

# GOLDMUND QUARTET

MARY ANNE RENNOLDS

## CHAMBER CONCERT SERIES

2024-25



**Goldmund Quartet**

**March 2, 2025 | 3:00 PM**

Sonia Vlahcevic Concert Hall

W.E. Singleton Center

**vcuarts** | music

# Goldmund Quartet

*Florian Schötz, violin*  
*Pinchas Adt, violin*  
*Christoph Vandory, viola*  
*Raphael Paratore, cello*

**FRANZ SCHUBERT**  
**(1797-1828)**  
(arr. Jakob Enke)

**Erlkönig** (von Goethe)

**LUDWIG VAN  
BEETHOVEN**  
**(1770-1827)**

**Quartet in F Major, Op. 18,  
No. 1**

Allegro con brio  
Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato  
Scherzo: Allegro molto  
Allegro

*INTERMISSION*

**EDVARD GRIEG**  
**(1843-1907)**

**Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 27**

Un poco andante; Allegro molto ed agitato  
Romanze: Andantino  
Intermezzo: Allegro molto marcato  
Finale: Lento; Presto al Saltarello

# Notes on the Program

## ERLKÖNIG (VON GOETHE)

His magnificent accomplishments in virtually every other musical genre notwithstanding, Schubert's lieder, which number more than six hundred and set texts by more than 150 poets, unquestionably represent his most significant contribution to the repertoire. While much of Schubert's music went unrecognized during his lifetime, his songs for voice and piano were frequently performed—primarily at *Schubertiades*, intimate affairs centered on Schubert's music—and were cherished by all who heard them.

Robert Winter has written, "Schubert's uniqueness lay...in his ability to fuse poetry and music in ways that seem not only unique but inevitable...Schubert's songs can withstand the closest scrutiny because they contain so many layers of meaning and stylistic intersection." Schubert's penetrating sensitivity to text is reflected not only in his melodic sensibility, which, of course, is one of his supreme gifts, but also in his imaginative piano accompaniments, how they interact with the vocal writing and relate to the text, illuminating or at times even contradicting the words being sung. Schubert's innovations to the art song elevated the entire genre, transforming it from simple, domestic fare into a musical form of primary importance for composers of the Romantic generation and beyond. They are his legacy, rightly earning him the sobriquet the "Prince of Song."

The fall of 1814 launched the seventeen-year-old Schubert into a period of fierce creativity that lasted more than a year. During this time, he completed two string quartets, two symphonies, two masses, and more than 150 songs; it has been calculated that he averaged more than sixty-five measures of music each day, without even accounting for work that did not survive. In the category of lieder, Schubert obsessed over one poet at a time.

One of these was Goethe, whose *Faust* had made a huge impression on the young composer. Schubert's first setting of Goethe was "Gretchen am Spinnrade (Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel)," composed in October of 1814. That was followed by the work being performed today, "Erlkönig (The Elf-King)." Composed in 1815, it is one of the composer's earliest breakthroughs in the art song genre. The poem by Goethe upon which the song was set tells the story of a young boy riding home on horseback through the night with his father. As they ride, the boy, terrified, sees and hears a supernatural being—the Elf-King—attempting to lure him away; the boy's father assures him that it's only the fog, the wind, the nighttime shadows. But finally, the Elf-King attacks the boy. The father arrives home to find that his son has died in his arms. In Schubert's remarkable setting, with the thrilling piano accompaniment providing a cinematic backdrop, the singer manifests all four of the poem's voices: the father, the son, the Elf-King, and the narrator. Each is ingeniously distinguished by its own musical character.

The conception of "Erlkönig" further illustrates Schubert's uncanny genius. Josef von Spaun recalled witnessing the song's creation. Spaun arrived at Schubert's home to find the composer closely studying Goethe's text. Spaun recalls, "He paced up and down several times with the book, suddenly he sat down, and in no time at all (just as quickly as you can write), there was the glorious ballad finished on the paper. We ran with it to the seminary, for there was no piano at Schubert's, and there, on the very same evening, the Erlkönig was sung and enthusiastically received."

The version of "Erlkönig" being performed today has been arranged for string quartet by Jakob Enke. The lower three instruments handle the wild-sounding, cinematic accompaniment while the first violin plays the song's vocal melody, which in its original version represented the voices of the father, the son, the Elf-King, and the narrator.

If you enjoy this performance, the Goldmund Quartet has a video of it available to view on YouTube.

