

69<sup>th</sup> Concert Series 2022-23



FRIENDS *of* MUSIC

is pleased to present

**The Emerson  
String Quartet**

**Eugene Drucker, violin**

**Philip Setzer, violin**

**Lawrence Dutton, viola**

**Paul Watkins, cello**

Saturday, September 17, 2022. 8:00 pm

Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York



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**Who We Are**

Friends of Music Concerts, Inc. is an award-winning, non-profit, volunteer organization now celebrating its 69th season of showcasing, right here in Westchester, artists chosen from among the finest in today's diverse world of chamber music. Additionally, our Partners 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.

**In order to help sustain what one of our artists called this “legendary series,” we would welcome people who can join the volunteers listed above, either as Board members or equally valued off-Board committee members. People we are looking for include, but are not limited to, those with writing/publishing production and/or fund development skills. Call us at 914-861-5080 or contact us on our website (see below); we can explore the possibilities together.**

**Acknowledgments**

We have been proud to be a grantee of ArtsWestchester with funding made possible by Westchester County government with the support of County Executive George Latimer, the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), the Rea Foundation, and the Bergen Foundation. Additional support has been received from many friends of Friends of Music, including subscribers and other ticket holders listed in this program.\* If you, too, can contribute in this way, please send your gifts to Friends of Music Concerts, Inc., P.O. Box 675, Millwood, NY 10546.

# Program

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## **String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 12**

*Adagio no troppo – Allegro non tardante*

*Canzonetta. Allegretto*

*Andante espressivo*

*Molto allegro e vivace*

**Felix Mendelssohn**

(1809-1847)

## **String Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 51, No. 1**

*Allegro*

*Romanze: Poco adagio*

*Allegretto molto moderato e comodo*

*Allegro*

**Johannes Brahms**

(1833-1897)

## **Intermission**

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## **Lyric for String Quartet**

**George T. Walker**

(1922-2018)

## **String Quartet in A-flat Major, Op. 105**

*Adagio a mon troppo – Allegro appassionato*

*Molto vivace*

*Lento e molto cantabile*

*Finale: Allegro non tanto*

**Antonín Dvořák**

(1841-1904)

Next concert

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**Sunday, October 9, at 3:00 pm.** Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

**Jeremy Denk, piano.**

Program: Ravel's Sonatine; Mozart's Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310; Ravel's Gaspard de la Nuit; J.S. Bach's Toccata in F-sharp minor, BWV 910; Missy Mazzoli's Heartbreaker; Ligeti's The Devil's Staircase; and Beethoven's Piano Sonata in A-flat Major Op. 110.

# Program notes

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## String Quartet No. 1 in E-flat Major, Op. 12

Felix Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn was a musical prodigy who as a little boy wrote very mature compositions. The young composer's grandfather was Moses Mendelssohn, the Jewish philosopher of the Enlightenment who was immortalized in Lessing's 1783 play *Nathan the Wise*, and his father was a wealthy banker. When his family learned that the boy was a genius, they spared nothing to nurture his artistic maturity. Musicales were held on alternate Sunday mornings in the Mendelssohn house in Berlin, and often were attended by important touring performers who were passing through the Prussian capital. There always was chamber music, sometimes an orchestra, occasionally even an opera. The guests frequently performed and, almost every time, young Felix had composed a work to be included in their program.

Before Mendelssohn turned twenty he had completed, in addition to his first two string quartets, three piano quartets, a string octet, and his first viola quintet. His admiration of Beethoven's late quartets, which he found to be spiritual, intellectual, and technical treasures, is evident in this **Quartet in E-flat Major**, written in 1829 not all that long after Beethoven's death. It has a broad dramatic compass, for the most part following established forms and structures. But in giving the first violin recitative-like passages in the first, third, and fourth movements, the composer creates a personal expression that is definitely untraditional.

The first movement's slow introduction, *Adagio non troppo*, has been described as a clear paraphrase of the opening of Beethoven's "Harp" Quartet, a kind of homage and farewell to the master composer. Other echoes of Beethoven's quartet are evident in the main body of the movement, *Allegro non tardante*, as well. (However, Mendelssohn's music in this work differs from that of Beethoven because it is gentler and, although sometimes fiery, it never has Beethoven's muscularity.) Later, in the development, when traditionally all the themes of the movement would have been voiced, the second violin introduces a dark theme that appears again both near the movement's end and in the finale of the entire work.

The second movement, *Canzonetta. Allegretto*, replaces the expected scherzo. This amiable movement has had some independent popularity; it often is played as an encore. It is based on a sixteenth century dance-like song in ABA form. It has daintiness, charm, and transparency, and has been judged by some to be one of Mendelssohn's finest works. Its elfin feeling is enhanced by short, quick bow strokes and pizzicato. The main (A) section contrasts with the Trio.

