73rd Concert Series 2026-27

is pleased to present

The Balourdet Quartet

Angela Bae, violin
Justin DeFilippis, violin
Benjamin Zannoni, viola
Russell Houston, cello

Sunday, October 4, 2026 3:00 p.m.
Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

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Who We Are

Friends of Music Concerts, Inc. celebrates its 73rd season of showcasing artists who represent the best in today's diverse world of chamber music. Additionally, FOMC's Partnerships in Education program in the public schools and free student admission to our concerts give young people enhanced exposure to and appreciation of classical music.

Whether you are new to classical music or a seasoned concertgoer, we would love to welcome you to our enthusiastic volunteer corps – at concerts or behind the scenes. Contact Sandy Galef, volunteer coordinator, at sgalef@aol.com or call 914 450 4086.

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Chamber music is an intimate conversation between musicians and the audience. This unique bond is only possible because of dedicated supporters like you. Ticket sales cover only part of our concert and program costs. Your gift directly funds artist fees, venue rentals, and our youth outreach programs. To donate, scan this QR code or go to **www.friendsofmusicconcerts.org**.

You can help secure the future of our csoncerts and outreach by making a lasting gift today. Joining the **George Raymond Legacy Circle** (named after our founder) allows you to support extraordinary musical performances for generations to come while aligning with your personal financial goals. To discuss confidentially these and other options, please contact Executive Director Martin Kagan at mkagan@friendsofmusicconcerts.org, 646-522-1661.

Program

String Quartet No. 3 in B♭ major, Op. 67 — Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Vivace
Andante
Agitato (Allegretto non troppo)
Poco Allegretto con Variazioni

Impossible Inventions — Paul Novak (b. 1998)

Faster – than – light – machine
Quantum – clockwork
Anti – gravity – machine
Cyborg – falling – in – love

Intermission

String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132 — Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Assai sostenuto – Allegro
Allegro ma non tanto
"Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der Lydischen Tonart"
Molto adagio – Andante
Alla marcia, assai vivace
Allegro appassionato

The Balourdet Quartet appears by arrangement with Colbert Artists Management.

Angela Bae plays the 1694 "Fetzer" Antonio Stradivari violin (Cremona, Italy).

Justin DeFilippis is playing the 1745 "Pennington" Pietro Guarneri violin (Venice, Italy).

Benjamin Zannoni is playing a 1913 Ferruccio Varagnolo viola (Milan, Italy).

Russell Houston plays a c. 1800 Gagliano Brothers cello (Naples, Italy).

The post-concert reception is sponsored by FOMC board members David Kraft and Sandy Galef.

To inquire about FOMC sponsorship opportunities, please contact Executive Director Martin Kagan at mkagan@friendsofmusicconcerts.org or at 646-522-1661.

Next concert

Sunday, Oct. 18, 2026, at 3:00 pm. Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
Trio Azura
Program: Ravel: Piano Trio in A minor, Higdon: Piano Trio No. 1, Mendelssohn: Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor

Program notes

String Quartet No. 3 B♭ major, Op. 67
Johannes Brahms

It may seem as if great musical minds spring forth, fully formed, upon the world, but even geniuses struggle with self doubt and Brahms was a champion self-doubter. Born five years after Beethoven's death, with the Master's work dominating European musical life, Brahms once said he felt as if he constantly heard Beethoven's footsteps behind him.

"Brahms was proclaimed by Schumann that he would be the one carrying the torch of Beethoven. Can you imagine the burden on this young man, how he developed, how he thrived and the quest for his own voice, combined with this incredible admiration for Beethoven?" pianist Wu Han (who just performed in our opening concert) told the Sarasota Herald-Tribune in an interview.

It took Brahms 40 years to write his first symphony, so intimidated was he by the shadow of his predecessor, but in those intervening years, he composed many works – among them, three string quartets. The quartet in B♭, Op. 67, was the last, written in 1875 while he was struggling with Symphony No. 1. In fact, the composer blithely called the quartet a "useless trifle" (surely our audience will be the judge of that), written to distract him from heavy symphonic work.

"While this quartet may have been a "trifle" to its composer, there is nothing trivial about it — or its predecessors — for string quartets who undertake to play it. It is common knowledge to performers of Brahms' chamber music that the sextets, and many quintets, that he wrote are kinder to their performers than the string quartets. The sound palette of Brahms' musical imagination was of a peculiar richness and depth, to the point that five or six performers provided the right natural sonority, but four would find themselves just that much more taxed, their resources that much more stretched," wrote violist Misha Amory of the Brentano Quartet.

The first movement, marked *vivace*, features a lively theme reminiscent of hunting horns in a call-and-response pattern, as well as Brahms's signature cross-rhythms (two against three). As the music progresses, shadows fall against the sunlight, but the bouncy "hunting horn" theme recurs and cheerfulness emerges at the end.

