Celebrity Series of Boston

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Sunday | January 22 | 3pm
NEC's Jordan Hall

Emerson String Quartet

Eugene Drucker and Philip Setzer violins
Lawrence Dutton viola
Paul Watkins cello

Bartók	String Quartet No. 2 Moderato Allegro molto capriccioso Lento ***Philip Setzer, first violin***
Walker	*Lyric for Strings* ***Philip Setzer, first violin***
Shostakovich	String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133 Moderato Allegretto – Adagio – Allegretto ***Eugene Drucker, first violin***
	INTERMISSION
Beethoven	String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 59, no. 2, "Razumovsky" Allegro Molto adagio Allegretto Finale: Presto ***Philip Setzer, first violin***

This afternoon's program will end at approximately 5:15pm.

The Emerson String Quartet appears by arrangement with IMG Artists, and records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon.
emersonquartet.com

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Celebrity Series of Boston is supported by Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

String Quartet No. 2
Béla Bartók (Born March 25, 1881, in Nagyszentmiklos, Hungary; died September 26, 1945, in New York)

The first movement of the Second Quartet is in sonata form, with the classical sequence of exposition, development, and recapitulation sections, but the *process* of development begins in the opening measures. Against a pulsating accompaniment in the inner voices, the first violin plays a theme in search of itself. That is, the first few notes of the violin line generate the entire theme-group. The first three notes rise by fourths; then the motive turns back, descending a half-step and falling a fourth. This motive is extended, shared with the cello, and augmented until it becomes a pedal-tone of Gs played in four different octaves, while the three lower instruments play ascending triads to build the first climax of the piece. Within 18 measures, the original motive is gradually transformed beyond recognition. Then, closer to its original shape, it is taken up imitatively by all the instruments, leading to a second theme-group. Here the two violins, playing in octaves, outline an augmented triad. The music lingers nostalgically in F-sharp minor for a moment before it is propelled into a turbulent *appassionato* section. A haunting third theme (derived from the *appassionato* material) closes the exposition. The development starts quietly but nervously, with imitative entrances of the main motive. The harmonies become more ascetic. An *accelerando* led by the second violin culminates in an extremely excited section where the outer voices sustain long notes, punctuated by declamations of an important three-note motive, while the inner voices make throbbing *crescendos* and *diminuendos*.

Emphatic syncopations begin the bridge back to the recapitulation, which is remarkable for the way it transforms the emotional climate. The opening of the piece created a reflective, nostalgic mood; here the same theme, with the same pulsing accompaniment, is much more distant, depressed, anemic. The first violin extends its melody into the upper reaches of the D-string, one of the less sonorous and more nasal regions of the instrument. The accompanying harmonies are more static. It is as if the music were trying to recapture the spirit of the beginning, but couldn't. From here to the end of the movement, the rest of the material from the exposition is heard again. There are many forceful, defiant moments, alternating with phrases of bittersweet tenderness, but something has happened to the flow of the music. It stops and starts, changes tempo and character often without a feeling of transition or resolution. These fragments are sometimes simplified, sometimes exaggerated, sometimes grotesque--they point in many different directions but don't really go anywhere. Together they form a mosaic of nostalgia and despair.

This piece was completed in 1917, while Europe was in the throes of war and the old order was being swept away. Perceptions of the world and of oneself had to change. Symbolically, the Second Quartet is about that changing. Bartók may not have consciously intended it as such; his uncompromising esthetic principles may have prevented him from allowing too easy a programmatic explanation of his creative process. But in a historical perspective, this work must be seen as a borderline between two eras; it looks backward to a time of romantic yearnings, reflects the violence of the present, and expresses despair for the future.

