



PRINCETON
UNIVERSITY
CONCERTS

Dover String Quartet



2022 Spring Season

Welcome back to Princeton University Concerts!
We've missed you!

Thursday, April 7, 2022 at 7:30PM • Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

DOVER STRING QUARTET

Joel Link, violin

Bryan Lee, violin

Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, viola

Camden Shaw, cello

Music of Gratitude and Remembrance

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

(1732–1809)

String Quartet in D Major, Op. 64, No. 5 “The Lark” (1790)

Allegro moderato

Adagio cantabile

Menuetto: Allegretto

Finale: Vivace

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

(1906–1975)

String Quartet No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83 (1949)

Allegretto

Andantino

Allegretto (attacca)

Allegretto

INTERMISSION

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809–1847)

String Quartet No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 44, No. 3 (1838)

Allegro vivace

Scherzo. Assai leggiero vivace

Adagio non troppo

Molto allegro con fuoco

*The Dover Quartet appears by arrangement with the Curtis Institute of Music,
where it serves as the Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble-in-Residence.*

PLEASE NOTE: Wearing a mask over your mouth and nose is required while inside the venue. Thank you for keeping our community safe.



About the Program

By Lucy Caplan © 2022 • Program Annotator

Lucy Caplan is a Lecturer on History and Literature at Harvard University. In 2016 she received the Rubin Prize for Music Criticism.

In Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs*, the character of Peisetaerus recounts the fable of the Lark. The Lark was the first of all birds to be born, the story goes—born even before the Earth itself—and she was distraught when her father died. Having no place to bury him, she waited for days before she eventually buried him in her own head. This was the origin of the bird's distinctive crest, and this was also the origin of memory.

Haydn's "Lark" quartet, one of the works on this evening's program, evokes the bird's lilting song rather than its appearance, yet it feels apt to begin with this fable given the program's broader focus on "Music of Gratitude and Remembrance." The connections linking music to memory run deep and wide. They are especially meaningful across the many global cultural traditions in which music's role is understood to be fundamentally social: from the storytelling role of the West African griot, who serves as a keeper of cultural memory, to the narrative ballads sung by folk artists in rural Appalachia. Not unlike fables, these musical traditions are creative works which also serve as a way to preserve and transmit important cultural values and ideas.

“ The works on tonight's program take an oblique approach to what it means to express memory through music. Using abstract musical language, they circle around ideas of remembrance and gratitude via gesture, allusion, and mood.

In a sense, then, the Western classical genre of the string quartet seems a rather unlikely place to encounter music associated with remembrance. String quartets, as a rule, do not tell a straightforward tale about the past, nor do they pass down specific stories from generation to generation. Rather, the works on tonight's program take a more oblique approach to what it means to express memory through music. Using abstract musical language, they circle around ideas of remembrance and gratitude via gesture, allusion, and mood. A mosaic of memory emerges—one in which music offers a fleeting and perpetually imperfect glimpse into the past.

Franz Joseph Haydn, String Quartet in D Major, Op. 64, No. 5 “The Lark” (1790)

We hear the song of the lark almost as soon as we begin. High-pitched and earnestly elegant, it is warmly supported by a foundation of staccato eighth notes. The wistful violin melody climbs across the quartet’s first movement, alighting from time to time to join the quartet’s three other players. In the slow movement, the music returns to a more earthbound register, grounded in a meditative serenity. The minuet that follows is full of vigorous grace notes and swingy accents; in the perpetual-motion fourth movement, all four musicians take flight. In their playful virtuosity, they seem to anticipate the fantastical, constantly ascendant music of Mendelssohn’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Haydn wrote this quartet, along with the five others which comprise Op. 64, during a moment of personal and professional change. For nearly three decades, he had worked at Esterházy Court, supported by royal patronage. He considered this secure position to be a sort of gilded cage: After spending a brief time away in Vienna, he lamented to a friend that he was “full of the memories of the glorious past. When will those days return?” If this was a somewhat humorous reference—the “glorious past” referred to a time mere weeks earlier—it also signaled Haydn’s real desire to alter his surroundings. That day came soon enough, when an unexpected leadership change at Esterházy in 1790 released him from his duties. This quartet was written just as Haydn departed for London, where he anticipated that he would be able to do exactly as he pleased. One might imagine that he identified somewhat with the soaring lark of the quartet’s nickname, grateful to be finally able to move freely throughout his world.

Dmitri Shostakovich, String Quartet No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83 (1949)

If Haydn felt himself to be somewhat constrained by the expectations bestowed upon a court musician, then Shostakovich faced far more consequential restrictions on his work and livelihood. He struggled to negotiate the mercurial political and cultural climate of Stalinist Russia, in which some of his music was welcomed with open arms and other work was attacked for being insufficiently laudatory of the state. These tensions came to a head in 1948, when Shostakovich, along with a number of other composers, was denounced as an insufficiently patriotic formalist. In the immediate aftermath of this proclamation, he kept much of his music under wraps, declining to perform new work in public. The Fourth Quartet was written during this period: Composed in 1949, it was not premiered until December 1953, several months after Stalin’s death.

