

Wednesday Evening, December 6, 2023, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

Juilliard String Quartet

Areta Zhulla and **Ronald Copes**, *Violins*

Molly Carr, *Viola*

Astrid Schween, *Cello*

With **Itzhak Perlman**, *Violin*

Part of the Daniel Saidenberg Faculty Recital Series

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) **String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135**
(1826)

Allegretto

Vivace

Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo

“Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß.” Grave, ma non troppo tratto (“Muss es sein?”)—

Allegro (“Es muss sein!”)—Grave, ma non troppo tratto—Allegro

TYSON GHOLSTON DAVIS* (b. 2000) **Two Fragments From *Amorphous Figures***
(2022; New York premiere)

Canonic Circles (Variation 4)

Episode 2

Intermission

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-97) **String Quintet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 111** (1890)

Allegro non troppo, ma con brio

Adagio

Un poco Allegretto

Vivace ma non troppo presto

ITZHAK PERLMAN, ARETA ZHULLA, *Violins*

MOLLY CARR, RONALD COPES, *Violas*

ASTRID SCHWEEN, *Cello*

*Juilliard composition student (*Jerome L. Greene Fellowship*)

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, including an intermission

Alice Tully Hall

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Notes on the Program

by James M. Keller

String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: probably December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Ludwig van Beethoven worked on his Op. 135 string quartet, his last complete quartet, during summer 1826. In the opening movement, the viola proclaims a succinct motif to which the other instruments respond with the musical equivalent of a raised eyebrow. These figures are developed (along with other motifs) in various permutations and contexts within the general design of a sonata-allegro form. The second movement leads from a giddy game of musical tag to a practically untamed explosion of hysterical merriment in which the first violin lets loose like a 5-year-old stoked up on birthday cake—and then back again to the game of tag. Beethoven referred to D-flat Major as “the key of sentiment,” and that spirit certainly reigns over the third-movement cavatina. Its tone of profound nostalgia maintains through a set of four quiet variations. This movement seems to have been an afterthought, as Beethoven initially imagined his quartet as a three-movement structure.

Op. 135's finale is as famous for its words as for its music. This being a string quartet, the words, of course, are not spoken—or, rather, they are “spoken” privately by Beethoven to his performers, since they are entered on the score itself, with the implication that they not be explicitly performed, but as a thematic alert for when they follow in the movement proper. “Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß” (The hard-won resolution) he inscribes by way of a preface. Then, above an unassuming three-note motif which seems to end in an ascending

question mark, Beethoven writes “Muss es sein?” (Must it be?). He follows with the answer: “Es muss sein! Es muss sein!” (It must be! It must be!).

Beethoven's biographer Alexander Wheelock Thayer reported that the words represent nothing more than the composer's poking fun at someone who he felt wanted to get something for nothing. Ignaz Dembscher, a government official, wanted to borrow the performance parts of Beethoven's earlier Op. 130 quartet so he could include the work in a private concert; but because Dembscher had not attended the premiere and had not paid an initial subscription for the piece, the composer was not inclined to provide copies. Beethoven's friend Karl Holz, playing the middleman, told Dembscher that if he paid Beethoven the full subscription cost of 50 florins, he could have a copy of the score. “Muss es sein?” asked Dembscher. “Es muss sein,” replied Holz. Beethoven was so amused hearing about this transaction that he wrote a little canon to memorialize the event: its words were “Es muss sein, es muss sein, Ja, ja, ja, ja! Heraus mit dem Beutel!” (It must be, it must be, yes, yes, yes, yes! Get out your wallet!) Beethoven, not one to undervalue his own jokes, apparently couldn't get this little jest out of his mind. So here it is again, as the theme of that canon pops up to head the last movement of his quartet—a prominent spot, to be sure.

Two Fragments From *Amorphous Figures*

TYSON GHOLSTON DAVIS

Born: August 22, 2000, in Fayetteville, North Carolina

Tyson Gholston Davis (BM '23, composition), now studying in Juilliard's master's program, has already fielded 25 commissions, including from the Albany Symphony, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and New York New Music Ensemble, and is also working on commissions from Eighth Blackbird and

Da Capo Chamber Players, among others. From 2019 through 2021, he wrote a series of 12 works, each titled *Tableau*, for as many unaccompanied solo instruments. He has composed twice previously for string quartet; his String Quartet No. 1 was premiered in 2018 by the Attacca Quartet and his *Nine Inkblots (After H. Rorschach)* was recorded in 2021 by JACK Quartet. In 2019, the National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America and conductor Antonio Pappano premiered his work *Delicate Tension*, commissioned by the American Embassy in Berlin for the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall; it was performed in Berlin, Edinburgh, and Hamburg.