*Written by Patrick Castillo, revised by Stephen Schmidt*

## **QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP. 18, NO. 1**

Beethoven's Opus 18 quartets were not written in the sequence in which they are numbered. In his BBC Music Guide, Basil Lam gives the following order:

1. No. 4 in C minor – probably much revised after second version of No. 1
2. No. 1 in F Major (first version)
3. No. 3 in D Major
4. (uncertain) No. 5 in A Major
5. No. 2 in G Major
6. No. 6 in B-Flat Major

The F major quartet, published as No. 1, underwent a comprehensive revision by which it became in many ways the strongest work of the set. Beethoven sent its first version to his friend Carl Amenda but two years later wrote to him "Don't let anyone see your quartet as I have greatly changed it, as only now do I know how to write quartets properly." The result was a work of considerable power in which the composer showed not only his mastery of structural subtlety but also a new grasp of quartet texture. Such lessons are evident in every movement. The first movement is one of the most succinct and muscular statements in early Beethoven, and the first figure generates a remarkable range of growth. The directness and simplicity of its beginning did not come all at once; the sketches show that it had to be worked out, and its conciseness serves to make room for later expansion. The little turning figure in the first theme is soon overlaid by a new counterpoint and then, as the music moves to the dominant, the second group floats and expands (with gentle syncopations) in a way we might not have

supposed possible in a piece with so crisp a start. In the revision, the development was drastically altered in its range of modulation and the perfection of its part-writing-of all the Op. 18 quartets, this shows the most democracy between the instruments.

Beethoven told Amenda that when composing the slow movement, he had *Romeo and Juliet* in mind. More than once in his career did Beethoven respond to the promptings of Shakespeare, but as with the “Pastoral” Symphony (No. 6), he would have insisted that the result was “more an expression of feeling than painting.” This passionate quartet movement in D minor demonstrates a new refinement of sound, partly due to the way in which the composer removed many of the more vehement markings of the first version. During his revision, Beethoven refined the dynamics, which makes the intense outburst towards the end even more striking.

The movement that follows is a scherzo, but it is far from being the usual release of energy after the restraints of a slow movement; this scherzo is almost soothing. This is another sign of the maturity of Beethoven’s Op. 18 quartets and shows that even in his early period, he was already expanding upon the ideas of predecessors Haydn and Mozart. When these works were first heard, the impression was of disconcerting but dazzling mastery of novel ideas. By the time this F major quartet appeared, audiences were prepared for a fiercely aggressive Beethoven scherzo, so the quiet nature of this one provided a new kind of surprise, not contradicted by the abrupt humor of the humorously modulating trio with its skipping octaves. In this scherzo there is, as Basil Lam says, an element of “unrest that links it with the first half of the quartet,” but it is also an easement towards the rondo finale.

When revising the fourth movement, Beethoven changed the marking for this finale from Allegretto to Allegro. This means that he first thought of a speed that was not excessive, but he may

have felt that Allegretto suggested too slow a pace. The Allegro marking does not really mean very fast (we have to remember that the literal meaning of the word is “cheerful” or “lively” – not “quick”). If played too quickly, there is the risk of losing some of the fine details, and its rhythmic vitality is stronger if it is not hurried. The first subject is contrasted with singing elements that give the piece great spaciousness, which balances nicely with the first movement.

*Written by Dr. Robert Simpson, revised by Stephen Schmidt*

## **QUARTET NO. 1 IN G MINOR, OP. 27**

Edvard Grieg produced only one complete mature string quartet, the String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 27. It was composed in 1878 when he was 35 years old. The historical record indicates that it was a challenge for Grieg, a composer who was perhaps more accustomed to writing in smaller forms, such as his celebrated art songs and Romantic piano miniatures. Yet this remains one of the most original and influential string quartets of the late 19th century, approximately contemporaneous with the first important quartets from Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Borodin and Dvořák. It was written in the same year as César Franck's Piano Quartet, with which it shares some prominent elements of innovative cyclic design. Grieg's quartet even managed to impress the aloof Debussy who, fifteen years later, wrote his only quartet in the same key, with more than a few striking similarities.

Like many composers (notably Schubert, Mendelsohn and Shostakovich), Grieg borrows from his own music for the main theme of the quartet: a portion of his somber song “Spillamæd (Minstrels).” The icy theme is announced in unison by the quartet right at the beginning of the emphatic, slow, introductory andante before the bristling allegro. Almost all the musical material in the first movement is derived from it,



including several creative variations of the full theme itself in a wide range of expression and effects. There are at least eight clear permutations for the listener to discover. But like the cyclic designs of Franck and, later, Debussy, the theme extends beyond the bounds of the first movement to obliquely influence the second, reappear in the third and frame the fourth, including a nearly literal restatement of the quartet's beginning just before the movement's conclusion. Though the complete work comprises a four-movement design with a great variety of music, it is fused together with a rare artistic unity.

