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JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

FEBRUARY 18, 2026 | 7:30 PM



Juilliard String Quartet

Areta Zhulla, *violin*

Leonard Fu, *violin*

Molly Carr, *viola*

Astrid Schween, *cello*

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JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

With unparalleled artistry and enduring vigor, the Juilliard String Quartet (JSQ) continues to inspire audiences around the world. Founded in 1946 and hailed by *The Boston Globe* as “the most important American quartet in history,” the ensemble draws on a deep and vital engagement to the classics while embracing the mission of championing new works, a vibrant combination of the familiar and the daring. Each performance of the Juilliard String Quartet is a unique experience, bringing together the four members’ profound understanding, total commitment, and unceasing curiosity in sharing the wonders of the string quartet literature.

The Juilliard String Quartet continues to honor its rich legacy of innovative commissions with *Letters to Ludwig*, a deeply personal, multi-year commissioning project that invites living composers to engage with Beethoven’s late quartets. The first chapter featured two evocative new works by German composer Jörg Widmann, inspired by Op. 130, including its original ending, the *Grosse Fuge*. In the 2025–26 season, the journey continues with a new quartet by Iraqi-American composer Michelle Barzel Ross, reflecting on the profound spirit of Op. 132. These commissions were made possible with the generous support of The Juilliard School, Chamber Music in Napa Valley, and Arizona Friends of Chamber Music.

As part of a new collaboration with Deutsche Grammophon’s STAGE+ platform, the Juilliard String Quartet plans to present live-streamed performances of each chapter of *Letters to Ludwig*, offering global audiences an immersive experience of this evolving artistic journey. The first chapter was live-streamed in January 2025 and is now archived on the platform for on-demand viewing. Performance highlights of the Juilliard String Quartet’s 2024-25 season included ongoing collaborations with violinist Itzhak Perlman and pianists Emanuel Ax and Jean-Yves Thibaudet, with appearances at major venues including Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, and Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco. The season also featured distinguished collaborations with soprano Tony Arnold and clarinetist Daniel Ottensamer. The Quartet’s extensive touring this season included performances at London’s Wigmore Hall and BBC Radio, Berlin’s Pierre Boulez Saal, Salzburg’s Mozarteum Grosse Saal, Chicago’s Ravinia Festival, as well as New York’s Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

A facet of the JSQ’s decades-old legacy is a prolific and celebrated discography, with landmark recordings that continue to be rereleased by Sony Masterworks. The quartet’s latest album on Sony (2021), featuring works by Beethoven, Bartók, and Dvořák, was released to international acclaim, with *Strings Magazine* calling it a “miracle of contrasting color”. Other notable releases include an album featuring the world premiere recording of Davidovsky’s *Fragments* (2018) alongside Beethoven’s Op. 95 quartet and Bartók’s Quartet No. 1. The JSQ’s recordings of the Bartók and Schoenberg quartets as well as those of Debussy, Ravel, Dutilleux, and Beethoven have won Grammy Awards, and in 2011 the JSQ became the first classical music ensemble to receive a lifetime achievement award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences.

The JSQ is string quartet in residence at The Juilliard School in New York City and its members - Areta Zhulla, Leonard Fu, Molly Carr, and Astrid Schween - are all sought-after teachers on the string and chamber music faculties. The quartet regularly offers classes and open rehearsals while on tour and hosts the internationally recognized Juilliard String Quartet Seminar each May at The Juilliard School.

EVENING SERIES

This evening’s concert is sponsored through the generous support of Max McCauslin & John Smith.

PROGRAM

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 108

Allegretto

Lento

Allegro

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)

Prelude in E-flat Major, BWV 852

(arr. Michelle Barzel Ross)

MICHELLE BARZEL ROSS (B. 1987)

Birds on the Moon

Commissioned by JSQ, Chamber Music Napa Valley, and John Kongsgaard

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

String Quartet No. 15 in A Minor, Op. 132

Assai sostenuto—Allegro

Allegro ma non tanto

"Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die

Gottheit, in der Lydischen Tonart". Molto adagio –

Andante

Alla marcia, assai vivace

Allegro appassionato

Shostakovich: *String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 108*

The leading composer of the neo-Russian school, Shostakovich created fifteen string quartets, each an intensely personal utterance exhibiting his most daring innovations of form and harmony. In 1960 Shostakovich wrote his Quartet No. 7 in memory of his adored first wife, Nina Vasilyevna Varzar, a brilliant and spirited woman with a fine sense of humor. Critics consider Opus 108 to be the first of his final group of quartets, works through which he sought to offer thoughts on life, death, and immortality. Many listeners have attributed the increasingly melancholy atmosphere in these later works to Nina's early death.

