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Graduate String Quartet Fall Recital

Astrodon Quartet
Zach Levin and Dallas Noble, violin
Amelia Eckloff, viola
Timothy Beccue, cello
November 8, 4:30pm
Grusin Hall

Program

String Quartet in B minor, Op. 33 No. 1

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

I. Allegro moderato
II. Scherzo: Allegro di molto – Trio
III. Andante
IV. Finale: Presto

String Quartet No. 4

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

I. Allegro
II. Prestissimo, con sordino
III. Non troppo lento
IV. Allegretto pizzicato
V. Allegro Molto

Intermission

String Quartet No. 9 in C major, Op. 59, No. 3, “Razumovsky”

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770- 1827)

I. Introduzione: Andante con moto – Allegro vivace
II. Andante con moto quasi Allegretto
III. Menuetto grazioso - Trio
IV. Allegro molto

Program Notes

By Astrodon Quartet

String Quartet in B minor, Op. 33, No. 1

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Composed in 1781, Haydn's six Op. 33 quartets marked his return to the genre after nearly a decade away. He described the works as written in a "new and special way," reflecting a growing interest in conversational interplay, melodic clarity, and the expressive possibilities of the string quartet. The B-minor quartet, one of the set's most unusual works in its choice of key, reveals a darker, more unsettled side of Haydn's characteristic wit.

The opening *Allegro moderato* begins ambiguously, hinting at D major before gradually establishing B minor. Its opening gestures seem to search for direction, interrupted by pauses and sudden shifts in character. Rather than presenting two clearly contrasting themes, Haydn develops a compact musical idea through changes in rhythm, harmony, and texture. The result is a movement that feels less like a narrative moving confidently toward its destination than a conversation repeatedly interrupted by new thoughts. Moments of lyrical warmth emerge, but never quite settle the music's underlying restlessness.

The *Scherzo: Allegro di molto* compresses this tension into a brief, quick-footed dance. Its outer sections are clipped and slightly brooding, with a rhythmic insistence that gives the music an almost mischievous edge. The contrasting B-major trio offers a sudden glimpse of light; more open and pastoral, it seems to suspend the

scherzo's nervous energy before the return of the darker opening material.

The *Andante*, in D major, offers a more sustained kind of expression. Its stately, gently lilting character recalls a slow dance, while the first violin's unfolding melody lends the movement an almost vocal quality. Yet the calm is not entirely still. Chromatic turns and unexpected harmonic shifts draw the music away from its initial simplicity, revealing greater tenderness and depth beneath its poised surface.

The finale, *Presto*, releases the tension that has accumulated throughout the quartet. Rapid passagework, nimble exchanges, and violinistic flourishes give the music the exhilaration of a spirited race. Its momentum rarely lets up, and the four instruments seem to egg one another onward. After the uncertainty of the opening movement and the shadows of the scherzo, the finale's restless energy offers not so much a resolution of the quartet's darker character as a transformation of it: what began as hesitation becomes motion, wit, and sheer exuberance.

String Quartet No. 4

Belá Bartók (1881-1945)

Written in the summer of 1928, Bartók's Fourth String Quartet brings together the rhythmic vitality of folk music and a strikingly modern approach to harmony, texture, and instrumental color. Its five movements are arranged in a symmetrical arch: the first and fifth share thematic material, as do the second and fourth, while the slow third movement forms the work's nexus. Across this structure, the music seems to travel from the abstract and tightly constructed world of the opening toward something increasingly physical and humanistic, culminating in a finale whose energy feels almost triumphant.

The opening *Allegro* begins with tightly coiled melodic fragments, built around small intervals that seem to pull against one another. These ideas pass rapidly between the instruments, accumulating into dense, muscular textures punctuated by sudden accents and bursts of rhythmic energy. The music feels academic in its precision, as though its melodies are being examined, dismantled, and reassembled.

The *Prestissimo, con sordino* shifts into a world of muted, fleeting gestures. Rapid exchanges, slides, and sudden changes of articulation create an elusive, almost weightless scherzo. The music seems to dart in and out of focus, propelled by an energy that is more nervous than forceful. The fourth movement will return to this material in a radically different guise.

At the heart of the quartet, the *Non troppo lento* opens an entirely different sound world. The cello introduces a long, ornamented

melody that unfolds with the freedom and inflection of a folk singer's voice, supported by a sustained, drone-like accompaniment. The music gradually gives way to Bartók's celebrated "night music": delicate, high-register sounds suggest insects, distant birds, and the barely perceptible movement of the natural world. These strange, suspended textures interrupt the flow of the melody before it returns, transformed by the stillness surrounding it. Here, the quartet's intellectual rigor gives way to something deeply intimate: music that seems less composed than discovered through listening.

