



presents...

BENJAMIN GROSVENOR | Piano DORIC STRING QUARTET

Alex Redington | Violin
Ying Xue | Violin

Hélène Clément | Viola
John Myerscough | Cello

Wednesday, April 25, 2023 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

BEETHOVEN

String Quartet in F Minor, Opus 95 "Serioso"

Allegro con brio
Allegretto ma non troppo
Allegro assai vivace ma serioso
Larghetto espressivo; Allegretto agitato

HAYDN

String Quartet in D Major, Opus 50, No. 6 "Frog"

Allegro
Poco adagio
Menuetto: Allegretto
Finale: Allegro con spirito

INTERMISSION

BRIDGE

Piano Quintet in D Minor, H.49

Adagio; Allegro moderato
Adagio ma non troppo; Allegro con brio; Adagio ma non troppo
Allegro energico

The Advocates Reception follows this performance.

Benjamin Grosvenor and **Doric String Quartet** are represented by Arts Management Group
130 West 57th Street, Suite 6A, New York, NY 10019 artsmg.com

Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

ARTIST PROFILES

San Francisco Performances presents Benjamin Grosvenor for the third time. He made his SF Performances debut in April 2013.

Tonight is the SF Performances debut of Doric String Quartet.



British pianist **Benjamin Grosvenor** is internationally recognized for his sonorous lyricism and understated brilliance at the keyboard. His virtuosic interpretations are underpinned by a unique balance of technical mastery and intense musicality. Grosvenor has been heralded one of the most important pianists to emerge from the UK in several decades.

His 2022–23 season begins with Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No. 3* with RSO Wien conducted by Marin Alsop at the BBC Proms. He is "Artist in Focus" at The Sage Gateshead, and performs three projects across the season with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Other concerto highlights of the 2022–23 season include touring with the London Philharmonic and their Chief Conductor Edward Gardner, Orchestra of St Luke's at Carnegie Hall, Auckland Philharmonia, Prague Radio, Bern, San Diego and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestras, and Hallé Orchestra.

In 2011 Benjamin signed to Decca Classics, becoming the youngest British musician ever, and the first British pianist in almost 60 years, to sign to the label. Released in 2020, his second concerto album featuring Chopin's piano concerti, recorded with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra under the baton of Elim Chan, received both the Gramophone Concerto Award and a *Diapason d'Or de L'Année*. His renewal of the Decca partnership in 2021 coincided with the release of Benjamin's latest album

Liszt, centred around the composer's Sonata in B minor, which was awarded "Chocs de l'année" and Prix de Caecilia.

Grosvenor has received *Gramophone's* "Young Artist of the Year," a Classical Brit Critics' Award, UK Critics' Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent and a *Diapason d'Or Jeune Talent Award*. He has been featured in two BBC television documentaries, *BBC Breakfast*, *Front Row*, as well as in CNN's "Human to Hero" series. In 2016, he became the inaugural recipient of The Ronnie and Lawrence Ackman Classical Piano Prize with the New York Philharmonic.

He studied at the Royal Academy of Music where he graduated in 2012 with the "Queen's Commendation for Excellence" and in 2016 was awarded a RAM Fellowship. Benjamin is an Ambassador of Music Masters, a charity dedicated to making music education accessible to all children regardless of their background, championing diversity and inclusion.



Firmly established as one of the leading quartets of its generation, the **Doric String Quartet** receives enthusiastic responses from audiences and critics across the globe. With repertoire ranging from Haydn through to Bartók, Adès and Brett Dean, the Quartet's schedule takes them to the leading concert halls around the world including Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Vienna Konzerthaus, Berlin Konzerthaus, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Stockholm Concert Hall, Louvre, Carnegie Hall and Kioi Hall Tokyo, as well as regular performances at Wigmore Hall.

Highlights of the 2022–23 season see the Dorics performing at important European venues including Hamburg Laeiszhalle, De Singel, De Bijloke and Tivoli Vredenburg, as well as making three visits to Wigmore Hall across the season. Collaborations include performances in Belgium and the Netherlands with Cuarteto Quiroga, as well as revisiting their partnership with Pieter Wispelwey. The Quartet undertakes its annual North American tour, which

this year features performances in Boston, Chicago and San Francisco alongside Benjamin Grosvenor. Further afield, the Quartet returns to Japan for a tour including performances in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Yokohama.

