SAN FRANCISCO
**PERFORMANCES**

**presents...**

# MODIGLIANI QUARTET

Amaury Coeytaux | Violin
Loïc Rio | Violin
Laurent Marfaing | Viola
François Kieffer | Cello

## Friday, November 14, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

**KURTÁG** — **Hommage à Andràs Mihàly: 12 Mikroludien für Streichquartett, Opus 13**

*I.*
*II.*
*III.*
*IV. Presto*
*V. Lontano, calmo, appena sentito*
*VI.*
*VII.*
*VIII. Con slancio*
*IX. Leggiero / Pesante, con moto*
*X. Molto agitato - piu presto*
*XI.*
*XII. Leggiero, con moto, non dolce*

**HAYDN** — **String Quartet in F Major, Opus 77, No. 2**

*Allegro moderato*
*Menuetto: Presto ma non troppo*
*Andante*
*Finale: Vivace assai*

INTERMISSION

**BEETHOVEN** — **String Quartet in C Major, Opus 59, No. 3**

*Introduzione; Andante con moto: Allegro vivace*
*Andante con moto quasi Allegretto*
*Menuetto: Grazioso*
*Allegro molto*
*Thème russe: Allegro*

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**Modigliani Quartet** is represented by Arts Management Group
130 West 57th Street, Suite 6A, New York, NY 10019 artsmg.com

## ENSEMBLE PROFILE

*San Francisco Performances presents Modigliani Quartet for the second time. The ensemble made their SF Performances debut in April 2023.*

Founded in 2003, the **Modigliani Quartet** is recognized as one of today's most sought-after quartets, regularly performing in leading international concert series and on the world's most prestigious stages.

Beginning with the 2025–26 season, the Modigliani Quartet will be the Artist-in-Resident at Radio France in Paris. As part of this residency, the Quartet will give two string quartet concerts annually, as well as a chamber performance with guest musicians. The residency will culminate in the premiere of a commissioned work by composer Philippe Manoury.

Other highlights of the 2025–26 season include a North American tour in Fall 2025, with performances at prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall and the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia. An extensive tour of Asia will follow, featuring concerts in South Korea, China, and Singapore. In Europe, the Quartet will perform at major venues including the Alte Oper in Frankfurt, Laeiszhalle in Hamburg, the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

In 2020 the quartet became Artistic Director of the string quartet festival "Vibre! Quatuors à Bordeaux" as well as the renowned "The Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition." The quartet is the Founder and Artistic Director since 2011 of the Saint-Paul-de-Vence Festival. Since Fall, 2023 they have been mentors at the École Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot.

The Modigliani Quartet has been recording for the Mirare label since 2008 and has since released 13 award-winning CD's. In January, 2024 the Quartet's latest album, with string quartets by Grieg and Smetana, was released and received enthusiastically by the international press: "The French Modigliani Quartet brings these highly emotional works to life with energy, color and glowing passion" (*Rondo*, January, 2024). The recording was also featured in the bestseller list 2–2024 (category chamber music) at the "Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik". Since 2024 the Modigliani Quartet has dedicated itself to the greatest challenge in the life of a string quartet: recording all 16 string quartets by Beethoven.

Thanks to the generosity and support of private sponsors, the Modigliani Quartet plays on four outstanding Italian instruments: Amaury Coeytaux plays a 1715 violin by Stradivari; Loïc Rio plays a 1780 violin by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini; Laurent Marfaing plays a 1660 viola by Luigi Mariani; and François Kieffer plays a 1706 cello by Matteo Goffriller.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### Hommage à Andràs Mihàly: 12 Mikroludien für Streichquartett, Opus 13

**GYÖRGY KURTÁG**
(B. 1926)

Though he was born in Romania, György Kurtág—who will turn 100 in February—has made his career in Hungary. He trained at the Budapest Academy from 1948 through 1955 and spent 1957–8 in Paris, where he studied with Milhaud and Messiaen and encountered Western avant-garde music. Kurtág began his career as a tutor at the Bartók Music School and later with the National Philharmonia; from 1967 until 1986 he was a professor of piano and composition at the Budapest Academy. As a composer, Kurtág has not been prolific and has composed quite slowly: in *The New Grove Dictionary*, György Kröo notes that in the 14-year span 1959 to 1973, Kurtág wrote a total of 90 minutes of music. His musical language is derived from two quite different influences: Hungarian national music, particularly from Liszt, Bartók, Kodály, and from Kurtág's own love of the Hungarian language and such native instruments as the cimbalon; he combines this with a passion for serial techniques as he encountered them in the music of Anton Webern.