The second movement is a diabolical scherzo. With relentless rhythmic energy and percussively repeated pedal-tones, it creates the most savage sonorities that had yet been heard in chamber music. The whole movement is built from primitive motivic blocks, rocking back and forth between two or three pitches. The central section is satiric, even cynical, momentarily creating the ambiance of a perverted dance-hall. In the *prestissimo* coda, all the instruments are muted, and the first violin and viola create a sandstorm of fast notes with rhythmic outlining from the other instruments. The movement reaches a breathtaking climax as the mutes fly off, the pace slows, and we are riveted to the repetitions of the motive F-sharp…F…D. This is broken down even further to the last angry notes of the piece: F…D…F…D.

The *Lento* unfolds as a series of sections, which sound vaguely like variations. There are motivic links between the sections and also with material from the earlier movements. The second section features an elegiac transformation of the F-sharp, F, D cell with which the Scherzo ended. Chords based on fourths—quartal harmonies—assume a central importance, while the tritone (the augmented fourth) is prevalent melodically. After a wrenching *accelerando* later in the movement, there is a lifeless dialogue between the two pairs of instruments, each pair playing in octaves. The music can become passionate only in gestures of defiant despair, and it always sinks back, retreats into itself, into the abyss. The Quartet ends with two *pizzicato* notes that sound like a death-knell.

- Eugene Drucker

Lyric for Strings
George Walker (Born June 27, 1922, in Washington, DC;
died August 23, 2018, in Montclair, New Jersey)

The pianist and composer, George Walker, came from a family that loved music. His father was a physician and a self-taught pianist, his mother oversaw his first piano lessons when he was only five years old, and his sister, Frances, was a concert pianist. He attended the preparatory division of Howard University's music department and graduated at the early age of eighteen from Oberlin College of Music in 1941. He continued his piano studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia with Rudolf Serkin as his teacher and studied orchestration there at the same time with Gian-Carlo Menotti. He made his debut at Town Hall in New York in 1943, and then toured the United States and Europe, concluding his tour with study at the American Academy at Fountainebleau, France, with Robert Casadesus and the illustrious Nadia Boulanger. Returning to the US, he received his PhD from the Eastman School of Music in 1957.

He taught at the universities of Colorado and Delaware, was chairman of the music department at Rutgers University, taught at Smith College, and at the Peabody Conservatory. Among the many grants he received were those from the Fulbright, Guggenheim, Rockefeller, and Bok foundations.

Walker published more than 75 works and received commissions from many important orchestras and institutions in the United States and England. In 1996, he won the Pulitzer Prize for Music for his *Lilacs* for voice and orchestra, a composition commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

His *Lyric for Strings* takes the form of a single, short movement, simple but expressive. In it, the various string instruments enter one at a time until a large ensemble has been created. After the exposition, development, and climax of its warm and straightforward theme, the piece ends in serene resignation.

Emerson String Quartet violinist Philip Setzer contributed this remembrance:

> Pianist and composer George Walker was very close to his grandmother, a remarkable woman who had lost her husband when he was sold into slavery. A year after she died, the 24-year-old Walker wrote his first string quartet. He later arranged the beautiful slow movement for string orchestra and named it *Lyric for Strings*, dedicating it to the memory of his grandmother. This became his most famous work, but he also wrote numerous compositions in many different styles, including music for solo piano, orchestra, voice, and chamber music, and winning the Pulitzer Prize for Composition in 1996. I had the pleasure of speaking on the phone several times with George Walker toward the end of his long life. The Emerson Quartet had plans to play the original string quartet version of Lyric for him in the fall of 2018 before performing it at a concert series in New Jersey. I had also hoped to pick him up

and bring him to the concert. Before any of this could happen, he fell, hitting his head, and passed away a few days later. We were deeply saddened to hear the news of his death and to realize that we would not have the opportunity to meet George Walker and play for him. We hope that performing his heartfelt masterpiece helps to pay tribute to an extraordinary musician, composer and human being.