Davis is often inspired by visual artworks, specifically paintings by Stanton Macdonald-Wright, Morgan Russell, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, and Helen Frankenthaler, the last a particular obsession. Her paintings inspired not only *Amorphous Figures* but also Davis' *Grey Fireworks* (2022, for violin and piano), *Pink Atmospheres* (2023, for soprano saxophone and piano), and *Desert Pass* (2023, for wind quintet), as well as further compositions currently in progress.

Amorphous Figures (String Quartet No. 2) was commissioned for the Juilliard String Quartet by a consortium of three organizations: Da Camera of Houston, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and Chamber Music Cincinnati. The Juilliard String Quartet premiered it May 17, 2023, at the Terrace Theater of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and since then has performed it in eight U.S. and European cities. Davis provided this comment about the work:

Amorphous Figures (String Quartet No. 2) (2022) is a work written in response to *Jacob's Ladder* (1957), a painting by the American abstract expressionist Helen Frankenthaler. I first discovered

this work in 2019, when I had been making frequent visits to the Museum of Modern Art. Frankenthaler's color palette and her sublime sense of space and movement immediately drew me to the canvas. I began to see musical characteristics of her abstraction. The hues dance around one another in a way that they begin to morph into one another subtly. The soft edges of these oil paints thinned with turpentine aid this quality of variations I found. With these themes in mind, musical elements such as motivic development and developing variation allowed me to begin my sketches of this work. *Amorphous Figures* consists of continuous variations that gradually expand on the melodic and gestural content of the work.

Davis has extracted two sections to stand independently as Two Fragments From *Amorphous Figures*. The first is Canonic Circles (Variation 4), which is marked in the score as "floating, serene, spacious." It is followed by Episode 2 ("Sospeso; senza tempo"—Suspended; without tempo).

String Quintet in G Major, Op. 111

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born: May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany

Died: April 3, 1897, in Vienna

The genealogy of the first movement of Johannes Brahms' G-major quintet reaches to spring 1890, when he sketched its principal material as a draft for what he envisioned to be his Fifth Symphony. It's easy to imagine an orchestra playing at the outset. The opening theme is introduced by the cello, which must project through an overlay in which the four upper instrumental parts play vigorous, fluttering chords (*forte*, no less) that threaten to obscure the deep tones of the melody. The composer's trusted violinist friend Joseph Joachim begged him to thin out the

texture, and Brahms did experiment with ways to do this before finally deciding to stick to his guns and retain the thick, energetic writing he had envisioned all along. Robert Haven Schauffler, a cellist who published a biography of the composer in 1933, drew on personal experience when he described this passage: "One of two things happens. Either the Master's directions are swept aside, or the agonized cellist saws so desperately that one hears considerably more resin, sheep-gut, copper wire, horse-tail, and bow-wood than Brahms." During a rehearsal, Brahms's friend Max Kalbeck said that the first movement suggested to him images of the Prater, the principal public park of Vienna. "You've guessed it," exclaimed Brahms, "and with all the pretty girls there, right?" Surely the "Prater" passage must be the second theme and its answer—lyrical, carefree, and incorporating Brahms's signature rhythmic alternation of two and three beats. "Never has Viennese Gemüthlichkeit, even in its supreme perfect and touching expression than in this ... expectant question and confident answer, in which happiness and sadness mingle as they always mingle in simple hearts"—so wrote Daniel Gregory Mason in his analytical study of Brahms' chamber music, also published in the composer's centennial year of 1933.

The second movement, an Adagio in D Minor, injects a more somber note, culmi-

nating in a dark close on the lowest strings of all the instruments. The ensuing *Un poco allegretto* inhabits the graceful, emotionally ambiguous world of Brahms' piano intermezzos. The specter of Schubert hovers over this movement, too, especially in the Trio section's folksy tunes and sleight-of-hand modulations. A broader sense of humor launches the finale in the decidedly "wrong" key of B Minor, but through an ingenious harmonic progression everyone lands emphatically on G Major, reaffirming the expected—indeed, necessary—tonic. At the end, a coda lets loose with a hearty, animated Hungarian dance, or perhaps a Slavonic polka, with off-balance phrases of five measures each.

