Brentano String Quartet
Dear Friends,

“The world’s most celebrated musicians among friends”—Princeton University Concerts’ tagline rings especially true tonight as we welcome back the Brentano String Quartet to Richardson Auditorium. Having served as Princeton University’s former Edward T. Cone Ensemble-in-Residence from 1999 to 2014, this deeply beloved ensemble will forever hold a special space in our community. The thoughtful program that they bring tonight extends this concept of musical friendship, fostering a musical dialogue from 19th century spirituals to the present day—including a work arranged by Princeton University Department of Music Professor Steven Mackey.

Music cannot exist in isolation—instead it is intricately interwoven into the fabric created by everyone who engages with it. Thank you for being a part of that vital communal spirit, and for your friendship.

Warmly,

Marna Seltzer
Director of Princeton University Concerts
Thursday, November 3, 2022 at 7:30PM • Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET
MARK STEINBERG Violin • SERENA CANIN Violin
MISHA AMORY Viola • NINA LEE Cello

Dvořák and the American Identity
The quartet kindly requests that you reserve applause until the conclusion of each half.

SPRITUAL | “Deep River”

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)
String Quartet No. 14 in A-flat Major, Op. 105 (1895)
Adagio, ma non troppo—Allegro appassionato
Molto vivace
Lento e molto cantabile
Allegro non tanto

INTERMISSION

DVOŘÁK
“Lento” from String Quartet No. 12 in F Major, Op. 96, “American” (1893)

WILLIAM GRANT STILL (1895–1978)
“The Quiet One” from the Lyric Quartet, “Musical Portraits of Three Friends” (1960)

CHARLES IVES (1874–1954)
“Prelude: Allegro” from String Quartet No. 1, Op. 57, “From the Salvation Army” (1902)

GEORGE WALKER (1922–2018)
Lyric for Strings (1946)

ROBERT PETE WILLIAMS (1914–1980)
“I’ve Grown So Ugly” (arr. Steven Mackey, b. 1956)

SPRITUAL | “Go Down Moses—Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”
In 1893, just before the premiere of his New World Symphony, Antonín Dvořák made the now famous proclamation that “the new American school of music must strike its roots deeply into its own soil...I am now satisfied that inspiration for truly national music might be derived from the Negro melodies or Indian chants.” Dvořák’s words have often been taken to gesture toward a more racially inclusive future for American classical music, one which acknowledges and celebrates the indelible contributions of Black and Indigenous musicians.

That future has not yet come into being. Throughout the twentieth century, and into the present, racism and white supremacy have continued to shape the experiences of composers of color. William Grant Still lamented in 1950 that “There is resentment against a Negro composer who doggedly insists that he can and will write abstract music of a non-racial nature. At the same time, if the Negro composer writes racial music, his opponents will say [white composers like] John Powell and George Gershwin did it better!” Still’s words identify a fundamental limitation of Dvořák’s vision, which insists upon the use of Black musical material without necessarily making space for Black composers. Half a century later, George Walker asserted in a 2000 interview that “Racism is alive and well in classical music.” While the systematic exclusion of Black composers might once have been viewed as a matter of “benign neglect,” Walker continued, “today, it is better described as arrogant disdain.”

Two decades later, musicians and cultural institutions are reckoning with this history of exclusion in a variety of ways. This evening’s program features the

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Lucy Caplan is a Lecturer on History and Literature at Harvard University and a winner of the Rubin Prize for Music Criticism.
music of Walker and Still—widely celebrated, yet still underperformed—alongside that of Dvořák; it also includes examples of African American spirituals, one of the traditions that inspired Dvořák’s commentary. Music by other American art music composers, which similarly draws upon popular and vernacular song, rounds out the program. These works offer a collective sense that “the American identity” is inseparable from the histories of racial exclusion that have so often fractured that seemingly unified term; they also remind us of the remarkable breadth and beauty of the traditions that comprise American sound.
Spirituals, “Deep River” and “Go Down Moses—Swing Low, Sweet Chariot”

Spirituals—the vast body of sacred songs which originated among enslaved people in the United States—vary in tone, from the mournful (they are sometimes known as “sorrow songs”) to the resolutely hopeful. Whatever their mood, they are powerful. Indeed, abolitionist Frederick Douglass once wrote that “the mere hearing of these songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject would do.” After the Civil War, songs including “Deep River,” “Go Down, Moses,” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” were preserved and popularized by groups like the Fisk Jubilee Singers and concert singers including Harry T. Burleigh, a renowned baritone and composer who worked closely with Dvořák during their time at the National Conservatory of Music in New York City.

