

MARY ANNE RENNOLDS

# Chamber Concert Series 2023-24



# ISIDORE QUARTET

3:00 PM | October 15, 2023

Sonia Vlahcevic Concert Hall  
W.E. Singleton Center

**VCUarts** | music

# Isidore Quartet

*Adrian Steele, violin (first on Haydn and Beethoven)*

*Phoenix Avalon, violin (first on Childs)*

*Devin Moore, viola*

*Joshua McClendon, cello*

**JOSEPH  
HAYDN  
(1732-1809)**

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

Moderato  
Adagio  
Minuetto: Allegretto  
Fuga a quattro soggetti

**BILLY  
CHILDS  
(b. 1957)**

**String Quartet No. 2 “Awakening” (2012)**

Wake Up Call  
The White Room  
Song of Healing

## *INTERMISSION*

**LUDWIG  
van BEETHOVEN  
(1770-1827)**

**String Quartet No. 15 in A minor,  
Op. 132 (1825)**

Assai sostenuto - Allegro  
Allegro ma non tanto  
Molto adagio - Andante (“Heiliger Dankge  
sang...”)  
Alla marcia, assai vivace  
Allegro appassionato

# Notes on the Program

## JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

*Born in Rohrau, Austria, March 31, 1732; died in Vienna, 1809*

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

Haydn's Op. 20 quartets are pillars of the string quartet repertoire, works that both solidified the genre as worthy of its own lineage and introduced new compositional techniques into the post-baroque classical world.

Composed in 1772, the 40 year-old Haydn was already well established as a composer, leading a busy life composing symphonic, chamber, and vocal works for the court of Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy.

In the second Op. 20 quartet, Haydn begins immediately to challenge the existing hierarchy of voices in the quartet, announcing the theme with a three-voice texture led by the cello. The traditional melodic instrument, the first violin, is made to wait its turn to state the theme once more before the exposition can continue. In the aftermath of such treason, Haydn, never lacking wit, seems almost to tease the first violinist with the cello's sixteenth note flourishes shortly thereafter, to which the first violin immediately responds with a dramatic run of its own.

Beyond the warm embrace of his melodies and the ease of his musical dialogue, Haydn also veers into darker territory in the quartet, introducing the concept of *sturm und drang*, clearly influenced by the burgeoning romanticism of his contemporaries and the more operatic modes that he was writing in for his other duties in the Esterhazy court. The second movement introduces itself in a desperately grand,

almost garishly ornamented statement from the whole quartet, before a series of outbursts and laments, as if part of an operatic recitative. Haydn pairs this with an ever-developing chromaticism, incredibly apparent in the waning moments of the second movement and in the opening of the third.

In the third movement, Haydn adds to the minuet an ever-present drone, creating a bagpipe-like texture and allowing him to cleverly introduce the subject of the fourth movement fugue chromatically against the G drone. In the finale, Haydn once again sets up the drama, marking the quartet *sotto voce* until the dam can no longer hold, leading to a dramatic and unexpected flurry of forte sixteenth notes that lead us to the end of the piece.

—*Note by Adrian Steele*

## **BILLY CHILDS (b. 1957)** **String Quartet No. 2 “Awakening”**

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 Phil, DSO, Kronos Quartet, Ying Quartet). A formative education, extensive experience, and an unwavering self-conception allowed the five-time Grammy Award-winning Billy Childs 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 is inspired by Childs’ real-life experience with his wife. After she was diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism and taken into emergency care, Childs, a state over, was notified of the situation and immediately rushed to be with her. This three-movement work outlines the 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 his 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 heartbreakingly lyrical cascades of melody that accumulate throughout the quartet, evoking a sense of uncontrollable anguish, fear, and lamentation. This brief look inside the composer’s psyche is swiftly dissipated 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 unknown.

