

*The Edmonton Chamber Music Society presents
The 2022 Spring Equinox Festival*

The Viano String Quartet

Lucy Wang | Violin
Hao Zhou | Violin
Aiden Kane | Viola
Tate Zawadiuk | Cello

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

Muttart Hall Alberta College Campus MacEwan University

7 PM: Pre-Concert Performance

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Prelude in G-sharp Minor, Op. 32, No. 12

Sophia Zhang, piano

Pietro Locatelli (1695–1764)

The Harmonic Labyrinth

Elana Zhang, violin

Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962)

Recitativo and Scherzo, Op. 6

Elana Zhang, violin

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20

Jaydon Zhuang, piano

7:30 PM: The Viano String Quartet

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

Strum: Music for Strings

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92, “on Kabardinian themes”

Allegro sostenuto

Adagio

Allegro

Intermission

Alberto Ginastera (1916–1983)

Quartet No. 1, Op. 20
Allegro violento ed agitato
Vivacissimo

Alexander Borodin (1833–1887)

Quartet No. 2 in D Major
Allegro moderato
Scherzo
Notturmo
Finale

The Viano String Quartet

Praised for their “huge range of dynamics, massive sound and spontaneity” (*American Record Guide*), the Viano String Quartet are First Prize winners of the 2019 Banff International String Quartet Competition. Formed in 2015 at the Colburn Conservatory of Music in Los Angeles, where they were Ensemble-in-Residence through the 2020/21 season, the quartet has performed in venues such as Wigmore Hall, Place Flagey, Konzerthaus Berlin, and Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

Summer of 2021 brings debuts at Bravo! Vail and Rockport Music Festival, a return visit to Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, and later in the season, extensive touring throughout Europe, Canada, and the United States. The quartet has been recently named the Nina von Maltzahn String Quartet in Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music for 2021/22 season.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, the Viano String Quartet has actively presented virtual and socially distanced live concerts for various organizations, including the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, Friends of Chamber Music of Troy, Salt Lake Chamber Music Society, Dallas Chamber Music Society, Schneider Series at the New School, and the Banff International String Quartet Festival. With their colleagues in the Calidore String Quartet, they presented a movement of the Mendelssohn Octet while distanced across countries in a film project, *The Way Forward*.

As part of the Banff International String Quartet Competition prize, the quartet is in residence at the Meadows School of Music at Southern Methodist University through the 2022/23 season. For two weeks each semester, they will perform side-by-side concerts, coach chamber ensembles, and initiate projects within the SMU community. Their 2019/20 season saw performances on three continents, including debuts in Berlin, Paris, Bremen, Brussels, Vancouver, and Beijing, among other cities. The quartet also gave several performances in Los Angeles at Boston Court, the Music Guild, and Zipper Hall, and produced a recording with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

They have collaborated with world-class musicians such as pianists Emanuel Ax and Elisso Virsaladze, violists Paul Coletti and Paul Neubauer, violinist Noah Bendix-Balgley, and vocalist Hila Plitmann.

The quartet achieved incredible success in their formative years, with an unbroken streak of top prizes. In addition to their career-defining achievement at the 2019 Banff International String

Quartet Competition, where they were among the youngest First Prize winners in history, they also received the Grand Prize at the 2019 ENKOR International Music Competition and second prize at the 2019 Yellow Springs Chamber Music Competition. At the 2018 Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition they received Third Prize, the Haydn Prize for the best performance of a Haydn quartet, and the Sidney Griller Award for the best performance of the compulsory work, Thomas Ades' *The Four Quarters*. They received the Silver Medal at the 2018 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition and Third Prize at the 9th Osaka International Chamber Music Competition in 2017.

Committed to engaging with communities outside the concert hall, the Viano String Quartet has given presentations for school children and students of all ages through residencies in Bellingham, Washington (the "Play it Forward" residency, a collaboration between the Bellingham Festival of Music and the Whatcom Symphony to reach school children in the northern Washington State area), Northern Michigan University, and the Santa Monica Conservatory. In 2019 they gave multiple performances of "Over the Top", a Musical Encounter Interactive presentation they scripted, developed, and performed at the Colburn School for inner-city school children.

The Vianos work primarily with members of the Colburn School faculty, including Martin Beaver, Scott St. John, Clive Greensmith, Paul Coletti, and Fabio Bidini. They have received coaching from artists such as David Finckel, Gary Hoffman, Arnold Steinhardt, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, and members of the Alban Berg, Brentano, Emerson, Miró, Shanghai, St. Lawrence, and Takács String Quartets. They have attended the Ravinia Steans Chamber Music Institute, the St. Lawrence String Quartet Seminar, the Festival d'Aix en Provence, the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, and the McGill International String Quartet Academy.

