

Belcea String Quartet





Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 132nd season of Princeton University Concerts' Concert Classics series! It is both a joy and a profound honor to continue nurturing this extraordinary musical tradition—one that has connected generations of listeners in our community for well over a century.

Tonight's program beautifully reflects that sense of continuity and connection. Last season, we had the rare delight of hearing the Belcea Quartet and the Ébène Quartet share the stage in a remarkable evening of octets. This season, we're thrilled to welcome both ensembles back individually. Though each has graced our series many times before, every return brings fresh perspective and renewed energy. That is at the core of chamber music's magic: ever-changing, ever-revealing—and always deeply familiar.

As we embark on a season rich with beloved friends and exciting new voices, may Princeton University Concerts continue to serve as a constant in a shifting world. Thank you for being part of this journey. We're so glad you're here.

Enjoy the performance!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Marna Seltzer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "M" and "S".

Marna Seltzer
Director of Princeton University Concerts

Thursday, October 23, 2025 at 7:30PM • Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

BELCEA STRING QUARTET

Corina Belcea, Violin

Suyeon Kang, Violin

Krzysztof Chorzelski, Viola

Antoine Lederlin, Cello

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(1756–1791)

String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465 “Dissonance”

Adagio—Allegro

Andante cantabile

Menuetto and Trio. Allegro

Allegro molto

BRETT DEAN

(b. 1961)

String Quartet No. 4, “A Little Book of Prayers”

Petition

Speaking in Tongues

Contemplation

The Gospel Truth (“A Closer Walk with Thee”)

Lament

*Written for the Belcea Quartet in memory of
violinist Laura Samuel (1976–2024)*

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

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

Allegretto

Vivace

Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo

Grave, ma non troppo tratto—Allegro

*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.*



About the Program

By Lucy Caplan © 2025 • Program Annotator

*Lucy Caplan is Assistant Professor of Music at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. She is the author of *Dreaming in Ensemble: How Black Artists Transformed American Opera*, published by Harvard University Press.*

To begin at the end (the end of the program, that is): the last part of the last movement of Beethoven's Quartet Op. 135 presents a puzzle. These are some of the final notes that the composer ever wrote; one might reasonably expect them to sound momentous or majestic. Instead, they are lighthearted, verging on silly: simple pizzicato phrases, pianissimo whispers, and a louder conclusion so brief it feels almost perfunctory. What are we to make of this—is it a joke? An elision? A revelation?

“...we cannot know exactly what we are going to hear, and the only answer is to devote our total attention to the music.”

The ambiguity of the quartet's ending raises themes that are common to the works on this evening's program—a sense of dissonance, capaciously defined, and a tug of war between expectation and reality. In Mozart's quartet K. 465, a strikingly avant-garde introduction built on chromatic harmonies precedes a beautiful, but ultimately fairly traditional work. Brett Dean's String Quartet No. 4—a new piece composed for the Belcea Quartet—moves fluently across styles, encompassing both the traditional Christian prayers that are foundational to Western classical music and what Dean terms “string-quartet-tongues other than my own.” Beethoven's work toggles between the abstract grandeur characteristic of his late quartets, on the one hand, and a disarmingly simple playfulness on the other. The resulting dissonances encourage close, curious listening: we cannot know exactly what we are going to hear, and the only answer is to devote our total attention to the music.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465 “Dissonance” (1785)

The strict formal conventions of the Classical period offer listeners a sense of comfort, even predictability; when listening to music of this era, we often feel that we know just what to expect. The introduction to Mozart's nineteenth string quartet radically upends this norm. Oddly tense harmonies sink sinuously into one another, leaving us unmoored

from any particular key. The rhythmic pulse, too, is elusive. Where are we? Each time we seem to be approaching a soft, familiar landing, Mozart zigzags off course—creating the overwhelming sense of dissonance which gives the piece its nickname.

It doesn't last. After this disorienting introduction, the remainder of the work's first movement is a fast-paced romp in bright-hued C major. The quartet is the sixth in a set dedicated to Franz Joseph Haydn, and Mozart's indebtedness to Haydn comes through clearly in the movement's precision and good cheer. The second movement begins with a lovely, graceful song, which soon gives way to a gentle dialogue between first violin and cello. Flashes of the dissonant introduction crackle near the movement's end, but they pass quickly, enabling a peaceful conclusion. The third movement is a minuet built around sets of repeated notes: they are carefree at first, but they take on a more turbulent role in the contrasting trio section. The quartet concludes with an ebullient Allegro. Its elegant ornamentation and figuration are quintessentially Classical, yet quick changes of mood presage the drama of the Romantic period—another way in which Mozart pushes ever so elegantly at the boundaries of convention.

