

**Friends of Chamber Music present the Cuarteto Casals in concert
at the Vancouver Playhouse, Sunday, February 1, 2026, at 3:00 pm**

CUARTETO CASALS

Vera Martínez Mehner – violin

Abel Tomàs – violin

Cristina Cordero – viola

Arnau Tomàs – cello



Founded in 1997 at the Escuela Reina Sofía in Madrid, Cuarteto Casals won First Prizes at the London and Brahms-Hamburg competitions, and ever since has been a continual guest at the world's most prestigious concert halls. These halls include Carnegie Hall, Philharmonie Berlin, Wigmore Hall in London, Cité de la Musique Paris, Philharmonie Paris, Konzerthaus and Musikverein in Vienna, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, and Suntory Hall amongst many others.

To celebrate its 25th anniversary, the quartet released a recording of the complete 'Art of Fugue' by J.S. Bach to much critical acclaim. The group is currently recording all of Dmitri Shostakovich's 15 string quartets, one of the great quartet cycles of the 20th Century. They have released recordings of quartets 1 – 12 of the 15 total thus far.

With more than 27 years of experience together, the Cuarteto Casals has compiled a substantial discography on the Harmonia Mundi label. Their recordings feature repertoire ranging from lesser-known Spanish composers, such as Arriaga and Toldrá, to Viennese classics by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms, through 20th Century greats Debussy, Ravel, Zemlinsky, Bartok, Ligeti, and Kurtág, as well as a Blu-ray live recording of the complete Schubert quartets.

A prize from the prestigious Burletti-Buitoni Trust in London enabled the quartet to assemble a collection of matching Baroque and Classical period bows which it uses for works from Purcell

through Schubert, refining their ability to distinguish between diverse musical styles. In addition, the quartet has been profoundly influenced by its work with living composers, especially György Kurtág, and has given the world premiere of quartets written by leading Spanish composers, including a concerto for string quartet and orchestra by Francisco Coll, premiered with the Orquesta Nacional de España, and other commissions by Mauricio Sotelo, Benet Casablancas, Dahoud Salim, Lucio Amanti, Aureliano Cattaneo, and Matan Porat. Additionally, the quartet has performed John Adam's 'Absolute Jest' with many orchestras and performed the world premiere of Elisenda Fabregas's 'Fiery Earth' in the Palau de la Música Catalana in 2025.

In recognition of its unique contributions to the cultural life within Catalunya and throughout Spain, Cuarteto Casals members have been acknowledged as cultural ambassadors by the Generalitat of Catalunya and the Institut Ramon Llull. Past awards include the Premio Nacional de Música, the Premi Nacional de Cultura de Catalunya and the Premi Ciutat Barcelona; additionally, the quartet has had the privilege to perform repeatedly on the extraordinary collection of decorated Stradivarius instruments maintained at the Royal Palace in Madrid. To honor Cuarteto Casals' decades on the concert stage, the quartet has received the prestigious Medal of Honor from Reina Sofía of Spain.

Cuarteto Casals often appears on television and radio throughout Europe and North America, and in addition to giving much sought-after masterclasses, is quartet in residence at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole, the Koninklijk Conservatorium Den Haag, and at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya in Barcelona.

During their previous Vancouver concert for Friends, Cuarteto Casals collaborated with the young BC-raised Canadian rising star pianist, Jaeden Izik-Dzurko. Together they played the Brahms Piano Quintet, Opus 34. This was a repeat of their shared success at the Santander Piano Competition in Spain where Jaeden won all the First Prizes, including one for chamber music. Jaeden has since won both the Montreal and Leeds International Piano Competitions and is enjoying a brilliant career as a concert artist.

Cuarteto Casals is represented by Arts Management Group, Inc.

Programme

String Quartet No. 3 in E-flat Major

Juan Crisóstomo Arriaga (1806-1826)

Allegro

Andantino. Pastorale

Menuetto. Allegro – Trio

Presto Agitato

Juan Crisóstomo Arriaga was a Spanish Basque composer from Bilbao. He was nicknamed "the Spanish Mozart" after he died, because, similar to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, he was both a child prodigy and an accomplished composer who died young. They also shared the same first and second baptismal names; and they shared the same birthday, 27 January, although fifty years apart. Arriaga was also a child prodigy, and at 10 years of age was playing 2nd violin in a professional string quartet.

In September 1821, Arriaga travelled to Paris where he began his studies at the Conservatoire, including violin under Pierre Baillot, counterpoint with Luigi Cherubini, and harmony under François-Joseph Fétis. From all evidence, Arriaga made quite an impression on his teachers. In 1823, Cherubini, who had become director at the Conservatoire the previous year, famously asked on hearing the young composer's *Stabat Mater*, "Who wrote this?" and learning it was Arriaga, said to him, "Amazing – you are music itself." Sadly, the composer died 10 days before his 20th birthday.

Arriaga composed his three string quartets at age 16, with his third and final in the genre receiving the most acclaim.