String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133
Dmitri Shostakovich (Born September 25, 1906, in St. Petersburg; died August 8, 1975, in Moscow)

Dmitri Shostakovich's family was originally Polish; they settled in Russia two generations before the composer's birth, when his grandfather was allowed to return from exile in Siberia. His mother gave him his first piano lessons, and at the age of thirteen, he entered the Petrograd Conservatory. When he completed his studies there, six years later, his graduation piece was his Symphony No. 1, a brilliant work that was soon performed widely in Europe and America. He died after a fruitful 50-year career during which he proved to be music's last great classicist, the composer of fifteen symphonies and fifteen string quartets with an important place in the historical line that leads from Haydn to our own time.

Shostakovich suffered greatly during World War II, the war which the Russians call the Great Patriotic War. He lived through the terrible siege of Leningrad, memorialized in his Symphony No. 7. Shostakovich attested that the Russian people would never forget or forgive the Nazis' attempt to destroy Slavic culture. On July 14, 1960, when he finished his String Quartet No. 8, he dedicated it to "the memory of the victims of fascism and War." His Quartets nos. 11, 12, and 13 date from the time when Leonid Brezhnev was reversing the cultural climate that Khrushchev had established in Soviet Russia when liberal cultural policies made their brief appearance in the early 1960s. These three quartets, written between 1966 and 1970, appeared in a period which would later be seen as a time of neo-Stalinist stagnation. The earlier thaw of the Khrushchev era that had been so stimulating and exciting for Soviet artists was over.

By the time of his composition of this quartet, Shostakovich was in what can be called his career's late stage. Perhaps the circumstances of his life had some carryover into the music he was composing, which overall has a dark and grief-stricken feel. Shostakovich, at that time, was just turning 60, and his health was deteriorating. He was suffering from a rare form of polio and had had his first heart attack in 1966. He was also enduring considerable pain from arthritis. Possibly, the cumulative effects of his age, health problems, and the political climate caused him to turn away from the more open, expansive symphonic form, which had occupied him in previous years, towards the more introspective and the more philosophical forms of chamber music.

Yet as he said to a friend, “I myself am not ready to die. I still have a lot of music to write.” And he told another confidant, Isaak Glikman, that while composing each new work, he was filled with anxiety that he would not live to finish it. Nevertheless, during his last eleven years, he composed seven of his fifteen string quartets. The quartet form helped him to affirm his belief in the power of individual creativity.

At this period, he sought solace from old friends, many of whom were musicians he had known for decades. The Beethoven Quartet had premiered all but the very first of his string quartets, and at this juncture, he decided that the Quartets nos. 11, 12, 13, and 14, would each be dedicated to one the four members of the quartet. He dedicated Quartet No. 12 to Dmitry Tsyganov, the first violinist of the Beethoven Quartet, who, like the others of the quartet, was a close contemporary of Shostakovich’s. He composed the work in 1968, and its premiere took place in Moscow on September 14, 1968, at the Moscow Composers’ Club. In explaining the dedications to the four quartet members, Shostakovich wrote, it seems now almost defensively, “Do I have to say how many unforgettable minutes these musicians have given me?”

Each of the quartets in this grouping strikes out on its own, not following the standard traditional quartet form. In this work, Shostakovich’s most personal voice seems to cry out with intense pain and terror, making no conscious concessions to the conservative dictates of the Soviet State except perhaps in adhering to the constraints of tonal music, although allowing it to be rife with dissonance.

Controversy about Quartet No. 12, in particular, was spawned as critics debated whether this work is a composition rooted in tonality or atonality. It is a bold work, but probably cannot be called a true twelve-tone work because in some places, especially in the finale, the music unquestionably returns to a clear-cut sense of diatonic tonality. Since the work begins with the introduction of what is essentially a twelve-tone theme, many commentators have opined that this work signified a change of direction for Shostakovich, but actually he had used similar note rows as themes before. The one in the first movement of this quartet does not follow the rules of the procedure Schoenberg laid out for strict tone rows, and although the twelve-note sequence appears here in an atonal context, the quartet has an underlying tonal base that is established a little later.

