

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society
presents
Balourdet Quartet

Angela Bae, Violin
Justin DeFilippis, Violin
Benjamin Zannoni, Viola
Russell Houston, Cello

Wolf • Mendelssohn • Beethoven
Sunday Afternoon
May 14, 2023, • 4:30 PM
Trinity Church Auditorium
Red Bank, NJ

ADVANCE NOTES

PROGRAM

Italian Serenade (1887)

Hugo Wolf

String Quartet in E minor, Op. 44 No. 2 (1837)

Felix Mendelssohn

- I. Allegro assai appassionato
- II. Scherzo: Allegro di molto
- III. Andante
- IV. Presto agitato

INTERMISSION

String Quartet in E-flat, Op. 130
(with Große Fuge, Op. 133) (1825)

Ludwig van Beethoven

- I. Adagio, ma non troppo – Allegro
- II. Presto
- III. Andante con moto, ma non troppo. Poco scherzoso
- IV. Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai
- V. Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo
- VI. Große Fuge. Ouverture. Allegro – Meno mosso e moderato – Allegretto – Fuga. [Allegro] – Meno Mosso e moderato – Allegro molto e con brio

Program Notes

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903)

Italian Serenade (1887)

(~7 minutes)



It is a mystery why the great song composer Hugo Wolf wrote his rare instrumental piece *Italian Serenade* in 1887. Originally intended as a three-movement work but never completed, the light tarantella-like showpiece for quartet is a delightful encore piece, left incomplete, partially because of his failing syphilitic health. The tragedy of his life and his syphilitic decline in great contrast to the ebullience and spirit of this music. A serenade traditionally is night music sung outdoors, often for courtship, and the melodic character of this piece and its whimsy fit that description perfectly. Wolf never visited Italy, but was likely inspired by a novella by Eichendorff in which a young

violinist travels to Italy. The main tune resembles a melody originally played on a form of Italian folk oboe. A true quartet showpiece for all players, it is also a great example of the combination of song and dance in music, a charming eighth lilt pervading the delightful texture.



Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)

String Quartet in E minor, Op. 44 No. 2 (1837)

(~27 minutes)



Felix Mendelssohn was one of the great musical child prodigies, and by age 28 he was a true master of his craft. He had already long since written some of the greatest masterpieces of chamber music as a teenager, and he held the music directorship of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, making himself a successor to J.S. Bach in organizing musical life in the city. The *E Minor Quartet* showcases the two sides of the mature Mendelssohn. On the one hand, he still owes much to Mozart and the classics for the purity of his melodic gift. Yet emotionally the music chiefly owes itself to the Romantics, and the influence of the *Sturm und Drang* literature of the likes of Goethe and Schiller. The first and last movements both feature agitated textures and characters,

with churning accompaniment figures and searching melodies. The first movement theme is pleadingly haunting, and the movement abounds with scurrying fast note lines except in moments of great lyricism and repose. The last movement is a Presto, a lively dance, finds great life and energy in ebullient major key episodes, only to be snatched back into the darkness of the E Minor tonality in the end. The inner movements are some of the most characteristically Mendelssohnian character pieces he ever wrote. The second movement is a mischievous scherzo, almost a gleefully witty counterpart to the scherzo he wrote in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Trickery abounds in the alternation of five repeated loud notes interspersed in a sparkly texture and passed throughout the quartet. The third movement takes after the form of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* for piano, and features a soaring, gorgeous melody atop a gently flowing accompaniment texture. The warmth of this serenade shows off the tender side of Mendelssohn and the sensitivity of his artistic soul and humanity.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

String Quartet in E-flat, Op. 130

with Große Fuge, Op.133 (1825)

(~50 minutes)



Beethoven's late string quartets, the last substantial body of work before his passing, are considered some of the most powerful and transcendent works in the history of music, and the Opus 130 Quartet is no exception. The third quartet he completed in 1825, this work seems to take us into an inner world where thought and feeling become one and the nature of beauty is explored and pondered upon, until in its original finale movement Beethoven almost shakes the universe with an explosive and earth-shattering finale. This movement, the *Grosse Fuge*, received such a backlash for seeming to almost break the very fabric of musical convention and harmony itself that Beethoven agreed to rewrite the finale the following year (his very last music he ever wrote).

