDREN

Children ages 6 and older are welcome to attend all performances, unless indicated otherwise for specific events. Children under age 6 and babies will not be admitted. Parents and guardians are encouraged to exercise judgement when determining if programs are appropriate for their children. Please contact the box office at (706) 542-4400 with questions about specific performances.

ACCESSIBILITY

Venues are accessible to people using wheelchairs or with restricted mobility. Please contact the box office to make advance arrangements if you require special assistance. Accessible parking spaces are located near the entrance to the PAC lobby.

LARGE-PRINT PROGRAMS

Large-print programs are available by calling the box office at least 72 hours before the performance.

ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES

For individuals requiring hearing assistance, the Performing Arts Center offers Assistive Listening Devices that may be checked out at no cost to patrons with a photo ID at the coat check desk in the Performing Arts Center lobby. The photo ID will be returned in exchange for the device at the conclusion of the performance.

FOOD AND DRINK

Concessions are available for purchase in the PAC lobby for all UGA Presents performances and other selected events. Food and drink are prohibited inside the performance venues. Complimentary cough lozenges are available at the coat check desk. Please do not unwrap lozenges during performances.

VOLUNTEERS

We appreciate the dedicated service of the many community volunteers who serve at the Performing Arts Center. To inquire about joining our team, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator at (706) 542-2634. Training sessions are held each August.

RENTALS

Hodgson Concert Hall and Ramsey Concert Hall are available for rental. For information please call (706) 542-2290 or visit the rental page at pac.uga.edu/rentals. Rental inquiries for the Fine Arts Theatre should be directed to the UGA Dept. of Theatre and Film Studies.

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