

Brandeis
FALL 2022

CONCERT SERIES

Slosberg Music Center

LYDIAN STRING QUARTET: BEETHOVEN, CHASALOW & DEBUSSY



PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER HUANG

ANDREA SEGAR & JULIA GLENN,
VIOLINS

MARK BERGER, *VIOLA*

JOSHUA GORDON, *CELLO*

and special guest artist

CLARA LYON, *VIOLIN*



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2022 | 8 PM

SLOSBERG MUSIC CENTER

LYDIAN STRING QUARTET

with special guest

CLARA LYON, *VIOLIN*

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2022 | 8 PM

Slosberg Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Trio in C minor, Op. 9 No. 3 (1798)

- I. Allegro con spirito
- II. Adagio con espressione
- III. Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace
- IV. Finale. Presto

Julia Glenn, *violin* | Mark Berger, *viola* | Joshua Gordon, *cello*

Eric Chasalow (b. 1955)

String Quartet No. 2 (2019) ~ *world premiere*

Clara Lyon, *violin 1* | Julia Glenn, *violin 2*
Mark Berger, *viola* | Joshua Gordon, *cello*

~ **INTERMISSION** ~

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10 (1893)

- I. Animé e très décidé
- II. Assez vif et bien rythmé
- III. Andantino, doucement expressif
- IV. Très modéré

Clara Lyon, *violin 1* | Julia Glenn, *violin 2*
Mark Berger, *viola* | Joshua Gordon, *cello*

PROGRAM NOTES

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Trio in C minor, Op. 9 No. 3 (1798)

The eighteenth century saw major developments in and codifications of Western classical chamber music—most notably the shift from counterpoint and sounding-bass-driven harmony to four-part triadic harmony, and from a preference for trio sonatas to a reverence of piano trios and string quartets. Add to this the stylistic changes brought by emerging Romanticism and surrounding nationalism in the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and one quickly realizes the vastness of the crockpot of influences with which composers of this time could—and had—to play.

Beethoven's five string trios come precisely from this crockpot, wildly different in their manifestations and serving as fodder for crucial compositional experiments. He wrote them in the 1790s before any of his quartets or symphonies, starting with two lighter trios in a divertimento mold. The three trios of Op. 9 are set in four movements each, and the C minor trio you'll hear tonight stands out in its heft, deliberateness of craft and stage-setting for quartets and symphonies to come. Its multitude of influences and aims gives performers a sometimes frustrating amount of leeway in terms of possible performance, practice and interpretational approaches.

The key of C minor is often recognized as Beethoven's home for turmoil and (at least partial) resolution, associated with such monumental works as his Fifth Symphony, Third Piano Concerto and *Pathétique* and Op. 111 piano sonatas. The first movement of tonight's trio opens with four descending steps in unison, containing the fateful augmented second that so dramatizes musical climates in minor. Troubled rhythms and near-constant sixteenth notes drive the winds and fuel our unrest. Storm and angst are softened by a second theme in E-flat major, but despair wins out by the end of the movement.

The second movement immediately transforms to tranquility, opening the skies with the parallel key of C major. The opening descending minor scale of the first movement is reborn as ascending major steps, unfolding into a set of undulating variations before tiptoeing into the sunset. The ensuing Scherzo returns us to the turbulence of C minor

and battled rhythms, although both relative and parallel majors make increasing appearances and thus hold more say in the argument of ultimate affect. The final movement seems to doom us with lengthier descending opening scales in C minor, but a second theme in major eventually dominates the exposition and guides the increasing positivism that follows, leaving us with ephemeral ascending arpeggios in major. Ultimately, the torment of minor versus major is soothed by the antithesis of the very word “versus.” Major itself does not win out in the end; instead, we reach a new understanding that perhaps they were not so separate to begin with, and hope comes from this simple but deep constant dual presence. In this way, Beethoven proves his anticipation of harmonic and tonal attitudes that were still many decades—if not a full century—away for the collective consciousness.