The piece opens with a downward winding single unison scale descending, then unfolds into four-part harmony as if the four voices in the quartet are being birthed out of one strain of thought. In fact, much of the material of the entire six movements is developed in this slow opening. The fast section of the first movement breaks out with jubilation and a fanfare motive, but the introductory slow music interjects itself at various points throughout this sonata-form movement, starts and stops pervading

the music. The second movement Presto is a fleeting and mercurial scherzo, alternating between hushed and boisterously rustic, bristling with internal energy until an explosion of luminous velocity. The Andante movement, marked slightly joking in character, is quaint and filled with a lot of tongue and cheek in the nature of its curtsy-like gestures. The “Alla danza Tedesca” resembles a lilting German folk dance, lyrical yet slightly off-balance.

After this series of three movements that are more progressively cheerful, almost to the point of irony, the famous Cavatina speaks to humanity’s deepest emotions and feelings. It is Timeless yet concise, at least than half the length of the other epic slow movements in the other late quartets. Beethoven himself even supposedly confessed that “nothing that he had written had so moved him” as much as this Cavatina. It is a serenade that sings to us from underneath a full speaking voice and from another world, almost too possessed by its to speak, until it breaks into a restless passage marked “beklemmt” (anguished). After impacting us with unspeakable depth of feeling the Cavatina, Beethoven in the two different endings offers us different resolutions of this narrative shift. The replacement sixth movement resembles the folk dance aspect of much of the earlier movements, and seems to resolve the whole piece with a smile. By contrast, The Grosse Fugue presents utter unbridled, maniacally joyful abandon and jolts the listener out of complacency. It is epically symphonic in the way it is in four distinct parts that borrow material from earlier in the piece, much like the Ode to Joy. It redefines mastery of the contrapuntal, conversational fugal form conquered by J.S. Bach, and though Beethoven had been maligned in his youth for his counterpoint skills here he redefines the form for a new, later age of musical style. Additionally, its harmonic daringness that at times sounds like it was written 100 years later, stretching tonality to a breaking point but always resolving triumphantly with a sense that Beethoven has shown us the joy of being truly free in a world defined by order.



Artists

The **Balourdet Quartet**, based in Boston, Massachusetts, is currently in residence at the New England Conservatory’s Professional String Quartet Program. The quartet received the Grand Prize at the 2021 Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition, as well as prizes in international competitions including the Banff, Paolo Borciani, and Carl Nielsen competitions. They were also awarded the Gold

Medal at the 2020 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition and the 2021 Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition.

Highlights of the Balourdet 2022-23 season include appearances at Chamber Music Detroit, the Grand Piano Series in Naples, FL, NEC's Jordan Hall, Merkin Hall, and Wigmore Hall. Summer 2022 also saw the Balourdet performing at festivals including Bravo! Vail, Music Mountain, and Strings Music Festival. Additionally this season, the quartet is thrilled to premiere a new commissioned work by celebrated composer Karim Al-Zand, made possible through Chamber Music America's Classical Commissioning Grant.

The Balourdet has performed at festivals and series including Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival, the Aspen Music Festival, La Jolla Music Society Summerfest, the Dame Myra Hess Concerts, Montgomery Chamber Music, Santa Fe ProMusica, and the Schneider Concert Series. Committed to sharing their musical values with the next generation, the quartet has given masterclasses and coachings at New England Conservatory Preparatory Department, Fischhoff Chamber Music Academy, Upper Valley Music Center, and Wright State University, as well as a residency teaching and performing at the Green Mountain Chamber Music Festival.

The Balourdet Quartet was formed in 2018 at Rice University in Houston, Texas under the tutelage of James Dunham, Norman Fischer, and Cho-Liang Lin. It currently works primarily with Paul Katz at the New England Conservatory, as well as Miriam Fried and members of the Cleveland and Borromeo Quartets. The quartet takes its name from Antoine Balourdet, chef extraordinaire at the Hotel St. Bernard and beloved member of the Taos School of Music community.

Born in Seoul, Korea, **Angela Bae** began her musical aspirations at the age of three. She studied with Phillip Levy in Los Angeles, California and graduated in 2020 with her Bachelor's degree with Paul Kantor at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music.

Angela has won awards in Korea and the United States, including the The Korea Times Competition, Alexander and Buono International Competition, Music Center Spotlight, and Mika Hasler Competition. She has appeared as soloist in venues such as Weill Hall, Disney Hall, and Sydney Town Hall. When she was 16, she became the youngest Concertmaster of the American Youth Symphony in LA.

