CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-SIXTH SEASON

Sunday, December 6, 2026, at 1:30
Epiphany Center for the Arts

CSO Chamber Music Series

AUDIRE MUSIC

Rong-Yan Tang Violin
Jasmine Mengjia Lin Violin
Youming Chen Viola
Olivia Jakyoung Huh Cello
Alexander Horton Bass

BEETHOVEN — String Quartet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2
Allegro
Adagio cantabile—Allegro
Scherzo: Allegro
Allegro molto quasi presto

INTERMISSION

DVOŘÁK — String Quintet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 77
Allegro con fuoco
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Poco andante
Finale: Allegro assai

Chicago Symphony acknowledges support from the Illinois Arts Council.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770; Bonn, Germany
Died March 26, 1827; Vienna, Austria

String Quartet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2



COMPOSED
1799

The year of the completion of the six op. 18 quartets—1800—was an important time in Beethoven's career. He had achieved a success good enough to write to his old friend Franz Wegeler in Bonn,

> My compositions bring me in a good deal, and may I say that I am offered more commissions than it is possible for me to carry out. Moreover, for every composition I can count on six or seven publishers and even more, if I want them. People no longer come to an arrangement with me. I state my price, and they pay.

At the time of this gratifying recognition of his talents, however, the first signs of his fateful deafness appeared, and he began the titanic struggle that became a gravitational pole of his life. Within two years, driven from the social contact on which he had flourished by the fear of discovery of his malady, he penned the Heiligenstadt Testament, his cri de coeur against this wicked trick of the gods. These first quartets stand on the brink of that great crisis in Beethoven's life.

The string quartet, perfected by Haydn, was the favorite form of musical entertainment in the salons of Vienna at the turn of the nineteenth century. As early as 1795, Count Anton Georg Apponyi had suggested to Beethoven that he undertake some works in the form, but the proposal did not bear fruit until three years later, when the op. 18 set was begun. In 1798 Beethoven was closely associated with the noted composer and theorist Emanuel Alois Förster, perhaps as a student. (Beethoven later referred to him as his "old master.") Förster was one of the era's foremost composers of string quartets, and his influence may have inspired Beethoven to undertake his first works in the genre. Beethoven, at that time of his life still determined to impress the aristocracy, probably also wished to have his name attached to the most

THIS PAGE: Ludwig van Beethoven, copperplate engraving by Johann Joseph Neidl (1776–1832) after a lost portrait by Gandolph Ernst Stainhauser von Treuberg (1766–1805), ca. 1800–01 | OPPOSITE PAGE: A view of the Lobkowitz Palace in Vienna, at left. Painting by Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780), ca. 1759. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria | NEXT SPREAD: Antonín Dvořák, portrait, ca. 1880. Private collection, anonymous artist. Photo by Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images



fashionable musical form of the day. At any rate, the quartets were begun in mid-1798 (though some sketches apparently date back to the early 1790s), mostly composed the following year, and completed in 1800. They were first played by the ensemble of Ignaz Schuppanzigh either in the home of Förster or in the Viennese palace of Prince Karl Lobkowitz, to whom they were dedicated on their publication in 1801. Lobkowitz was so pleased with the quartets that he pledged Beethoven an annual stipend of 600 gulden. With their respectful renewal of the classical style and technique of Haydn, the quartets enjoyed a good (though, as was almost always the case with Beethoven's new works, not unanimous) success and were frequently heard during the composer's lifetime. Looking back on op. 18 in 1811, a critic for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* wrote,

> In them, the loveliest melodies appeal to the feelings, and the unity, the supreme simplicity, the particular and firmly sustained character in each individual piece making up those quartets raise them to the level of masterworks, and join Beethoven's name with the revered names of Haydn and Mozart.

The G major quartet, the second of the op. 18 set, is Beethoven's wittiest specimen of the genre and, because of its frequently featherstitched texture, is regarded by many players to be one of his most difficult to perform. The opening Allegro, much indebted to Haydn in its conversational intimacy, drew from Theodore Helm, Beethoven's nineteenth-century biographer, the following fanciful description:

The principal subject brings before one's imagination a brilliant scene in some eighteenth-century salon, with all the ceremonious display and flourish typical of the period. The doors of the drawing room swing open to usher in the arriving guests, met with bows and gracious words of greeting.

