

64th Concert Series 2017-2018



is pleased to present

# **The Emerson String Quartet**

Eugene Drucker, violin

Philip Setzer, violin

Lawrence Dutton, viola

Paul Watkins, cello

Saturday, October 7, 2017 8:00 PM

Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York



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**We need additional helping hands to carry out our mission. Do consider joining the volunteers listed above. Call us at 914-861-5080 or contact us on our website (see below); we can discuss several specific areas in which assistance is needed.**

**Acknowledgements**

Our concerts are made possible, in part, by an ArtsWestchester Program Support grant made with funds received from Westchester County Government, and by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. Additional support is received from many friends of Friends of Music who include subscribers and other ticket holders listed in this program\* who give over and above the cost of their attendance, and from the matching grants programs of IBM, Citibank, McKinsey & Co., and others. If you can choose this way to help maintain the excellent quality of our concerts, please send your contributions to Friends of Music Concerts, Inc., P.O. Box 675, Millwood, NY 10546.

*\*as of September 25, 2017*

# Program

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## **String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135**

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

*Allegretto*

*Vivace*

*Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo*

*Grave, ma non troppo tratto; Allegro*

(Philip Setzer, first violin)

## **String Quartet No. 3 in A Major, Op. 41**

Robert Schumann  
(1810-1856)

*Andante expressive; Allegro molto moderato*

*Assai agitato*

*Adagio molto*

*Allegro molto vivace*

(Philip Setzer, first violin)

## Intermission

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## **String Quartet No. 12 in E-Flat Major, Op. 127**

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

*Maestoso; Allegro*

*Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile*

*Scherzando vivace*

*Finale*

(Eugene Drucker, first violin)

The Emerson String Quartet appears by arrangement with IMG Artists, 7 West 54th Street, New York, NY 10019. 212-994-3500

The Emerson String Quartet has recorded on Deutsche Grammophon and on the Decca Gold Label.

Next concert

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Saturday, October 21, 2017, 8:00 pm at Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

### **Zorá String Quartet**

Program: Mendelssohn: String Quartet No. 2 in A minor, Op. 13; Beethoven: String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132.

# Program notes

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## String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135

Ludwig van Beethoven

On October 30, 1826, after only three months of work, Beethoven finished his last extended composition, this **F Major String Quartet, Op. 135**, but it was not the very last chamber music work he wrote. That honor went to a new finale for the Op. 130 Quartet, a dancing rondo to replace the great, weighty **Grosse Fuge** (“Grand Fugue”), which later was published as a separate composition, Op. 133.

With Op. 135, Beethoven gave up the gigantism of his preceding quartets and returned to a compact four-movement structure. The new work surprised his friends and almost disappointed posterity. Even in the early 20th century, some scholars and critics seemed to feel that Beethoven had let them down by abandoning his colossal forms and earth-shaking style for the simple charm, subtle clarity, and gentleness of this work. The absence of solemnity from all but the slow movement was thought to be an offense against the future, a sin against history. For Romantic critics, the idea that Beethoven could even insert a private joke into his last work, whether or not he knew it to be his last, was incomprehensible. The truth is that the terrible troubles of Beethoven’s last year did not destroy his frequently bitter wit; they may even have enlivened it.

The most famous frivolity of the quartet is in the heading of the finale, where Beethoven wrote, as though giving it a title, “The Difficult Decision.” Below this inscription is a line of music consisting of the movement’s two principal pieces of melodic material, each with a few words written under the notes, as in a song. First comes a question, gravely put: “*Muss es sein?* (Must it be?)”; then often comes the quick reply, “*Es muss sein! Es muss sein!*” (It must be! It must be!)

During Beethoven’s last years, his friends competed with one another to get their hands on the music of his latest works before they were published. They also were expected to demonstrate their fidelity to the master by missing no opportunity to hear these pieces performed. One friend, a businessman who hired musicians to give quartet parties at his home, boasted that he always could get any music he wanted from Beethoven. However, he had failed to attend the first performance of the Op. 130 Quartet in March, and when he asked to borrow the music in April, the composer refused his request. An intermediary suggested that he could restore himself to Beethoven’s good graces by paying the full price of a concert-series subscription ticket to the musicians who had played it. “Must I?” he is reported to have asked. In reply, Beethoven quickly composed a canon on the “*Es muss sein*” phrase, almost exactly as it was to appear in Op. 135 a few months later. It is set for four male voices to be sung “quickly and angrily” with the text, “You must! Yes, you must! Take out your purse!”