Kurtág has shown a fondness for creating large structures out of multiple small movements, and his music is marked by the brevity and concentration he has admired in the works of Webern. The title *Microludes* suggests precisely what this music is: a sequence of tiny interludes. Composed between November 1977 and January 1978, the *Microludes* span barely 10 minutes and consists of 12 movements, each of which inhabits a completely different world musically in terms of tempo, sonority, and expression. The notion of paying homage to different people figures importantly in Kurtág's music: those honored by his many homage pieces range from Scarlatti to Varèse, Bach to Ives, Schubert to Nancy Sinatra. The cellist-composer András Mihály (1917–1993) was one of Kurtág's colleagues in Budapest.

It would be a form of over-kill to describe these 12 movements in detail. Take them for what they are: extreme miniatures that pass by in seconds and range from diaphanous wispiness to furious energy, from se-

rene melodies to rasping blocks of sound, from passages marked quadruple *piano* to moments of strident intensity.

## String Quartet in F Major, Opus 77, No. 2

**FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN**
(1732–1809)

Haydn returned to Vienna from England in 1795 to discover that his music was much in demand. In 1796, Count Joseph Erdödy commissioned a set of six quartets from Haydn, and these were eventually published as his Opus 76. In 1799, Prince Lobkowitz—who would become Beethoven's patron and who would receive the dedication of the *Eroica*—also commissioned a set of six quartets from Haydn. Haydn got the first two of these done, and then things changed.

In England, Haydn had been overwhelmed by the music of Handel, and in the years following his return from London his own interests were turning toward vocal music. In 1798, he completed *The Creation*, and the following year—just as he began the quartets for Lobkowitz—he started work on *The Seasons*. Given his new passion for vocal music, perhaps it was inevitable that Haydn should grow less interested in instrumental music, and now he was able to complete only two of the projected quartets for Lobkowitz. He published those two quartets as his Opus 77 in 1802, the year he turned 70.

All of this might suggest a falling-off in his final two completed quartets, but exactly the opposite is true—the two quartets of Opus 77 represent one of the summits of quartet-writing. In their balanced integration of all four voices, idiomatic writing, experiments with form, and genial spirits (this music is just plain fun), these pieces stand at a level of quartet-writing that all subsequent practitioners of the form have been hard-pressed to match.

If it has become a cliché that Haydn liberated all four voices and made them democratic equals, then it should be noted that we return to an era of aristocracy in the opening movement of the *Quartet in F Major*, for the first violin pretty much dominates things here. Haydn avoids the traditional fast opening movement, choosing instead to set this at *Allegro moderato*. The gracious swing of the first violin's opening phrase will dominate this movement, and it even intrudes into the accompaniment when he introduces his second subject. Haydn builds most of the development on this phrase, and at the end it drives the movement to a full-throated climax.

Haydn reverses the expected order of the middle two movements. The minuet comes second here, but with it comes a further surprise: its marking is *Presto*, and the music zips along off-the-beat accents that often mask the downbeat. The trio brings yet one more surprise: Haydn slips into an unexpected key—D-flat major—as the upper voices weave their long melody over the cello's steady drone.

There is no true slow movement in this quartet—the third movement is built on an elegant little march that is marked *Andante*. It begins not as a quartet but as a duet: first violin and cello alone lay out the quiet central theme, and eventually the two middle voices join them. The movement is structured on continual repetition of this one theme: it is varied and embellished as it proceeds and finally rises to a splendid climax. The opening march now returns in its original form to lead the movement to a quiet close.

The finale, marked *Vivace assai* ("Very fast") seems to combine two quite different worlds—it is both a dance-finale and a sonata-form movement built on its firm opening idea. Full of energy, this movement whips along, its high spirits enlivened with some very graceful counterpoint, deft use of silences, and enough foot-tapping fun to send an audience out the door feeling better about the whole business of being alive.