After so buoyant a finale to so upbeat a work, it comes as a surprise to realize that the 57-year-old Brahms thought of this as his farewell to composition. Signing off on final changes before the score was processed into print, he attached a letter to his publisher: "With this note you can take leave of my music, because it is high time to stop." Fortunately, succeeding scores would turn him into a liar.

James M. Keller, the longtime program annotator of the San Francisco Symphony and for 25 years program annotator of the New York Philharmonic, is the author of Chamber Music: A Listener's Guide (Oxford University Press).



Erin Beliano

About the Juilliard String Quartet

With unparalleled artistry and enduring vigor, the Juilliard String Quartet (JSQ) continues to inspire audiences around the world. Founded in 1946, the ensemble draws on a deep and vital engagement to the classics while embracing the mission of championing new works, a vibrant combination of the familiar and the daring. Each performance of the quartet is a unique experience, bringing together the four members' profound understanding, total commitment, and unceasing curiosity in sharing the wonders of the string quartet literature. In 2022—following in the footsteps of her mentor Roger Tapping, who passed away earlier that year—Molly Carr (BM '09, MM '11, viola) joined the quartet, which also includes Areta Zhulla (Pre-College '04; BM '08, MM '10, violin), Ronald Copes, and Astrid Schween (Pre-College '80; BM '84, MM '85, cello). In the 2022-23 season, the JSQ performed world premieres, including two works written for the group by Jörg Widmann (advanced certificate '95, clarinet), composed to be performed alongside late quartets by Beethoven, which were premiered at the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music. Other season highlights included tours with violinist Itzhak Perlman

and pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet performing Chausson's Concert for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet, culminating in a concert at Carnegie Hall; two European tours including stops in Italy, Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic; and concerts in Philadelphia, Detroit, San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver, and Napa Valley. In 2021, adding to the JSQ's celebrated discography, an album of works by Beethoven, Bartók, and Dvořák was released by Sony Classical. Sony Masterworks also released a JSQ catalog release (*The Early Juilliard Recordings*) the same year. In 2018, the JSQ released an album on Sony featuring the world premiere recording of Mario Davidovsky's *Fragments* (2016), together with Beethoven's Quartet Op. 95 and Bartók's Quartet No. 1. Sony Classical's 2014 reissue of the quartet's landmark recordings of the first four Elliott Carter string quartets along with the 2013 recording of Carter's fifth quartet traces a remarkable period in the evolution of both the composer and the ensemble. The quartet's recordings of the Bartók and Schoenberg quartets as well as those of Debussy, Ravel, and Beethoven have won Grammy Awards; in 2011, the JSQ became the first classical music ensemble to receive

a lifetime achievement award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. Devoted master teachers, the members of the JSQ offer classes and open rehearsals when on tour. The JSQ is string quartet in residence at Juilliard and its members are all sought-after teachers on the string and chamber music faculties. Each May, they host the five-day internationally recognized Juilliard String Quartet Seminar. During the summer, the quartet works closely on string quartet repertoire with Fellows at the Tanglewood Music Center.



Itzhak Perlman

Undeniably the reigning virtuoso of the violin, Itzhak Perlman (Pre-College '63; '68, faculty 1999-present) enjoys superstar sta-

tus rarely afforded a classical musician. Beloved for his charm and humanity as well as his talent, he is treasured by audiences throughout the world who respond not only to his remarkable artistry but also to his irrepressible joy for making music. Last month marked the 65th anniversary of Perlman's U.S. debut and appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, on November 2, 1958. The 2015–16 season commemorated his 70th birthday with three album releases and worldwide concert tours. Over the past two decades, Perlman has become more actively involved in music education through his work with the Perlman Music Program and at Juilliard. He has been honored with 16 Grammy, 4 Emmys, a Kennedy Center Honor, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2015, President Obama presented Perlman with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, given to individuals who have made meritorious contributions to security, world peace, cultural pursuits, and other significant public and private endeavors.

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