

ONEPPO CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES

David Shifrin, *artistic director*

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# Emerson String Quartet

Tuesday, September 12, 2023 | 7:30 pm  
Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Yale SCHOOL OF MUSIC

José García-León, Dean

# Program

George Walker  
1922–2018

## **Lyric for Strings (1946, rev. 1990)**

Philip Setzer, *first violin*

Sarah Kirkland Snider  
b. 1973

## **Drink the Wild Ayre (2023)**

Eugene Drucker, *first violin*

Felix Mendelssohn  
1809–1847

## **String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 13, “Ist es wahr?”**

- I. Adagio – Allegro vivace
- II. Adagio non lento
- III. Intermezzo. Allegretto con moto –  
Allegro di molto
- IV. Presto – Adagio non lento

Philip Setzer, *first violin*

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven  
1770–1827

## **String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat major, Op. 130**

- I. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro
- II. Presto
- III. Andante con moto, ma non troppo
- IV. Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai
- V. Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo
- VI. Finale: Große Fuge

Eugene Drucker, *first violin*

*As a courtesy to others, please silence all devices. Photography and recording of any kind is strictly prohibited. Please do not leave the hall during musical selections. Thank you.*

# Artist Profile

Emerson String Quartet

Philip Setzer, *violin*

Eugene Drucker, *violin*

Lawrence Dutton, *viola*

Paul Watkins, *cello*

The Emerson String Quartet will disband in late October 2023 after more than four decades as one of the world's premier chamber music ensembles. "With musicians like this," wrote a reviewer for *The Times* (London), "there must be some hope for humanity." The Quartet has made more than 30 acclaimed recordings, and has been honored with nine GRAMMYS® (including two for Best Classical Album), three Gramophone Awards, the Avery Fisher Prize, and Musical America's "Ensemble of the Year" Award. The ESQ has commissioned works from some of today's most esteemed composers, and has partnered in performance with leading soloists such as Renée Fleming, Barbara Hannigan, Evgeny Kissin, Emanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, James Galway, Edgar Meyer, Mstislav Rostropovich, Menahem Pressler, Leon Fleisher, André Previn, and Isaac Stern.

The Emerson's extensive discography includes the complete string quartets of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bartók, Webern, and Shostakovich, as well as multi-CD sets of major works by Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Dvořák. In October 2020, the group released a CD of Schumann's three quartets for the Pentatone label. Deutsche Grammophon recently reissued its box set of the Emerson Complete Recordings on the label, now

expanded to 55 discs. The Quartet's final recording, *Infinite Voyage*, a collaboration with soprano Barbara Hannigan, features music by Schoenberg, Hindemith, Berg, and Chausson.

Formed in 1976 and based in New York City, the Emerson String Quartet was one of the first quartets whose violinists alternate in the first violin position. The group, which takes its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, serves as Quartet-in-Residence at Stony Brook University. In 2013, Paul Watkins, a distinguished soloist and award-winning conductor, joined the original members of the Quartet after the departure of cellist David Finckel.

"The Emerson performances represented an extraordinary fusion of experience and authority with audacity and freshness" (*Boston Globe*).

The Emerson String Quartet appears by arrangement with IMG Artists and records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon.  
» [emersonquartet.com](http://emersonquartet.com)

# Program Notes

Lyric for Strings

WALKER

[georgetwalker.com](http://georgetwalker.com)

Composer and pianist George Theophilus Walker was born in Washington, D.C., on June 27, 1922, of West Indian-American parentage, and died in Montclair, New Jersey, in 2018 at the age of 96. Graduating in 1940 from Oberlin College with highest honors, he was admitted to the Curtis Institute of Music to study piano with Rudolf Serkin and composition with Rosario Scalero. He graduated from Curtis with Artist Diplomas in piano and composition in 1945.

In 1946, George Walker composed his String Quartet No. 1. The second movement of this work, performed this evening in its original form, was arranged by the composer for string orchestra. At the time, *Lyric for Strings* became one of the most-frequently-performed orchestral works by a living American composer. A half-century later, in 1996, George Walker became the first Black composer to receive the coveted Pulitzer Prize in Music for his work, *Lilacs for Voice and Orchestra*, premiered by the Boston Symphony. In 1998, he received the Composers Award from the Lancaster Symphony and the Letter of Distinction from the American Music Center for “his significant contributions to the field of contemporary American Music.” In 1999, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In April 2000, George Walker was inducted into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame in a ceremony at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Drink the Wild Ayre

SNIDER

*Note by the composer*

*Drink the Wild Ayre* is my second string quartet. I wrote my first over twenty years ago, while poring over recordings by the Emerson String Quartet. At that time, I was new to composition and bought every CD of theirs I could find, obsessively studying counterpoint and voice-leading via their recordings. Their performances became my benchmark for the masterpieces they recorded; their sounds became synonymous, in my mind, with the composer’s intent. For me, theirs was the definitive interpretation of all the great string quartets in history.

So, when the invitation to write this piece came in—the Emerson’s final commission, to be performed during this, their final season—I nearly fell off my chair. I am still awestruck and humbled to have written this piece for some of my earliest heroes.

The title is a playful nod to one of the most famous quotes by their transcendentalist namesake essayist/philosopher/poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Live in the sunshine, swim the sea, Drink the wild air’s salubrity.” An ayre is a song-like, lyrical piece. The title seemed an apt reference not only to the lilting, asymmetrical rhythms of the music’s melodic narrative, but also to the questing spirit, sense of adventure, and full-hearted passion with which the Emerson has thrown itself into everything it has done for the past 47 years. Here’s to the singular magic of these artistic giants, and the new adventures that await them.

