

Isidore Quartet

New Orleans Friends of Music, October 19, 2026

This concert is dedicated to the memory of
JONATHAN McCALL
Past President, Board Member, and Counselor
in gratitude for his many contributions to New Orleans Friends of Music

PROGRAM

String Quartet in F minor Op. 20, No. 5 (1772)

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732–1809)

Allegro moderato
Menuetto
Adagio
Finale: Fuga *a due soggetti*

Three Idylls for String Quartet, H. 67

Frank Bridge
(1879–1941)

Adagio molto espressivo
Allegretto poco lento
Allegro con moto

Intermission

String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2 “Razumovsky” Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770–1827)

Allegro
Molto adagio
Allegretto
Presto

PROGRAM NOTES

by Marc Loudon

Board member Marc Loudon provides these program notes that are published on the *Friends of Music* web site at least one week prior to performance. These notes are more extensive than those in the program, which are limited by space. The YouTube performances cited in these notes are in some cases preceded and/or interrupted by commercial messages. Listeners can sometimes avoid these by clicking on the “Skip” link in the ad. You can also subscribe to YouTube Premium to avoid the ads completely.

(The following note for the Haydn Quartet is edited from a note provided by violinist Adrian Steele of the Isidore Quartet.)

Joseph Haydn’s set of six Op. 20 quartets marked a remarkable development for the genre, establishing the string quartet as a medium capable of extraordinary emotional depth, technical complexity, and musical conversation between all four voices. At the time of their composition, Haydn was forty years old and had spent much of his career in the service of the Esterházy court. The six quartets are often called the “Sun Quartets,” a name that comes simply from the Sun printed on the cover of their first edition. The nickname is particularly ironic in the case of the

two minor-key quartets in the set, including the **Op. 20 No. 5 Quartet in F minor**, whose dark, restless character could hardly be further removed from the brightness of its nickname.

One of the most striking developments in the Op. 20 quartets is the newfound equality of the four voices. This spirit of equality extends to the set's remarkable use of counterpoint: three of the six quartets end with fugues, bringing the learned style of the Baroque into a musical language that is unmistakably Haydn's own. Throughout the set, Haydn also stretches the conventions of Classical form with irregular phrase lengths, unexpected harmonic turns, and a willingness to interrupt or redirect musical ideas just as they seem to have arrived at their destination. Op. 20 No. 5 contains nearly all of these characteristics, with one notable exception: here, the first violin remains conspicuously dominant for much of the quartet, despite the viola's occasional attempts to break free of its accompanying role.

The first movement opens with the first violin alone on the downbeat, immediately answered by an offbeat motive in the lower three voices. From these opening gestures, Haydn establishes a world of instability and interruption, continually disrupting our expectations of where the music should go next. The movement plays intriguingly with the conventions of sonata form, introducing substantial new material in the recapitulation and using silences, *subitos* (sudden changes), and relentless motivic repetition to keep the ground shifting beneath us. Even its ending feels like a joke: after all of this harmonic and formal turbulence, Haydn cuts the movement off almost abruptly, as though to suggest that none of his elaborate machinations were quite as serious as they seemed.

The second movement, a minuet and trio, initially appears more conventional, but Haydn quickly begins to undermine that impression. Many of its phrases are of unusual length, and cadences seem to arrive only to reveal that the thought is not finished. Haydn repeatedly creates the sensation of an ending before extending the phrase beyond where we expect it to go—a small but characteristic example of his ability to make musical expectation itself part of the drama.

The jewel of the quartet is the third movement, a gorgeous *sicilienne* (a slow, graceful dance typically in 6/8 time) in which the first violin sings lightly above an accompaniment reminiscent of a strummed guitar. After the tension and instability of the first two movements, its pastoral character feels like a brief clearing in the middle of a much darker landscape. But the respite is temporary. In the final movement, the closing fugue is *a due soggetti* (in two themes, one broad, the other rapid, serving as both subject and counter-subject to each other). It begins quietly, its subject passed gently from voice to voice as the tension gradually accumulates. Eventually the cello breaks through the hush, setting the quartet on a dramatic trajectory toward its conclusion. Even here, however, Haydn refuses to let the ending unfold quite as expected, saving one final lamenting turn of phrase before bringing the quartet to its close.

Performance of the Haydn Op. 20, No.5, Quartet by the Brentano Quartet:

[Haydn Quartet Op. 20 No. 5 by the Brentano Quartet](#)

(The following note was provided by violist Devon Moore of the Isidore Quartet.)

A distinguished violist, conductor, and composer, **Frank Bridge** (photo) was one of Britain's foremost musical figures of the twentieth century. After studying at the Royal College of Music in London, he established himself as both a respected performer—appearing as a member of the Joachim Quartet and the English String Quartet—and an admired conductor. His intimate



knowledge of the string quartet medium is evident throughout a body of chamber music distinguished by its craftsmanship, lyricism, and expressive refinement.

Composed in 1906, the **Three Idylls** belong to Bridge's early, richly Romantic period, preceding the profound artistic transformation brought about by the First World War. A committed pacifist, Bridge emerged from the conflict with a dramatically altered musical voice, embracing greater chromaticism, structural complexity, and emotional volatility. Yet even in these youthful miniatures, one hears a composer whose harmonic imagination and sensitivity to instrumental color

already set him apart.