Brett Dean, String Quartet No. 4, “A Little Book of Prayers” (2024-25)

(Notes by the composer)

I first met and played as a guest violist with the Belcea Quartet at the Sydney Festival in 2001. Though still a young group, they were already well-established stars in the chamber music firmament. Their commissioning of my new string quartet is a very welcome reunion with these wonderful musicians, including the two founding members, Corina Belcea and Krzysztof Chorzelski, with whom I performed Mozart quintets a quarter of a century ago. I was very saddened however to learn of the recent passing of the quartet's former second violinist and founder-member, Laura Samuel. My new work is dedicated to the memory of this very special person. In writing it, what has emerged is “A Little Book of Prayers,” the work's subtitle.

Certainly, the prominent moments throughout the work for the second violin have been written in homage to Laura, whom I last encountered in her later career as the warmly unifying concertmaster of the BBC Scottish Orchestra. But these passages also serve as a gesture of welcome to the quartet's new Australian member, Suyeon Kang, whose great playing I first encountered whilst she was still studying in Melbourne in 2007.

My book of prayers includes three different models of traditional Christian prayer as the work's reflective first, third, and fifth movements: wordless prayers of petition, contemplation, and lament respectively. These pieces found their inspiration not only in traditional words and sentiments of sacred prayer and comfort but also in secular prayers, for

example from the contemporary British poet Carol Ann Duffy and the Australian cartoonist and writer, Michael Leunig.

In between these slower sections stand two faster scherzo movements that explore other rituals of prayer or adoration. The second movement, *Speaking in Tongues*, looks at the Pentecostal practice of glossolalia in which people utter words or word-like phrases, often very rapidly and supposedly in tongues unknown to the speaker. This highly rhythmic music culminates in a fast-cut of compositional styles, signatures, and the briefest of quotations as I endeavour to speak in “string-quartet-tongues other than my own.” The fourth movement looks at a 19th-century gospel number, *Just a Closer Walk with Thee*, in glassy harmonics as if through a kaleidoscopic lens. In late 1800s New Orleans, this highly adaptable song was known to be used both as funeral dirge and dance tune.

Beethoven, String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135 (1826)

Op. 135 has been called the “black sheep” of Beethoven’s late quartets. It is short whereas the others are long and buoyant in mood rather than ultra-serious. Instead of seeming to anticipate the future of the genre, its simplicity and convivial affect recall the Mozart quartet earlier on this program. The first movement begins with a plainly stated question from the viola, answered by the first violin. What follows is essentially a pared-down version of a typical sonata movement, which uses just enough melody, texture, and time to get its musical point across. The second movement, a scherzo, initially recalls Haydn in its off-beat accents. A tornado of a trio section follows, with blaring lower voices and a frantic first violin.

The third movement could not be more different from the first two. Expansive in scale, and in the tonally distant key of D-flat major, it comprises a set of variations on a theme which flow seamlessly into one another. It also recalls Classical models, in particular the quasi-operatic slow movements of many of Mozart’s and Haydn’s quartets, in its heartbreakingly earnest sincerity. This makes the finale all the more surprising. It is preceded by a strange inscription—“Der schwer gefasste Entschluss” or “The difficult resolution”—and it veers wildly between anguish and impish playfulness. The stark opening section is accompanied by the words “Muss es sein?” or “Must it be?” The cheery Allegro that comprises most of the movement offers an answer: “Es muss sein” or “It must be.” Yet the particular meaning of these phrases in relation to the music we hear remains beguilingly unclear. One of Beethoven’s great biographers, the musicologist Lewis Lockwood, offers the following provocation: “What is the meaning of the inscription? We do not know, and are not meant to know in any specific sense, what is being asked and answered. We cannot miss the feeling that something basic is afoot, but we cannot define it in words or concepts. That may be the point.”



BELCEA STRING QUARTET

from the student perspective of Yuri Lee, a composer and violinist in the Music Department.

I am so excited that the Belcea Quartet is coming to Princeton to perform Mozart's String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, Brett Dean's String Quartet No. 4—written specifically for the ensemble—and Beethoven's String Quartet No. 16 in F Major. The program beautifully captures the Belcea Quartet's artistic identity, featuring a seamless dialogue between the classical canon and the music of our time.

As a composer myself, I'm deeply inspired by ensembles like the Belcea Quartet, who not only honor the rich tradition of classical music but also actively champion new works and living composers. Their commitment to both the past and the present reminds me that music is a living art form, and that we, as listeners, performers, and composers, each play a part in its evolution through our acts of listening, reinterpreting, and creating.