Fiery Earth (2024) – Canadian premiere

Elisenda Fábregas (1955 -)

Spanish/American composer Elisenda Fábregas (b. 1955, Terrassa, Catalonia) has had a multifaceted career as a composer, pianist and lecturer. Until very recently she was based in Seoul, South Korea, where she was a Visiting Professor of music and cultural studies at Kyung-Hee University Humanitas College (Global Campus) from 2013 to 2021. She also taught graduate composition at Ewha's Women University and was a piano professor at Chugye University for the Arts from 2010 to 2013.

She was a Post-Doctoral Fulbright scholar and holds doctorates from the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University in Music Composition (2011), and from Columbia University Teachers College in Education (1992); she also received Bachelors and Masters degrees in piano performance from The Juilliard School (1982-83). Before coming to the US, she also completed her piano studies in Barcelona. During her early career, Elisenda performed as a pianist throughout Europe and the US, including a 1983 Carnegie Recital Hall debut in NYC. Her experiences and training ultimately propelled her towards musical composition.

She has written compositions for a richly varied assortment of musical ensembles and solo instruments. In 2000, Elisenda received the Shepherd Distinguished Composer of the Year Award from the Music Teachers National Association in Washington D.C. for her piano work *Portraits*

I. Elisenda's compositions have been recorded and released on various labels including Naxos and Bridge Records.

Fiery earth for string quartet is dedicated to Cuarteto Casals, who co-commissioned this work jointly with the *Fundacio del Orfeo Catala – Palau de la Musica Catalana*. Cuarteto Casals premiered *Fiery earth* on March 19, 2025, at the Palau de la Musica Catalana.

Fiery earth is an homage to the creative power of the earth, an entity envisioned as a live organism, with its repetitive cycles of transformation and regeneration. The formal structure is a loosely constructed, one-movement *passacaglia* based on a three-bar *ostinato* reminiscent of Gregorian chant. This ostinato is varied and develops throughout the piece, continuously progressing in tempo and dynamics towards a dramatic finale. This thematic development is a ‘metaphor’ for the earth’s transformations although this work is not programmatic. The musical language is modal/tonal with some harmonic references to the music of Spain although integrated within an international musical idiom.

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Intermission

String Quartet No. 15 in G Major, Op 161, D887

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Allegro molto moderato

Andante un poco moto

Scherzo: Allegro vivace, Trio: Allegretto

Allegro assai

Schubert started violin lessons with his father when he was eight years old; six years later he was composing music for the family string quartet: brothers Ignaz and Ferdinand on violin, Franz on viola, and their father playing cello. The composer’s eleven or so early quartets are generally rarely played. The exuberant “Trout” piano quintet and the surviving first movement of a C Minor quartet (“Quartettsatz”) set the scene for the great chamber works of the composer’s later years. Amongst these latter is his G Major quartet from 1826. Written on an epic scale, the piece plays on the contrast between major and minor, with Schubert presenting a pervasive ambiguity between the two.

In the *Allegro molto moderato*, dotted rhythms contribute to a subdued theme which is accompanied by repeating triplets. Both figures recur relentlessly throughout this unsettled movement.

The *Andante* is a movement of extreme contrasts. The gentle and genial opening lulls with its repeats, but is eventually forcefully interrupted by the first movement's dotted rhythm. One of the most frightening episodes in chamber music follows: rapidly ascending runs and tremolos building to terrifying dagger-like stabs. The subsequent reassurance of the opening theme is now plagued by the certainty that the nightmare will return.

A similar but milder contrast exists in the third movement. The superficially light and Mendelssohnian in style *Scherzo* is not without an underlying threat, whereas its *Trio* is a guileless Ländler.

The *Allegro assai* is almost unbeatable in its relentless length, as if some demonic forces were compelling the music to continue. Again, the key is ambiguously minor and major. The demon forced the first violin to perform almost impossible arpeggios before the music briefly pauses for breath with a commandingly majestic theme. Almost immediately, the interminable dance returns. The music finally collapses, exhausted by its demons, and this unsettling work ends with two loud chords definitively in the major key.

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Next concerts - both at the Vancouver Playhouse

David Finckel, cello; Wu Han, piano

Sunday, February 15, 2026 – 3:00 pm

Bach: Sonata in D major for Viola da Gamba and Keyboard BWV 1028 (1740)

Schumann: Fantasy Pieces Op. 73 (1849)

Saint-Saens: Sonata No. 1 in c minor, Op. 32 (1873)

Jalbert: Ephemeral Objects (composed for David Finckel and Wu Han, 2020)

Chopin: Sonata in g minor, Op. 65 (1847)

Takács Quartet (final Vancouver concert with original quartet member, cellist András Fejér)

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 – 7:30 pm

Beethoven: String Quartet in G Major, Opus 18 No. 2

Beethoven: String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, Opus 74 “Harp”

Beethoven: String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Opus 131

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