As a chamber musician, she performed and worked with artists including James Dunham, Norman Fischer, Kenneth Goldsmith, and Gil Shaham. In 2018, she

attended the Taos School of Music, working with pianists Robert McDonald and Thomas Sauer, as well as the Borromeo, Miro, and Brentano Quartets. From the friendship and musical companionship built during Taos the Balourdet Quartet, of which she is a violinist, was born.

She is currently pursuing her Master's degree with Don Weilerstein at the New England Conservatory of Music Professional String Quartet Program.

Justin DeFilippis is a violinist of the Balourdet Quartet, currently in residence in the Professional String Quartet Program at the New England Conservatory. Previously, he completed his Master's Degree at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music under the tutelage of Cho-Liang Lin, and Bachelor's at New England Conservatory working with Donald Weilerstein. He currently studies with Nicholas Kitchen of the Borromeo String Quartet. He completed a minor in music theory along with his performance degree from NEC. In high school, he attended the Juilliard School Pre-College Division, studying with Elizabeth Chang and graduating with the Commencement Award. An avid chamber musician, he has coached and played with members of the Brentano, Pacifica, Miro, Shanghai, Cleveland, Dover, and Ying Quartets as well as the Peabody Trio, and has participated in numerous solo and chamber masterclasses with such artists as Leonidas Kavakos, Augustin Hadelich, Ida Kavafian, and members of the Emerson and Juilliard Quartets. He was a two-time participant of the Taos School of Music, and has also attended the New York String Orchestra Seminar, the Yellow Barn Young Artist Program, the Aspen Center for Advanced Quartet Studies, and received the Kaplan Fellowship at the Bowdoin International Music Festival. He also was a National Finalist of the MTNA Competition Junior Division. Recently, he has also performed alongside Cho-Liang Lin and Jon Kimura Parker, members of Silkroad, and served as concertmaster of the Shepherd School Symphony on a number of occasions.

Benjamin Zannoni is the violist of the Balourdet Quartet, currently in residence in the Professional String Quartet Program at the New England Conservatory, where he studies with Martha Katz. He has received degrees from the Manhattan School of Music's Pinchas Zukerman Performance Program and Orchestral Performance Program, as well as the Juilliard School and Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. In the past, Ben has studied under Karen Dreyfus, Pinchas Zukerman, Patinka Kopec, Heidi Castleman, Robert Vernon, and James Dunham and has played in masterclasses for Koichiro Harada, Kazuhide Isomura, Roberto Diaz, Lawrence Dutton, Richard O'Neil, Richie Hawley, and Jutta Puchhammer-Sédillot. He has attended festivals such as the Young Artists Program at the National Arts Center in

Ottawa Canada, Music Academy of the West, Sejong International Music Festival, and the Heifetz International Music Institute.

Russell Houston is the cellist of the Balourdet Quartet, currently in residence at the Professional String Quartet Program at the New England Conservatory.

Russell is the recipient of top prizes at the Lynn Harrell Concerto Competition, Lennox International Young Artist Competition, Mondavi National Young Artists Competition, Sorantin International Competition, and the Samuel and Elinore Thaviu Competition. He has also performed as a soloist with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and Plano Symphony Orchestra.

His festival appearances include the Aspen Music Festival, Kneisel Hall, New York String Orchestra, Sarasota Music Festival, Piatigorsky International Cello Festival, Pyongchang Music Festival, and Taos School of Music. Houston has had the privilege of sharing the stage with renowned artists such as Denis Bouriakov, Cho-Liang Lin, Brinton Smith, and members of the Cleveland and Dover Quartets.

Russell is currently pursuing a Graduate Diploma under the tutelage of Paul Katz at the New England Conservatory. Houston holds degrees from the Colburn Conservatory, Northwestern University, and Rice University. His primary teachers include Clive Greensmith, Hans Jensen, and Brinton Smith.



The recording of the Balourdet concert is scheduled to be broadcast on the Brookdale Community College cable channel on June 11, 2023, 4:30 PM.

Subsequent Broadcasts:

- June 12, 2023, 2:30 and 7:30 PM
- June 16, 2023, 7:30
- June 17, 2023, 7:30

The recording will premiere on YouTube starting Sunday, June 11, 2023, at 4:30. You can access the YouTube recording at www.rbcms.org