ONEPPO CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES

David Shifrin, artistic director

Quartetto di Cremona

Tuesday, October 31, 2023 | 7:30 pm
Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Yale SCHOOL OF MUSIC
José García-León, Dean
Program

Hugo Wolf
1860–1903

Maurice Ravel
1875–1937

String Quartet in F major, M. 35
I. Allegro moderato – Très doux
II. Assez vif – Très rhythmé
III. Très lent
IV. Vif et agité

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven
1770–1827

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132
I. Assai sostenuto – Allegro
II. Allegro ma non tanto
III. Molto adagio – Andante – Molto adagio – Andante – Molto adagio
IV. Alla marcia, assai vivace – Piu allegro – attacca:
V. Allegro appassionato

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 Profiles

Quartetto di Cremona

Cristiano Gualco, violin
Paolo Andreoli, violin
Simone Gramaglia, viola
Giovanni Scaglione, cello

Since its formation in 2000, the Quartetto di Cremona has established a reputation as one of the most exciting chamber ensembles on the international stage. Regularly invited to perform in major music festivals and halls in Europe, North and South America, and the Far East, they garner universal acclaim for their high level of interpretive artistry.

Highlights of recent and upcoming seasons are performances at Wigmore Hall (London), at the Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), at the Elbphilharmonie (Hamburg), at the Konzerthaus in Berlin, at the Brucknerhaus (Linz), at the Salle de la Madeleine (Geneva), in Stockholm, Schwarzenberg, Kuhmo, Mumbai, and Taipei, and for the Fundación Juan March in Madrid and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York. North American tours are regularly planned twice a year, with the Carnegie Hall debut in October 2023 as well as a re-invitation from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in March 2024.

The Quartet is also collaborating with numerous artists such as Eckart Runge, Till Fellner, Pablo Barragan, Kit Armstrong, Miguel da Silva, the Emerson Quartet, and the Pavel Haas Quartet.

On the discographic side, a new CD will soon be released with the ensemble’s own version of The Art of Fugue, performed with seven instruments so as not to alter the original writing of Bach’s score.

Previous recordings include Italian Postcards (2020, Avie Records); a double CD dedicated to Schubert (2019, Audite); the complete Beethoven string quartets (2018, Audite). All of them were received with great interest by international critics, as well as winning discographic prizes.

Frequently invited to present masterclasses in Europe, Asia, North and South America, the members of the quartet have been Professors at the Walter Stauffer Academy in Cremona since 2011.

Winners of the 2019 Franco Buitoni Award for their constant contribution to the promotion of chamber music in Italy and around the world, members of the quartet are ambassadors for the international project “Friends of Stradivari” and honorary citizen of Cremona. They also endorse “Le Dimore del Quartetto” and Thomastik Infield Strings.
Program Notes

Italian Serenade
Wolf
Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Hugo Wolf is almost exclusively associated in many music lovers’ minds with the Lied genre. Few composers carried the tradition of poetic song settings – cultivated by Schubert and Schumann – forward into late Romanticism quite like he did. Wolf did, however, compose a few instrumental works in his career, and this gem remains an enduring favorite. Literature may still have inspired this piece: the composer had recently encountered an Eichendorff novella about a young violinist who at one point plays an “Italian Serenade” with a string orchestra. Perhaps that stirred his imagination, or perhaps it was born from thin air. This energetic, standalone work for quartet was conceived initially as part of a multi-movement set that never materialized. Even a few years later when he re-orchestrated it for string orchestra with solo viola, he still never managed to expand the idea. Wolf likely never heard the piece performed, as he spent his last years confined to a mental health hospital for treatment. Yet in its dancing rhythms and buoyant melodies, the Italian Serenade offers a brilliant, if brief, glimpse of joy.

String Quartet in F major
Ravel
Tawnie Olson

Ravel was 28 years old when he wrote his first and only string quartet; the same age, curiously enough, as Beethoven was when he wrote his Op.18, No. 3. Like Beethoven, Ravel was clearly influenced by the string quartets of his elder colleagues, most notably Debussy’s String Quartet in G minor, Op.10. Franck’s influence can also be detected in this work’s cyclic re-use of thematic material from the first movement.