Shostakovich characterized the quartet as music meant to honor and emulate Jewish folk traditions, while also memorializing the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. He explained, “Jewish folk music has made a most powerful impression on me. I never tire of delighting in it; it’s multifaceted, it can appear to be happy while it is tragic. It’s almost always laughter through tears....[But] this is not purely a musical issue, this is also a moral issue. The Jews became the most persecuted and defenseless people of Europe [during World War II]. It was a return to the Middle Ages. Jews became a symbol for me. All of man’s defenselessness was concentrated in them. After the war, I tried to convey that feeling in my music....That’s when I wrote the Violin Concerto, the Songs on *Jewish Folk Poetry*, and the Fourth Quartet.” While the veracity of Shostakovich’s memoirs has been contested (the author, musicologist Solomon Volkov, appears to have embellished significant portions in order to foreground his own anti-Soviet views), there is clearly some relationship between Jewish folk music and this quartet; it is also tempting to hear the piece as an expression of Shostakovich’s own sense of repression and persecution. The work begins with a songlike melody that is made strange by the composer’s characteristic refusal to stay in either a major or a minor key, instead lingering in an unsettling tonal ambiguity. The second movement, a plaintive waltz, seems to want to cry out before thinking better of it and retreating into quiet. The galloping energy at the outset of the third movement, propelled by an ostinato in the inner voices, soon gives way to expressive melodic solos for each instrument, all performed atop a vaguely menacing rhythmic pattern. Folksong-like melody returns in the fourth and final movement, once again evoking the tentative dance between anguish and restraint which defines the quartet as a whole.

Felix Mendelssohn, String Quartet No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 44, No. 3 (1838)

In stark contrast to the guarded ambivalence of Shostakovich’s music, Mendelssohn’s Quartet, Op. 44, No. 3 wears its heart on its sleeve. The joyous first movement bursts forth from an opening gesture of four sixteenth notes. Expansive in length, the rest of the movement teems with a momentum generated by a constant undercurrent of fast-moving sixteenth notes. The scherzo that follows is similarly propulsive: light on its feet even as it ventures into the minor-key shadows. The openhearted third movement lets the first violin sing, its plaintive melodies supported by a return to the sixteenth-note-laden accompaniment which characterized the first movement. Finally, there is an exuberant finale, whose virtuosic opening later gives way to occasional moments

of tranquility. There is a sense of return in this movement—not only to the musical gestures of this quartet’s earlier movements but also to the formal and structural qualities of earlier composers’ works in the genre.

Indeed, in this quartet and in much of his music, Mendelssohn casts a backward glance. A child prodigy—he composed two of his best-loved works, the Octet for Strings and the Overture to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, while still a teenager—he soaked up the musical influences of his youth. A deep admirer of the classical tradition exemplified by Haydn and Mozart and a devotee of Beethoven, he paid homage to these figures’ work in various ways. In this quartet, for instance, we can hear echoes of Haydn’s commitment to traditional forms, Mozart’s tender melodic writing, and Beethoven’s embrace of heroic character. The composite effect of this multifaceted engagement with the musical past, though, is something new: a sonic world that perches on the border between Classical and Romantic, marking out a new compositional voice.

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CONTEST ENTRIES DUE Thursday, April 21, 2022



About the *Artists*



DOVER STRING QUARTET

Named one of the greatest string quartets of the last 100 years by *BBC Music Magazine*, the GRAMMY® nominated Dover Quartet has followed a “practically meteoric” (*Strings magazine*) trajectory to become one of the most in-demand chamber ensembles in the world. In addition to its faculty role as the Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble-in-Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music, the Dover Quartet holds residencies with the Kennedy Center, Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, Artosphere, and Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival. The group’s awards include a stunning sweep of all prizes at the 2013

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Banff International String Quartet Competition, grand and first prizes at the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition, and prizes at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition. Its prestigious honors include the Avery Fisher Career Grant, Chamber Music America’s Cleveland Quartet Award, and Lincoln Center’s Hunt Family Award.

The Dover Quartet's active 2021–22 season includes world premiere performances of Marc Neikrug's Piano Quintet No. 2 at the Kennedy Center with pianist Haochen Zhang, Chris Rogerson's *Dream Sequence* for Santa Fe Pro Musica with pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, and Princeton's own Steven Mackey's theatrical musical work *Memoir* at Artosphere with arx duo and narrator Natalie Christa. Other artist collaborations include performances with the Escher String Quartet, harpist Bridget Kibbey, the Pavel Haas Quartet, and baritone Davóne Tines. The quartet has also recently collaborated with artists such as pianists Emanuel Ax and Inon Barnaton, violinist Ray Chen, bassist Edgar Meyer, clarinetist Anthony McGill, and the late pianist Peter Serkin.

Cedille Records released the second of three volumes of the quartet's recording of the Beethoven complete string quartets in October 2021. Their recording *Encores* was also released in 2021 on the Brooklyn Classical label. The quartet's GRAMMY® nominated recording *The Schumann Quartets* was released by Azica Records in 2019. Beyond performances, a documentary film *Strings Attached: On the Road with the Dover Quartet*, has delighted audiences since its release in summer 2020.

The members of the Dover Quartet studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, where they were mentored extensively by violinists Shmuel Ashkenasi, Kenneth Goldsmith, Joseph Silverstein, and Arnold Steinhardt; violists James Dunham and Michael Tree; cellists Norman Fischer and Peter Wiley. It was at Curtis that the Dover Quartet formed, and its name pays tribute to *Dover Beach* by fellow Curtis alumnus Samuel Barber.

Tonight's performance marks the Dover Quartet's Princeton University Concerts debut. They will return to campus on April 26, 2022 under the auspices of the Department of Music when they premiere Steven Mackey's *Memoir*, a new music theater work.

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2022

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