

Belcea String Quartet Ébène String Quartet





Dear Friends,

I am so pleased to welcome back two of our all-time favorite quartets. Tonight, we celebrate an extraordinary collaboration as they come together to perform not one, but two string octets—stunning works crafted, almost unbelievably, by composers only 16 and 18 years old. I don't know what you were doing as a teenager, but I can assure you I wasn't creating masterpieces that would resonate across generations... at any age!

This evening is also a deeply gratifying testament to the relationships we've cultivated with some of the world's greatest artists, who choose to come to Princeton with their most cherished projects as they tour to the world's finest concert halls.

Here's to a night that showcases not only the power of music but also the joy of artistic partnership.

Enjoy!

Marna Seltzer

Director of Princeton University Concerts

Out of respect for the artists and enjoyment of your fellow concertgoers, please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices before the concert. Photographs and audio/video recording are prohibited during the performance.

BELCEA STRING QUARTET

Corina Belcea, Violin Suyeon Kang, Violin Krzysztof Chorzelski, Viola Antoine Lederlin, Cello

ÉBÈNE STRING QUARTET

Pierre Colombet, Violin Gabriel Le Magadure, Violin Marie Chilemme, Viola Yuya Okamoto, Cello

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809 - 1847)

String Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20

Allegro moderato con fuoco

Andante

Scherzo. Allegro leggierissimo

Presto

INTERMISSION

GEORGE ENESCU

(1881 - 1955)

String Octet in C Major, Op. 7

Très modéré—

Très fougueux—

Lentement-

Mouvement de valse bien rythmée



About the Program

By Lucy Caplan © 2024 • Program Annotator

Lucy Caplan is Assistant Professor of Music at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Her first book, 'Dreaming in Ensemble: How Black Artists Transformed American Opera,' will be published by Harvard University Press in 2025. She is a winner of the Rubin Prize for Music Criticism.

Young composers seem to be drawn to the string octet: intrigued, perhaps, by its theatrical proportions, opulent sonic canvas, and relative rarity. This evening's program features two works by teenage composers—the sixteen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn and the eighteenyear-old George Enescu—that have become classics of the genre. (Shostakovich's wellknown Two Pieces for String Octet, composed when he was eighteen years old, fit this description as well.) Given their early position within each composer's body of work, such pieces are often heard as evidence of things to come, mined for clues as to the composer's emerging signature style. Alternatively, youthful works are sometimes treated more like playthings, fun and novel rather than wholly representative.



LL Both octets are notable not just for what they precede, but for what they are: exuberant, exciting, openhearted displays of musicality. Both embrace virtuosity, inviting the performers to shine as individuals and as a collective."

Yet while these analytical approaches can be illuminating, they aren't entirely necessary. Both Mendelssohn and Enescu's octets are notable not just for what they precede, but for what they are: exuberant, exciting, openhearted displays of musicality. Both embrace virtuosity, inviting the performers to shine as individuals and as a collective. And both are also immensely ambitious, interweaving dense fugues and complex counterpoint with yearning, luxurious melodies. No matter the age of their composers, these are examples of musical beauty worth celebrating.

Felix Mendelssohn, String Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20 (1825)

By the time he was fourteen, the prodigiously talented Felix Mendelssohn had already composed sonatas for both violin and piano, a set of piano quartets, and pieces for string quartet and piano trio-to mention just a few. His preternatural talent as both a composer and a performer astonished audiences. Goethe, who had heard a fourteen-year-old Mozart play the piano in 1763, met Mendelssohn, then twelve, in 1821. Comparing the two, he observed that Mendelssohn had "the same relation to the little Mozart that the perfect speech of a grown man does to the prattle of a child." The Octet builds on these chambermusic predecessors. Its larger ensemble seems appropriate to its extravagant sounds—as if a single quartet's worth of players couldn't possibly contain so much vivacity. The first violinist he had in mind as he wrote, Eduard Rietz, was a friend and mentor just a few years older than the composer, and Mendelssohn's admiration for Rietz's talents shines through in the bravura gestures that he offers to this player throughout the piece.

The quartet's first movement begins with a splash, as a bold, climbing arpeggiated gesture is introduced in the first violin and then passed around the ensemble. Written in sonata form, it is consistently kinetic, with an undercurrent of restlessness underlying even its sweet second theme. The mood changes in the second movement, a lyrical, minor-key Andante which features plaintive solo melodies interspersed with stormier chromatic passages that are voiced by various combinations of players. The third movement is an early example of the fantastical, rapid-fire approach to scherzos which would go on to become a hallmark of the composer's style; his sister, the composer Fanny Hensel, would later write that when listening to this movement, "one feels close to the world of spirits lightly carried up into the air." And the finale is fittingly capacious: a gigantic fugal piece whose busy, eighth-note subject is introduced in the cello's low register before bouncing



up and around the ensemble, finally landing in the first violin's stratosphere. Like the octet as a whole, the movement bubbles over with generosity and warmth, ultimately reaching a high-octane close.