The short third movement, *Andante espressivo*, begins with the first violin singing a passionate, intimate aria, *con fuoco* (with fire). There follows another vocal sounding passage, also marked *con fuoco*, that covers a large emotional range. A tender coda brings brief calm that is broken by the two opening chords of the spirited Finale, *Molto allegro e vivace*, which follows the third movement without a break. Those two chords give the music an immediate sense of drama. It is stormy and unsettled; themes from the first movement reappear throughout, with its coda being a near complete recapitulation of that from the first movement. The musicologist John Horton put it well: "The coda of this finale is one of Mendelssohn's purest and most radiant passages of quartet writing, leaving the listener with a wonderful sense of contentment."

## String Quartet in C minor, Op. 51, No. 1

Johannes Brahms

Brahms's views about the importance of the string quartet as the ultimate expression of the composer's craft may explain why he had written twenty or more of them over two decades before he permitted the first two, those in in Opus 51, to be published. The long delay had two causes. One was the burden of following Beethoven. The other was that Brahms was seeking a way, using just four instruments, to deal with the complex polyphony that was an inherent part of his musical thought. The larger grouping of the sextet in the 1860's had given him a satisfactory medium, but he had trouble with a quintet. Finally, in the 1870's, he felt that at last he knew what to do with four players; his Op. 51 quartets are works in which fullness of expression is not diminished by economy of means.

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Until his late thirties Brahms lived his life as though he were to be forever young physically spiritually, and artistically. He had no fixed residence but moved from one to another of the many towns that supported Germany's decentralized musical life, trying his new pieces for his friends and playing occasional concerts. In 1865 in Switzerland, he met a group of wealthy amateurs who admired his work and organized a private concert. Among them was Doctor Theodor Billroth, an eminent surgeon who also was an excellent pianist and violist. He and Brahms became fast friends; when Billroth moved to Vienna, Brahms, too, relocated there. The two played piano duets together. Nearly all the chamber music Brahms composed in Vienna was first heard privately at Billroth's residence, with Billroth, often a member of the performing ensemble, providing informed and honest musical judgements. Ultimately Brahms dedicated his first two quartets to him.

Brahms completed his Op. 51 quartets in 1873 during his vacation in the countryside not far from Munich. Musician-friends came from the city to visit, and tried them out. At summer's end, Brahms delivered them to his publisher, and in September Clara Schumann, his musical confidante and trusted friend, wrote him, "I am delighted that you are getting such a good fee for your quartets. Now be careful how you invest your money." The Hellmesberger Quartet gave the first public performance of this quartet in Vienna on December 11, 1873.

The **Quartet in C minor** is a somber but passionate piece. A bold arpeggio over a throbbing accompaniment sets the heroic tone for its first movement, *Allegro*. In the strict sonata form, each subsequent theme develops and expands logically from the last in Brahms's familiar expressive language, complex and convoluted, with tense drama. The opening theme is referred to in all the later movements except the third. In the second movement it is transformed into the principal subject of a calm *Romanze: Poco adagio*, a simple sounding three-part song of great beauty in the distant key of A-flat. The character of this movement belies its complex, highly organized structure.

The third movement, *Allegretto molto moderato e comodo*, may be interpreted as a gracious dance or as an uneasy, sinister, shadowy one. The main theme, in an unusual duple meter, is derived from the middle section of the first theme of the first movement. The contrasting central trio section is made up of a folk-like tune in Ländler style, imitating an Austrian peasant dance, colorfully accompanied by unusual sounds for the open strings of the second violin and viola. In the energetic finale, *Allegro*, Brahms refers again to the third movement, but the musical materials are most closely related to a section of the first movement's main theme. The movement is presented with a concentrated force that recalls and balances the opening movement.

## Lyric for String Quartet

George Theophilus Walker

Born in Washington, DC, the pianist, composer, and organist George T. Walker came from a family that loved music. His father was a physician and self-taught pianist, his mother oversaw his first piano lessons when he was just five years old, and his sister, Frances, was a concert pianist. He attended the preparatory division of Howard University's music department; admitted to the Oberlin Conservatory of Music at the age of fourteen, he graduated from there at the age of eighteen. He continued his piano studies with Rudolph Serkin at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, studying orchestration there with Gian-Carlo Menotti. He made his debut at Town Hall in New York in 1943, and later toured the United States and Europe, when he studied at the American Academy in Fontainebleau. After returning to the U.S., he received his Ph.D. from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY.

He taught at the Universities of Colorado and Delaware, at Rutgers University as chair of its music department, at Smith College, and at the Peabody Conservatory. Among the many grants he received were those from the Fulbright, Guggenheim, Rockefeller, and Bok Foundations.