The *Allegretto pizzicato* revisits the second movement's material through plucked strings alone. Rhythms snap and scurry, while the percussive *Bartók pizzicato* (in which the string strikes the fingerboard) adds flashes of startling physicality. What was elusive and spectral in the second movement becomes earthy, playful, and almost grotesque, as though the same musical ideas have returned to the body.

The final *Allegro molto* brings the quartet's journey to its culmination. Returning to the first movement's driving energy and familiar melodic fragments, the music gathers momentum through increasingly relentless rhythms and explosive exchanges. But what once felt abstract and tightly controlled now seems liberated. The folk-like character of the material comes to the fore, displaying true exuberance. The arch closes, but the music has changed: what began as an intellectual puzzle ends as a celebration of movement, sound, and the human impulse to make music.

String Quartet No. 9 in C major, Op. 59, No. 3

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Composed in 1806 as the final work in the three quartets commissioned by Count Andrey Razumovsky, Beethoven's Op. 59 quartets radically expanded the expressive and technical possibilities of the string quartet. By this time, Beethoven was struggling with increasingly severe hearing loss, a condition that had driven him into despair and social isolation. In 1802, he confronted the possibility of permanent deafness in the anguished document now known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, before resolving to continue composing. The C-major quartet seems to trace a journey from uncertainty toward an almost defiant affirmation of life.

The opening *Andante con moto* begins with a searching, chromatic introduction. Fragmented gestures and harmonies that resist resolution create an atmosphere of uncertainty, as though the music is struggling to find its bearings. This tension gives way to the brilliant C-major *Allegro vivace*, whose expansive melodies and surging energy seem to burst into the open. The contrast between the two sections is striking: what begins in hesitation becomes a celebration of movement and possibility.

The second movement, *Andante con moto quasi allegretto*, offers a more troubled kind of intensity. Its persistent pulse and recurring melodic figures create a sense of restless forward motion, while sharp accents and sudden changes in dynamics disrupt any feeling of repose. The music seems caught between restraint and agitation; its repetitions deepen rather than relieve the tension.

Against the exuberance of the first movement, this darker, more inward music suggests the difficulty of finding peace.

The *Menuetto grazioso* brings an unexpected change of character. Rather than the driving scherzos found in many of Beethoven's middle-period works, this movement returns to the measured elegance of an older dance form. Its graceful, flowing phrases are interrupted by a more animated and "outdoors" central section, before the minuet returns with renewed poise. The effect is not simply nostalgic: the music offers a moment of balance, a glimpse of a world in which order and grace remain possible.

The finale, *Allegro molto*, begins with a fugue whose theme passes from instrument to instrument, each voice joining the others in an increasingly intricate and exhilarating exchange. The music demands extraordinary precision, yet its complexity never feels merely intellectual; its relentless momentum creates a sense of collective purpose, as though the four instruments are driving toward something beyond themselves. On sketches for this movement, Beethoven wrote, "Let your deafness be no more a secret—even in art." The inscription casts the finale in a particularly powerful light. A composer whose relationship with sound was becoming increasingly uncertain responds with music of astonishing clarity, vitality, and conviction. The quartet ends not with resignation, but with an exuberance that feels hard-won: a declaration that, even in the face of profound personal difficulty, the creative spirit remains irrepressibly alive.

About the Performers

The Astrodon Quartet brings together four exceptional musicians dedicated to the art of the string quartet. Unified by their devotion to their craft and their commitment to community service, they strive to bring the highest quality of musical performance and education to communities of every socioeconomic status.

Named for the first dinosaur discovered in their home state of Maryland, the group shares a love for the city of Baltimore almost as deep as their love for the string quartet repertoire. Individually, Astrodon's musicians represent three states and two countries, but Baltimore was the city that brought them together and nurtured their growth. Its spirit of cooperation, determination, and creativity inspires them in every moment of their journey.

The Astrodon Quartet is thrilled to be the recipient of the Takács Graduate Quartet Residency, which is generously funded by the Starling Foundation. From 2026-2028, they will be in residence at the University of Colorado Boulder, where they will perform in the community and study extensively with the renowned Takács Quartet.

The quartet has recently participated in the 2026 Calidore Quartet Seminar, the 2026 Lunenburg Academy of Music Performance String Quartet Academy, and the 2026 Redfish Music Festival, where they worked closely with leading artists in the field. They are honored to have been coached by Michael Kannen, Maria Lambros, Paul Katz, and members of the Calidore, Verona, and Cavani Quartets.



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