



ARTPOWER! PRESENTS:  
**EMERSON STRING QUARTET**



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**Thursday, April 23, 2015 / 8pm**

Department of Music's Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

PROGRAM

CHAMBER MUSIC // USA

**Eugene Drucker**, violin  
**Philip Setzer**, violin  
**Lawrence Dutton**, viola  
**Paul Watkins**, cello

**PROGRAM**

String Quartet No. 14 in G major, K. 387  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)  
*Allegro vivace assai*  
*Menuetto: Allegro*  
*Andante cantabile*  
*Molto allegro*  
(Philip Setzer, first violin)

String Quartet No. 2 in C Major, Op. 36  
Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976)  
*Allegro calmo senza rigore*  
*Vivace*  
*Chacony*  
(Eugene Drucker, first violin)

\*\*\*INTERMISSION\*\*\*

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132  
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)  
*Assai sostenuto - Allegro*  
*Allegro ma non tanto*  
*Molto adagio: Heiliger Dankgesang eines*  
*Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart*  
*Alla marcia, assai vivace*  
*Allegro appassionato - Presto*  
(Philip Setzer, first violin)

## PROGRAM NOTES

### Mozart: String Quartet in G Major, K. 387

Despite great diversity between the movements of the G major quartet, there are some connecting threads that run throughout the entire piece. One unifying factor is the abrupt alternation forte (“loud”) and piano (“soft”) in the first movement (measure by measure), in the Menuetto (note by note), and generally in the third and fourth movements, (with several sharp changes from one to the other). Also, fragments of the chromatic scale (moving by half steps only, instead of by whole and half steps as in major and minor scales) are found in the first movement (extension of the first theme), Menuetto (the forte/piano passages), and last movement (start of the development section).

The first violin presents the principal theme at the very outset, its forceful, determined character compromised somewhat by alternating soft measures. After a repeat, with the melody in the second violin, the chromatic scales weave their way through the four instruments and lead to the subsidiary theme, a jocular, graceful tune introduced by the second violin. As the theme continues, we hear flashes of chromatic runs and alternating fortes and pianos. After a rather lengthy development Mozart brings the themes back for the recapitulation, hewing quite closely to their original presentation, but with slight changes to vary the tonal coloration.

Although traditionally the minuet is an easygoing, undemanding movement, Mozart invests his Menuetto with a good deal of musical weight and significance and organizes it in sonata form, instead of the more usual ternary form. The first theme includes the alternately loud and soft chromatic line. Starting in the first violin and then cello, it passes next to the second violin and viola, which play it together but out of phase, the second’s loud notes coming with the viola’s soft notes and vice versa. The second theme, a one-

measure downward-leaning motif, is played by the first violin over a rolling accompaniment. And a theme built around three repeated notes and a descending chromatic line concludes the tightly planned exposition. After the briefest development section, Mozart returns all three themes. The grim trio starts off with an ominous minor-key unison passage. Cast in ternary form, the middle section is a short interlude of downward melodic movement before the forbidding unison is heard again. The Menuetto returns after the trio.

The slow movement is an outpouring of serene, though concentrated, melody. Following a rising and falling contour, the main theme gradually grows louder and then suddenly drops to a soft dynamic level near the end as Mozart extends the final phrase of the theme with its three repeated-note upbeats. This motto goes on to become the impetus for the subsidiary theme. Further episodes conclude the exposition, after which Mozart skips any development, bringing back and developing the opening theme, followed by the second and third themes and a quiet close.

The finale is the most remarkable movement of the quartet, as Mozart effortlessly moves back and forth between learned polyphony, starting both themes with extended fugal passages, and galant homophony, ending the same themes with straightforward accompanied melody. The first theme fugato is based on a four-note phrase that Mozart later used, almost intact, in the last movement of his “Jupiter” Symphony. The homophonic continuation is a running eighth note line, which includes a few loud-soft alternations. The cello initiates the second fugal theme, which is then combined with the first fugal theme, before the dancelike homophonic sequence ends the exposition. The following recapitulation is much shortened with the two fugal themes brought back simultaneously and the first homophonic theme not returned at all. A short coda, referring to the chromatic bit and the first fugato, ends the movement.