Walker published more than 75 works, receiving commissions from many important orchestras and institutions in the United States and England. In 1996, he became the first Black composer to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music; it was for **Lilacs for Voice and Orchestra**, a composition commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

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The famous **Lyric for Strings**, written in 1946, was dedicated to his grandmother, a formerly enslaved person who died before its completion. Originally titled “Lament,” it was introduced that year in a radio concert by the Curtis Institute’s student orchestra conducted by Seymour Lipkin. In March, 1947, it received its professional premiere under the title “Adagio” by the National Gallery Orchestra under Richard Bales in the annual American Music Festival in Washington. The composer subsequently changed the title to Lyric for Strings.

Originally the second movement of Walker’s String Quartet No. 1, **Lyric for String Quartet** takes the form of a single short movement, *Molto Adagio*, simple but expressive. In it, the various string instruments enter one at a time until an ensemble has been created. Descending motives and sustained notes create an initial mournful mood. The motion increases with contrapuntal lines weaving their way over a sustained pedal tone until gentle chords intervene for a bit until the interwoven lyrical lines return, with the music reaching an emotional climax. Then, quiet chords return, and gentle earlier lines are repeated. The piece ends in peaceful resignation.

### **String Quartet in A-flat Major, Op. 105**

Antonín Dvorák

Antonín Dvorák’s father was a village innkeeper and butcher who hoped to pass his trade on to his son, but the young man turned instead to music. He took up the violin and organ and, at age sixteen, left home to study in Prague. Five years later, having mastered several instruments, he joined the orchestra of the Czech Provisional Theatre as a violist, remaining there until he was thirty. He soon began to test his creative powers with extended compositions in traditional classical style. Chamber music had an important place in Dvorák’s life; many of his earliest works were quartets and quintets, modeled after Beethoven and Schubert, that he played with his colleagues while developing his craft.

This quartet is his last, written when he had become one of the world’s most honored composers. In 1892 he was appointed as the director of the new National Conservatory in New York, where he remained until 1895. During that time, he wrote some of the best music of his mature years, e.g. The New World Symphony, the Cello Concerto (Op. 104), the American String Quartet, and the String Quartet in E-flat Major (Op. 97). Despite his enthusiasm for the young society on our continent, he knew that his art was rooted in his homeland; after spending a five-month leave in Prague in 1894, he decided not to stay in America much longer. He began this string quartet back in the States in March 1885, but put it aside when he returned to Prague in April.

When he began to teach again at the Prague Conservatory that fall, his creative urge returned. In less than a month he wrote the Quartet in G Major that was published as his Op. 106, and in December he completed this one. It became a fresh, joyous score that expressed his delight at being home.

The introduction of the first movement, *Adagio ma non troppo*, is followed by the main section, *Allegro appassionato*, that seems to be an idyllic expression of Dvorák’s joy. The second movement, *Molto vivace*, is a scherzo in the manner of a *furiant*, a vigorously athletic, energetic Czech folk dance with a contrasting middle section that is a calm, relaxed nature picture. Next comes a long-lined slow movement, *Lento e molto cantabile*. Its first and last parts are radiantly lyrical; the middle is gently agitated. The *Finale: Allegro non tanto*, is a long, lively, freely developed movement, rich in rhythmic and dance melodies that rise to a joyous climax.

---notes provided by Susan Halpern.

# About the Artists

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Over the more than four decades since it first formed at Juilliard in 1976, the **Emerson String Quartet** has maintained its status as one of the world's premier chamber ensembles. "With musicians like this," wrote a reviewer for *The Times (London)*, "there must be 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. In 2015 the Quartet received the Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award, Chamber Music America's highest honor, in recognition of its significant and lasting contribution to the chamber music field. The Quartet collaborates with some of today's most esteemed composers to premiere new works, keeping the string quartet form alive and relevant. The group has partnered in performance with such stellar soloists as Renée Fleming, Barbara Hannigan, Evgeny Kissin, Emanuel Ax, and Yefim Bronfman, to name a few.

The Quartet's extensive discography includes the complete string quartets of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bartók, Webern, and Shostakovich, as well as multi-CD sets of the major works of Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Dvorák. In 2018, Deutsche Grammophon issued a box of the Emerson Complete Recordings on the label. In October 2020, the group released a recording of Schumann's three string quartets for the Pentatone label. In the preceding year, the Quartet joined forces with GRAMMY-winning pianist Evgeny Kissin to release their debut collaborative album for Deutsche Grammophon, recorded live at a sold-out Carnegie Hall concert in 2018.

The Emerson String Quartet, which takes its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, was one of the first quartets to have its violinists alternate in the first chair position. The Quartet has balanced busy performing careers with a commitment to teaching, as they serve as Quartet-in-Residence at Stony Brook University.

As we have noted elsewhere, tonight marks the 18<sup>th</sup> time that the Emerson has appeared on our series; because the group is disbanding after their final concert in Alice Tully Hall in October 2023, it is their last hurrah with us. We are grateful for our years together, and wish them well as they continue to perform individually and to mentor young musicians on the cusps of their own careers.



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