The first movement of the quartet, *Allegretto*, opens with a long principal theme that also consists of a questioning figure, hesitatingly asked, and its answer. The second subject is a simple, direct theme that would not have been out of place in one of his earliest quartets or in one by Haydn, except that it is distributed among the instruments and later is developed in ways that belong entirely to this time of maturity. Even the simplest and most basic connecting passages here are so richly tuneful that, in development, the movement seems to have not just two subjects but as many as a half-dozen. Next comes a scherzo, *Vivace*, of great rhythmic freedom, with a central trio section that is a rustic dance.

The third movement, *Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo*, is a brief elegy, only fifty-four measures long, that Beethoven described as a sweet song of calm and peace. In form, it is a simple set of variations on a short theme that becomes, among other things, a recitative, a smooth and elaborately polyphonic long phrase and a complex, fragmented texture. The finale begins with the difficult question, *Grave*, “Must I?” in the viola and cello. It will be asked again later, even more forcefully, yet most of the movement is devoted to the answer, *Allegro*, “You must!” or, in the end, perhaps, “What must be, must be.”

### **String Quartet No. 3 in A Major, Op. 41**

Robert Schumann

Robert Schumann’s father was a small-town bookseller who encouraged his son’s inclination toward the arts. At the age of six, the boy began to play the piano and to compose. By the time he was fourteen, when he had begun to write poetry, some of his works had been published. At eighteen, he entered Leipzig University as a law student, but the call of music was too strong for him to resist; he therefore abandoned the university, determined to become a great pianist. After badly injuring his hand, he gave up hope of a performing career and turned to composition. Several brilliant collections of short, descriptive, atmospheric piano pieces established his position as one of Germany’s leading composers.

In 1838, Schumann wrote to Clara Wieck, who later was to be his wife, “The piano has become too limited for me,” and confided that he had begun working on ideas for string quartets. In 1839 he mentioned quartet writing again in letters to a friend, adding that he was “living through some of Beethoven’s last quartets.” In 1840, the year of his marriage, he wrote almost nothing but songs, more than 130 of them, in a great outpouring of love. His attention was diverted to the orchestra in 1841, when he wrote four symphonic compositions and the first movement of his Piano Concerto.

Finally, in 1842 he put other work aside to concentrate on chamber music, studying for two months all the Mozart and Beethoven quartets available to him. Then, in a burst of creative energy between June and October, he composed three string quartets, a piano quartet and a piano quintet.

The three string quartets were completed by July 22nd. On September 13th, Clara’s twenty-third birthday, four friends came to the Schumann home in Leipzig to play through the set, with Ferdinand David, the concertmaster of the *Gewandhaus* (“Draper’s Hall”) Orchestra, for whom Mendelssohn later would compose his Violin Concerto, taking the first violin part. At David’s house, on September 29<sup>th</sup>, the three quartets were repeated for a little audience of friends, Mendelssohn among them. After each reading, Schumann made minor revisions. In February 1843, the quartets were published with a dedication to Mendelssohn. Ten years later, Schumann made a gift of the sketches for these works to his young disciple, the twenty-year-old Johannes Brahms, who left them, upon his death, to Joseph Joachim, the great violinist who had introduced him to Schumann.

**Quartet No. 3** is the largest of the three and, for many listeners, the most accomplished. It opens with a few introductory measures, *Andante espressivo*, in which a vaguely questioning fragment of a melody is played three times; it then is answered in the main section of the movement, *Allegro molto moderato*. The falling two-note figure from the introduction becomes one of the most important musical ideas discussed at length in the course of the movement’s

development. Next comes a fast movement, *Assai agitato*, with the function of a scherzo, but in the form of theme, variations, and a coda. The subject, first heard restlessly syncopated, is not plainly stated until the slow contrapuntal variation. The slow movement that follows, *Adagio molto*, is one of Schumann's tender, passionate effusions, an extended song heard in alternation with contrasting material. The Finale, *Allegro molto vivace*, is a vigorous, free rondo.