## String Quartet in C Major, Opus 59, No. 3

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**
(1770–1827)

The three string quartets of Beethoven's Opus 59—commissioned by Count Andreas Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna and an accomplished violinist—are brilliantly scored, adventurous harmonically, and conceived on a scale of grandeur previously unknown in quartet writing. The breadth of their conception led to their being called "symphony quartets," and it is no surprise that they met with little popular or critical success—no one had ever heard quartets like these before.

Completed in December 1806, the *Quartet in C Major* proved from the beginning the least problematic of the Razumovsky Quartets. In an early review, the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* said of the three quartets of Opus 59: "They are profoundly conceived and finely worked out but are not intelligible to the general public—perhaps with the exception of the third, in C major, whose individuality, melodiousness and harmonic strength must surely win over every educated music lover." Yet the *Quartet in C Major* presents listener and performer with problems all its own. It was composed at exactly the same time as Beethoven's *Fourth Symphony*, and both quartet and symphony open in an aural fog. The two works begin with a slow introduction that purposely obscures both harmony and rhythm—Beethoven cuts listeners adrift and leaves them struggling for some sense of direction. And then the *Allegro* of both works establishes a definite tonality and tempo. The spiritual father of both symphony and quartet was almost certainly Mozart's *"Dissonant" Quartet* of 1785.

In Beethoven's quartet the first violin leaps out brightly with the opening theme of the *Allegro vivace* and proclaims the clear tonality of C major. The violin's first two notes announce an important pattern: that rise of a half-step will unify the entire first movement. The first violin has so concertante a part that this movement (in fact, the entire quartet) has something of the feel of a violin concerto. That virtuoso part, often in a very high register, dominates this sonata-form movement, while the other three voices are frequently relegated to the role of accompanists. The music arrives at a moment of stasis before one of Beethoven's shortest codas: the cello's half-step rises launch a rapid chromatic stringendo to the final cadence.

The *Andante* opens with a *forte cello* pizzicato, and the first violin outlines the brooding A-minor theme that will dominate the movement. A surprising feature of this movement is that its steady tread of six eighth-notes per measure continues almost throughout, but rather than becoming monotonous, this measured pace takes on a force of its own, particularly as it is reinforced by Beethoven's imaginative and expressive use of cello pizzicato. A second theme—in C major—lightens the mood somewhat, but the tone of the *Andante* remains dark and restless. Once again, the first violin rises high above the other instruments, often in passages of an almost aching beauty.

In contrast to the intense *Andante*, the *Menuetto* can seem lightweight. Vincent d'Indy felt that it represented "a return to the style of 1796," and it is true that the movement lacks the originality of the

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movements that surround it (it is also the final minuet movement in any Beethoven quartet). But if the music can seem lightweight, it agreeably lessens the tension between the powerful movements on either side of it, and Beethoven makes piquant contrast between the flowing legato of the minuet and the sharply-articulated staccato of its trio. Rather than conclude with a simple *da capo*, Beethoven writes out a coda that leads without pause to the final movement.

That finale leaps to life with a brilliant fugue introduced by the viola. This movement has been called a fugue, but that is inaccurate: only its beginning is fugal—the remainder is in sonata form. The most impressive aspect of this movement is its relentless energy—it is virtually a perpetual motion for four virtuoso players. One of its most memorable sequences occurs in the development, where each of the instruments is in turn given a brilliant eight-measure passage (based on the final measure of the fugue theme) that simply goes up and comes down the scale. But Beethoven specifies that each instrument must remain on one string, and the result is a brief but dazzling cadenza for each instrument as the others accompany. It is gloriously apt quartet writing, and the effect in performance is breathtaking. There are few finales in Beethoven—or anywhere else—full of such headlong energy, and the music finally hurtles to a cadence. But it is a false cadence, as if Beethoven is unwilling to quit too soon. The music tentatively resumes, then speeds ahead and—set off by a lovely countertheme in the second violin—races to the end of one of Beethoven's most exciting finales.

*—Program notes by Eric Bromberger*