String Quartet No. 2 in A minor  
MENDELSSOHN  
*Members of the Daedalus Quartet*

Felix Mendelssohn completed his first string quartet, which remains without an opus number, in 1823, at the age of fourteen. The work, in E-flat major, is the output of a very gifted student, but not a mature composer. Two years later, however, he produced his Octet for Strings, and it was clear that, at the age of sixteen, Mendelssohn had come into his own. He had mastered the technical aspects of composition, including voicing, structure, and balance, to name a few. Moreover, he had grown to understand how to manipulate sound in order to make us laugh, cry, gasp, and cheer.

In another two years, Mendelssohn turned eighteen, and he wrote a song based on a text by J. G. Droyson called *Frage* (Question). We can imagine the girl who inspired the song; the text reads, in part: “Is it true? Is it true that you are always waiting for me in the arbored walk ... she who feels with me and stays ever true to me?” The music from *Frage* frames Mendelssohn’s Op. 13 quartet of the same year, and elements from *Frage* contribute to every movement in the piece. In particular, the dotted rhythm and the melodic half-step found in the “Is it true?” music pervade the quartet.

Despite its connection to the song, the quartet is not simply the pining of a lovesick teenager. Ludwig van Beethoven died the same year Op. 13 was composed, and the work can also be seen as an

homage to that great master of the quartet idiom. His influence is most apparent in the last movement, which closely resembles the last movement of Beethoven’s Op. 132, written two years prior. The first violin’s recitative, the opening melody, and the bass line in the cello part are too similar to Op. 132 to be coincidental. In addition, a fugato section in the second movement (which is based on the half step from *Frage*) closely resembles the fugato section in the second movement of Beethoven’s Op. 95 quartet. Scholars also point out links to the Cavatina from Beethoven’s Op. 130 quartet in the Adagio non lento, and remark on the similarity of the quoted phrase “Is it true?” to Beethoven’s “Must it be?” in his Op. 135 quartet. Certainly, Mendelssohn idolized Beethoven, and he seems to have channeled his grief at Beethoven’s death into the quartet, but it is debatable whether or not each of these references was conscious.

Opus 13 is a dark piece at times, but it is not tragic in the Beethovenian sense. After the Adagio introduction in A major, with the *Frage* quote, we are spurred by a rumbling in the viola into a tumultuous Allegro vivace in A minor, whose theme is an expansion of the “Is it true?” rhythmic motive. But despite the passionate outbursts, the nervous murmuring, and the wailing melodies, we can’t help somehow relishing all this grief, in the same way that a teenager relishes the pangs of love. Similarly, the second movement drips with angst but is deliciously sweet. The Intermezzo is in ternary form: a classic Mendelssohn

## Program Notes *cont.*

scherzo sandwiched between strains of an ancient-sounding song, to lute-like accompaniment. The final movement, the stormy, youthful answer to Beethoven's Op. 132, yields to the opening *Frage* material in a way that might seem saccharine were it not so sincere. As it is, we are left marveling at the deft emotional manipulation by the young genius, who somehow made us all believe that we were eighteen again, when the world still held unlimited potential and its colors seemed more vivid.

String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat major  
BEETHOVEN

*Patrick Campbell Jankowski*

In its original version, Beethoven's Op. 130 quartet was perhaps so far "ahead of its time" that the composer was compelled to rethink its ending. The contrapuntal masterpiece that initially concluded the work was deemed too "heavy" for the listener and outright confusing for the original performers, so Beethoven detached it from the quartet and substituted a more buoyant contra-dance. Centuries later, we've heard and played music that challenges our ears far more than this, so perhaps we can handle it.

The Grosse Fugue has attained legendary status in the music world for its apparent anachronism. Upon first listen, many would be surprised to learn that it was written prior to 1927, let alone a whole century prior, yet ironically the fugue as a standalone form was, by Beethoven's time, considered somewhat a relic of the

past. So there it sits, looking forward and backward, alien to its surroundings.

The quartet as a whole is the longest of Beethoven's chamber works, and runs the gamut of tone and tempo. Within it are two of his shortest movements, the energetic Presto and the German dance, as well as one of the composer's most beloved slow movements: the operatic Cavatina... and then there's the fugue. In short, buckle up and enjoy the ride.

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*List as of September 7, 2023*

# Upcoming Events at YSM

- SEP 17 **James O'Donnell, organ**  
**ISM Great Organ Music at Yale**  
7:30 p.m. | Woolsey Hall  
Free admission
- SEP 22 **Evensong**  
**ISM Yale Schola Cantorum**  
5:30 p.m. | Christ Church  
Free admission
- SEP 22 **Mahler's Symphony No. 3; Peter Oundjian, principal conductor**  
**Yale Philharmonia**  
7:30 p.m. | Woolsey Hall  
Tickets start at \$13, Yale faculty/staff start at \$9, Students FREE
- SEP 24 **Gold & Glitter: Arthur Haas, harpsichord & Daniel S. Lee, Baroque violin**  
**Faculty Artist Series**  
3 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall  
Free admission
- SEP 29 **Bertha Hope, piano**  
**Ellington Jazz Series**  
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall  
Tickets start at \$26, Yale faculty/staff start at \$19, Students start at \$11

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