Ravel’s quartet was dedicated neither to Franck nor to Debussy, however, but to Ravel’s former teacher, Gabriel Fauré. Fauré himself had not yet written a string quartet of his own; he did not undertake the enterprise until 21 years after the completion of Ravel’s quartet. According to a letter he wrote his wife, his delay in attempting a work in the genre was due to his sense of intimidation at Beethoven’s stunning accomplishments in the genre. Perhaps because of this, he was quite critical of the String Quartet in F, particularly the last movement. Ravel in turn became dissatisfied with his finale, provoking Debussy to make his famous remark “Au nom des dieux de la musique et du mien, ne touchez à rien de ce que vous avez écrit de votre quatuor” (“In the name of the gods of music and of mine, don’t touch anything you’ve written in your quartet!”).
The controversy over the last movement aside, Ravel was not completely dissatisfied with the Quartet in F. In his own words, “My quartet is the product of the desire to create a specific musical structure, incompletely realized, no doubt, but far clearer than in any of my work up until then.” In addition to having realized specific formal goals, Ravel also succeeded in creating a work which is unrelentingly pleasant to listen to; its harmonies are elegant and fresh-sounding, and its use of string timbre is masterful.

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132
BEETHOVEN
Keith Murphy

In the last three years of his life, Beethoven turned almost exclusively to the composition of string quartets, and the resulting set of quartets (opp. 127, 130–133, 135) represent for many the greatest set of chamber music in the Western canon. These works, however, did not always enjoy the exalted status they hold today. Contemporary audiences were baffled by the formal innovations of the late quartets, and many attributed the difficulties to Beethoven’s deafness. Though Robert Schumann proved to be an early and ardent supporter of these masterpieces, they did not gain a wider audience until several decades after their composition. It is easy to see why audiences in the early nineteenth century may have been confused by the music; Beethoven in his later music continually questioned the fundamental organizing principles of the Classical era. The A minor quartet is written in five movements, not the traditional four (with the fourth and fifth movements running together), and the opening presents a strangely chromatic canon that owes more to the much earlier music of Bach and Palestrina, whose scores Beethoven is known to have studied intensely in his last years, than to contemporary sentiments. The second movement is a greatly expanded minuet in A major whose delicate through-composed trio makes surprising use of the violin’s open A string. At the center of the quartet lies the transcendent Molto adagio, at the head of which Beethoven placed the words, “Holy song of thanksgiving of a
convalescent to the divinity, in the Lydian mode.” The inscription refers to a serious intestinal inflammation, which interrupted Beethoven’s composition of Op. 132 for an entire month. Later in the movement, a bright D major with jovial trills and play between the violins is marked, “feeling new strength.” The fourth movement is a merry march in A major that shockingly dissolves into a recitative for the first violin over a tremolo accompaniment. Recitative, a style of dramatic declamation borrowed from opera, appears several times in Beethoven’s late music, and the instance here cuts short the fourth movement’s march and leads directly into the troubled A minor finale.

Beethoven began work on Op. 132 in 1824, just as he was applying the finishing touches to the E-flat quartet, Op. 127. Op. 132 was the second of the late quartets to be composed (the opus numbers of the set do not reflect their order of composition), on a commission from the Russian prince Golitsyn, himself an amateur cellist who had asked Beethoven to compose “one, two, or three quartets” and to name whatever price he saw fit. Though Beethoven would go on to add a third quartet (Op. 130) to the set for his noble patron in 1825, Golitsyn unfortunately found himself in financial trouble and unable to pay for more than the first quartet, though he admitted to being very pleased with the music. The debt ironically was not to be paid until after the composer’s death.
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*List as of October 26, 2023*
Upcoming Events at YSM

NOV 2  Natacha Diels, guest composer
New Music New Haven
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Free admission

NOV 3  Fred Hersch, 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

NOV 5  Wendy Sharp, violin
Faculty Artist Series
3 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Free admission

NOV 8  Boris Berman, piano
Horowitz Piano Series
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Tickets start at $17, Yale faculty/staff start at $12, Students start at $8

NOV 9  Yale Schola Cantorum with Danish National Vocal Ensemble
Institute of Sacred Music
7:30 p.m. | Woolsey Hall
Free admission

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