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. Utilizing various extended techniques (false harmonics, glissandos, Bartok pizzicatos), Childs manifests the feeling of being in the sterile, unwelcoming hospital room devoid of comfort with its blindingly white walls and eerily repetitive machinery

noises. The mechanical landscape eventually avalanches 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 compartmentalize and understand the impact that this event had on their relationship. The love, trust, and unencumbered expression of emotion can be viscerally felt as this duo rejoins the quartet as the movement comes to a close. A sense of healing, or at least a willingness to heal, is felt as the final chord - a hopeful A Major - dissolves into silence.

Childs, through a unique, yet familiar compositional style evocative of 21st-century multi-genre perspective, 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*

# LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

*Born in Bonn, Germany, baptized December 17, 1770;*

*died in Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827*

## String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132 (1824-5)

The five string quartets and Grosse Fuge 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, with a variety of debilitating diseases. 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 an old church mode known as the 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.

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, which follows. Its central pastoral episode, nominally a trio section, begins with a musette-like theme high on the first violin. It continues with a länder theme which Beethoven wrote 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 this work. Both works end with a feeling of transcendence and triumph.

— *Program notes copyright © 2023 Keith Horner.*

*Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca*

# Artist Biographies

**Adrian Steele and Phoenix Avalon**, violins

**Devin Moore**, viola

**Joshua McClendon**, cello

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 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, 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 (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 has already collaborated with a number of eminent performers including Jeremy Denk and James Ehnes. Their 23/24 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!

# About the Mary Anne Rennolds Chamber Concert Series

The Department of Music at Virginia Commonwealth University has presented the top chamber music performers in the world to Richmond audiences for more than forty years. VCU Music's series, originally founded as the Terrace Concerts, debuted in 1983 in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Today, the series is named in honor of Mary Anne Rennolds, one of Richmond's greatest music patrons. A fund was established in her memory to present chamber music events in Richmond, independently of the Terrace Concerts.

Please consider donating to the fund in honor of Mary Anne Rennolds and her legacy. To donate online, please go to <https://support.vcu.edu/give/Arts>. Search by keyword and look for "Rennolds". The fund name is "Mary Anne Rennolds Chamber Concerts".

If you would like to provide a check donation, checks can be made out to the VCU Foundation with Rennolds Chamber Concert in the subject line. Checks may be mailed to VCU Arts Music attn: Linda Johnston at 922 Park Avenue, Box 842004, Richmond, VA 23284-2004.

Thank you for supporting the premier chamber music series in Richmond.

## Donate to VCU Music

The VCU Friends of Music Scholarship Fund continues to assist many of our VCU Music students with significant scholarship funding, making it possible for them to pursue their education. To contribute to this fund online, please go to: <https://support.vcu.edu/give/Arts>. Search by keyword and look for "Friends of Music".

For additional information on how to support VCU Music, please email [music@vcu.edu](mailto:music@vcu.edu) or call 804-827-4541. Your support is valuable and appreciated.

# Upcoming VCU Music Events

## **Guest Artist: Eastern Boundary Quartet**

Thursday, October 19, 7:00 p.m.

## **Professor Justin Alexander with Guest Artists Gusti Sidharta and Peni Candra Rini Percussion Performance**

Wednesday, October 25, 7:30 p.m.

## **Fall Jazz Fest\***

Thursday, October 26, 7:30 p.m.

## **Sheri Oyan Faculty Saxophone Recital\***

Sunday, October 29, 4:00 p.m.

## **Jazz Orchestra Celebrates**

## **Women Jazz Composers\***

Tuesday, November 14, 7:30 p.m.

## **Symphonic Wind Ensemble Concert\***

Thursday, November 16, 8:00 p.m.

## **Fall Choral Concert\***

Thursday, November 30, 7:00 p.m.

## **VCU Symphony Concert\***

Wednesday, December 6, 8:00 p.m.

## **Small Jazz Ensemble and Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra\***

Thursday, December 7, 7:30 p.m.

## **36th Annual Holiday Gala\***

Friday, December 8, 7:00 p.m.

All of the above events will take place at the Singleton Center for the Performing Arts.

\*Ticket required. Tickets may be purchased at [vcumusic.showclix.com](http://vcumusic.showclix.com).

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# **Chamber Concert Series 2023-24**

**VCUarts**



**Academy of St Martin in  
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