The work has two movements, the latter quite lengthy. The first movement begins with the much-commented-upon twelve-tone row that the cello states; with it, the cello immediately sets a grim, serious mood. Yet the principal subject maintains a feeling of nobility within its sorrow, and sometimes it even seems calming although it is, nevertheless, without hope. Quartets nos. 10 and 11 begin with an unaccompanied first violin line with a chromatic inflection; in Quartet No. 12, Shostakovich has gone one step further: here he uses a cello and introduces twelve tones, but the figure ends on D flat, the tonal center of the movement. One by one, the other instruments join in with the cello before a sudden change of time signature and tempo occurs.

The second theme is faster and very aseptic in feeling. The twelve semitones are used again for the violin melody that follows, marked *Allegretto*. The opening cello figure reappears again in the viola part, with a change of tonality, and it is now followed by the *Allegretto* theme in the cello line. This material is explored in the rest of the movement before it comes to a quiet close.

The vast and difficult second movement, with its dimensions much heftier than the preceding movement, opens strongly with dramatic and angry desperation expressed by trills in the upper instruments and an emphatic response from the cello. These provide much of the motivic material for the movement, but Shostakovich also continues to expand the initial series of twelve tones that he introduced in the first movement. Shostakovich includes much virtuosic writing throughout the scherzo. An impassioned moving cello line, *Adagio,* is answered by muted upper strings. This section is full of despair. The first violin, playing pizzicato, reiterates the twelve notes, in a rising line, but does not alter the darkness of the mood. The movement continues in a kind of extended coda, its material closely interwoven, and again, motives related to the first movement reappear for further development, notably in a gently lyrical and faster section, *Moderato*. The rhythmic cello figure of the beginning of the second movement assumes increasing importance as the movement moves toward its end. The tempo quickens as Shostakovich reprises material from earlier in the movement as well as from the first movement. The quartet ends with the D-flat major tonality finally firmly established.

String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 59, no. 2
Ludwig van Beethoven (Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn; died March 26, 1827, in Vienna)

Beethoven composed his three String Quartets, Op. 59, in 1805 and 1806, a time of newly mature mastery for him. In these two astonishingly productive years he also wrote the *Appassionata* Sonata, the first version of the opera *Fidelio*, two of the *Leonore* Overtures, the Violin Concerto, the Piano Concerto No. 4, Symphony No. 4, and the Thirty Variations in C minor for Piano. Although it was a fertile time in the composer's life, it was a troubled one because his health was poor, and emotional problems burdened him even more than usual. His nephew's marriage plans upset him, his deafness worried him, and the French occupation of Vienna disturbed him greatly.

The three Op. 59 quartets displayed such radical advances over Beethoven's previous quartets, the six of Op. 18 published five years before, that traditional and conservative musicians were highly wary about their challenges and even the future course of Beethoven's musical development. Their originality and difficulty puzzled many of their first hearers, but today, their central position in the canon of Beethoven's works is firmly established. These quartets expanded the notion of what the quartet genre was expected to deliver: they were conceived with such broadness that they have a quasi-symphonic feel.

The *Allegro* first movement of Op. 59, no. 2, is clear and direct in form but greatly extended, especially when all the repetitions the composer indicated are followed. (In the first quartet of the Op. 59 series, Beethoven had eliminated repeats, but in this one, he uses repeats extensively, beginning with the exposition of the first movement.) The two initial strong, sharp chords supply a hint of the plaintive minor-key theme and the eloquent pauses, similar to music that Stravinsky was to write more than a century later, become as much an integral part of the melody as the notes themselves. The second subject is heard as an outgrowth and continuation of the first theme rather than as new material. This subject becomes thoroughly developed and recalled. Throughout, the movement maintains a driving force and much rhythmic interest. At the end, the coda functions not only as a formal closing, but as yet another development.

Next comes a slow movement, *Molto adagio*, to be played, Beethoven said, "with much sentiment." It is based principally on a beautiful, long melodic line of the kind often found in the composer's later works. The music has a feeling of tranquility at first, and then it becomes somewhat agitated and even pained, the mood emphasized by an indication in the score: "*mancando*," a dying off or weakening. Carl Czerny wrote that his friend Beethoven composed this movement while "in contemplation of the night sky and of the harmony of the spheres."