Written with the utmost economy of texture, Quartet No. 7 develops its ideas primarily through extended solo, duo, or trio passages rather than full quartet voicing. This deliberate sparseness especially enhances the sense of desolation in the austere central movement (Lento), the cool heart of the quartet. The opening Allegretto explores two chromatic themes made whimsical by frequent meter changes. At its recapitulation the first theme, played pizzicato in triple meter, is transformed into a bizarre waltz, which reappears in the closing section of the finale. After a brief introduction, played with mutes in all instruments, the Allegro finale restates the chromatic viola motif heard at the end of the Lento and transforms it into a demonic fugue.

Notes by Nancy Monsman

Bach: *Prelude in E-flat Major, BWV 852* (arr. Michelle Barzel Ross)

From the arranger, Michelle Barzel Ross: *Birds on the Moon* begins with a distorted Bach fragment which I borrowed from *Prelude 852 of Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1*. As my quartet begins, however, Bach's counterpoint is unrecognizable because each player is rhythmically phased apart from each other. I fell in love with this Bach Prelude, and as I was composing my quartet, started each morning for almost a year playing this prelude as slowly as possible on my upright piano. To my delight, slow tempos heightened my attention to Bach's

sensuous and ecstatic counterpoint: every rise and fall reverberated in my ears, in my dreams, blurring into other scores. While researching for my quartet, I began to see traces of this prelude, the warmth of its E flat major and its mesmerizing rising fourth, across late Beethoven piano sonatas and string quartets. I could not get the connection between this Prelude (which contains a double Fuga...before the actual Fuga!) and Beethoven's Opus 110 Piano Sonata's last movement Fuga out of my mind. In my obsession, I discovered that it was likely Beethoven knew this Prelude inside out because he was known to have performed the WTC as a young child and to have Bach's score on his desk. Subconsciously or not, I ultimately realized that Bach's rising fourth served as a mirror to the cello melody which sits within the heart of my quartet (Movement 4), as my melody begins with a rising 5th answered by a falling 4th. Bach's 852 subject weaves throughout my string quartet on a transformational path: the players begin with a feeling of awe and sadness in their sound as the counterpoint searches for itself, yearning to reach out across obscured time and colors to find its original alignment. This yearning culminates in the center of my work, when the viola meets my cello melody with a version of Bach's subject transposed into C major. At this union, I have written in the score: "LOVE LAID BARE."

Michelle Barzel Ross: *Birds on the Moon*

From the composer: *Birds on the Moon* is a poetic labyrinth which weaves across mediums, musical dialogue, time and color. The work is in five attacca movements, mirrored on the Beethoven's 132. The powerful emotional structure of 132's Heiliger Dankgesang inspired me to juxtapose ancient and new sounds and thread a path of transformation and return in *Birds on the Moon*. My quartet begins in extreme emotional vulnerability: a musical paradox where time, rhythm, and the bare bones of musical counterpoint itself are stretched and juxtaposed. The music searches and evolves through fantastical invented string techniques (all born from improvisation) as accelerating lines of tension and contrasting musical forms propel the piece forward. My Musette is inspired from the alluring drone in Beethoven's 132 Second Movement, and is filled with fantastical

and whimsical bird calls, pizzicato, tapping and knocking. The third movement begins with wide, searching intervals, with an exponential growth in tension. The quartet accelerates towards a cluster, from which emerges a tender cello melody. This is met by the Bach fragment in the viola, and the full string quartet finally sings with loving counterpoint as the music rises like Murmuration: gestures joyously spill out like birds in flight, lines swirl, rise, expand and contract, culminating in a final bird fluttering in the violin. While the violin is knocking at the height of its register, the rest of the quartet falls downwards, the joyous counterpoint turns inward again, and time phases like the opening. Unconscious design and synchronicity guided my compositional process. Often, I would fall in love with an obscure color while improvising, and slowly, signs would emerge from the recess of my mind, like a compass to understand and attempt to translate the material. Two Wallace Stevens poems came to me from long stored memories, and finally birds emerged like an anchor as I attempted to notate my wild, imaginative improvisational language into a tangible medium. I became obsessed with the idea of time phasing with itself and envisioned gravity affecting each players' counterpoint differently: the phrase birds on the moon appeared in my mind. To my delight, this phrase revealed itself to be equal parts riddle and poetry: throughout history, philosophers, poets, amateur astronomers as early as the 17th century questioned if birds indeed migrated to the moon in winter? And so, the title of my quartet *Birds on the Moon* alludes to a metaphysical and impossible journey, contains the multitudes of cosmically huge and improbably small, and alludes to the beautiful expanse which can be found within one sliver of Bach counterpoint.