Antonín Dvořák, String Quartet No. 14 in A-flat Major, Op. 105 (1895)

“Lento” from String Quartet No. 12 in F Major, Op. 96, “American” (1893)

Dvořák’s Quartet No. 14 has an elusive relationship to place. Dvořák began initial sketches for the piece while in the United States, then completed it shortly after his three-year sojourn there came to an end. It has been interpreted either as reminiscent of Dvořák’s fondness for America or as an expression of relief to be back in his Bohemian homeland. Whichever psychological state it represents, the quartet is a remarkably vivacious work. A sinuous, minor-key introduction precedes a lively first movement. The whirling scherzo that follows has echoes of the furiant, a Czech folk dance. Its trio section features a sustained duet between two voices—a favorite technique of Dvořák’s across his chamber music. The preternaturally calm opening of the third movement eventually gives way to a harmonically adventurous middle section, capped off by an elaborate return to the movement’s opening theme. A rumbling in the cello introduces the final movement, an energetic romp which alternates between forward-driving intensity and moments of playful lyricism before coming to a triumphant close. The celebrated slow movement of another of Dvořák’s quartets, the “American,” offers a poignant counterweight to the optimism of the Quartet No. 14. The first violin and cello’s elongated melodic lines unspool over a rippling texture in the inner voices, joining together in a plaintive duet filled with nostalgic longing.

William Grant Still, “The Quiet One” from the Lyric Quartet (1960)

Still’s chamber music is often evocative in nature; for instance, his Suite for Violin and Piano (recently featured on the Concert Classics Series) takes its inspiration
from three works of sculpture by African American artists. The Lyric Quartet follows in this pattern: subtitled “Musical Portraits of Three Friends,” it depicts three distinct personalities. “The Quiet One,” the quartet’s middle movement, is somewhat subdued in tone but still pervaded by warmth and generosity. The four instruments begin in rhythmic unison, then expand into a busier texture anchored by occasional pizzicato interjections.

**Charles Ives, “Prelude: Allegro” from String Quartet No. 1, Op. 57 (1902)**

Charles Ives’ experience of American identity could hardly have been more different from that of William Grant Still. Born twenty years apart and separated by race and region, the two composers nonetheless found themselves similarly intrigued by the possibility of melding vernacular and classical influences. Ives’ first string quartet, written while he was a student at Yale, mixes, reimagines, and resets a variety of Protestant hymn tunes, which the composer encountered often while working as a church organist in New Haven. While much of this movement retains the harmonic simplicity of that original material, it also presages some of the lively experimentalism that would come to characterize Ives’ later work.

**George Walker, Lyric for Strings (1946)**

2022 marks the centennial of George Walker’s birth, and Lyric for Strings links the composer to much deeper American histories. Written while he was in his twenties and still a student, the piece was initially conceived as a memorial to his maternal grandmother, Malvina King. Born into slavery, King emancipated herself and went on to become the matriarch of a sprawling family in Washington, D.C. Walker’s tribute to her is alternately mournful and optimistic, reaching an impassioned climax before turning to a more tranquil conclusion. Like the spirituals and other folk traditions it evokes, it insists on finding beauty within struggle.

**Robert Pete Williams (arr. Steven Mackey), “I’ve Grown So Ugly”**

In “I’ve Grown So Ugly,” the Louisiana-born blues musician Robert Pete Williams embraces the genre’s characteristic mixture of the tragic and the comic: “Got so ugly,” he sings, “that I don’t even know myself.” Written while Williams was incarcerated in the Jim Crow South during the 1950s, the song’s seemingly humorous lyrics actually reflect on the dehumanizing and debilitating experience of imprisonment. Mackey’s arrangement of the song emphasizes its original instrumentation, with sliding pitches that evoke the blues singer’s assertive timbre and a forceful repeated riff that takes the place of the guitar.
Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. Within a few years of its formation, the Quartet garnered the first Cleveland Quartet Award and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award and was also honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut. Since then, the Quartet has concertized widely, performing in the world’s most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall in New York City; the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House.