George Enescu, String Octet in C Major, Op. 7 (1900)

Like Mendelssohn, Enescu demonstrated musical promise from an extraordinarily young age. He began composing at age five and commenced conservatory studies in Vienna when he was seven. As an adult, he became a sort of musical jack-of-all-trades: a sought-after violinist, pianist, and conductor; a well-respected composer; and a renowned musical mind who was reputed to know the entire Ring cycle and most of Bach's works by heart. At the time that he composed the octet, he had just graduated from the Paris Conservatoire, where he came into contact with some of the day's most prominent European musicians. The piece embodies both the scope of Enescu's ambitions as a composer and the singular historical moment in which he worked. Crafted on a grand scale, it luxuriates in sumptuous late-Romantic harmonies and elaborate counterpoint, while also embracing the angular rhythms and crunchy chromaticism of early-twentieth-century modernism.

The octet consists of four movements played without pause, a quality which draws attention to its cyclical form. The first movement announces its grandeur from the start, with a lengthy first theme voiced in octaves. A striking variety of additional thematic figures emerges over the course of the movement. Sometimes, Enescu treats the ensemble as a mini-orchestra, with triple-stop chords for multiple instruments creating an enormous, symphonic sound. At other points, the players create haunting, drone-like textures over which a solo violin might play a freely wandering line; subtle shifts in tempo heighten the improvisatory feel. The second movement is explosive. It begins with a furious, ultra-expressive fugue, which shows none of the academic restraint often associated with that form. Soon, it swerves into a trio section full of syrupy melodies and fancy chromatic flourishes, before gathering energy for another fugal section. At the beginning of the third movement, all eight players mute their instruments, producing a thick, subdued tone. All eight instrumentalists play nearly without rest throughout the movement, creating a warm foundation upon which individual melodic lines can rest. A storm gathers at its end, eventually transforming into the fourth movement: a spooky, frenetic waltz. Emotionally far from the elegant ballroom dance that the name implies, this waltz feels almost confrontational, like a dance performed by two opposing boxers getting ready for a match. Its sharply accented rhythms share space with elaborate arpeggiated figures. In the final moments of the octet, Enescu evokes Schubert's Cello Quintet with a prominent figure that descends from D-flat to C-a subtle but unmistakable homage to another beloved classic of the more-than-a-quartet string repertoire.

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BELCEA STRING QUARTET

With the Romanian violinist Corina Belcea, the Korean-Australian Suyeon Kang on second violin, the Polish violist Krzysztof Chorzelski, and the French cellist Antoine Lederlin, four different artistic provenances meet and unite to create unique excellence in the Belcea Quartet.

The ensemble's repertoire spans Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven to Bartok, Janacek to Szymanowski. They also continue to introduce new works by current composers to the audience such as Julian Anderson (2024), Guillaume Connesson (2023), Joseph Phibbs (2018), Krzysztof Penderecki (2016), Thomas Larcher (2015), and Mark-Anthony Turnage (2014 & 2010). These commissioned works are created in association with the Belcea Quartet Trust, the quartet's own foundation, whose aim is to continually broaden the string quartet literature as well as to support young quartets through concentrated joint coaching sessions. In this way they can also pass on to the next generation the experience they gained as students of the Amadeus and Alban Berg Quartets.

In addition to the complete recordings of the string quartets by Bartók, Beethoven, Brahms (Diapason d'or de l'année 2016) and Britten, the quartet's wide-ranging discography includes works by Berg, Dutilleux, Mozart, Schoenberg, Schubert, Shostakovich, Janáček, and Ligeti, among others. In spring 2022, Alpha Classics released the two string sextets by Brahms performed with violist Tabea Zimmermann and cellist Jean-Guihen Queyras. Their performances of all of the Beethoven string quartets at the Konzerthaus Vienna in 2012 were released on DVD by EuroArts in 2014, followed by the release of a recording of Britten's three string quartets in 2015.

From 2017 to 2020, the quartet held the prestigious position of Ensemble-in-Residence at the Pierre Boulez Hall in Berlin. Since then, they have performed there regularly. In addition, the Belcea Quartet has been part of a shared string quartet series at the Vienna Konzerthaus since 2010. The Ébène Quartet has been their partner ensemble in this series since the 2021/22 season.

This season will take the Belcea Quartet to renowned venues such as the Stockholm Konserthuset, Wigmore Hall in London, the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in Paris, and the Flagey in Brussels. A special highlight will be this octet tour with the Ébène Quartet through North and South America, as well as Asia, where they will perform at Carnegie Hall, the Teatro Cultura Artística in São Paulo, and the Grand Hall of the Lee Shau Kee Lecture Center in Hong Kong, among others. The Belcea Quartet made its PUC debut in 2016.

CELEBRATING LOU CHEN

It is with bittersweet emotion that Princeton University Concerts announces the departure of Lou Chen, our colleague, friend, and partner as the Program Manager of Trenton Arts at Princeton. With Lou's guidance, we were able to start our Neighborhood Music Project, an initiative that has brought hundreds of Trenton public school students to our concerts and created points of connection with our artists in the classroom. We wish Lou success in his next adventure as the new Chief Executive Officer of InTempo, a non-profit educational institution in Stamford, Connecticut.