--Program note by Melvin Berger

### Britten: String Quartet No. 2 in C Major, Op. 36

*“At the end of World War II, in 1945, Yehudi Menuhin was asked to play recitals in the just liberated concentration camps of Germany and Poland. He brought with him a young pianist named Benjamin Britten. It was upon his return to England following this heart-rending experience that Britten wrote his Second String Quartet. To know this gives us all a more profound understanding when we experience the epic Passacaglia and the sense of liberation achieved through the massive C major chords at the end.” - Philip Setzer*

Most music historians agree that the two leading English composers were Henry Purcell in the seventeenth-century and Benjamin Britten in the twentieth. It is very fitting, therefore, that Britten’s second string quartet, probably his best-known chamber piece, was composed to commemorate the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Purcell’s death. He finished the work on October 14, 1945, and it was first played in London on November 21, 1945 by the Zorian String Quartet.

The quartet starts with the ascending wide-spaced interval of a tenth—an octave plus a third. The first violin and cello play it as the beginning of the first theme, joined by the second violin for the phrases that continue the melody. The viola accompanies with a drone made up of two notes at the same interval of the tenth. Two more times in quick succession the same opening is heard, starting on different notes, played by various combinations of instruments, and featuring varied melodic extensions. With very simple means, Britten then proceeds to build the movement on this material. After the themes are developed and varied, the cello begins a loud rolling arpeggio figure, on which the others superimpose the all-important interval of the tenth, and then finally present the several melodic ideas simultaneously.

An explosion of sound signals the opening

of the following movement, a rather somber scherzo. A quiet arpeggio figure in the second violin and viola emerges, against which the other two players give out the well-marked heavily accented theme. Sharp dynamic contrasts abound, as Britten expands this melody and introduces other melodic material. A change of character in the three lower instruments ushers in the trio section, in which the first violin states the powerful new subject—really an augmentation of the scherzo melody. A transition of arpeggios in the cello leads to a very freely realized return of the scherzo.

The last movement pays homage to Purcell, even to the extent of using the old English spelling of the title, Chacony. A chaconne, using the more familiar spelling, is a Baroque form in which a brief melody, usually in moderately slow triple meter, is subject to continuous variation. Britten’s nine-measure melody passes through twenty-one variations. They are separated, though, into four groups or sections. As Britten wrote, “The sections may be said to review the theme from (a) harmonic, (b) rhythmic, (c) melodic, and (d) formal aspects.” The first group contains six variations based on an evolving harmonic scheme. A cello cadenza leads to the second group of six, in which the rhythm is varied. This time a viola cadenza marks the break, to be followed by six more variations based on a countermelody that Britten introduces in the second violin. The first violin has the final cadenza, setting the stage for the last three variations, which act as a coda to the movement.

--Program note by Melvin Berger

### Beethoven: String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132

While working on his Op. 132 quartet during the winter of 1824 – 1825, Beethoven fell gravely ill. The condition left him seriously weakened, but he was still able to finish the work by July 1825. Although it has the highest number of the three quartets (Opp. 127, 130 and 132) that he composed at the behest of Russian nobleman and amateur cellist, Prince Galitzin, it was actually second in order of composition.

Study of his sketch-book shows that he originally planned the quartet in the traditional four movements, but on recovering from his sickness decided to replace the two middle sections with three movements, including the central Heiliger Dankgesang.

The quartet starts with a short, slow introductory motif that bears a similarity to the ones heard at the opening of the quartet Op. 131 and the Grosse Fuge, Op. 133. Some think Beethoven used this motif – a slow, rising half-step followed by a large leap – as a way of unifying these three works; others believe that the motifs resemble each other because they were all composed around the same time, and the inadvertent repetition of certain favorite melodic turns is almost inevitable. Emerging from the introductory measure is a brilliant violin flourish that leads to the main theme, played high in the register by the cello. Following some expansion, a new idea, starting with three repeated notes, is heard and quickly passes throughout the quartet, leading to still another distinctive idea – a flowing melody in the second violin over a nervous, agitated triplet accompaniment. Although one can conceive these themes as the subjects of traditional sonata form, such analysis violates the free spirit in which Beethoven created this amazing movement.

Wistful and nostalgic in tone, the second movement has two motifs that run throughout the entire opening section. The first is a pair of rising three-note figures; the other, and more important is a long note that drops down with a flurry of faster notes. After many repetitions of the two melodic cells, Beethoven moves on to the middle section a sort of musette, with the first violin sustaining a bagpipe-like drone under its high-pitched melody. The movement ends with a literal repeat of the opening section.

