

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

Belcea Quartet & Quatuor Ébène
Sunday, November 10 – 3 PM
Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM

String Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20

Felix Mendelssohn

Born: February 3, 1809

Died: November 4, 1847

Composed: 1825

Duration: Approx. 45 minutes

Composed when Mendelssohn was just 16, the *String Octet in E-flat Major* is a work of astonishing brilliance and youthful energy. The piece stands out not only because of the young composer's extraordinary talent but also for its innovative use of eight string instruments, creating a lush, symphonic sound. The first movement begins with a burst of lively enthusiasm, full of joyful melodies and rhythmic drive, setting the tone for the entire piece. The second movement, a gentle and lyrical Andante, offers a calm contrast with its flowing, songlike quality. Mendelssohn's famous scherzo—light, fast, and filled with fairy-like charm—captures a magical atmosphere, inspired in part by Goethe's *Faust*. The final movement brings the work to an exhilarating close, weaving complex lines together with a sense of exuberance and playful invention. Mendelssohn himself instructed that the octet "must be played by all the instruments in symphonic orchestral style," highlighting the piece's grandeur and ambitious scope.

String Octet in C Major, Op. 7

George Enescu

Born: August 19, 1881

Died: May 4, 1955

Composed: 1900

Duration: Approx. 45 minutes

George Enescu was a true musical prodigy of the rarest kind. He started playing violin at age 4, composing at 5, became the youngest student ever admitted to the Vienna Conservatory at 7, and graduated at 13. He then spent four years at the Paris Conservatory, premiering his first mature composition at the age of 16. Enescu composed his *String Octet* in 1900, between the ages of 18 and 19. He labored for a year and a half over this vast work of grand proportions, creating one of the most daunting masterworks in the history of chamber music. His *String Octet* is a stunningly original and mature masterpiece, inviting comparison to Mendelssohn's *Octet*, with each being a landmark in its own historical and stylistic context. Like Mendelssohn's, Enescu's work is full of rich melody and staggeringly artful counterpoint, including a significant fugue, as well as a pleasing diversity of moods and motions throughout the journey. However, while Mendelssohn's piece is almost purely classical, Enescu's is deeply romantic, highly chromatic, and incorporates the expanded harmonic palette of Wagner, Mahler, and Strauss. It also features the spicy modal character of Eastern European folk music, occasionally flavored with what some might describe as a "Gypsy" influence.