



AMELIA ISLAND
CHAMBER MUSIC
FESTIVAL 2023

22ND
SEASON



MARK & MAGGIE O'CONNOR
& THE VEGA STRING QUARTET
"BEETHOVEN & BLUEGRASS"

Wednesday, May 24, 2023

Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island | 4750 Amelia Island Parkway | Amelia Island, FL

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All venues for Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival in-person concerts are handicap accessible.

PROGRAM

May 24, 2023

The Vega String Quartet

Emily Daggett Smith & Jessica Shuang Wu, *violins*

Yinzi Kong, *viola*; Guang Wang, *cello*

Mark O'Connor Duo

Mark O'Connor, Maggie O'Connor

String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 95, "Serioso"

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770 - 1827)

Allegro con brio

Allegretto ma no troppo

Allegro assai vivace ma serioso-Trio

Larghetto espressivo-Allegretto agitato

The Vega String Quartet

String Quartet No. 2, "Bluegrass"

MARK O'CONNOR

(b. 1961)

The Vega String Quartet

INTERMISSION

Bluegrass

selections to be announced from the stage

Appalachia Waltz

Mark O'Connor Duo
with Maggie O'Connor

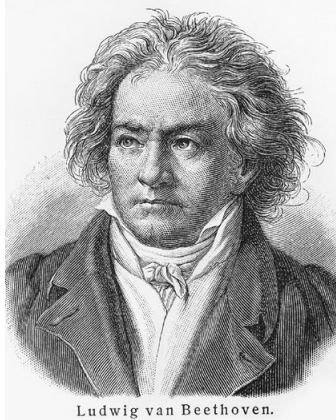
**Program subject to change*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 95, “Serioso”

“The Quartet [95] is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public.”~Ludwig van Beethoven

The nickname “Serioso” is the only descriptive title given by Beethoven to any of his quartets. Written during the last of his middle period, the nickname is derived from the third movement’s tempo marking, *Allegro assai vivace ma serioso*. It also serves as a statement from the composer to reflect that everything written was deliberate and intentional. The mood of “Serioso” set primarily in its minor key remains “urgent” and “violent.”

The String Quartet No. 11 in F minor, the shortest of all his quartets, has its beginnings in the summer of 1810 and was completed in October. It was an unsettled, disturbing time for the composer: he had just experienced a failed love affair and his deafness was worsening. He had written to a friend earlier in 1809: “Now you can help me look for a wife. Indeed, you might find some beautiful girl...and one who would perhaps now and then grant a sigh to my harmonies.” The beautiful girl who subsequently rejected Beethoven’s proposal was the cousin of his doctor, nineteen-year-old Therese Malfatti. His emotionally disturbed state is described in a letter written to a friend in May 1810. Beethoven wrote: “If I had not read somewhere that no one should quit life voluntarily while he could still do something worthwhile, I



would have been dead long ago and certainly by my own hand.”

“Serioso” was not premiered until 1814 and not published until two years later. Rather than being dedicated to a patron, it was the first of his quartets to be dedicated to a good friend, Nikolaus von Zmeskill. It is the shortest of his quartets and has been called “a masterpiece in compression.” Writer for the *New York Times* Daniel J. Wakin described this quartet as showing the composer “in all of his violent, tragic, angry, plaintive, [and] contemplative guises.” The work is considered a culmination of his second period and looks forward to the late quartets “in its dominant qualities of conciseness, directness and instant confrontation of contrasts” according to American musicologist and music critic Joseph Kerman. He states: “The F minor Quartet is not a pretty piece, but it is terribly strong and perhaps rather terrible...The piece stands aloof, preoccupied with its radical private war on every fiber of rhetoric and feeling that Beethoven knew or could invent. Everything unessential falls victim, leaving a residue of extreme concentration, in dangerously high tension. But strength, not strain is the commanding impression.” Peter Laki, professor of music and musicologist describes this quartet by saying: “In extremely concise form, the quartet

sums up most of the qualities of the “heroic” period: robust force, melodic poignancy, formal concentration, abrupt interruptions, bold key changes and an irresistible rhythmic drive.”