The title *Idyll* traditionally evokes an idealized pastoral landscape or a moment of untouched tranquility. While embracing this tradition, Bridge begins instead in the shadows, making the moments when light emerges from darker harmonic landscapes all the more radiant. The music unfolds like a painting gradually revealing itself to the eye, its shifting contrasts of light and darkness inviting the listener on a journey of discovery. One might imagine it as the meeting point of Caravaggio's dramatic chiaroscuro and Monet's incandescent atmosphere.

The opening *Adagio molto* begins with an introspective melody in the viola—a particularly telling choice from a composer who understood the instrument's expressive depth from the inside. From the somber mist of C-sharp minor, the music blossoms briefly into radiant, almost lovestruck lyricism before returning to quiet introspection. Even in its opening pages, Bridge demonstrates a remarkable command of quartet writing, balancing four independent voices with effortless fluency.

The central *Allegretto poco lento*, perhaps the best-known of the three movements, unfolds with gentle syncopations, understated elegance, and harmonies that again drift intriguingly between major and minor. Its wistful melody so captivated Benjamin Britten, a pupil of Bridge, that more than thirty years later he selected it as the basis for his *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, the work that first brought the young composer international recognition. Britten's affectionate tribute has, in turn, introduced generations of listeners to the quiet beauty of Bridge's original miniature.

The concluding *Allegro con moto* exchanges introspection for buoyant energy. Its animated rhythms and sparkling interplay reveal a composer delighting in the conversational possibilities of four equal voices. Fleeting echoes of French Impressionism—particularly the harmonic subtlety and luminous textures associated with Claude Debussy, whose *String Quartet* Bridge greatly admired—enrich the movement without ever obscuring its distinctly English lyricism. After the emotional journey of the preceding movements, the work concludes, not in pastoral stillness, but with warmth, vitality, and optimism.

Three Idylls offers an early glimpse of a composer whose artistic journey would become one of the most remarkable in twentieth-century British music.

The following link is a performance of *Three Idylls* by the Sydney Camerata.

[Frank Bridge *Three Idylls* by the Sydney Camerata](#)

Ludwig van Beethoven composed his three Opus 59 quartets in 1805–06 on commission from



the Russian ambassador in Vienna, Count Andreas Kyrilovich Razumovsky (photo). The count was an excellent amateur violinist who played second violin in his own house string quartet, except when another violinist stepped in so he could sit back and listen. His first violinist was the illustrious Ignaz Schuppanzigh, whom Beethoven had known since 1794 and who premiered many of the composer's works.

The **String Quartet No. 8 in E Minor**, often known as the **Razumovsky Quartet No. 2**, is the second of the three Razumovsky quartets. The "Razumovskys" are the first three of five quartets that are usually known as the "Middle Period" string quartets, the others being Op. 74 and Op. 95. Although the Razumovsky quartets are now mainstream repertoire, they were

initially received with uncertainty, as they deviated from the established genre of string quartets in their content and emotional range. One review published in 1807 stated that "Three new, very long and difficult Beethoven string quartets ... are attracting the attention of all connoisseurs. The conception is profound and the construction excellent, but they are not easily comprehended."

The Op. 59 set was completed in 1806, after the "Eroica" Symphony of 1803, six years after his earlier Op. 18 quartets, and immediately following the "Waldstein" and "Appassionata" Piano Sonatas. In the three-year period of 1803–06, Beethoven completed his Fourth Piano Concerto, the Piano Sonata in F, Op. 54, his Triple Concerto, 3 Leonore Overtures, the three Op. 59 quartets, and his opera *Fidelio*, thereby demonstrating his mastery of the genres of the symphony, sonata, concerto, opera and string quartet. With the publication of the Op. 59 quartets, Beethoven moved the genre of the string quartet out of the small "chamber" setting and onto a larger stage. Each of the Op. 59 quartets stands as a monumental individual work in terms of both literal size and dramatic scope.

The first movement of the second Razumovsky Quartet is remarkable for its tautness, agitation, and lean-but-dramatic gestures. In this movement we don't hear a "singable" theme; rather, the movement comprises three elements—arresting opening chords, eloquent silence, and a short arpeggiated phrase—that produce the overall effect of the movement.

According to Beethoven's friend and student Carl Czerny, "The second movement, an adagio in E major, occurred [to Beethoven] when contemplating the starry sky and thinking of the music of the spheres." To help us grasp the transporting beauty of this music, Beethoven clearly writes at the beginning of the score, "*This piece is to be played with great feeling.*" An opening eight-bar chorale conjures a "heavenly" feeling that provides an immediate contrast with the feeling of agitation left in the wake of the first movement. The texture is dappled with triplets and dotted rhythms superimposed on the ever-present chorale.

The third movement is a scherzo in form, but it has some unusual repetitions not found in a typical scherzo: *allegretto-trio-allegretto-trio-allegretto*. The *allegretto* section is in the minor key, jerky and syncopated. In the *trio* section, Beethoven switches to the major key and constructs a remarkable little fugue on a patriotic hymn famously used later by Mussorgsky in his opera *Boris Godunov*. (Beethoven utilized Russian themes in the first two of the Razumovsky

quartets; it isn't known whether Razumovsky specified this element or whether his was an idea original to Beethoven.)

The *Presto* finale is a rondo that is a wild romp with a galloping rhythm that only occasionally asserts the E minor home key, preferring boisterously and humorously to stress C major. Beethoven presents the refrain four times, each time wittily shortening the subject from the previous hearing. Beethoven's delight in building suspense and laughingly moving on culminates in the final return to the main theme and its even faster conclusion.

The following link leads to a performance by the Castalian Quartet.

[**The Beethoven Razumovsky Quartet #2 by the Castalian Quartet**](#)