

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Isidore String Quartet

Adrian Steele, violin
Phoenix Avalon, violin

Devin Moore, viola
Joshua McClendon, cello

PROGRAM: BRAHMS, THE ADMIRER

Choral Arrangements for String Quartet (arr. Devin Moore)

Kyrie (chant)

Bach. J.S.: *In dulci jubilo*

Gloria (chant)

Brahms, Johannes: 5 Lieder, Op. 41 No. 1: *Ich schwing mein Horn ins jammertal*

Credo (chant)

Sanctus (chant)

Bach: *Agnus Dei* (from B minor Mass, BWV 232)

Brahms: - Geistliches Lied, Op. 30

String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 18, No. 6 (1801)

Ludwig van Beethoven
1770-1827

Allegro con brio

Adagio ma non troppo

Scherzo (Allegro)

La Malinconia (Adagio) - Allegretto quasi Allegro

-intermission-

String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat major, Op. 67 (1875)

Johannes Brahms
1833-1897

Vivace

Andante

Agitato. Allegretto non troppo

Poco allegretto con variazioni



Full Playbill

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"A polished sonority and well-balanced, tightly synchronized ensemble with nearly faultless intonation....it is heartening to know that chamber music is in good hands with such gifted young ensembles as the Isidore Quartet"
—Chicago Classical Review

Winners of a 2023 Avery Fisher Career Grant, and the 14th Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2022, the New York City-based Isidore String Quartet was formed in 2019 with a vision to revisit, rediscover, and reinvigorate the repertoire. The quartet is heavily influenced by the Juilliard String Quartet and the idea of 'approaching the established as if it were brand new, and the new as if it were firmly established.'

The quartet began as an ensemble at the Juilliard School, and has coached with Joel Krosnick, Joseph Lin, Astrid Schween, Laurie Smukler, Joseph Kalichstein, Roger Tapping, Misha Amory, and numerous others.

In North America, the Isidore Quartet has appeared on major series in Boston, New York, Berkeley, Chicago, Ann Arbor, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Durham, Washington DC, Houston, San Francisco, New Orleans, Cincinnati, Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, and has collaborated with several eminent performers including James Ehnes and Jeremy Denk. Their 25/26 season includes performances in Philadelphia, Cleveland, Calgary, Tulsa, Pasadena, Santa Barbara, New York, Washington's Library of Congress, plus return engagements in Montreal, Berkeley, Houston, La Jolla, Phoenix, Indianapolis, Baltimore, and Spivey Hall in Georgia. First-time collaborations include clarinetist Anthony McGill, cellist Sterling Elliott, and the Miró Quartet.

In Europe they have performed at Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and in Bonn (Beethoven Haus), Stuttgart, Cologne, and Dresden, among many others. During 25/26 they will make their debuts in Paris (Philharmonie) and London (Wigmore Hall).

Over the past several years, the quartet has developed a strong connection to the works of composer and pianist Billy Childs, performing his Quartets No. 2 and 3 throughout North America and Europe. In February 2026 they will premiere a new Childs quartet written expressly for them.

Both on stage and outside the concert hall, the Isidore Quartet is deeply invested in connecting with youth and elderly populations, and with marginalized communities who otherwise have limited access to high-quality live music performance. They approach music as a "playground" and attempt to break down barriers to encourage collaboration and creativity. The name *Isidore* recognizes the ensemble's musical connection to the Juilliard Quartet: one of that group's early members was legendary violinist Isidore Cohen. Additionally, it acknowledges a shared affection for a certain libation - legend has it a Greek monk named Isidore concocted the first genuine vodka recipe for the Grand Duchy of Moscow!

May, 2025. *Please discard any previously or undated versions.*

Program Notes

Brahms: The Admirer

Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms

Johannes Brahms's deep admiration for both Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven profoundly shaped his compositional style and artistic ideals. From Bach, Brahms inherited a reverence for rigorous contrapuntal technique, structural clarity, and the seamless integration of voices - qualities that are evident in his mastery of fugue, canon, and variation form. Brahms saw Bach not only as a fountainhead of musical craftsmanship but also as a spiritual and intellectual guide, inspiring him to pursue complexity balanced by coherence. This is especially apparent in Brahms's late works, where Baroque forms and counterpoint serve as a foundation for Romantic expression.

Equally significant was Brahms's relationship with Beethoven's legacy. Beethoven's innovations in expanding the emotional and structural possibilities of classical forms presented both a challenge and a model for Brahms. While Brahms admired Beethoven's boldness and dramatic intensity, he also felt the weight of Beethoven's towering presence in the symphonic and chamber music genres. Rather than attempting to imitate Beethoven's grand heroic style directly, Brahms sought to continue his tradition by combining classical balance and formal discipline with his own Romantic sensibility. This respectful dialogue with Beethoven is reflected in Brahms's dedication to absolute music - works that express deep feeling without programmatic content - and his careful development of motifs and themes.

Together, Bach and Beethoven shaped Brahms's musical identity: Bach's contrapuntal mastery provided the technical backbone, while Beethoven's expressive scope offered a vision of music as a profound, transformative art. A vital component of the three B's, Brahms would leave a lasting impression on the music world as an academic traditionalist, a tortured perfectionist, a hopeless Romantic, and a one of a kind composer. This particular program aims to understand Brahms as an innovative traditionalist with a deep reverence for the legacies of compositional giants Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven.

The first part of the program is structured to evoke the traditional layout of the Tridentine Mass. This design alludes to the enduring influence and central role of sacred music in Western art, not merely as historical reference but as a living source of expression. Interspersed with arrangements of choral works by Bach and Brahms that reinterpret this liturgical form, the program follows the skeletal structure of the Mass Ordinary - Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. In adopting a structure from the past and reshaping it with contemporary sensibilities, the program reflects a core aesthetic of Brahms: the reverent blending of old and new, in which tradition becomes a foundation for renewed artistic voice.

-written by Devin Moore

In dulci jubilo

Bach, J.S.

Johann Sebastian Bach's chorale harmonizations are among the most influential contributions to Western music, shaping the foundation of tonal harmony and choral writing. Drawing on well-known Lutheran hymn tunes, Bach created four-part settings that combine elegant voice leading with rich harmonic expression, often used as teaching models for centuries. Though many were originally written as components of larger cantatas and passions, these chorales have endured as standalone pieces admired for their clarity, structure, and spiritual depth. Their pedagogical impact is profound - generations of composers, theorists, and students have studied them to understand functional harmony, counterpoint, and the expressive potential of simple melodic material.

5 Lieder, Op. 41 No. 1: *Ich schwing mein Horn ins Jammertal*

Brahms, Johannes

Ich schwing mein Horn ins Jammertal (I Blow My Horn into the Vale of Tears), Op. 41 No. 1, is the opening piece of his 1862 collection of five part-songs for unaccompanied male chorus. Set in B-flat major and marked Andante, the work draws on a melancholic text from the *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* anthology, a collection of German folk poetry. The poem portrays a hunter who, having lost his quarry, bids a sorrowful farewell to the chase, symbolizing themes of unfulfilled longing and resignation.

Brahms's setting captures the poem's somber mood through a gently undulating melodic line and rich harmonic textures, evoking the imagery of a horn call echoing through a desolate landscape. The piece exemplifies Brahms's affinity for folk-inspired material and his skill in crafting expressive choral works that blend simplicity with emotional depth.

B minor Mass, BWV 232: *Agnus Dei*

Bach, J.S.

Bach's Mass in B minor is widely regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces of Western sacred music. Completed near the end of his life, the Mass is not a liturgical work in the traditional sense but rather a monumental compilation of sacred music drawn from various points in Bach's career. It unites a wide range of musical styles - from Renaissance polyphony to operatic drama - into a cohesive and spiritually profound whole, reflecting both Bach's deep faith and his extraordinary compositional craft.

The *Agnus Dei*, one of the Mass's final movements, is a deeply introspective alto aria that offers a quiet, meditative plea for mercy. Set in the unusual key of G minor, the piece features a solo voice accompanied by unison violins and continuo, creating a uniquely expressive texture that mirrors the timbre of the

human voice. Adapted from earlier material, the aria exemplifies Bach's ability to transform and elevate existing music into a work of spiritual depth and emotional clarity.

The Latin text *Agnus Dei* ("Lamb of God") comes from the Christian liturgy and refers to Jesus Christ as the sacrificial offering who takes away the sin of the world. Traditionally sung before Communion, the text has inspired centuries of musical and artistic interpretations. In Bach's hands, this ancient prayer becomes a moment of serene reflection and quiet intensity, preparing the listener for the final invocation of peace.

Geistliches Lied, Op. 30

Brahms, Johannes

Composed in 1856, Johannes Brahms's *Geistliches Lied* ("Sacred Song"), Op. 30, is a serene and harmonically rich motet originally scored for four-part choir and organ. Set to a 17th-century text by Paul Flemming, the piece is a musical prayer for inner peace and submission to divine will: "Let nothing ever grieve thee, distress thee, or fret thee." The text's message of calm trust in God's guidance is mirrored in Brahms's elegant counterpoint and luminous harmonic palette.

Written in a double canon at the ninth, *Geistliches Lied* demonstrates Brahms's early mastery of intricate contrapuntal technique, a skill he admired in Renaissance and Baroque composers - especially J.S. Bach. Despite the formal complexity, the music remains gentle and flowing, with a soothing, chorale-like quality. The piece closes with a peaceful Amen, leaving the listener with a sense of quiet resolution and spiritual reassurance. As one of Brahms's earliest sacred choral works, *Geistliches Lied* already shows the composer's lifelong balance of intellect and devotion.

String Quartet No. 6 in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6

Beethoven, Ludwig van

Beethoven's *String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18 No. 6*, concludes his first published set of quartets and offers a compelling glimpse of a composer rooted in Classical tradition while already pushing its boundaries. Deeply influenced by Haydn, this quartet favors wit, rhythmic precision, and formal clarity over overt lyricism, especially in the first three movements. The opening *Allegro con brio* is compact and fast-paced, with a brilliant arpeggiated theme and a tightly constructed second subject. The second movement shifts into a more lyrical, aria-like character, featuring a standout moment in which earlier minor-key material returns in a serene C-major setting. The third movement, a *Scherzo*, is full of playful syncopations and rhythmic mischief, contrasted by a fleet-footed and flowing trio.

The most striking element of the quartet is its final movement, titled *La Malinconia* ("Melancholy"). It opens with a slow, emotionally intense introduction - marked to be played "with the greatest delicacy" - which returns later in the movement to dramatic effect. This brooding material stands in sharp contrast

to the main section, a lively, rondo-like Allegretto that drives the quartet toward a brilliant and joyful Prestissimo conclusion. With its expressive contrasts and structural ingenuity, Op. 18 No. 6 showcases Beethoven's ability to honor Classical form while injecting it with new emotional and formal complexity - a hallmark of his evolving style.

String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 67

Brahms, Johannes

Composed during the summer of 1875, Brahms's String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 67, is a radiant and refined work that stands apart from the emotional weight of his earlier quartets. Often described by Brahms himself as a "pretty little thing," the piece was written as a diversion from the intense labor of completing his First Symphony. Yet behind his modest words lies a quartet of remarkable sophistication, marked by formal clarity, lyrical warmth, and rhythmic vitality. It is Brahms at his most genial—steeped in Classical tradition, but infused with a uniquely Romantic voice.

The first movement (Vivace) opens with exuberant energy, its bright, fanfare-like theme setting the tone for an elegant and spirited sonata form. Rhythmic shifts and intricate interplay between the instruments create a sense of lightness and charm, evoking the influence of Haydn. The second movement (Andante), in E-flat major, offers a moment of introspective calm. Cast as a theme with five variations, it explores gentle melancholy, graceful lyricism, and rich harmonic color, demonstrating Brahms's mastery of variation technique.

The third movement (Agitato - Allegretto non troppo) serves as a scherzo in all but name. Its hushed, tense outer sections contrast with a flowing, waltz-like trio, blending unease and charm in equal measure. The finale (Poco allegretto con variazioni) returns to the theme-and-variations form, this time with a brighter, more extroverted character. A simple, pastoral theme is developed with increasing complexity, culminating in a contrapuntal variation that pays homage to Brahms's Baroque influences. The work concludes with clarity, cohesion, and a touch of joyful wit.

Though lacking the dramatic weight of his earlier quartets, Op. 67 is emotionally resonant in a subtler way. Beneath its surface grace lies a quiet depth - serenity tinged with longing, humor touched by nostalgia. Through its poise and balance, the quartet invites listeners into a sound world of inward beauty and reflection, where restraint becomes its own form of expressive power.

Notes by Devin Moore