The first movement, *Allegro con brio*, is marked forte. Immediately there is an eruption of emotion followed by 3 beats of silence. The furious octave leaps give way to a sweeter and lyrical statement which is suddenly replaced by frenzied, startling clashes of sound. As quickly as the clashes erupted, the movement quietly calms and closes. The contrasting second movement set in 2/4 and written in D major is marked *Allegretto ma non troppo*, moderately fast but not too much. Each instrument independently voices the hauntingly quiet melody. The cello delicately tip toes downward and is marked *sotto voce*, literally meaning under the voice. The movement slows to its end with

pianissimo descending notes mingled with rests. Without a pause, the third movement *Allegro assai vivace ma serio*, (fast, very much lively but grave, serious, tragic) explodes, changing mood and direction. The final movement is marked *Larghetto espressivo - Allegretto agitato*, slow, broad and expressive -moderately fast and agitated. It is a contradictory blend of restless anxiousness and calm, major and minor. The furiously fast ending flies and soars to finish in F major.

The four movements of “*Serioso*” have provided extreme contrasting shifts in mood and dynamics. The bright conclusion ending in F major seems fittingly ironic. Composer Randall Thompson voiced his verdict on the Quartet’s conclusion by saying, “No bottle of champagne was ever uncorked at a better time.”

MARK O’CONNOR

Appalachia Waltz and String Quartet No. 2, “Bluegrass”

“Music washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.” ~Berthold Averbach

Music, as a whole, in and of itself, knows no specific Tongue, Time, or Territory. A universal gift, Music transcends all languages and allows us to release the constraints that we place on the spoken and written word. If we so choose, we are free to travel across boundaries of time, space, and genres.

Such is the music of American composer and pedagogue, Mark O’Connor. Born in Mountlake Terrace, Washington, O’Connor began studying guitar at age five. When he was eight years old, he heard the music of the Louisiana fiddle player, Doug Kershaw and longed for a fiddle.

Three years later he was given one. As a teenager he began winning national championships in fiddle, mandolin, and flat-pick guitar. His teachers and mentors provided a blend of genres. In his teens he studied with the legendary American Fiddler Benny Thomasson from Texas. He also studied with the French jazz violinist, Stéphane Grappelli. Country music legends Chet Atkins and Doc Watson also contributed to his spectrum of learning. Chet Atkins said, “Mark O’Connor has been astounding listeners with his genius since he was thirteen.” American mandolinist, David

Grisman, succinctly describes O'Connor: "The guy is from planet music."

"*Appalachia Waltz*" was composed in 1993 for violin. It was also arranged for string trio on the 1995 album recorded with cellist Yo-Yo Ma and bassist Edgar Meyer. The piece, crossing musical boundaries, was influenced by Scandinavian and Appalachian fiddling.

Of *Appalachia Waltz* Mr. O'Connor said it is "supposed to sound simple and innocent. If I play [it] for any fiddler, they'll say it sounds classical. If I play it for any classical violinist, they'll say it sounds like a fiddle or folk tune." This "simple and innocent" tune reaches far beyond the Appalachian region and mountains to carry us to the past or the future. Mr. O'Connor said, "I think that's been part of my success, that my music looks forward while looking backward." As American composer Paul Burch penned: "Appalachia is still, for American musicians, a kind of fountain of youth we always go back to, the old home place to a group of artists who represent the quintessence of American independence, fortitude, genius, and madness."

The Bluegrass of O'Connor's youth serves as a beginning point for his *String Quartet No. 2 "Bluegrass."* Composed in 2005 this work incorporates the influence of Texas fiddler Benny Thomasson and jazz violinist Stéphen Grappelli. It speaks with a soulful gospel sound and gives way to a Beethoven-like boldness. Quoting Mr. O'Connor: "As I continue to develop

Photo: Deanna Rose



other artistic interpretations of vernacular and idiomatic music of my own past, I uncover new pathways in discovering how much this music from my childhood means to me in the present tense. With my *String Quartet No. 2*, I bring to bear one of my favorite music styles I learned as an 11- and 12-year-old, bluegrass. Bluegrass music is the vocabulary I use in the

quartet, and it instructs the musical language of the string quartet art form. Although in this case I admit that just like my own classical string writing is unique, such is the case with my early bluegrass playing. In other words this is not a classical interpretation of roots music, rather it is a modern interpretation of modern interpreted bluegrass music. Or put in a different way, it is my own version of my own version!"