The second, *andante* (at a walking pace, easygoing), begins with a lush melody for the first violin, enriched by harmonic accompaniment from the other three instruments. Turbulent moments appear, only to return to the flowing, lyrical (perhaps Schumann-esque?) feeling of the opening and end with pure serenity.

The third movement begins with *agitato*, *allegretto non troppo* (agitated, fast but not too much), bringing the viola to the forefront and requiring the violins and cello to be muted. This section's leading melody carries hints of sighs and sadness, but with an underlying sweetness of expression. Brahms himself described the movement as "the tenderest and most impassioned I have ever written."

The finale, *poco allegretto con variazioni* (a little fast with variations), foregrounds the viola again at the start, then sweeps into eight theme-and-variations, returning to the "hunting horns" melody that chases toward a triumphant close.

Impossible Inventions
Paul Novak

Impossible Inventions, composed in 2024, thrusts string quartet writing firmly into the 21st century, or perhaps the 31st century, as composer Novak writes that it "reimagines the string quartet as a series of fantastical sci-fi machines."

At Friends of Music Concerts' Partnerships in Education program, public high school students had no problem launching their imaginations far into the future when they heard the Balourdet Quartet play this piece.

The students' reactions:

"At the beginning, struggle."
"Aliens in Star Wars."
"Problems."
"Horror film!"
"Chased by a swarm of bees."
"Alien invasion!"
"Fast-moving and unpredictable."
"Suspenseful."

Novak has written about his work:

"Impossible Inventions makes the string quartet defy the laws of physics. Structured in four interlocking movements without pause, this piece takes its inspiration from hypothetical technologies envisioned in science fiction.

"The first movement, marked *faster – than – light – machine*, the most substantial of the four, imagines a spacecraft hurtling at an extraordinary speed. The second and third movements, *quantum – clockwork and anti – gravity – machine*, are shorter interludes which conjure churning clockwork with pizzicati and the weightlessness of space with shimmering natural harmonics. The final movement, *cyborg – falling – in – love*, transforms the viola into a robot falling in love, accompanied by a lyrical, gentle dance. The 'inventions' of the title have a double meaning, referring to both the wondrous sci-fi machines and to the piece's swirling contrapuntal writing reminiscent of Bach.

"Impossible Inventions was commissioned by the Barlow Endowment Award, and was made possible thanks to a generous residency at New Hampshire's Avaloch Farm Music Institute. It is dedicated with gratitude and warmth to my friends Angela, Justin, Ben and Russell of the Balourdet Quartet – an extraordinary ensemble that defies the laws of physics."

The jury of the 2025 Luigi Nono Prize, held in Turin, Italy, praised Impossible Inventions for "innovative and elegant string writing, expressing a breathless and swirling energy that remains continually inventive and surprising."

This work is included on the Balourdet Quartet's newest album, "Strange Machines," which was released just before this concert. The recording "stretches across nearly six centuries of music while exploring artificial intelligence, memory, machinery, mortality and the future of the string quartet," according to critic Eric Alper. However, violinist Justin DeFilippis told Alper, "We thought we were making an album about technology. What we discovered was that every composer was really writing about the human experience."

Based in Chicago, Novak has received awards from the Fromm Foundation, Barlow Endowment, ASCAP, BMI and American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is 2026-29 composer-in-residence of the California Symphony, the co-artistic director and flutist of Chicago-based ensemble Mycelium New Music, and is a PhD candidate at the University of Chicago. Originally from Reno, Nev., he completed his undergraduate studies at Rice University, which is also where the Balourdet Quartet completed its formation.

His recent projects include Forest Migrations, an orchestral piece commissioned by American Composers Orchestra, inspired by the movement of forests around the world in response to environmental threats and Seven Dreams About my Body, a fantasia suite of microtonal interludes for Blackbox Ensemble inspired by strange recurring dreams during the pandemic.

String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132
Ludwig van Beethoven

Deeply emotional and reflective of Beethoven's precarious health at the time, Opus 132 was written just two years before his death. It was commissioned by and dedicated to Count Nikolai Galitzin, a Russian aristocrat and amateur cellist. Its influence resonates to this day.

In 1825, Beethoven was in constant distress from a severe bowel inflammation and had been completely deaf for years. In 2020, during another health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, Los Angeles Times music critic Mark Swed wrote that in Op. 132, Beethoven "represented the psychology of pain and illness in all its transcendent transparency … [conveying] the changes of perception wrought by disease."

The first movement, *assai sostenuto – allegro* (very sustained - quickly) opens with an intensely somber melody but within one minute, a crisis arrives. Turbulent emotions contend with lyrical phrases throughout, punctuated in the middle by a lovely melody on the second violin.

The second movement, *allegro ma non tanto* (fast but not too much), features rising and falling musical motifs, developing into a section reminiscent of bagpipes.

The third movement bears a uniquely long (for Beethoven) title: *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der Lydischen Tonart* ("Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian mode"). Marked *molto adagio – andante* (very slow) it expresses the composer's profound gratitude at recovering from his illness, but is there, perhaps, an intimation of death in the music's breathing phrases?