Over the third movement Beethoven inscribed the words, Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart (“Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the

Divinity by a Convalescent, in the Lydian mode”). The sublime hymn expresses his gratitude for the return of good health; use of the Lydian mode, an ancient ecclesiastical scale (corresponding to the modern F scale, but without a B flat) gives the music a spiritual tone. The music consists of five lines of a slow, solemn chordal hymn, with each line preceded by a faster moving contrapuntal prelude. The vital and vigorous contrasting second section, Neue Kraft fuhlend (“Feeling of new strength”) evokes a sense of strength through alternating loud and soft measures that surge with a powerful, propulsive force.

After varied returns of both sections, the movement ends with a free restatement of the Heiliger Dankgesang, marked on the score by Beethoven to be played Mit innigster Empfindung (“with the most intimate emotions”).

The raucous Alla marcia provides the sudden change in mood, from heavenly to earthly, which Beethoven seems to need following moments of deeply emotional expression. After a brief aggressive march, the music completely changes character and takes on the style of a recitative, a rhythmically free section, in which the first violin plays an improvisatory speech like melodic line over a minimal accompaniment in the other parts.

The finale follows the recitative without pause. Structurally, it combines rondo and sonata form. The basic songful and lyrical character is modified by an underlying turbulent rocking motion that throws an uneasy cast over the proceedings. The first private performance of the A minor quartet was before an audience of fourteen persons at the Tavern Zunn Wilden Mann in Vienna by the Schuppanzigh Quartet on September 9, 1825. The same players gave the public premiere two months later, on November 6, 1825.

--Program note by Melvin Berger

## BIOGRAPHY

The Emerson String Quartet has an unparalleled list of achievements over three decades: more than thirty acclaimed recordings, nine Grammys® (including two for Best Classical Album), three Gramophone Awards, the Avery Fisher Prize, Musical America’s “Ensemble of the Year” and collaborations with many of the greatest artists of our time.

The arrival of Paul Watkins in 2013 has had a profound effect on the Emerson Quartet. Mr. Watkins, a distinguished soloist, award-winning conductor, and devoted chamber musician, joined the ensemble in its 37th season, and his dedication and enthusiasm have infused the Quartet with a warm, rich tone and a palpable joy in the collaborative process. The reconfigured group has been greeted with impressive accolades. “One of the characteristics of the Emerson Quartet is that its players (the violinists Eugene Drucker and Philip Setzer and the violist Lawrence Dutton in addition, now, to Mr. Watkins) all have the ability and the instruments to produce a sweet and glossy sound — but do so sparingly. Instead, they establish a chromatic scale of timbres that range from dry and tart over clean and zesty all the way to lustrous and singing. Listening to them pass tiny rhythmic motifs around the group, I was struck by how evenly calibrated these timbres were.” - *The New York Times*

The Quartet’s summer season began with engagements in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and a pair of concerts in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Following a tour of Japan, the Quartet performed at the Ravinia, Tanglewood, Chamber Music Northwest, Aspen, Domaine Forget, Toronto, Austin, Norfolk, Cape Cod and Mostly Mozart festivals. In a season of over 80 quartet performances, mingled with the Quartet members’ individual artistic commitments, Emerson highlights feature numerous concerts on both coasts and throughout North America. In October,

Paul Watkins performed with the Emerson Quartet for the first time in Carnegie Hall. The program included the Schumann Piano Quintet with acclaimed pianist and colleague Yefim Bronfman. Multiple tours of Europe comprise dates in Austria, Ireland, Switzerland, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The Quartet continues its series at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC for its 35th season, and, in May, is presented by colleagues David Finckel and Wu Han for the two final season concerts at Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in Alice Tully Hall. Guest artists Colin Carr and Paul Neubauer join the Emerson in a program that also includes the New York premiere of Lowell Liebermann’s String Quartet No. 5, commissioned by a consortium of presenters through Music Accord.

The Emerson recently released *Journeys*, its second CD on SONY Classical, featuring Tchaikovsky’s *Souvenir de Florence* and Schoenberg’s *Verklaerte Nacht*. Future recordings are planned with Mr. Watkins.

Formed in 1976 and based in New York City, the Emerson was one of the first quartets formed with two violinists alternating in the first chair position. In 2002, the Quartet began to stand for most of its concerts, with the cellist seated on a riser. The Emerson Quartet took its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson and is Quartet-in-Residence at Stony Brook University. In January of 2015, the Quartet received the Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award, Chamber Music America’s highest honor, in recognition of its significant and lasting contribution to the chamber music field.

*The Emerson String Quartet appears by arrangement with IMG Artists and records exclusively for Sony Classical.*  
[www.emersonquartet.com](http://www.emersonquartet.com)

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