Most recently, Mr. O'Connor said, "The most gratifying experience in composing my 2nd quartet was encountering a new color spectrum of sounds from a centuries-old instrumentation. I wanted to find this expression with new resonance, articulation and melody using these instrumental voices. It is string quartet language born out of my progressive approach to traditional bluegrass music and the foremost inspiration and instruction of Beethoven's quartets."

~Emma Mills Bledsoe, 2023

ABOUT THE MARK O'CONNOR DUO



MARK O'CONNOR

Mark O'Connor began his creative journey at the feet of American fiddling legend Benny Thomasson, and the iconic French jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli. Now, at age 61, he has melded these influences into a new American classical music and is perpetuating his vision of an American School of String Playing. Mr. O'Connor has won three Grammys, seven CMA awards as well as several national fiddle, guitar and mandolin champion titles. His distinguished career includes representing the United States Information Agency in cultural diplomacy to six continents and performing in front of several U.S. presidents including being invited to the White House by President Ronald Reagan to perform as a teen.

After recording a series of albums for Rounder and Warner Bros including his multiple Grammy-winning New Nashville Cats, his recordings for Sony Classical with Yo-Yo Ma,

Appalachia Waltz and Appalachian Journey sold a million CDs and gained O'Connor worldwide recognition as a leading proponent of a new American musical idiom.

Mr. O'Connor's Fiddle Concerto released on Warner Bros. has become the most-performed violin concerto composed in the last 50 years. On his own OMAC Records label, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra recorded his sweeping Americana Symphony while his groundbreaking 9th concerto, The Improvised Violin Concerto was recorded in Boston Symphony Hall. His new touring group, the Mark O'Connor Band consisting of family members (wife, son and daughter-in-law) debuted at #1 on Billboard Magazine's bluegrass album chart and their first album Coming Home won a Grammy in 2017 and followed it up with a live band album A Musical Legacy.

ABOUT THE MARK O'CONNOR DUO *(continued)*



Mark & Maggie O'Connor with the Vega Quartet - Emily Daggett Smith, Jessica Shuang Wu, AICMF Artistic Director William Ransom, Yinzi Kong and Guang Wang

Maggie O'CONNOR

Violinist and American fiddler and singer Maggie O'Connor is a Grammy Award winning musician who frequently performs in a duo with her husband, violinist and composer Mark O'Connor. With a unique background in both traditional classical violin training and American musical styles, Maggie continues her mission to show that violinists can and should participate in everything the instrument has to offer, performing on some of the world's most coveted stages.

Growing up in a musical family in the suburbs of Atlanta GA, Maggie started playing the violin at age 7 in a family band. Concurrently, she took classical violin lessons with Larisa Morgulis, a distinguished graduate of the Odessa Conservatory in Ukraine. Playing music with her family band is where Maggie began to develop an ear for arranging, recording, group playing, and improvisation;

skills she has embraced throughout her musical life. In her early years, she was a member of numerous bluegrass and rock bands while also being a member and soloist with Atlanta's top three youth orchestras.

Maggie has appeared on multiple recordings both singing and playing violin, ranging from the Mark O'Connor Band's Grammy winning album "Coming Home", to "A Musical Legacy", as well as Zac Brown produced singles "In my Blood" and "Casino". With the group she has performed with the Zac Brown Band in stadiums including Fenway Park to audiences of over 20,000 people a night, worked with renowned Nashville producer Tony Brown, and recorded with Paul Simon. They also performed at the 59th Grammy Awards Ceremony in 2017 where the group also won "Best Bluegrass Album of the Year."