~ Julia Glenn

• • • •

Eric Chasalow (b. 1955)

String Quartet No. 2 (2019) ~ *world premiere*

My Second Quartet, written for and dedicated to the Lydian Quartet, exists in two versions and tonight is the premiere of the concert version of the piece, which is in one movement and lasts fifteen minutes. Each time composers choose to write for a particular medium, we enter a different subculture with its own artistic norms, audience, membership organizations, and venues. The subculture of electroacoustic music, in which I often work, with only a fifty to one hundred-year-old history—“performed” with loudspeakers, has encouraged composers to move out of the traditional music venues and to think about how that move changes the music we write and how it will be received. So when the Lydian Quartet and I spoke about a new piece, we started discussing how it might respond differently to new performance spaces. What about a piece that might work with the quartet in different corners of a museum? We eventually experimented in the Rose, which we found very successful.

With the museum as venue, I decided to find some simple way to engage the distinctions between sound art and music. The piece that resulted, my Second Quartet starts with the members of the quartet situated in different parts of the museum. The sound of each instrument floats freely without synchronization. Everyone entering the museum is encouraged to move freely around the space to hear how things

change with the accidental sonic collisions and reverberations. After about forty minutes, the quartet members meet in a central location and the audience experiences the same musical materials that previously inhabited the museum, this time assembled into a tightly controlled piece of music. This performance scenario creates a direct contrast of sound experiences – one time-based and one not. But these two parts also have a musical effect, introducing ideas in an informal way, so that they can start to seep into our memory before becoming part of a musical discourse. Unfortunately, the original premiere in the Rose was to have been April 2020 and so our premiere had to wait until things were safe for live performance once again. Hopefully there will be a museum performance in the future.

I have taken the time to explain the generating idea for this quartet because it also explains a lot about the kind of musical materials it is made of. The opening of the piece is comprised of simple and repetitive pizzicati that evolve slowly and subsequent sections have a very direct quality too. There is a succession of ensemble textures with less layering than I might have otherwise composed since, in the larger piece for museum space, I wanted to start with similar materials in all four instruments, out of synchronization, floating toward the listener from different corners of the museum.

The other inspiration for my Second Quartet was my sense of wonder in the structures and qualities of the late Beethoven quartets, especially Op. 133, the Grosse Fugue, so it is especially appropriate that the program includes Beethoven.

~ Eric Chasalow

• • • •

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10 (1893)

For at least one performer tonight, early exposure to Claude Debussy's string quartet was hearing it as the flip side of Maurice Ravel's similarly vinyl-friendly quartet (the wonderful old Budapest Quartet LP) and assuming at that immature age (12) that these two French composers must be birds of a feather. It would have been more illuminating to hear Debussy's quartet without the long replicated coupling of Ravel, and instead contrast it with his equally pathbreaking orchestral tone poem *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* premiered a year later, or with his late

chamber works (the three extant sonatas of the uncompleted set of six he intended) to hear the evolution of his chamber music writing to a more pared down approach to structure, motivic ideas, motion, tone color, instrumentation, and expression, with his daring 1915 set of twelve solo piano études thrown in for good measure.

But if a record label insisted on adding another relevant string quartet to the disc, Edvard Grieg's earlier 1878 quartet would make a powerful preceding work (it's been done). Indeed, there has been some musicological speculation that Grieg's quartet (with its rhetorical opening followed by a rippling fast theme, plus its terraced chord moves) was a formative influence on Debussy's own, although the latter would not have admitted it (Debussy's review of Grieg's *Elegiac Melodies* acidly described them, "one has in the mouth the bizarre and delightful taste of a pink bonbon that could be filled with snow"). César Franck's 1890 String Quartet in D minor is also often cited as a model, full of unexpected harmonic twists and churning inner rhythms, and a cyclical form that Debussy emulated with the return of his opening first movement theme in the finale.

This is not meant to denigrate Ravel's own beloved masterwork and how Debussy's quartet was a clear model for it. But one can recognize a subconscious connection between Debussy and the two earlier composers, even if the former two were still considered to be in the shadow of Austro-Germanic dominance of the rules of composition. With all three of them, the harmonic adventure of an opening idea or theme could be freed from those traditions of modulation and given a more forward looking journey. Debussy would go far beyond the others exploring alternative scales (the different modes, gamelan/pentatonic, whole tone, more) and their resultant harmonies, flouting conventional listeners' expectations of resolution.