The second movement is a remarkably daring composition. It begins with a hymnlike theme decorated with glistening filigree by the first violin but soon comes to a dying close with a tiny melodic fragment composed more of silence than of sound. The first violin posits a quick repetition of the fragment, and suddenly, the other instruments join it in a startling episode of skittering energy. This aberrant thought, so surprisingly stumbled upon, is quickly dismissed, however, and the hymnlike theme returns, as though nothing untoward had happened, and continues without incident to its appointed close.

The scherzo, a witty descendant of those in Haydn's quartets, is marked by a certain leonine gruffness that came more and more to characterize Beethoven's works.

Aufgeknöpft (unbuttoned) is how Beethoven referred to the convivial finale. Helm allowed that by this point in his imaginary soirée "the champagne had been passed around," and the lighthearted gaiety and quick changes of subject that bubble through the movement do certainly evoke the high spirits and good-natured banter of a congenial gathering of friends. *C*

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born September 8, 1841; Nelahozeves (near Prague), Bohemia
Died May 1, 1904; Prague, Bohemia

String Quintet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 77



COMPOSED
1875

In 1874 Antonín Dvořák was a little-known Prague musician whose income from his compositions and as organist at Saint Adalbert's Church was so meager that the city officials certified his poverty. That same year, he submitted some of his work for consideration to a committee in Vienna awarding government grants to struggling artists whose members were a most distinguished lot—Johann Herbeck, director of the court opera, the renowned critic Eduard Hanslick, and that titan of Viennese music himself, Johannes Brahms. Their report noted that Dvořák possessed "genuine and original gifts" and that his works displayed "an undoubted talent, but in a way which as yet remains formless and unbridled." They deemed his work worthy of encouragement, however, and, on

their recommendation, the minister of culture, Karl Stremayer, awarded the young musician 400 gulden, the highest stipend bestowed under the program. The distinction represented Dvořák's first recognition outside his homeland and his initial contact with Brahms and Hanslick, who both were to be powerful influences on his career through their example, artistic guidance, and professional help.

Dvořák had just begun the G major string quintet when he learned, in February 1875, that he had been awarded the Austrian State Prize. To celebrate, he took a short holiday, a luxury he had previously been unable to afford. He finished the quintet in March when he returned to Prague and submitted the score to a competition sponsored by the local Society of Artists. It won, and the society presented the work's premiere on March 18, 1876, with an ensemble led by František Ondříček. At that first performance, the quintet began with a movement marked Andante religioso that Dvořák had adapted from the slow movement of his E minor string quartet of 1870. He decided that the movement did not fit this venue either, and he later reworked it as the Notturno for Strings, op. 40. The quintet, which the composer originally designated as his op. 18, was subject to a disreputable bit of publishing subterfuge in 1888, when Fritz Simrock of Berlin, whose bank account was bursting with profits from the sale of the Slavonic Dances, issued the score as op. 77 to make this early piece appear to be a (presumably, more valuable) work of Dvořák's maturity. (Simrock performed similar margin-inflating, chronological legerdemain on the op. 27/op. 80 string quartet, the op. 24/op. 76 F major symphony, and the op. 38/op. 78 Symphonic Variations.) Dvořák was furious, but the deed had been done, and the quintet is most usually listed with its higher opus number.

The G major string quintet did not need Simrock's machinations for defense. The work, one of the first to show the composer's growing self-assurance and maturity during the years after he received the Austrian prize, is full of typically Dvořákian delights. Its melodic profligacy brings to mind Brahms's jealous lament: "I should be glad if something occurred to me as a main idea that only occurs to him by the way." Its first, second, and concluding movements are infected with the rhythms and melodic leadings of the peasant music he had lovingly stored in his heart and head since childhood. The composer's biographer Otto Šourek called the Andante "one of the most entrancing slow movements in the whole of Dvořák's chamber music; . . . one flowing stream of passionate warmth, depth of feeling, and powerfully expressive range of mood." The character of this quintet, like that of its composer, is unaffected, sincere, and immediately friendly. *C*

Richard E. Rodda, a former faculty member at Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Institute of Music, provides program notes for many American orchestras, concert series, and festivals.

Rong-Yan Tang Violin



Rong-Yan Tang was appointed to the first violin section of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra by Daniel Barenboim in 2003. After graduating from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, she came to the United States on full scholarship to study with Camilla Wicks at Louisiana State University and Donald Weilerstein at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Prior to joining the CSO, Tang held several positions, most recently as associate concertmaster of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic. As a soloist, she has performed in China, Hong Kong, and France, as well as with several U.S. orchestras.