The third movement, a scherzo, *Allegretto*, becomes stretched because of its reprises, occurring one more time than was then commonly written. Beethoven bases the first section on a restlessly capricious rhythmic subject; the contrasting Trio consists of a long series of artfully varied repetitions of the theme, which he colors with some distinctive modal figuration and allows the viola to introduce. Beethoven had found the theme, from a well-known Russian folk song, "*Slava*," in a collection published in 1790. Mussorgsky later also used this popular hymn as "Glory to God in Heaven," in the Coronation Scene of his opera, *Boris Godunov*; it also appears in Tchaikovsky's opera *Mazeppa* as well as in several of Rimsky-Korsakov's works.

The Quartet closes with a dazzlingly brilliant rondo-sonata Finale, *Presto*, with its high-spirited first theme appearing in a major key. Although this movement has relentless dotted rhythms, the second theme, introduced by the first violin, has a lyrical quality. After several episodes, the tempo quickens significantly as the movement speeds to its end.

It is likely, yet unconfirmed, that Beethoven may have used the *Thème Russe* folk song in the third movement at the request of his patron, the extraordinary Count Andrei Kyrillovich Razumovsky (1752-1836), to whom Beethoven dedicated the three Op. 59 Quartets. Razumovsky began life as the son of a Russian peasant and rose to the rank of admiral in the service of his country. The Empress made him first a Count and later, a Prince. He was the Russian Ambassador to Venice, Naples, Copenhagen, and Stockholm after which, for some twenty years, he occasionally played second violin in a quartet with the fine musicians he kept on retainer, moving in musical circles where he must have seen Beethoven often. Nevertheless, curiously little documentation of his friendship with Beethoven has come down to us; it was lost, perhaps in the disastrous fire that destroyed Razumovsky's palace in 1815. In 1808 or 1809, Beethoven dedicated his Symphonies nos. 5 and 6 jointly to Razumovsky and Prince Lobkowitz, another of his leading patrons.

EMERSON STRING QUARTET

The Emerson String Quartet is in the midst of its final season of concerts, disbanding after more than four decades as one of the world's premier chamber music ensembles. The Quartet has made more than 30 acclaimed recordings, and has been honored with nine Grammy Awards® (including two for Best Classical Album), three *Gramophone Awards*, the Avery Fisher Prize, and *Musical America's* "Ensemble of the Year" award. As part of their larger mission to keep the string quartet form alive and relevant, they have commissioned and premiered works from some of today's most esteemed composers, and have partnered in performance with leading soloists such as Renée Fleming, Barbara Hannigan, Evgeny Kissin, Emanuel Ax, Mstislav Rostropovich, Yefim Bronfman, James Galway, Edgar Meyer, Menahem Pressler, Leon Fleisher, André Previn, and Isaac Stern, to name a few.

Now in its final season, the Quartet is giving farewell performances across North America and Europe, including San Francisco's Herbst Theater, Chicago's Orchestra Hall, Toronto's Royal Conservatory of Music, Vienna's Musikverein, Prague's Rudolfinum, London's Southbank Centre for the completion of its acclaimed cycle of Shostakovich quartets, and more, before coming home to New York City for its final series there with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, in a trio of programs entitled *Emerson Dimensions* where the Quartet will perform some of its most storied repertoire. They will give several performances of André Previn's *Penelope* with Renée Fleming and Uma Thurman, including at the Los Angeles Opera, and they will appear at Carnegie Hall with Evgeny Kissin to perform the Dvořák Quintet as part of a benefit concert for the Andrei Sakharov Foundation. The final performance as the Emerson String Quartet will take place in October 2023 in New York City, and will be filmed for a planned documentary by filmmaker Tristan Cook.