In addition to performing the entire two-century range of the standard quartet repertoire, the Brentano Quartet maintains a strong interest in contemporary music and has commissioned many new works. Their latest project, a monodrama for quartet and voice called “Dido Reimagined,” was composed by Pulitzer-winning composer Melinda Wagner and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, and premiered in the spring 2022 with soprano Dawn Upshaw. Other recent commissions include the composers Matthew Aucoin, Lei Liang, Vijay Iyer, James Macmillan, and a cello quintet by Princeton faculty member Steven Mackey.

The Brentano Quartet has worked closely with other important composers of our time, among them Elliot Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. They have also been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman, mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, and pianists Richard Goode, Jonathan Biss, and Mitsuko Uchida. The Quartet has recorded works by Mozart and Schubert for Azica Records and all of Beethoven’s late Quartets for the Aeon label. In 2012, they provided the central music for the critically acclaimed independent film A Late Quartet. Since 2014, the Brentano Quartet has served as Artists-in-Residence at the Yale School of Music. They were formerly the Ensemble-in-Residence at Princeton University and were twice invited to be the collaborative ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

The Quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved,” the intended recipient of his famous love confession.
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Living with Long COVID as a Musician:
A Conversation/Concert

Joshua Roman, Cello
in conversation with Clemency Burton-Hill

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2022 | 7:30PM

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CONCERT CLASSICS

Thursday, October 13 | 7:30PM
GENEVA LEWIS* Violin
AUDREY VARDANEGA* Piano

Thursday, November 3 | 7:30PM
BRENTANO STRING QUARTET

Sunday, November 20 | 3PM
VIKINGUR ÓLAFSSON* Piano
Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 2PM

Thursday, February 16 | 7:30PM
ALEXI KENNEY Violin

Wednesday, March 8 | 7:30PM
LAWRENCE BROWNLEE Tenor
KEVIN J. MILLER* Piano

Thursday, March 30 | 7:30PM
JUPITER ENSEMBLE*

Thursday, April 6 | 7:30PM
ALINA IBRAIMOVA* Violin
CÉDRIC TIBERGHIEIN* Piano

Thursday, April 27 | 7:30PM
EMERSON & CALIDORE STRING QUARTETS

PERFORMANCES UP CLOSE

Wednesday, October 26 | 6PM & 9PM
JESS GILLAM Saxophone
THOMAS WEAVER* Piano

Tuesday, December 13 | 6PM & 9PM
tenTHING BRASS ENSEMBLE*

Sunday, March 26 | 3PM & 6PM
CHIAROSCURO STRING QUARTET*

Wednesday, April 12 | 6PM & 9PM
CÉCILE McLORIN SALVANT* Vocals
SULLIVAN FORTNER* Piano

RICHARDSON CHAMBER PLAYERS

Sunday, November 13 & Sunday, March 5 | 3PM

*Princeton University Concerts debut

SPECIAL EVENTS

Wednesday, February 1 | 7:30PM
JOYCE DI DONATO Mezzo-soprano
IL POMO d’ORO* Orchestra

Tuesday, February 21 | 7:30PM
MITSUKO UCHIDA Piano

HEALING WITH MUSIC

Thursday, September 29 | 7:30PM
INTRODUCING CLEMENCY BURTON-HILL
Exploring music’s role in brain injury recovery

Wednesday, November 9 | 7:30PM
JOSHUA ROMAN Cello
Living with Long COVID as a musician

Thursday, February 9 | 7:30PM
FRED HERSCH* Piano
Exploring music’s role after an AIDS-related coma

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Featuring The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Saturday, October 22 | 1PM
MEET THE MUSIC, for ages 6–12

Saturday, May 20 | 1PM & 3PM
CMS KIDS, for neurodiverse audiences ages 3–6

AT THE MOVIES

Tuesday, October 11 | 7:30PM
FALLING FOR STRADIVARI

Wednesday, February 8 | 7:30PM
THE BALLAD OF FRED HERSCH

LIVE MUSIC MEDITATION

Matthew Weiner, Meditation Instruction

Thursday, September 29 | 12:30PM
ALEXI KENNEY Violin

Wednesday, October 26 | 12:30PM
JESS GILLAM Saxophone

Thursday, February 9 | 12:30PM
FRED HERSCH Piano

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