Since 2010 the Doric Quartet has recorded exclusively for Chandos Records. The Quartet's most recent release of the second installment of their Mendelssohn String Quartet cycle was awarded Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* and Chamber Choice in *BBC Music Magazine*. 2019 saw the release of the Doric's benchmark recording of the complete Britten String Quartets. Future recording plans including the complete Beethoven String Quartet cycle as well as works by Berg and Webern.

Formed in 1998 the Doric String Quartet won first prize at the 2008 Osaka International Chamber Music Competition and 2nd prize at the Premio Paolo Borciani International String Quartet Competition. In 2015 the Quartet was appointed as Teaching Quartet in Association at the Royal Academy of Music in London and from 2018 the Quartet took over the Artistic Directorship of the Mendelssohn on Mull Festival.

The Quartet's violist Hélène Clément plays a viola by Guissani from 1843, generously on loan from Britten-Pears Arts and previously owned by Frank Bridge and Benjamin Britten.

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in F Minor, Opus 95 "Serioso"

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1779–1827)

Beethoven's manuscript for the *Quartet in F Minor* is dated October 1810, but almost certainly he continued to work on this quartet for some years after that, and it was not published until 1816. This quartet has a nickname, "*Quartetto Serioso*," that—unusually for a musical nickname—came from the composer himself. Well aware of the music's extraordinary character, Beethoven described the quartet as having been "written for a small circle of connoisseurs and...never to be performed in public." Joseph Kerman has described it as "an involved, impassioned, highly idiosyncratic piece, problematic in every one of its movements, advanced in a hundred ways" and "unmatched in Beethoven's out-

put for compression, exaggerated articulation, and a corresponding sense of extreme tension.” Yet this same quartet—virtually the shortest of Beethoven’s string quartets—comes from the same period as the easily accessible “Archduke” Trio, the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies, and the incidental music to Goethe’s *Egmont*, and this music’s extraordinary focus and tension seem sharply at odds with those scores. In fact, this quartet in many ways prefigures Beethoven’s late style and the great cycle of quartets written during his final years.

The first movement is extraordinarily compressed (it lasts barely four minutes), and it catapults listeners through an unexpected series of key relationships. The unison opening figure is almost spit out, passing through and ending in a “wrong” key and then followed by complete silence. Octave leaps and furious restatements of the opening figure lead to the swaying second subject, announced in flowing triplets by the viola. The development section of this (highly modified) sonata-form movement is quite short, treating only the opening theme, before the movement exhausts itself on fragments of that theme.

The marking of the second movement, *Allegretto ma non troppo*, might seem to suggest some relief, but this movement is even more closely argued than the first. The cello’s strange descending line introduces a lovely opening melody, but this quickly gives way to a long and complex fugue, its sinuous subject announced by the viola and then taken up and developed by the other voices. A quiet close (derived from the cello’s introduction) links this movement to the third, a violent fast movement marked *Allegro assai vivace ma serio*. The movement is in ABABA form, the explosive opening section alternating with a chorale-like subject for the lower three voices which the first violin decorates. Once again, Beethoven takes each section into unexpected keys. The last movement has a slow introduction—*Larghetto espressivo*—full of the darkness that has marked the first three movements, and this leads to a blistering finale that does much to dispel the tension. In an oft-quoted remark about the arrival of this theme, American composer Randall Thompson is reported to have said: “No bottle of champagne was ever uncorked at a better moment.” In contrast, for example, to the near-contemporary *Seventh Symphony*, which ends in wild celebration, this quartet has an almost consciously anti-heroic close, concluding with a very fast coda that Beethoven marks

simply *Allegro*.

Some have felt that the *Quartet in F Minor* is composed with the same technique as the late quartets but without their sense of spiritual elevation, and in this sense they see the present quartet as looking ahead toward Beethoven’s late style. But it is unfair to this music to regard it simply as a forerunner of another style. This quartet may well be dark, explosive, and extremely concentrated. But it should be valued for just those qualities.

String Quartet in D Major, Opus 50, No. 6 “Frog”

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN
(1732–1809)

Musical nicknames can be a problem. Some make good sense. The nickname *Eroica* is so exactly right for Beethoven’s *Third Symphony* that it crystallizes how we feel about that music and gives us a useful way of perceiving it. But other nicknames bear about as much relation to the music they are supposed to describe as patterns of stars do to the constellations that have been draped around them.

And so it should be said right from the start: there is nothing remotely amphibian about Haydn’s so-called “Frog” Quartet. That nickname was attached to this music because of a bowing pattern in the last movement said to resemble the croaking of a frog. But any neutral observer would be hard-pressed to make that identification, and so—instead of searching for it—we are much better off ignoring that intrusive nickname and hearing this sparkling music for itself.