One of the most striking aspects of Grieg's quartet is the distinctive way he writes for the string ensemble, an inseparable combination of texture and color resulting in a consistently unique quartet sound. On one hand, Grieg scores thick sections of unison sounds encroaching on the orchestral with double, triple and even quadruple stops simultaneously in all parts. Were this the only texture Grieg used, one might be tempted to agree with those who find the quartet rather unusual and not quartet-like. But Grieg employs a diversity of other textures, including skillful counterpoint, a fluid exchange of voice-leading across all four instruments and a variety of novel sounds that he may well have borrowed from Norwegian folk music for fiddle. If the stormy first movement emphasizes the vast orchestral unity of the strings, the middle movements highlight the delicate spaciousness of individual instruments in diverse combinations. The nimble finale and numerous sections throughout the quartet have an etched clarity of remarkable lightness and effervescence. It is precisely the juxtaposition of all these textures within one work that makes Grieg's music a revelation of new possibilities. Like Debussy, Grieg seemed to re-imagine how to use a string quartet. Grieg was the first to do so. Fresh in the way it sounds, Grieg's quartet is equally striking in the way it moves. The music is energized with astonishing rhythmic vitality and the constant impulse to dance. The second movement, *Romanze*, begins with a gently swaying waltz that



accelerates into an intoxicating whirl around the dance floor with the intensity of a manic dervish. This is but a tentative warmup for the intricate motions of the third movement *Intermezzo*, a scherzo with the rustic spice of a festival dance under the midnight sun. The finale sustains and ultimately surpasses this energetic frolic with its saltarello, a leaping dance of Italian origin dating back to the Middle Ages. Grieg's absorption of Nordic folk dances such as the *springdans* and *haller* is evident here along with heavy syncopations and cross-rhythms in an unbridled, lyrical frenzy framed by the sober soundposts of the motto theme on either side.

Grieg's musical language was progressive for its time particularly within the generally conservative genre of the string quartet. Highly chromatic with rich harmonies and bold modulations, the music explores modal and pentatonic scales with an exotic folk flavor leading the vanguard of new music invading the traditions of Western Europe. Though Grieg studied in Leipzig using Mendelssohn and Schumann as his first models, he ultimately developed his own unique musical voice, which is perhaps best illustrated by this inspired and passionate string quartet, a harbinger of musical developments towards the end of the century. Grieg would try his hand with the string quartet once more some ten years later, but his efforts produced only two movements and rough sketches for the rest of a quartet in F Major. Though incomplete, these continue to demonstrate Grieg's innovative approach with many of the same characteristics. Though leaving us wanting, it is enough for us to marvel. No great cycle of quartets here, just a single finished work of great originality, historical significance and ravishing musical delight.

*Written by Kai Christiansen, revised by Stephen Schmidt*

# Artist Biography

The **Goldmund Quartet** is known to feature “exquisite playing” and “such multi-layered homogeneity” (Süddeutsche Zeitung) in its interpretations of the great classical and modern works of the quartet literature. Its inwardness, the unbelievably fine intonation and the phrases worked out down to the smallest detail inspire audiences worldwide.

As evident from their 2024/25 season calendar, the Quartet is now counted amongst the leading string quartets of the younger generation worldwide. Highlights include another substantial tour of the US taking in Montréal, Indianapolis and Memphis and a tour of Japan on the occasion of the Nippon Music Foundation’s 50th anniversary at Suntory Hall with Ray Chen, Camille Thomas, Maria Dueñas and as soloists with Tokyo Symphony Orchestra. The ensemble will debut at prestigious festivals such as Schubertiade Hohenems and HarzClassixFestival, appear on Cyprus and in Split, at Teatro Liceu de Salamanca and in Florence in the renowned series of the Amici della Musica Firenze. Returns will lead them to the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Oraniensteiner Konzerte and the Bodensee Festival. The Goldmund Quartet presents their own chamber music festival at Kloster Irsee in May 2025. Additionally, the Goldmund Academy will be held for the very first time offering guidance for young string quartets and providing a platform for emerging talent.