Founded in 1994 by students at the Royal College of Music in London, the Belcea Quartet has since grown into one of the world's most acclaimed ensembles, celebrated for its technical mastery and interpretive depth. What especially excites me about the Belcea Quartet is the way they treat each note with incredible attention, dedication, and a kind of quiet magic. It is not just the big structural moments of a piece—the cadences, climactic points, and thematic materials—that they illuminate, but also the smaller, seemingly simple and unsophisticated passages. They give even those moments shape, character, and intention, revealing hidden depths that might otherwise go unnoticed.

FREE FOOD

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: COME TO INTERNOSHIN'!

Tonight, at intermission, meet your fellow student attendees in the Richardson Lounge (basement level) and share your thoughts about the concert over free snacks.

Hosted by the Student Ambassadors of Princeton University Concerts.



My first introduction to the quartet was a video of their performance of Beethoven's String Quartet No. 9. Having long admired the lush harmonic language of later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century composers such as Borodin and Ravel, I was astonished by how instantly the Belcea Quartet drew me into Beethoven's sound world. From the very first two chords—the anguished diminished sonority answered by the tender dominant seventh—I was captivated. The clarity, emotional contrast, and sincerity of their playing resonated through even a laptop screen. I can only imagine the experience of hearing that energy live, and I cannot wait to do so.

This is the Belcea String Quartet's third visit to Princeton University Concerts. For an official biography of the group, please visit www.belceaquartet.com.

What would you listen to at the end of the world?

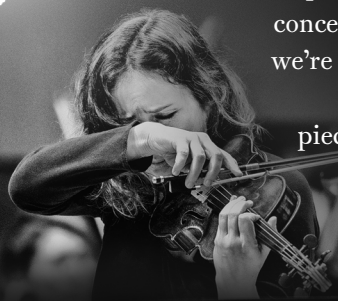
ANNOUNCING THE 2025-26 AUDIENCE VOICES & CREATIVE REACTIONS CONTEST

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Inspired by *Dies Irae*—a bold concert experience conceived by violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja—we're inviting you to share the music you'd want to hear at the end of an era. Whether it's a piece that brings comfort, clarity, or catharsis: what would be your final track, and why?

Submit your track(s) for our "End of the World" playlist, with a chance to win a grand prize valued at over \$500! The playlist will be unveiled at the *Dies Irae* performance on March 26, 2026.

puc.princeton.edu/lasting-tracks-contest



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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.

If you wish to make a donation to Princeton University Concerts, please call us at 609-258-2800, visit puc.princeton.edu, or send a check payable to Princeton University Concerts to: Princeton University Concerts, Woolworth Center, Princeton, NJ 08544.

THANK YOU!

We are deeply grateful for the support we have received and thank all of our donors and volunteers. The list below acknowledges gifts of \$100 or more, received between April 1, 2025 and October 15, 2025. If you see an error or would like to make a change in your listing, please contact the Concert Office at 609-258-2800.

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Fall 25

At the Princeton Public Library

Thursday, September 18 | 12PM | Book Group

"OUT LOUD"

BY MARK MORRIS

Performances Up Close

Thursday, September 25 | 6PM & 9PM

Pre-Concert: Do-Re-Meet Speed Dating | 7PM

TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET

JORDAN BAK Viola

Performances Up Close

Tuesday, September 30 | 6PM & 9PM

ABEL SELAOCOE Cello*

At the Princeton Garden Theatre

Thursday, October 2 | 7PM

"PAVAROTTI"

Music & Healing

Wednesday, October 8 | 7:30PM

MARK MORRIS Choreographer

"The Dance Lives On: Contemplating Artistic Legacy"

All in the Family

Saturday, October 18 | 1PM

MEET THE MUSIC Ages 6-12

"Musical Fairy Tales"

At the Princeton Public Library

Sunday, October 19 | 2PM | Movie Screening

"QUARTET"

Concert Classics Series

Thursday, October 23 | 7:30PM

BELCEA STRING QUARTET

Richardson Chamber Players

Sunday, November 2 | 3PM

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC

*Princeton University Concerts Debut

Concert Classics Series

Thursday, November 6 | 7:30PM

PAUL LEWIS Piano

Live Music Meditation

Thursday, November 13 | 12PM

EMI FERGUSON Flute

Performances Up Close

Thursday, November 13 | 6PM & 9PM

EMI FERGUSON Flute

RUCKUS Early Music Band*

Music & Healing

Wednesday, December 3 | 7:30PM

PETER SELLARS Director*

"Mourning through Music"

Live Music Meditation

Wednesday, December 10 | 12PM

THÉO OULD Accordion*

Performances Up Close

Wednesday, December 10 | 6PM & 9PM

Pre-Concert: Do-Re-Meet LGBTQIA+

and Allies Mingle | 7PM

THÉO OULD Accordion*

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IN THE SPRING SEMESTER

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25/26

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