The Quartet's extensive discography includes the complete string quartets of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Bartók, Webern, and Shostakovich, as well as multi-CD sets of the major works of Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Dvořák. In its final season, the Quartet will record Schoenberg's Second Quartet with Barbara Hannigan for release in 2023, with the sessions video documented by Mathieu Amalric for a short film. Deutsche Grammophon will also reissue its box set of the Emerson Complete Recordings on the label, with two new additions. In October 2020, the group released a recording of Schumann's three string quartets for the Pentatone label. In the preceding year, the Quartet joined forces with Grammy®-winning pianist Evgeny Kissin to release a collaborative album for Deutsche Grammophon, recorded live at a sold-out Carnegie Hall concert in 2018.

Formed in 1976 and based in New York City, the Emerson String Quartet was one of the first quartets whose violinists alternate in the first violin position. The Quartet, which takes its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, balances busy performing careers with a commitment to teaching, and serves as Quartet-in-Residence at Stony Brook University. In 2013, cellist Paul Watkins—a distinguished soloist, award-winning conductor, and devoted chamber musician—joined the original members of the Quartet to form today's group.

In the spring of 2016, the State University of New York awarded full-time Stony Brook faculty members Philip Setzer and Lawrence Dutton the status of Distinguished Professor, and conferred the title of Honorary Distinguished Professor on part-time faculty members Eugene Drucker and Paul Watkins. The Quartet's members also hold honorary doctorates from Middlebury College, the College of Wooster, Bard College, and the University of Hartford. In January 2015, the Quartet received the Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award, Chamber Music America's highest honor, in recognition of its significant and lasting contribution to the chamber music field.

The Emerson String Quartet enthusiastically endorses Thomastik strings.

From the Celebrity Series of Boston archives...

The Emerson String Quartet has appeared on the Celebrity Series of Boston 26 times since its first performance on the Series in November 1987. In February 2021, they were one of a small group of artists that joined Celebrity Series in launching the At Home streaming series, enabling the Series to continue to offer concerts to the public and employment to artists during the pandemic. The Emersons have undertaken several collaborations over the years: sharing a billing with the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio (February 1999), with violinist Isaac Stern and pianist Yefim Bronfman (April 2001), with pianist Leon Fleisher (May 2007), and with flautist James Galway (March 2011), and pianist Evgeny Kissin (April 2018). In January 2002, they appeared as featured performers with the Cleveland Orchestra on one of the orchestra's Celebrity Series presentations at Symphony Hall. More than half of their engagements have included string quartet repertoire exclusively, including performances of the complete Mendelssohn quartets over two programs in 2004/05.

Celebrity Series of Boston

Thank you for the memories
EMERSON STRING QUARTET

Remembering the 26 Performances for Boston:

All performances at Jordan Hall except as noted

Friday, February 26, 2021
Celebrity Series At Home virtual concert recorded at Drew University in Madison, NJ

Sunday, April 22, 2018
with Evgeny Kissin, piano

Sunday, November 20, 2016

Thursday, January 22, 2015

Sunday, December 2, 2012

Friday, April 27, 2012

Friday, March 11, 2011
with Sir James Galway, flute

Friday, December 4, 2009

Friday, December 5, 2008

Saturday, May 12, 2007
with Leon Fleisher, piano

Friday, April 21, 2006

Saturday, February 5, 2005

Friday, April 8, 2005

Friday, November 21, 2003

Friday, February 14, 2003

Two Celebrity Series appearances during the Quartet's 25th anniversary season:
Wednesday, January 23, 2002
w/Cleveland Orchestra at Symphony Hall

Saturday, February 9, 2002

Sunday, April 1, 2001
Joint performance with Isaac Stern, violin, and Yefim Bronfman, piano

Saturday, January 8, 2000

Sunday, February 7, 1999
w/Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio

Friday, February 28, 1997

December 4, 1994

Friday, February 19, 1993

Friday, November 30, 1990

Saturday, February 18, 1989

Friday, November 20, 1987
Celebrity Series debut