Winners of the 2018 International Wigmore Hall String Competition and the 2018 Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, the Quartet was named Rising Stars by the European Concert Hall Organisation for 2019/20. Since 2019, they have been performing on the famous “Paganini Quartet” of instruments by Antonio Stradivari, once owned by Niccolò Paganini and loaned to the quartet by the Nippon

Music Foundation. In addition, the Quartet was awarded the Jürgen Ponto Foundation Music Prize in March 2020 and the Freiherr von Waltershausen Prize in December 2020. In 2016, the Quartet won the Bavarian Arts Promotion and the ARD Competition's Karl Klöpper prizes.

Following the 2020 release on Berlin Classics of *Travel Diaries* - the Quartet's third album including works by Wolfgang Rihm, Ana Sokolovic, Fazil Say and Dobrinka Tabakova - the Goldmund Quartet published an album dedicated to Franz Schubert and released a limited vinyl release of *Prisma* in 2023. The latter featured contemporary works by Arvo Pärt, Philip Glass and Uno Helmersson alongside two newly commissioned pieces by Pascal Schumacher and Sophia Jani. Collaborations with composers such as Kaan Bulak, Jörg Widmann and others give evidence of their dedication to commissioning and performing contemporary music. These efforts alongside educational projects are supported by the Friends of Goldmund Quartett e.V. The next CD release, of an album of works by Felix Mendelssohn, is planned for Spring 2025.

The Goldmund Quartet has performed alongside artists such as Jörg Widmann, Ksenija Sidorova, Sabine Meyer, Pablo Ferrández, Nino Gvetadze, Noa Wildschut, Martynas Levickis, Maximilian Hornung, Elisabeth Brauß, Christian Gerhaher and Fazil Say.

In addition to studies at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Munich and with members of the Alban Berg Quartet, including Günter Pichler at the Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofía and the Artemis Quartet in Berlin, master classes and studies with members of the Hagen, Borodin, Belcea, Ysaye and Cherubini Quartets, Ferenc Rados, Eberhard Feltz and Alfred Brendel gave the Quartet important musical impulses.

# UPCOMING VCU EVENTS

## **String Faculty Soiree**

Tuesday, March 4th 7:00 PM

## **VCU Symphony presents “Mozaics and Music”**

Wednesday, March 5th 7:00 PM

## **George Stoffan Faculty Clarinet Recital**

Wednesday, March 19th 7:30 PM

## **Neave Trio Performance**

Saturday, March 22nd 7:00 PM

## **Sheri Oyan Faculty Saxophone Recital with quoux collective**

Sunday, March 23rd 4:00 PM

## **Mary Anne Rennolds Chamber Concert Series presents the Harlem Quartet\***

Sunday, April 6th 3:00 PM

All of the above events require a ticket to attend and will take place in the Singleton Center for the Performing Arts. Tickets are \$12.00 for the general public, \$5.00 for VCU Students.

\*Tickets for the Mary Anne Rennolds Chamber Concert Series are \$35.00.

Tickets may be purchased at: [arts.vcu.edu/music-tickets](https://arts.vcu.edu/music-tickets)

# About the Mary Anne Rennolds Chamber Concert Series

The Department of Music at Virginia Commonwealth University has presented the top chamber music performers in the world to Richmond audiences for more than forty years. VCU Music's series, originally founded as the Terrace Concerts, debuted in 1983 in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Today, the series is named in honor of Mary Anne Rennolds, one of Richmond's greatest music patrons. A fund was established in her memory to present chamber music events in Richmond, independently of the Terrace Concerts.

Please consider donating to the fund in honor of Mary Anne Rennolds and her legacy. To donate online, please go to <https://support.vcu.edu/give/Arts>. Search by keyword and look for "Rennolds". The fund name is "Mary Anne Rennolds Chamber Concerts".

If you would like to provide a check donation, checks can be made out to the VCU Foundation with Rennolds Chamber Concerts in the subject line. Checks may be mailed to VCU Arts Music attn: Linda Johnston at 922 Park Avenue, Box 842004, Richmond, VA 23284-2004.

Thank you for supporting the premier chamber music series in Richmond.

## Donate to VCU Music

The VCU Friends of Music Scholarship Fund continues to assist many of our VCU Music students with significant scholarship funding, making it possible for them to pursue their education. To contribute to this fund online, please go to: <https://support.vcu.edu/give/Arts>. Search by keyword and look for "Friends of Music".

For additional information on how to support VCU Music, please email [music@vcu.edu](mailto:music@vcu.edu) or call 804-827-4541. Your support is valuable and appreciated.

MARY ANNE RENNOLDS

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2024-25



**Harlem Quartet**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2025 | 3 PM**



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