Like Grieg, Debussy starts his quartet from a rigorous opening G minor chord (and the same opening notes GFDF in the melody) but plunges right into his own unexpected sideways move, as that richly voiced downbeat is the impulse for a powerful half-diminished seventh chord that could be at home both in a Wagner opera and in a jazz club, with the theme continuing in a turbulent Phrygian mode. To cite just a few other examples that set him apart: the opening motif being given so many treatments that the scholar Roy Howat likened them to Monet's illumination of a fixed object from different angles and lighting. A first

movement pre-climatic cello solo circles around itself employing a whole tone scale. A dizzying falling arpeggiated sequence in the finale is a reminder of the legendary Paris Conservatory confrontation when Debussy the student rattled his composition professor Ernest Guiraud by reeling off a forbidden series of parallel fifths and unresolved dissonances at the piano (to Guiraud's virulent criticism, Debussy replied, "there is no theory. Pleasure is the law").

And then there are the rhythmic and structural twists on tradition: the swirling inner rhythms creating minimalist figures that wouldn't be out of place in a Philip Glass score; the apparent sonata form of the first movement with its brief recapitulation but otherwise undermined with variations taking the place of the traditional development section; the second movement's Spanish dance stretched out to fit the unorthodox meter of 15/8; the introductory hint of a fugue in the finale which is doubled up, fractured, and reassembled into a completely new texture; lyrical lines whose gestures ignore bar lines and create a momentarily altered sense of meter.

The reactions of critics and audiences at the quartet's 1893 premiere and subsequent performances were decidedly mixed. The composer Paul Dukas was intrigued by dissonances in Debussy's quartet that "...are never harsh but, with their complex interrelationships, create an effect which is indeed almost more harmonious than the consonances." But the French musicologist Léon Vallas described many amateur musicians in the National Society crowd hearing it "as a freakish fantasy... they were utterly disconcerted by the novelty of the details and bewildered by the harmonic daring of this revolutionary style of writing." A 1902 Kneisel Quartet performance led the Boston Journal's critic Phillip Hale to write:

"[Debussy's quartet] is a strange and bizarre work... a hallucination characterized by leaping rhythms, violent shocks of harmony... and a curious assemblage of sonorities, some charming, some irritating... Is this indeed music?"

Yet only a month later, a Boston Symphony performance of *Prelude to An Afternoon of a Faun* made the same critic a believer in Debussy, the first positive review for him from an American critic:

"The music is exquisite for suggestive vagueness... cerebral rather than bodily, there are delicate shades of color that melt and fade into each other... the individuality of this music!"

Debussy may not have been as forceful or anarchic a revolutionary as other composers of his time. Yet his willingness to rebel against decades of music composition rules gave the likes of Igor Stravinsky, Bela Bartók, and Arnold Schoenberg the confidence to deploy their own individual and revolutionary ideas with a newfound freedom, setting the stage for the advancement of modernism in music even if more avant-garde composers might not acknowledge Debussy's long-range impact. Almost a century after the quartet's premiere, Philip Glass would write in 1992:

"We tend to concentrate on the biggies, like Boulez, Stockhausen, Bartók, and forget other influences which may be subtler but more lasting. Like Debussy. I think about him more now than I ever did. Not a popular idea."

~ Joshua Gordon

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

From its beginning in 1980, the **Lydian String Quartet** (Andrea Segar and Julia Glenn, violins; Mark Berger, viola; Joshua Gordon, cello) has been acclaimed by audiences and critics across the USA and abroad for embracing the full range of the string quartet repertoire with curiosity, virtuosity, and dedication to the highest artistic ideals of music making. In its formative years, the quartet studied repertoire with Robert Koff, a founding member of the Juilliard String Quartet who had joined the Brandeis University faculty in 1958. Forging a personality of their own, the Lydians were awarded top prizes in international string quartet competitions, including Evian, Portsmouth and Banff, culminating in 1984 with the Naumburg Award for Chamber Music.

In the years to follow, the quartet continued to build a reputation for their depth of interpretation, performing with "a precision and involvement marking them as among the world's best quartets" (Chicago Sun-Times). Residing at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts since the group's founding, the Lydians continue to offer compelling, insightful, and dramatic performances of the quartet literature. From the acknowledged masterpieces of the classical, romantic, and modern eras to new remarkable compositions written by today's cutting edge composers, the quartet approaches music-making with a sense of exploration and personal expression that is timeless.