My hope is that this work might capture even an ounce of the profound humanity, love, curiosity and magical spirit, contained within our beloved Roger. Thank you to John Kongsgaard and Chamber Music in Napa Valley for the honor of composing this quartet for JSQ and celebrating Roger. [Roger Tapping (1960–2022), former violist of the Juilliard String Quartet].

Beethoven: *String Quartet No. 15 in A Minor, Op. 132*

During the years before Beethoven began his final set of string quartets, he endured a period of deep isolation. Complete deafness, the loss of patrons, and difficulties with family and publishers often left him without the will to compose. He therefore welcomed a commission from Prince Nicholas Galitzin for “two or three string quartets.” From 1824 until November 1826—only months before his death—Beethoven devoted himself to quartets written for Galitzin (Opp. 127, 130, 132, and 133) as well as two others composed independently (Opp. 131 and 135). These works expand the boundaries of the quartet through unprecedented structural freedom and expressive depth.

Opus 132 is the second of these final six quartets. During its composition, Beethoven briefly negotiated with the London Philharmonic Society about a possible post in England, but frustrated by low fees, he abandoned the idea and focused on Galitzin's commission. As he became absorbed in the quartets, however, he largely ignored his patron, who was angered to discover that the 1825 premiere of Opus 132 took place without his knowledge.

While composing Opus 132, Beethoven fell seriously ill—most likely with liver disease—and was confined to bed for a month. His sketches indicate an original four-movement plan, but upon recovery he added a central movement, the “*Convalescent's Holy Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity*,” expressing gratitude for restored health. This addition gives the quartet its profound spiritual core.

The quartet opens with a slow introduction featuring a four-note cello motif that recurs throughout the Allegro and recalls related gestures in Opp. 130 and 131. The second movement is a wistful scherzo built from two melodic cells, framed by a pastoral musette. The third movement, written in the ancient Lydian mode, alternates a hymn with faster sections marked “*Neue Kraft fühlend*” (“feeling new strength”). A brief march leads to the finale, where a free violin recitative gives way to a rondo that drives exuberantly from A minor to A major.

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October 25 at 3 p.m. | St. Philip's in The Hills Episcopal Church

✿ KATHRYN COK, SOLO HARPSICHORD

Les Mademoiselles Jefferson, The musical lives of Jefferson's daughters

November 2 at 3 p.m. | Grace St. Paul's Episcopal Church

✿ THE GESUALDO SIX

Motets & Madrigals, Music of Palestrina and Gesualdo

January 10 at 3 p.m. | St. Philip's in The Hills Episcopal Church

✿ TROBÁR

Songbook for a King, Music from the age of troubadours and trouvères

February 8 at 3 p.m. | Grace St. Paul's Episcopal Church

✿ DAVÓNE TINES & RUCKUS

What is your Hand in This?, Musical reflections on the Semiquincentennial

March 1 at 3 p.m. | Grace St. Paul's Episcopal Church

✿ ACCADEMIA DE' DISSONANTI

The Art of Variation, Music of Corelli, Leo, Vivaldi, Tartini, and Dall'Abaco



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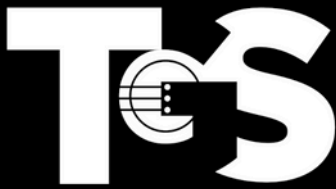
53RD SEASON // JULY 19–AUGUST 24, 2026

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Pictured: Dover Quartet, Will Liverman, Aiyun Huang
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John Millington Synge's
The Playboy of the Western World
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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25
Brentano Quartet
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SUNDAY, APRIL 12
Anran Qian, piano
3:00pm

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