

# **Hopkins Center for the Arts**

at Dartmouth

presents

## **Isidore String Quartet** *Awakenings*

Phoenix Avalon, violin (first on Bach and Childs)

Devin Moore, viola

Adrian Steele, violin (first on Beethoven)

Joshua McClendon, cello

**Wednesday, May 1, 7:30 pm**

The Church of Christ at Dartmouth College • 2024

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# Program

*Approximate duration: 85 minutes including intermission*

## **Contrapunctus 1–4 from *The Art of Fugue*, BWV 1080**

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

## **String Quartet No. 2 *Awakening***

Billy Childs (b. 1957–)

Wake Up Call  
The White Room  
Song of Healing

## **Intermission**

## **String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132**

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Assai sostenuto – Allegro  
Allegro ma non tanto  
Molto adagio – Andante (“Heiliger Dankgesang”)  
Alla marcia, assai vivace  
Allegro appassionato

# Program Notes

## **Johann Sebastian Bach**

### **Contrapunctus 1–4 from *The Art of Fugue*, BWV 1080 (1745–50)**

Johann Sebastian Bach is an essential figure to the past, present and future of the Isidore String Quartet. Every rehearsal or soundcheck begins with a substantial amount of his chorales, both for technical and musical implications. Not only are we able to isolate various “quartet techniques” that deserve constant revitalization—balance, timbre, bow control, intonation—we can work towards a uniquely irreplicable sense of oneness that his music encourages, and even fosters. Bach, for the ISQ, is the ground on which we explore endless possibilities, challenge worldly perceptions and flourish as one instrument, one voice, one being.

Left unfinished at the composer’s death, Bach’s *Die Kunst der Fuge* (*The Art of the Fugue*), BWV 1080, remains one of the most prolific works in classical music. Bach delved into this project around 1745 and

would nearly complete the 14 fugues and four canons in D minor before his eventual death on July 28, 1750.

A possible premonition of his fate, the composer’s musical signature -B-A-C-H- is located at the end of the almost completed final fugue, insinuating an intended fulfillment of the work at Fugue 14, his numerical equivalent (B-A-C-H; 2+1+3+8=14). Though originally composed in open score, this collection is inferred to have been intended for keyboard instruments (harpsichord, piano, etc.). However, the nature of the work and the pervading universality of Bach’s compositional manifestations provide a basis for transcription for various ensembles—in this case, the string quartet. Due to the restrictions in the tessitura of the inner voices of the quartet in particular, few minor alterations are made in Werner Icking’s edition to accommodate those boundaries while preserving the majority of the original composition.

The first four fugues in the work—*Contrapunctus I–IV*—find each of the four voices introducing the 12-note principal subject (*III* and *IV* in inversion). Though referred to as the *simple fugues*, *Contrapunctus I–IV* not only establish a foundational framework for the inevitable complexity of the remaining fugues, but also provide the opportunity to exhibit a multitude of characters, musical concepts, and soundworlds. The juxtaposition of the inherently somber, almost melancholic first statement of the viola in *Contrapunctus III* and the determined, swift nature of the first violin entrance with *Contrapunctus IV*, despite being composed of the same subject material, illuminates the endless possibilities at the disposal of the artist that chooses to embark on the timeless journey of *The Art of Fugue*.

Devin Moore

## **Billy Childs**

### **String Quartet No. 2 *Awakening* (2012)**

Los Angeles native Billy Childs began publicly performing on the piano at the age of six and would eventually receive a bachelor's degree in composition from the University of Southern California College of the Performance Arts. As a performer and composer, Childs was in demand early on, collaborating with pillars of the jazz industry, signing with Windham Hill Records in 1988, and receiving commissions from prestigious soloists and ensembles (LA Phil, DSO, Kronos Quartet, Ying Quartet). A formative education, extensive experience and an unwavering self-conception allowed the five-time Grammy Award-winning Billy Childs to develop a unique voice as a pianist and composer in both the classical and jazz spheres.

Commissioned by the Ying Quartet and completed in 2012, String Quartet No. 2 *Awakening* depicts the emotional, physical and spiritual journey in dealing with the serious illness of a loved one; it is inspired by Childs' real-life experience with his wife. After she was diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism and taken into emergency care, Childs, a state over, was notified of the

situation and immediately rushed to be with her. This three-movement work outlines the complex emotional journey, providing insight into the vulnerability of the composer.

The first movement, titled *Wake Up Call*, opens with a tremolo/trill in the second violin and viola, set against snap pizzicato in the cello, and a 12-tone opening pronouncement in the first violin, expressing his initial shock at learning of his wife's hospitalization. This cacophony of an anxiety-ridden sound-world is juxtaposed with a reflective middle section overcome with heartbreakingly lyrical cascades of melody that accumulate throughout the quartet, evoking a sense of uncontrollable anguish, fear and lamentation. This brief look inside the composer's psyche is swiftly dissipated as the opening material engulfs the music once again. *Wake Up Call* gives us a glimpse into both the external and internal experience of Childs in this time of unknown.

*The White Room*, the second movement, conveys the powerlessness and urgency he experienced waiting at her bedside through the use of a plaintive melody set against heartrending bi-tonal harmonies. Utilizing various extended techniques (false harmonics, glissandos, Bartok pizzicatos), Childs manifests the feeling of being in the sterile, unwelcoming hospital room devoid of comfort with its blindingly white walls and eerily repetitive machinery noises. The mechanical landscape eventually avalanches into two cadenzas in the viola and first violin that seem to spew rage, anger and torment. The doubled 16th-note figure that pervades the movement, resembling a heartbeat, rises and falls as the emotional arch takes shape, eventually settling into a state of numbness and fatigue.