The Lydian String Quartet has performed extensively throughout the United States at venues such as Jordan Hall in Boston; the Kennedy Center and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; Lincoln Center, Miller Theater, and Weill Recital Hall in New York City; the Pacific Rim Festival at the University of California at Santa Cruz; and the Snee Beethoven Series at the University at Buffalo. Abroad, the Quartet has made appearances in France, England, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Russia, Armenia, and Taiwan.

The Lydians have created intriguing thematic programming such as "Around the World in a String Quartet," a multi-year concert series that explores string quartet music from local world musical traditions in and beyond the western European art music setting; and "Vienna and the String Quartet," a project surveying the heart of the Western classical string quartet repertory by juxtaposing new and old Vienna. In addition to traditional concerts, the quartet offers programming with themes exploring concepts of time, place, the vernacular, and identity, as well as single composer programs, all-contemporary programs, cross-cultural collaborations, and mixed media programs (video, electronics, live painting projections). The Lydians enjoy working with other artists, in traditional configurations as well as in boundary-crossing performances. Most recently, these included such musicians as tabla player Sandeep Das, pipa player Chen Yihan, Syrian clarinetist/composer Kinan Azmeh, and others.

The Lydians have long championed the commissioning, performing and recording of new works. They enjoy working with young composers at the quartet's Brandeis home as well as in mini-residencies at universities across the US. Their five-year "American Originals" Project, from 1995-2000, featured music drawn from the rich repertoire of the 20th-Century American string quartet. During that time they performed and/or recorded over sixty works by American composers from the early twentieth century onward, accompanying concerts with workshops, lectures, and discussions. The Lydians were the first to record many of these works, helping to bring them to the forefront of the American contemporary quartet repertoire. In recognition of their work, the quartet has received numerous Chamber Music America/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming, grants from the Meet the Composer/Rockefeller Foundation/AT&T Jazz Program in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Aaron Copland Fund for Music.

In 2012 their first Lydian String Quartet Commission Prize drew over 400 applicants; as a result, first prize-winner Kurt Rohde wrote his epic string quartet treatises for an unrecovered past for the Lydians, who premiered it in 2013 and recorded it in the summer of 2015. The 2015 LSQ Commission Prize was awarded to composer Steven Snowden, who wrote Bird Catching From Above for the Lydians' premiere in the spring of 2016. The 2017 LSQ Commission Prize was awarded to Saad Haddad, who wrote his String Quartet for the Lydians' premiere in the spring of 2018. The 2020 LSQ Commission Prize winner is Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon.

The Lydians' 29 currently available commercial recordings reflect their diverse and far-reaching repertoire, including works by Beethoven, Brahms, Ives, Ornstein, Persichetti, and Schubert as well as American contemporary composers they have long known and collaborated with such as Martin Boykan, Eric Chasalow, Peter Child, John Harbison, Lee Hyla, Steven Mackey, Kurt Rohde, Harold Shapero, and Yehudi Wyner. Their recording of John Harbison's String Quartet No. 3 and "The Rewaking" was chosen by both The New York Times and The Boston Globe as one of the best classical recordings of 2001. Harbison recently wrote of the quartet: "Each time I encounter the Lydian Quartet my admiration for their technical, structural, and communicative power continues to grow. They are the complete package, and the wider my travels, the deeper goes my conviction."

Of their recently released (2012) recording of Beethoven's late quartets, Paul Rapoport of Fanfare magazine writes: "these are fine and distinctive performances, recorded in very realistic sound... The dense counterpoint of the Grosse Fuge benefits especially from the textural clarity characteristic of these performances, and the Lydian players turn in one of the most cleanly executed and precisely articulated renditions of this difficult movement in my experience." The Boston Globe's Jeremy Eichler wrote, of the release: "These distinguished readings are full of subtlety, tonal refinement, and a sense of accumulated musical wisdom."

The members of the Lydian String Quartet are on the faculty of Brandeis University, in Waltham, Mass. Learn more at lydianquartet.com.