A former protége of Isaac Stern, Tang plays on a violin from Stern's private collection, and by his invitation she performed at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall.

Tang has extensive experience as a chamber musician. As first violin of the Fry Street Quartet, she has appeared on Carnegie Hall's Rising Stars series, the New School's Schneider Concerts series, and at New York City's 92nd Street Y. Her most notable awards include the Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition's Millennium Grand Prize and first prize in the Yellow Springs National Chamber Music Competition.

Jasmine Mengjia Lin Violin



Canadian Chinese violinist Jasmine Mengjia Lin began playing the violin at age four. She was awarded the grand prize at the 2014 Kocian International Violin Competition and received a 2018 Canada Council for the Arts Musical Instrument Bank loan. She has performed with the Czech Chamber Philharmonic Pardubice and has participated in leading festivals such as the Schiermonnikoog Festival (Netherlands), Toronto Summer Music, Gstaad Menuhin Academy, and Kneisel Hall (Blue Hill, Maine).

Lin earned her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Juilliard School under Masao Kawasaki. She continued her studies at the Manhattan School of Music with Nicholas Mann, Sheryl Staples, and Sylvia Rosenberg and began doctoral studies at Rice University under Cho-Liang Lin. Previously, she studied with Atis Bankas at the Taylor Academy of the Royal Conservatory of Music in her hometown of Toronto.

Jasmine Mengjia Lin joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's second violin section in July 2026.

All photos by Todd Rosenberg Photography

Youming Chen Viola



Violist Youming Chen (pronounced YO-ming) was appointed by Riccardo Muti to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra during its 125th season. Previously, Chen served as the associate principal viola of the Kansas City Symphony and was a member of the Grant Park Music Festival. Recently, he founded Audire Music with CSO violinist Rong-Yan Tang. Audire Music performs string quartet masterworks in the Chicago area and *Live* on WFMT. As a chamber musician, he performs with the International Chamber Artists. He has participated in Pacific Music, Aspen Music, Prussia Cove, and Music@Menlo festivals. He received his bachelor of music degree from the University of Michigan, a master of music degree from the Juilliard School, and a doctor of musical arts degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

He is the current custodian of his Michael Alban viola, made in 1711. Former custodians include Michael Nowak, Marlow Fisher, David Schwartz, Myra Kestenbaum, and Alvin Dinkin.

Olivia Jakyoung Huh Cello



Cellist Olivia Jakyoung Huh has been performing since a very young age, making her solo debut recital at nine on the Kumho Prodigy Concert series in Seoul, South Korea. The same year, Huh made her concerto debut with the Guri Philharmonic Orchestra. She has gone on to win prizes at several international competitions, including first prize and a special prize at the Alice and Eleonore Schoenfeld International String Competition and first prize at the International Johannes Brahms Competition. More recently, Huh was invited to compete in the Queen Elisabeth Competition and the Geneva Competition, leading to performance opportunities in the United States, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, China, Spain, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea. An avid chamber musician, Huh has performed at prestigious festivals including the Yellow Barn Summer Festival, Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival, Tanglewood Music Festival, and New York String Orchestra Seminar.

Olivia Jakyoung Huh was appointed to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra cello section in October 2025, after beginning the 2025–26 season as one of three CSO Fellows. Huh is the third CSO musician appointed by Zell Music Director Designate Klaus Mäkelä.

Alexander Horton Bass



Alexander Horton joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as assistant principal bass in 2023. Prior to joining the CSO, he served as principal bass of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra for six years and was a member of the Grant Park Orchestra bass section for two summers. Horton has performed with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and spent summers attending the Aspen Music Festival and School and Brevard Music Center.

Originally from Tallahassee, Florida, Horton completed his bachelor's degree at Florida State University, where he studied with Melanie Punter and completed one year of graduate study at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music as a student of Bruce Bransby before joining the Alabama Symphony Orchestra. He has served on the faculties of Auburn University, Samford University, University of North Alabama, and Birmingham-Southern College.

CSO Chamber Music

Feb 9
CSO Chamber Music: South Loop Chamber

Feb 26
CSO Chamber Music at the University of Chicago

Apr 11
CSO Chamber Music at the University of Chicago

Apr 25
Meridian Quartet at North Park University

May 11
CSO Chamber Music: CSO Brass Quintet

June 13
Tourte String Quartet at South Shore Cultural Center

For tickets and more information, please visit **chicagosymphony.org**

Artists, prices and programs subject to change.