



2025/2026

78<sup>th</sup> SEASON

**Friends of Chamber Music present the Mandelring Quartett in concert  
at the Vancouver Playhouse, Sunday, March 15, 2026, at 3:00 pm**

**Sebastian Schmidt – violin**

**Nanette Schmidt – violin**

**Andreas Willwohl – viola**

**Bernhard Schmidt – cello**



“Brilliance is not a strong enough word – it’s more like an electric shock. The music transfixes the listener from literally the very first note, electrifying heart and brain without any advance warning. Mendelssohn’s music as played by the Mandelring Quartet, under extreme tension, heated and feverish, is dangerously close to catching fire!”

So wrote Zurich’s *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* declared that the Mandelring Quartet is so good, it is a worthy successor to the Alban Berg Quartet. The leading Austrian arts magazine, *Die Bühne*, writing of their Shostakovich cycle at the Salzburg Festival, named it as the “heir of the legendary Borodin Quartet.” And the renowned international music magazine *Fono Forum* named it one of the six best string quartets in the world.

The Mandelring Quartet’s expressivity and remarkable homogeneity of sound and phrasing have become its distinguishing characteristics. The four individual members perform as one in their shared determination to seek out the innermost core of the music and remain open to the musical truth. Their approach to the music is both emotional and personal.

Formed in 1983 in the German wine region of Neustadt an der Weinstrasse, the three Schmidt siblings - Sebastian, Nanette and Bernhard - join with violist Andreas Willwohl in a partnership dedicated to exemplary performances of chamber music. Their early success, winning some of the world’s great competitions – Munich’s (ARD), Evian and Reggio Emilia (Premio Paolo Bor-

ciani) – launched an impressive international career that continues to bring them to all corners of the globe. Along with their regular series of concerts in Berlin and Neustadt and performances throughout Germany, their concert tours have taken them through Europe – Amsterdam, Brussels, London, Madrid, Paris and Vienna – and on to regular performances in North America – New York, Washington D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles and Vancouver; to Japan — Osaka and Tokyo; to Central and South America – Buenos Aires, Lima, and Montevideo; the Middle East and Asia – including appearances in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The Mandelring Quartet has enjoyed highly successful appearances at major international Festivals including Lockenhaus, Montpelier, Montreal, Ottawa, the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, the Enescu Festival in Bucharest, and the Salzburg Festival where they presented the complete cycle of 15 string quartets of Shostakovich. They were Quartet in Residence for the 2020/21 season of the Circulo de Bellas Artes in Madrid and most recently appeared for the fourth time at Madrid’s Royal Palace performing on the renowned *Stradivarius Palatino* instruments of the Royal collection. The Mandelring Quartet celebrated its 40th Anniversary in 2023.

The Mandelring Quartet’s own festival, the HAMBACHER *MusikFEST*, is an annual meeting place for lovers of chamber music from all over the world. Since 2010 the Quartet has presented a regular series of concerts in its hometown of Neustadt, in the Chamber Music Hall of the Berlin Philharmonie, and since 2016, in the Munich Residenz.

Their discography includes more than thirty CD recordings, which have repeatedly been awarded the German Record Critics’ Prize and nominated for the International Classical Music Award, confirming the Mandelring Quartet’s exceptional quality and wide-ranging repertoire. Their recordings of the complete string Shostakovich quartet cycle and complete chamber music of Mendelssohn have been hailed as among the finest of our time. Their recordings of works by Schubert and Schumann have been selected as new benchmark performances. They have also released the complete String Quintets and Sextets of Johannes Brahms along with more recent releases of French repertoire.

The Mandelring Quartet appears by arrangement with California Artists Management.

## **PROGRAMME**

***String Quartet No. 3 in G Major, Opus 44 No. 1    Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–1847)***

**Molto allegro vivace**  
**Menuetto: Un poco Allegretto**  
**Andante espressivo ma con moto**  
**Presto con brio**

Although it was published as the first of the three quartets of the Opus 44 group, the D Major quartet was written last. Mendelssohn completed the work on July 24, 1838. In a letter to the violinist Ferdinand David, Mendelssohn wrote, "I have just finished my third quartet, in D Major, and like it much. I hope it will please you as well since it is more spirited and seems to me likely to be more agreeable to the players than the others."

The opening **Allegro vivace** crackles with energy and exuberance. After an opening statement by the first violin, all players share in the extension of the principal theme. The second subject, more restrained and introverted than the main theme, provides a sharp contrast to the opening. The development continues with great verve, expanding various motifs of the main theme. The high tension is maintained throughout the recapitulation and concluding coda.

In the second movement, Mendelssohn introduced a calming effect by substituting a gentle **Menuetto** for the more traditional scherzo. The middle section is livelier with a ceaseless flow of eighth notes set against long sustained notes and short snatches of counter-melody. An abbreviated form of the menuetto returns to conclude the movement.

The **Andante espressivo** provides an atmosphere of poignancy and intimacy that is unusual in Mendelssohn's chamber music. Written in sonata form, its two themes are constructed in the same way – a lyrical melody in the first violin set against a faster-moving counter-melody in the second violin. The short development section provides a bridge from the second theme back to the first. In the recapitulation, the first theme is varied by the addition of another counter-melody played by the viola while the second theme is little changed.