Clara Lyon is an accomplished performer and curator who forges meaningful connections across sonic languages and societal contexts to foster investigation and imagination. For the last eight seasons Lyon was a violinist and programming director for the Chicago-based Spektral Quartet, during which time they were nominated for three GRAMMY awards, named 2017 'Chicagoans of the Year' by the Chicago Tribune, and taught as resident artists at the music department of the University of Chicago. During her tenure as program director, she cultivated successful collaborative partnerships between celebrated composers, visual artists, writers, and community organizations to create thoughtful and immersive musical experiences across a variety of formats. She also spearheaded the quartet's lauded cycle of Arnold Schoenberg's complete string quartets.

Known for combining stylistic versatility, eclectic repertoire, and enthusiastic storytelling, her upcoming performances and projects include new commissions, multimedia work, and fresh interpretations of established materials. Lyon recently joined the roster of Decoda, the affiliate ensemble of Carnegie Hall, with whom she has performed since 2012. Her recordings can be heard on the Nimbus, New Amsterdam, New Focus, Starkland, Sideband, and Sono Luminus labels.

Recently, Lyon's interdisciplinary collaboration with musician Hannah Collins and visual artist Antonia Contro was shown as part of the *Only Connect* exhibit at the Secrist Gallery in Chicago. She is also the only performing member of the Theorem Collective, a small company of artists dedicated to adapting the celebrated fine art book *Theorem* by Antonia Contro and Elizabeth Bradfield, to the stage in 2024. As a curator, her work was commended as a 2020 recipient of the Music Academy of the West Alumni Enterprise Award, which supported Spektral Quartet's recording of a new work by Anna Thorvaldsdottir for string quartet and video art. A prizewinner of the Irving M. Klein International Competition and the Schadt International Competition, she has also performed as a soloist and chamber musician across the world, and has appeared frequently with Decoda, Argento Ensemble, Novus, and the Momenta Quartet. Lyon was a 2012-2014 fellow with Ensemble Connect, and holds degrees from The Juilliard School and SUNY Stony Brook. Currently based in Chicago, she enjoys fun facts, the color blue, and learning how to grow stuff.

2022 LYDIAN STRING QUARTET COMMISSION PRIZE

THE PRIZE

The Lydian String Quartet and Brandeis University announce their biennial competition for the commission of an original work for string quartet. The winning composer will receive a \$15,000 commission to compose a large-scale (15- to 30-minute) string quartet that will be premiered by the Lydian String Quartet in Fall 2024.

ELIGIBILITY

The competition is held without restriction regarding musical style, nationality, age, gender, race or religion. Members of the LSQ Commission Prize jury, Brandeis faculty and students currently enrolled at Brandeis University are not eligible.

As artists-in-residence at Brandeis, we believe that diversity, equity and inclusion are essential components of artistic excellence. Brandeis University is committed to creating equitable access and opportunities for applicants. Because diversity, equity and inclusion are at the core of Brandeis' history and mission, we value and are seeking applicants that represent a variety of social identities, including those that have been underrepresented in higher education, who possess skills that spark innovation and who, through their artistic pursuits, bring expertise in building, engaging and sustaining a pluralistic, just and inclusive community.

TO APPLY

All competitors must submit the following materials online no later than **December 15, 2022**:

1. Two representative scores as well as recordings of the two works, one that has been completed within the past five years and at least one demonstrating string instrument writing. MIDI representations are acceptable, but live or studio recordings are highly recommended.
2. Online application form, resume of compositional activities, biography and nonrefundable application fee of \$30 (U.S. dollars). Application fees must be submitted by credit card online.

The competition is anonymous. Please note that no identifying words, marks, voices or other indications breaking the anonymity are allowed on scores and sound files. The presence of any identifying features will disqualify the candidate.

The 2022 Lydian String Quartet composition competition is using SlideRoom as its jury platform.

To begin your submission to the competition, please visit lydianquartet.com/prize.

JUDGING AND COMMISSION PRIZE REGULATIONS

The winner of the LSQ Commission Prize will be announced by Jan. 31, 2023. Judges will include members of the Brandeis music composition faculty, guest composers, and the Lydian String Quartet. The decision of the judges is final.

By applying for the competition, each candidate accepts the regulations of this competition.