He will be missed!

ÉBÈNE STRING QUARTET

In the past two decades the Ébène Quartet has set standards by making familiar repertoire accessible in new ways beyond perfection and by constantly seeking an exchange with the audience. Cellist Yuya Okamoto, who joined the quartet's esteemed ranks in spring 2024, has added a new dimension.

After studies with the Quatuor Ysaÿe in Paris as well as with Gábor Takács, Eberhard Feltz, and György Kurtág, the unprecedented and outstanding success at the 2004 ARD Music Competition followed, marking the beginning of the Ébène Quartet's rise to fame, which resulted in numerous other prizes and awards. In 2005, for example, the quartet was awarded the Belmont Prize of the Forberg-Schneider Foundation; in 2007 it was prize winner of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, and in 2019 it was the first ensemble to be honored with the Frankfurt Music Prize.

In addition to the traditional repertoire, the quartet also dives into other styles. What began in 1999 as a distraction in the university's practice rooms of improvising on jazz standards and pop songs has become a trademark of quartet. To date, the quartet has released 3 albums in these genres, *Fiction* (2010), *Brazil* (2014) and *Eternal Stories* (2017). In June 2024, the quartet brought "Waves," a new project with electronic sound artist Xavier Tribolet, to the stage. The free approach to various styles creates a tension that is beneficial to every aspect of their artistic work. The complexity of their oeuvre has been greeted enthusiastically by audiences and critics.

The quartet's recordings of Bartók, Beethoven, Debussy, Haydn, Fauré, and the Mendelssohn siblings have received numerous awards, including Gramophone, BBC Music Magazine, and the Midem Classic Award. In 2015 and 2016 the musicians dedicated themselves to the theme "Lied." They participated in the album "Green (Mélodies françaises)" by Philippe Jaroussky and released a Schubert album with baritone Matthias Goerne (arrangements for string quartet, baritone, and double bass by Raphaël Merlin) and the Schubert string quintet with cellist Gautier Capuçon. Together with violist Antoine Tamestit, the quartet recorded the Mozart String Quintets K. 515 and K. 516, which were released in the spring of 2023. The album has received accolades such as Choc Classica, Diapason d'or, Gramophone of the month.

First and foremost is the recording of Beethoven's 16 string quartets, for which the quartet traveled across six continents between May 2019 and January 2020. With this complete recording, the four celebrated their 20th stage anniversary, which they additionally crowned with performances of the complete string quartet cycle in major European venues such as the Philharmonie de Paris and the Alte Oper Frankfurt. Invitations from Carnegie Hall New York, the Verbier Festival, and the Vienna Konzerthaus were also on the agenda.

In January 2021, the quartet was appointed by the University of Music and Performing Arts in Munich to establish a string quartet class as part of the newly founded Ébène Quartet Academy. Since the 2021/22 season, the quartet has performed a joint cycle with the Belcea Quartet at the Wiener Konzerthaus.

Highlights of the season include appearances at the Salzburg Festival, the Berlin Philharmonie, the Liszt Academy in Budapest, Wigmore Hall London, and the Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam. Always an audience favorite, this is the Ebène Quartet's 5th appearance on the Princeton University Concerts series.

GLEE CLUB 150TH FI FBRATION









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Other support comes from donors like you. We are grateful to the individuals whose support at all levels ensures that musical performance remains a vital part of Princeton, the community, and the region.

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Fall 24

At the Princeton Public Library

Wed, August 28, 2024 | 10:3ÓAM & 7PM (Book Groups) Wed, September 4, 2024 | 7PM (Keynote Deborah Amos)

"THE PIANIST FROM SYRIA" BY AEHAM AHMAD

At the Princeton Garden Theatre

Wed, September 25, 2024 | 7PM

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Thu, September 26, 2024 | 7:30PM

KINAN AZMEH* Clarinet

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Wed, October 9, 2024 | 7:30PM

CÉCILE MCLORIN SALVANT Vocals

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Sat, October 19, 2024 | 1PM & 3PM

CMS KIDS Ages 3-6, Relaxed Format

Lee Rehearsal Room, Lewis Arts Complex

Special Event

Wed, October 30, 2024 | 7:30PM

IGOR LEVIT Piano

At the Princeton Garden Theatre

Sat, November 2, 2024 | 1PM

"IGOR LEVIT: NO FEAR"

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Sun, November 3, 2024 | 3PM

IGOR LEVIT Piano

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Pianist and Advocate for Change

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Concert Classics Series

Thu, November 7, 2024 | 7:30PM

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Wed, November 13, 2024 | 7:30PM

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Wed, November 20, 2024 | 12:30 PM

ISIDORE STRING QUARTET

Performances Up Close

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ISIDORE STRING QUARTET*

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Sun, November 24, 2024 | 3PM

SONGS WITH/OUT WORDS

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Concert Classics Series

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DENIS KOZHUKHIN* Piano

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