The final **Presto** provides a brilliant contrast to the quiet inner movements of the quartet. It is a *saltarello*, based on the high-spirited Sixteenth Century Italian dance of that name. The principal theme is constructed of two parts, the first forceful and the second more gentle and tender. The second theme, a soft lyrical descending line similar to the second motif of the first theme, provides contrast to the bustle of the opening. The sweep and drive of this movement continue through to the final bars.

***String Quartet No. 3, Opus 46***

***Viktor Ullmann (1898-1944)***

**Allegro moderato**  
**Presto**  
**Largo**  
**Allegro vivace e ritmico**

Composer, conductor, and pianist Viktor Ullmann's parents converted from Judaism to Catholicism before he was born. As a result, his father was able to enjoy a successful career in the military of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was ennobled. Eventually studying in Vienna, in early 1918 he became a composition student of Arnold Schoenberg. In May 1919, he left Vienna for Prague, where he continued his studies with Alexander von Zemlinsky, under whose direction he

served as a conductor at the New German Theatre of Prague (now the Prague State Opera) until 1927. Starting in 1923, his compositions began receiving positive attention from critics and the public. During this period, he moved to Stuttgart. Success continued until 1933, when he was forced to flee from Germany when the Nazis rose to power, returning to Prague as a music teacher and journalist. From the mid-1930s onward, his musical style moved away from Schoenberg's influence and he developed his own individual sound.

By the time that Ullmann was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942, he had completed 41 works with Opus numbers, including piano sonatas, song cycles, operas, string quartets. Only 13 of these pieces survive. He and his wife were murdered in Auschwitz.

Commentators agree that his String Quartet No. 3 is the instrumental masterpiece of Ullmann's "Terezín period". The work is in one continuous movement, subdivided into four sections that mirror the movements of the traditional string quartet. The first section opens with a brief thematic fragment reminiscent of the finale of Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony - Ullmann frequently referred to other composers' music in the works he produced in Terezín - setting the tone for the quartet's **Allegro moderato** first section. The **Presto** begins with each of the four instruments playing a four-note motive, with the section functioning as a relentless sort of scherzo. A return of the opening section follows, complete with the twisted "Pastoral" motive. The viola begins the **Largo** section with a desolate, serial theme gradually taken up and elaborated by the other members of the quartet. Ullmann reserves most of his declamatory fervor for the closing section. The music ends in the major mode, more resolute than triumphant.

## INTERMISSION

*String Quartet No. 7 in F Major, Opus 59 No. 1*  
(1770-1827)

*Ludwig van Beethoven*

*Allegro*

*Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando*

*Adagio molto e mesto*

*Thème Russe: Allegro*

Beethoven's three Opus 59 quartets were commissioned in 1802 by Count Razumovsky, Russian ambassador to the Viennese Imperial Court, and included some Russian themes heard here in the finale to the magnificent No. 1. Opus 59 was intended for performance in Razumovsky's lavish new palace in Vienna. When Beethoven completed the trio of quartets before the palace was ready, the group of works was premiered by the Schuppanzigh Quartet in an unknown location. Reactions to this Opus were the harshest that Beethoven ever received. When violinist Felix Radicati said to him, "Surely, you do not consider this music?", Beethoven responded with a prophetic reply, "Not for you, but for a later age."

The monumental **Allegro** begins with a beautiful melody, which starts low in the cello, and soars up to the first violin's highest register. Although rich subsidiary material is presented, the two halves of the first theme dominate both the development and coda. The movement ends with a series of brilliant violin runs.

In Beethoven's day, the drumming, rhythmic notes of the **Allegretto** were considered strange and oddly amusing. Although lighter in mood than the opening, it is still somewhat restless and ill at ease. Various themes are employed, some gay and abandoned, others more lyrical and song-like. The structure is considered either a scherzo with two trios, or a sonata variant.

Beethoven wrote the phrase, "A weeping willow or acacia tree on my brother's grave", on the sketches of the profoundly moving **Adagio**, thereby offering insight into his intent. The lament's two cantilena (vocal) themes are characterised by wide intervals between notes. Each of the four voices weaves a separate magic, with the cello part particularly richly endowed. A violin cadenza and trill end the movement and lead to the finish.

The final **Allegro** is based on a Russian folk melody. Despite the original song's dirge-like accents, the movement is filled with high spirits. The theme is heard here in the major key, played at twice the speed of the original song. At the end, Beethoven slows the pace before a final brilliant flourish concludes the quartet.

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### **Next concerts - both at the Vancouver Playhouse at 7:30 pm**

#### **Trio Bohémo (Czechia)**

**Tuesday, March 24, 2026 – 7:30 pm**

Antonín Rejcha: Piano Trio in E flat Major, Op. 101 No. 1

Paul Schoenfield: Café Music (arr. for piano trio)

Bedřich Smetana: Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 15

#### **Dover Quartet (USA)**

**Tuesday, March 31, 2026 – 7:30 pm**

Franz Schubert: String Quartet No. 11 in E major, D.353

Grażyna Bacewicz: String Quartet No. 4

Joseph Haydn: String Quartet in D major, Op. 20, No. 4

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