ABOUT THE VEGA QUARTET

The Vega String Quartet, Quartet-in-Residence at Emory University, is cultivating a new generation of chamber music lovers through dynamic performances and innovative community engagement. The New York Times raved that “[the Quartet’s] playing had a kind of clean intoxication to it, pulling the listener along...the musicians took real risks in their music making” and the L.A. Times praised their “triumphant L.A. debut.” They concertize both nationally and internationally, most recently in Baltimore, Chicago, Nashville, Sacramento, Berlin, San Miguel, and the Brahmsaal in Vienna’s Musikverein. The Quartet’s major performing projects at Emory have included performing the complete cycle of Beethoven quartets, as well as pairing Bach’s complete works for solo violin, viola and cello with the six Bartók quartets. They have also developed a series of “Jazz Meets Classics” programs, bringing the two genres together. Recent highlights include the Quartet’s debut at Amsterdam’s famed Concertgebouw, a multi-city tour of Denmark, with performances at venues such as the Royal Danish Conservatory, and appearances at El Paso Pro Musica and the Sitka Music Festival.

A unique aspect of the Quartet’s residency at Emory is bringing performance into the classroom, collaborating with academic professors to create interdisciplinary parallels and conversations. They also enrich the cultural life of their community, having founded the Emory Youth Chamber Music Program, which gives intensive training in small ensemble playing

to advanced pre-college students. The Quartet was appointed to the roster of the Woodruff Arts Center’s Young Audience program, engaging thousands of students throughout the greater Atlanta school system. They have also held residencies in Augusta, Jacksonville and Juneau which combined traditional concerts with educational outreach, performances in non-traditional venues and masterclasses for area students.

The Vega Quartet has won numerous international awards, including at the Bordeaux String Quartet Competition, as well as top prizes from the Coleman Chamber Ensemble Competition, the Carmel Chamber Music Competition, and the National Society of Arts and Letters String Quartet Competition.

They tour throughout Asia, Europe and North America and have appeared at Weill Hall and Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, Bargemusic, and Duke Hall at the Royal Academy of Music, London. The members of the Vega Quartet collaborate with some of the world’s finest

musicians including Eliot Fisk, Christopher O’Riley, William Preucil, Richard Stoltzman, Robert Spano, Charles Wadsworth and the Eroica Trio. They also commission, premier and record works by leading composers. The Quartet is a frequent guest at numerous music festivals, including Amelia Island, Aspen, Brevard, Highlands-Cashiers, Juneau Jazz & Classics, Kingston, Mostly Mozart, Rockport, San Miguel de Allende, and SummerFest La Jolla.

What does VEGA mean
Vega is the brightest star in the
Lyra constellation. According
to Greek mythology, this
constellation represents the
lyre which belonged to the
legendary musician Orpheus.

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Stephen Halloway	Jackie Piersanti	Steve Zebrasky
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SPECIAL THANKS

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Susan Dodge, Royal Amelia Dance Academy
Lea Gallardo, Photography
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Roslyn Hume, Photography
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young PATRONS

If you have a love of music and an interest in exploring the arts, culture and community of Amelia Island, you will want to be a part of this dynamic group of young adults between the ages of 21 and 50.

Join for FREE. More details at <https://ameliachambermusic.org/young-patrons/>

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING for the 2023 Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival?

The Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival is a volunteer-driven organization with a small staff. The Festival would not exist without the skills, hard work and dedication of many volunteers. This is why we need your help.

To learn more and to sign up to become a volunteer please visit:
<https://ameliachambermusic.org/volunteer-opportunities/>

*A heartfelt **THANK YOU** to all of our Sponsors, Contributors, Volunteers, Partners and Patrons for a wonderful 22nd Season.*

We all are looking forward to our next AICMF Season.

LAST UPCOMING EVENT FOR OUR 22ND SEASON:

Saturday, June 3, 2023

Christopher Rex Spring Institute Final Concert

5:00 pm | St. Peter's Episcopal Church

**Times and venues are subject to change. For tickets and more information please visit www.aicmf.org*