## **String Quartet, in E-Flat Major, Op. 127**

Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven's last five string quartets date from the three years before his death. They are works of concentration, tension density, and weight that are unmatched by compositions requiring much larger performing forces. **The Op. 127 Quartet** is the first of the five; it was first quartet Beethoven had written in fifteen years. The earliest sketches for it date from 1822, but he put it aside to finish the Ninth Symphony. In the summer of 1824, when it was far from complete, he had already tried to sell it to publishers; he finished it in February 1825.

Early in January 1825, the esteemed violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, who was Beethoven's friend and one of his early teachers, asked Beethoven if he could have the right of first performance, an attraction that would guarantee the success of his concert series. Beethoven agreed. But after Schuppanzigh had publicized the premiere he discovered that Beethoven also had promised the first performance to the cellist, Joseph Lincke, a member of his quartet, for a concert that he was giving on his own. The confusion was resolved when Beethoven didn't have the Quartet ready in time for his concert, and Schuppanzigh was forced to play the fifteen-year-old Opus 95 instead.

When Beethoven finally finished the Opus 127, he delivered the music to the players who had been waiting to rehearse it just two weeks before it was to be performed. Even today, no ensemble would want the task of preparing such a difficult work in such a short time. The performance was a disaster, Beethoven was furious, and he took the music back, giving it to another violinist, Joseph Böhm, who performed it successfully after many rehearsals supervised by the composer. By this time, Beethoven was completely deaf, but he rehearsed the quartet by following the motion of the string players' bows.

Although the **Opus 127 Quartet** is one of Beethoven's late works, it is approachable because of its intense lyricism. In it, the composer retains the familiar four-movement form that he altered and augmented in all but the last of the quartets that followed: he began each movement with a few measures of introduction. The first theme is a brief, stern *Maestoso* that returns periodically in the course of the *Allegro* movement, providing contrast with the regular flow of the principal material, which Beethoven wanted to be quiet and sweet, played tenderly. The second movement, *Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile*, like the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony, is a set of variations, profound, sublime, and luxuriously ornamented.

The third movement, *Scherzando vivace*, cast in the classical scherzo form with a contrasting central trio section, is much larger in size than is usual for scherzo. The music presents new ideas one after the other; each is an outgrowth of its predecessor. It is animated and agitated by periodic interruptions of the regular meter.

Beethoven headed the last movement with only the word *Finale*, leaving the tempo to the players' discretion. This pastoral movement has some "violent dance rhythms" characteristic of Beethoven's late work, yet the Quartet's close is joyous. Its very long coda makes a lingering

farewell. The music rises gradually and, in its last moments, subsides and rises again and again, as though Beethoven does not want to part with it. Eventually he forces himself to come to an abrupt close.

— notes provided by Susan Halpern

## About the Artists

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The Emerson String Quartet has amassed an unparalleled list of achievements over four 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 2016-17 season marked the ensemble's 40th anniversary, which was celebrated with an extraordinary variety of high-profile projects and collaborations, commissions, and recordings. Included were a 40th anniversary gala at London's Wigmore Hall; celebratory concerts programmed by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center at Alice Tully Hall; collaborations with the Emerson's former cellist David Finckel and with cellist Clive Greensmith for separate performances of Schubert's magnificent Quintet in C Major, and with the renowned pianist Maurizio Pollini for a performance in Carnegie Hall of the Brahms Quintet. Universal Music Group issued their entire Deutsche Grammophon discography in a 52-CD box set, and they released a recording with the soprano Renée Fleming on the Decca label of works by Alben Berg and Egon Wellesz that had been performed at Walt Disney Concert Hall. The group's most recent recording, released this past April on the Decca Gold label, is "Chaconnes and Fantasies: Music of Britten and Purcell," and is the first of their recordings with cellist Paul Watkins, who joined the group in 2013.

Formed in 1970 and based in New York City, the Emerson was one of the first quartets whose violinists alternated in the first chair position. The Emerson Quartet, which took its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, is Quartet-in-Residence at Stony Brook University. During the spring of 2016, full-time Stony Brook faculty members Philip Setzer and Lawrence Dutton received the honor of Distinguished Professor, and part-time faculty members Eugene Drucker and Paul Watkins were awarded the title of Honorary Distinguished Professor. In January 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.



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