The final movement, *Song of Healing*, is an ode to recovery and rediscovery, with the viola's introductory melody expressing the slow process of healing and a new respect for the transient and delicate nature of life. The centerpiece of this movement is a conversation that occurs between the first violin and cello, signifying

## Program Notes *continued*

the real-life conversation between Childs and his wife as the two began to compartmentalize and understand the impact that this event had on their relationship. The love, trust and unencumbered expression of emotion can be viscerally felt as this duo rejoins the quartet as the movement comes to a close. A sense of healing, or at least a willingness to heal, is felt as the final chord—a hopeful A Major—dissolves into silence. Childs, through a unique, yet familiar compositional style evocative of 21st-century multigenic perspective, acknowledges and expresses the familiarity of fear, anguish and resolution regarding the fleeting nature of life, yielding a work that speaks directly to the human experience.

*Devin Moore*

### **Ludwig Van Beethoven**

#### **String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132 (1824–5)**

The five string quartets and *Grosse Fuge* that Beethoven composed during the last five years of his life mark the pinnacle of his chamber music. Ideas from one spill over to the next. The A minor quartet was the second of the sequence to be completed and was originally laid out in four movements. Then, in the spring of 1825, Beethoven fell seriously ill, with a variety of debilitating diseases. Towards the end of May, he began to recover and the change in his physical well-being had a profound impact on the quartet.

A central slow movement was the immediate result. Beethoven marked it “Sacred Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity from a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode” (*Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart*). It is one of the most sublime pieces of music ever written—and one of the longest quartet movements at almost half the length of the quartet itself. Its contemplative stillness is enhanced by the conscious use of an old church mode known as the Lydian mode. Beethoven

mentions it in the score, as if to remind us that the old church modes, with their spiritual, often mystical and tonally ambiguous connotations, were a deep source of inspiration in his late works. The slow movement’s successive alternations of *Adagio* and *Andante* bring new expressions of relief from the composer. These are noted in the margin of his score as “Feeling new strength” and “You returned my strength to find me in the evening” and, in the final section, “With the most intimate feeling.” Because of the generally dark character of much of the quartet, this transcendental slow movement seems to radiate inner release from outward suffering.

Beethoven made this slow movement the centerpiece of a vast, arch-like structure. The quartet opens with an *Allegro*, built around two contrasting themes, and presenting a thread of unresolved contradictions. The movement departs from conventional form as does the substantial scherzo, which follows. Its central pastoral episode, nominally a trio section, begins with a musette-like theme high on the first violin. It continues with a *ländler* theme which Beethoven wrote down in his sketchbook when he first went to Vienna many years earlier. After the sublime, heavenly slow movement, the mood is abruptly broken by a march—which brings us back to earth with a bump. As in the Ninth Symphony, an instrumental recitative leads to the finale. Its impassioned, waltz-like theme, which gives way to an unequivocal feeling of joy, was, in fact, originally designed to be the finale of the Ninth before Beethoven decided on a choral ending for this work. Both works end with a feeling of transcendence and triumph.

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Comments welcomed: [khnotes@sympatico.ca](mailto:khnotes@sympatico.ca)

# About Isidore String Quartet

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 members of the quartet are violinists Adrian Steele and Phoenix Avalon, violist Devin Moore and cellist Joshua McClendon. The four began as an ensemble at the Juilliard School, and following a break during the global pandemic reconvened at the Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival in the summer of 2021 under the tutelage of Joel Krosnick. In addition to Mr. Krosnick, the ISQ has coached with Joseph Lin, Astrid Schween, Laurie Smukler, Joseph Kalichstein, Roger Tapping, Misha Amory, Timothy Eddy, Donald Weilerstein, Atar Arad, Robert McDonald, Christoph Richter, Miriam Fried and Paul Biss.

Their Banff triumph brings extensive tours of North America and Europe, a two-year appointment as the Peak Fellowship Ensemble-in-Residence at Southern Methodist University in Dallas beginning in 2023-24, plus a two-week residency at Banff Centre including a professionally produced recording, along with extensive ongoing coaching, career guidance and mentorship.

The Isidore Quartet has appeared on major series in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Durham, Washington (JFK Center), San Antonio, Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa, and has collaborated with a number of eminent performers including James Ehnes, Jeremy Denk, Shai Wosner and Jon Nakamatsu. Their 23/24

season will feature appearances in Berkeley (Cal Performances), Boston (Celebrity Series), Washington DC (Phillips Collection), New York (92nd St. Y), Chicago, Baltimore, Ann Arbor, Denver, Houston, Indianapolis, Tucson, Phoenix, Santa Fe, La Jolla, Aspen, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and at Dartmouth College and Spivey Hall in Georgia, among many others. European highlights include Edinburgh, Lucerne, Brussels, Amsterdam, Hanover, Frankfurt and Hamburg’s ElbPhilharmonie.

Outside the concert hall, the quartet has worked with *PROJECT: MUSIC HEALS US* providing encouragement, education and healing to marginalized communities—including elderly, disabled, rehabilitating incarcerated and homeless populations—who otherwise have limited access to high-quality live music performance. They have also been resident ensemble for the Contemporary Alexander School/Alexander Alliance International. In conjunction with those well-versed in the world of Alexander Technique, as well as other performers, the ISQ explores the vast landscape of body awareness, mental preparation and performance practice.

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!

The Isidore String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists.

[www.davidroweartists.com](http://www.davidroweartists.com)

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As part of the Hop's tradition of immersing artists in the community to build knowledge and create connections, Isidore String Quartet leads a workshop at the Upper Valley Music Center.

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