The *Quartet in D Major* is the last of a set of six that Haydn completed in 1787. This was a very rich time for the composer. Over the previous years he had concentrated on orchestral music, writing the six “Paris” Symphonies (a somewhat useful nickname—those six symphonies had been written with French audiences and taste in mind and had been premiered in that city). But he had written only one string quartet since his Opus 33 of 1782. In the meantime, he had heard and studied the six quartets Mozart had dedicated to him, and he began to sense (as Mozart had) the unusual possibilities in the form. He now returned to the string quartet with renewed interest: his Opus 50, published in Vienna in 1787, was the first of several sets of quartets he composed over the next few years.

The *Quartet in D Major* is compact (barely 20 minutes long), bright (D major is a par-

ticularly resonant key for stringed instruments), and extroverted: it has virtuosic part for the first violin, but the writing for the other three players is often brilliant too. In these years Haydn was experimenting with monothematic movements. Rather than structuring the opening *Allegro* around the two “contrasted” themes that are part of the definition of sonata form, Haydn uses only one theme and then explores in detail the thematic (and motivic) possibilities of that theme before this sometimes dramatic movement comes to its surprisingly subdued close.

The *Poco adagio* is set in D minor, and now the music turns dark and expressive. There is some florid writing here (the score looks very black on the page), full of swirling arabesques, murmuring textures, and turns and trills. The minuet returns to D major. Sturdy energy is the keynote here, and trio makes effective use of several grand pauses.

The finale begins with the rapid alternation of the same note played on open and closed strings. Someone heard the sound of a frog in this oscillating sound, and that was the source of the nickname, but more remarkable is the sizzling writing for first violin, which has a part of concerto-like brilliance (the violin rockets up to high C-sharp at one point). Haydn’s marking *Allegro con spirito* is important—this is indeed a spirited movement, and after all its energy, this music pulses into silence on the alternating-string pattern that opened the movement.

Piano Quintet in D Minor, H.49

FRANK BRIDGE
(1879–1941)

Frank Bridge appears fated, at least for American audiences, to be remembered as the teacher of Benjamin Britten, though Bridge was a remarkable musician and composer in his own right. He studied viola and composition at the Royal College of Music and then made his career as a violist, conductor, and composer: Bridge played viola in several string quartets and conducted in both England and the United States. As a composer, he made a gradual evolution from a conservative musician, heir to nineteenth-century English music, to an explorer, interested in new ideas and willing to experiment with a new harmonic language. Bridge became interested in Britten when the latter was still a boy and

for three years gave him private composition lessons. Bridge was a demanding teacher, and his concern for craftsmanship, self-criticism, and economy of expression made a strong impression on the young Britten; Bridge's pacifism—which grew out of his horror at the slaughter of World War I—was also an influence on Britten's values.

Bridge composed his *Piano Quintet in D Minor* in 1904–05, when he was in his mid-twenties, but—dissatisfied—he did not publish it. He returned to the music in 1912 and revised it, condensing the original four-movement structure into three movements. The revised version, which was premiered by pianist Harold Samuel and the English String Quartet on May 29, 1912, is the version always performed today.

The *Piano Quintet in D Minor* is a big work, both in gesture and sound. The music can pitch between an intimacy of expression and a full-throated sonority that has the string quartet playing in powerful octaves. The first movement begins with a six-measure introduction that gives shape to one of the *Quintet's* principal themes before the music eases ahead at the *Allergro moderato*. Piano alone introduces the second subject, and the movement proceeds through powerful passages marked *Con passione* to more intimate material marked *dolce* and *espressivo*. After all this intensity, the first movement fades into silence on a chord marked triple *piano*.

In its original form, the *Quintet* had two interior movements—one slow, the other fast—but when Bridge revised the work he combined them into one movement in

ABA form. The outer sections are slow, and he placed the fast movement in the center of this slow movement (this was a favorite technique of Brahms). The slow opening section, marked *dolcissimo*, gives way to the brisk central episode, set in 9/8 and full of staccato writing. A passage for cello leads to the return of the opening material and a quiet close.

The vigorous finale returns to the grand manner of the opening movement—at one point Bridge marks the music *tutta forza*. Alert listeners will make out material from the two earlier movements returning here, and Bridge drives the *Quintet* to a powerful conclusion in D major in which all five players stamp out a great sustained D, spread across four octaves.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger