



In Association with the Smith College
Department of Music, presents the

Isidore String Quartet



Sunday, February 1, 2026, at 3:00 PM
Sweeney Concert Hall / Sage Hall
Smith College, Northampton, MA

Isidore String Quartet

**Adrian Steele and Phoenix Avalon, violins
Devin Moore, viola, Joshua McClendon, cello**

*In Memory of VCC Board Member
Peter Van Pelt*

Program

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Choral Arrangements for String Quartet (arranged
by Devin Moore)

- I. Kyrie (chant)
- II. Bach. J.S.: In dulci jubilo
- III. Gloria (chant)
- IV. Brahms, Johannes: 5 Lieder, Op. 41 No. 1:
Ich schwing mein Horn ins Jammertal
- V. Credo (chant)
- VI. Sanctus (chant)
- VII. Bach: Agnus Dei (from B minor Mass, BWV 232)
- VIII. Brahms: Geistliches Lied, Op. 30

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

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

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio ma non troppo
- III. Scherzo (Allegro)
- IV. La Malinconia (Adagio) – Allegretto quasi Allegro

Intermission

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

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

I. Vivace

II. Andante

III. Agitato. Allegretto non troppo

IV. Poco allegretto con variazioni

The Isidore String Quartet appears by arrangement with
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Please, no audio or video recording of this concert is allowed.

About Today's Concert

Notes by today's violist, **Devin Moore**. Thanks, Devin, for arranging such an exciting program! – John Montanari, VCC Artistic Director

Johannes Brahms' 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' late works, where Baroque forms and counterpoint serve as a foundation for Romantic expression.

Equally significant was Brahms' 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

About Today's Concert (cont.)

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' 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' 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 Choral Arrangements for String Quartet are 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.

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.

Composed during the summer of 1875, *Brahms' 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' 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.

About the Artists

Isidore String Quartet - Adrian Steele and Phoenix Avalon, violins, Devin Moore, viola, Joshua McClendon, cello

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 repertory. 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, Pittsburgh, Seattle, 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!

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From the Valley Classical Concerts Vice President

Welcome back, and happy 2026! What a great way to welcome in a new year, listening to the Isidore String Quartet performing Beethoven and Brahms.

First, I would like to inform you with great sadness that our longtime friend and VCC Board member, Peter Van Pelt, passed away at the end of 2025. Peter was a big supporter of the arts



here in the Valley and before that, as director of Pine Mountain Music Festival in Michigan. He was on our Board for 12 years advising and advancing the love of music. We will miss Peter's wit, wisdom, encyclopedic knowledge, and gentle presence.

Proofreading was among his many skills. He provided his edits right up until the end. I was sorry not to be able to send this note for his keen eye, so consider any typos you may find to be a dedication to him.

Second, I would like to welcome Kylie Johnson and Amy Gates, recent additions to our Board. Between them they bring us much experience in the music business, marketing, and fundraising for nonprofits.

I'd especially like to thank all the patrons who have sent in generous donations and to encourage those of you who have yet to contribute to consider it. Your generosity really helps us present the very best artists, as well as offer free tickets to young students and Card to Culture patrons who otherwise could not enjoy these concerts.

Thank you again for attending today. I look forward to seeing you Saturday, March 7th for gorgeous cello and piano from Camille Thomas and Julien Brocal.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurel Rogers".

“As you begin to realize that every different type of music, everybody's individual music, has its own rhythm, life, language and heritage, you realize how life changes, and you learn how to be more open and adaptive to what is around us.” ~ Yo-Yo Ma

The Valley Classical Concerts 2025-2026 Season

Sunday, October 12, 2025, 3:00 PM
The Harlem Quartet

Sunday, October 26, 2025, 3:00 PM
Quartetto di Cremona, with David Shifrin, clarinet

Sunday, November 16, 2025, 3:00 PM
Winds of the Boston Symphony Orchestra with
Jiayan Sun, piano

Sunday, February 1, 2026, 3:00 PM
The Isidore String Quartet

Saturday, March 7, 3:00 PM
Camille Thomas, cello, with Julien Brocal, piano

Saturday, March 21, 3:00 PM
"A Far Cry" Chamber Orchestra

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*In memory of Peter Van Pelt (partially or fully)

**In memory of Mark Morford

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