The name "Viano" was created to describe the four individual instruments in a string quartet interacting as one. Each of the four instruments begins with the letter "V," and like a piano, all four string instruments together play both harmony and melody, creating a unified instrument called the "Viano."

The Viano String Quartet

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Program notes by Morgan Luethe

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

Strum: Music for Strings (2008, rev. 2012)

New York violinist and composer Jessie Montgomery interweaves classical influence with elements of vernacular music and improvisation to create works that inhabit an engaging and refreshingly modern sound world. *Strum*, writes Montgomery, salutes “American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement.” The work’s title refers to the guitar-like plucking of the stringed instruments – a pervasive textural feature of the piece that lends authenticity to its evocation of folk music and dance traditions of the United States. Pizzicato strumming underpins with attractive rhythmic punctuation as melodic ideas are interspersed and unwound over several minutes, culminating in a frenetic, celebratory exclamation.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

String Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92, “on Karbadinian themes” (1941)

- I. *Allegro sostenuto*
- II. *Adagio*
- III. *Allegro*

Prokofiev’s turbulent second string quartet emerges out of a period of significant personal upheaval in the life of its composer. Following the 1941 German invasion of the Soviet Union, Prokofiev evacuated to the Kabardinian town of Nalchik, near European Russia’s border with Georgia. At the prompting of a local government official, Prokofiev undertook to write a quartet drawing on features of the traditional Kabardino-Balkar folk music of the region. Traditional dance rhythms, harmonies, and instrumental textures feature heavily throughout the work that expertly absorbs these influences into Prokofiev’s unapologetically brusque and angular compositional style. Like the late piano sonatas and the ambitious opera *War and Peace*, the second string quartet is one of many works Prokofiev produced surrounded by the sustained chaos of the Second World War.

Conceived in three movements, the work opens with music characterized by a powerful rhythmic drive and full-bodied blend of quartet instruments. Vigorous and refreshing to reflect the rural setting that inspired it, the quartet’s *Allegro sostenuto* movement indulges in dance-like melodies that are easy to latch on to. The following *Adagio* movement centres around a plaintive, folklike passage that rests a simple melody atop pizzicato accompaniment in delicate contrast to the tenser outer sections. The fresh air of the countryside returns in the energetic finale. Drawing inspiration from the lively mountain dances of the area, the closing *Allegro* is a fiery and skilled exploration of the ethnic themes upon which the work is built.

Alberto Ginastera (1916–1983)

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 20 (1948)

- I. *Allegro violento ed agitato*
- II. *Vivacissimo*

Alberto Ginastera was catapulted to prominence as the foremost composer of distinctively nationalistic music that evokes the landscape and culture of his native Argentina. The terse Opus 20 string quartet is assigned to the stage in the composer's musical development which he referred to as *subjective nationalism*, characterized by works that incorporate rhythmic and thematic aspects of Argentinian folk-music while advancing toward a rigorous, dissonant, and varied musical vocabulary. The violent first movement sketches images related to the "gaucho" tradition of the pampas lowlands, while the propulsive *Vivacissimo* second movement features technically intricate string effects and textures that suggest broader cosmopolitan musical influences are also present.

Alexander Borodin (1833–1887)

String Quartet No. 2 in D Major (1881)

- I. *Allegro moderato*
- II. *Scherzo*
- III. *Notturmo*
- IV. *Finale*

Dedicated to his wife, possibly as an anniversary gift, Borodin's second string quartet owes its endurance outside of Russia to the fame of its *Notturmo* slow movement. While undeniably the most memorable moment of the entire quartet, the popularity of the *Notturmo* tends to overshadow the movements that surround it, to the extent that it's most often recorded as a stand-alone piece. However, full performances of the work reveal that, if it is not an undisputed masterpiece, Borodin's unique melodic gift and facility for counterpoint make it an enjoyable, solidly-built contribution to the string quartet genre.

The sustained warmth of the first movement is established immediately by a genial, somewhat dreamy melody in the cello's upper register. Rather than pursuing dramatic tension through an opposition of contrasting themes, Borodin seeks development through contrapuntal subtlety and lyricism. After a short Mendelssohnian *Scherzo* characterized by sprightly agility and a witty interplay of themes, the beloved night music of the *Notturmo* unfurls with a sentimental glow reminiscent of the quartet's opening movement. Closing with a restatement of its aching main theme in canon, the slow movement makes way for a return of Borodin's penchant for contrapuntal dialogue between the instruments. Drawing its movement from the skillful development of related "question-answer" motifs, the *Finale* hurls forward to a poised conclusion in the home key.