Written in F Lydian, using the notes F - G - A - B - C - D - E – F, including B natural instead of the usual B♭ in an F major scale, the music acquires a prayerful, hymnlike quality. Indeed, the Lydian mode is one of the old church modes of Gregorian chant. It was also historically associated with healing and recovery.

Beethoven marked passages within the movement *Neue Kraft fühlend* ("Feeling new strength"). Towards the end, the hymn melody returns and Beethoven wrote on the score that it should be played *Mit innigster Empfindung* ("with the most intimate feeling.")

The fourth movement, *alla marcia, assai vivace* (attacca) (at a march, very lively, to be played with no pause before the next movement), shakes off the reverie, as if the patient is taking that new strength and setting off on a vigorous walk. Yet there are hints of recent suffering.

The dark and turbulent finale of Opus 132, *allegro appassionato* (fast and passionate), nevertheless concludes with the wild joy of an undaunted human spirit.

Some credit this quartet as T. S. Eliot's impetus to write the Four Quartets, a series of four interlinked poems. He wrote that he was listening to the A-minor quartet: "I find it quite inexhaustible to study. There is a sort of heavenly or at least more than human gaiety about some of [Beethoven's] later things which one imagines … as the fruit of reconciliation and relief after immense suffering."

In his novel "Point Counter Point," Aldous Huxley refers to Op. 132 as does Colm Tóibín in his novel, "The Magician."

Beethoven, writes Swed, the L.A. Times critic, was "an unapologetic revolutionary, a beacon for musical reinvention in his late string quartets, his greatest music and among the most consequential music ever written."

Just before the pandemic arrived, the string quartet Brooklyn Rider commissioned five composers to write short movements in response to Opus 132. The project was called "Healing Modes."

— Solange De Santis

About the Artists

The **Balourdet Quartet** is appearing in a return engagement with Friends of Music Concerts and is an enthusiastic participant in FOMC's Partnerships in Education program, coaching music students in Westchester County public schools at no cost to the school district.

Friends of Music Concerts is delighted that the quartet at this concert is also highlighting their just-released album, "Strange Machines," which includes the Paul Novak composition.

Acclaimed for its vibrant energy and emotional depth, the Balourdet Quartet creates "a world where memory and transformation coexist" (Seen and Heard International). Described as "an ensemble unafraid to show its personality" (The Strad), the quartet was awarded the 2024 Avery Fisher Career Grant as well as Chamber Music America's 2024 Cleveland Quartet Award. In 2026 the Balourdet Quartet was named the inaugural fellow of the Resonance String Quartet Fellowship.

Highlights of the 2025–26 season include performances at Carnegie Hall, the Smithsonian Museum, Boston's Celebrity Series and La Jolla Music Society. The Balourdet collaborates with leading artists of our time including Yo-Yo Ma, Marc-André Hamelin, James Ehnes, Misha Dichter, Simone Dinnerstein, Zuill Bailey, and the Dover, Pacifica, and Ying Quartets.

In the 2026-27 season so far, the Balourdet has played with circus performers at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival in Massachusetts and appeared at Toronto Summer Music. The group is highly active on social media – as witnessed by cellist Russell Houston losing a spicy chicken wing-eating contest to a member of the Telegraph Quartet while the Poiesis Quartet provides accompaniment.

Deeply committed to community engagement, the Balourdet creates programs that "inspire their creativity" (Seattle Times)—a core part of its mission—through ongoing residencies with the Seattle Chamber Music Society and the Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle. Their "infectious spirit" (Chicago Classical Review) resonates with audiences in diverse settings, from breweries to schools.

The Balourdet is also making a "positive impact" (Seattle Times) through its work with Seattle's Memory Hub, co-designing music-based programming for people living with memory loss. In collaboration with the University of Washington, the Ensemble is conducting research aimed at developing a practical blueprint for arts and health initiatives worldwide.

Collaboration lies at the heart of the Quartet's work, and its members regularly lead workshops on teamwork and leadership for entrepreneurs, and work with conservatory students and amateur musicians nationwide in activities ranging from masterclasses to interdisciplinary programs where music intersects with topics ranging from art history to business and the sciences.

The Quartet was formed in 2018 at the Taos School of Music, where its members bonded around Chef Antoine Balourdet's table, inspired by his joie de vivre. They later named the ensemble in tribute to him, honoring his generosity and spirit of friendship.

After developing further at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, the Balourdet held prestigious graduate residency positions at the New England Conservatory and Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, where the ensemble earned top prizes at the Banff, Borciani, and Nielsen International String Quartet Competitions, won the Gold Medal at the Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition, received the Chamber Music Award from the National Federation of Music Clubs, and was honored with Stanford University's John Lad Prize.

In 2021, it received the Grand Prize at New York's Concert Artists Guild Competition, which included joint management by Concert Artists Guild in the United States and Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in the United Kingdom and Europe.

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