Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth presents
The Leonkoro Quartet
Saturday, 28 February 2026 - Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2026

String Quartet (1927)
Henriëtte Bosmans (1895-1952)

The Dutch pianist and composer Henriëtte Bosmans was a musical natural. Her father, Henri Bosmans, was the principal cellist of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra under the direction of the legendary Willem Mengelberg. Her mother, Sarah Bosmans-Benedicts, was an accomplished pianist and pedagogue who served on the faculty of the Amsterdam Conservatory. As a girl, Henriëtte studied piano with her mother. After graduating from the conservatory with honors at age seventeen, she embarked on a concert career as soloist and collaborative pianist. After making her debut in Utrecht in 1915, she concertized throughout Europe with the most prominent conductors of the day, including Ernest Ansermet, Pierre Monteux, and Mengelberg. Between 1929 and 1949, she appeared as soloist twenty-two times with the Concertgebouw Orchestra.

Bosmans had begun composing at age fifteen. By the early 1920s she had undertaken further study with Cornelis Dopper in orchestration and, for composition, Willem Pijper — then one of the most celebrated Dutch composers. Pijper was a significant influence, helping Bosmans to develop a more individual style that embraced some modernist techniques, including whole tone scales, bitonality, and irregular rhythms. She dedicated the quartet to Pijper, completing it for presentation to him on his thirty-third birthday on 8 September 1927.

In an era when most homosexuality remained in the closet, Bosmans was openly bisexual. She was involved from 1920 to 1927 with Frieda Belinfante, a Dutch cellist and conductor. The String Quartet is thought to have been an expression of love lost after their breakup in 1927. The quartet opens with a brief soliloquy for solo viola; that initial theme, reminiscent of Vaughan Williams, recurs in various guises throughout the piece. The full ensemble responds in unison, before breaking into harmony heavily tinged with whole tones. The musical language is also suggestive of Leoš Janáček. A faster section unfolds in 7/8 meter before a return to the relaxed tempo of the opening segment.

The soulful slow movement is a descendant of the analogous movement in Debussy's early string quartet, but Bosmans makes it her own with pastoral elements. The texture often features violin soaring above foundational chords in the lower strings, but each player has his moment in the spotlight. Bosman's quartet concludes with a heart-pumping Allegro molto that gallops at breakneck pace for most of its duration. Even during quieter moments, a pulsing undertone sustains the tension, even while recalling the harmonic language and mood of the first two movements. The coda is riveting.

The Amsterdam String Quartet, consisting of members of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, played the premiere on 28 January 1928.

Five Pieces for String Quartet
Erwin Schulhoff (1894-1942)

Czech-born Erwin Schulhoff was a protégé of Dvořák and a student of Max Reger and Claude Debussy. Despite the fact that his name and music are unfamiliar to many of us, his music was widely performed throughout Europe in the 1920s and ’30s. As a student in Leipzig and Cologne, he earned prizes in both piano and composition.

When World War I erupted in 1914, Schulhoff was conscripted into the Austrian army and served for four years. The experience disillusioned him, shifting his political sympathies to socialism (he later joined the Communist Party). Whereas his early compositions had adopted a post-Romantic idiom, he now embraced atonality, an Expressionist aesthetic, and the Second Viennese School.

Two months after the Armistice that ended the war, Schulhoff moved to Dresden to live with his sister. Over the next four years in Germany, he encountered Dadaism and jazz, both of which would influence his later music. (He had several years of success as a jazz performer.) Schulhoff allied himself with a number of *avant-garde* movements, including Dadaism and quarter-tone music. He was one of the first to address the challenges of music "between" the pitches of the Western piano, as developed by his contemporary Aloïs Hába.

Returning to Prague in 1923, Schulhoff became fascinated by the music and philosophy of his countryman Leoš Janáček, who was by then a distinguished professor at the Prague Conservatory. Schulhoff’s study of Janáček’s music awakened an interest in Slavonic folk song and neoclassicism.

His 1923 *Fünf Stücke* (Five Pieces) is essentially a neobaroque dance suite for quartet. As the movement titles indicate, each of these miniatures adopts a different musical style. Schulhoff was no mere mimic, however, and the nationalities and dances of each movement are filtered through his personal compositional lens. The work was introduced in Salzburg at the International Society for New Music on 8 August 1924. Its success encouraged Schulhoff to write his First Quartet that autumn.

In the original 1929 edition of *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, Erich Steinhard wrote of Schulhoff: "The distinguishing qualities of his style are humour, audacity, transparency, brilliance and grace." Steinhard also noted, rather bizarrely, that "English dancing and English cheerfulness also appeal to [Schulhoff]." More than eight decades later, the assessment of his music has altered, not only because of the passage of time but also because of intense interest in Jewish composers who perished in the Holocaust.

Josef Bek's article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians II* (2001) is expanded significantly over the 1980 edition. Bek identifies a stylistic shift beginning in the mid-1920s to a "synthesis of avant-garde aggression and the continuing European mainstream tradition." Czech music, in particular, made a strong presence felt in his original compositions. These Five Pieces are strongly flavored with the rhythms and inflections of Czech speech and dance, despite the more international sweep implied by waltz, tango, and tarantella. In that respect, they show a strong kinship to the music of Janáček, whose work Schulhoff had studied in depth.

When the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, Schulhoff was unable to continue working. He failed in his attempts to leave for the West or to emigrate to the Soviet Union. In June 1941 he was arrested and deported to the German concentration camp in Wülzburg, Bavaria. He died there in August 1942.

Langsamer Satz
Anton von Webern (1883-1945)

Expansive early Romanticism from the pen of a terse writer

Few of us know Webern's music. Not to be confused with the German nineteenth-century Romantic Carl Maria von Weber, the Viennese native Anton Webern was a disciple and star pupil of Arnold Schoenberg, inventor of the twelve-tone system. Webern became a master of compression and expressivity, writing twelve-tone pieces of utmost brevity. His complete published works fit on three compact discs — and that includes his orchestrations of music by Bach and Schubert.

After his death, however, a cache of unpublished manuscripts was discovered among his effects. He composed them between 1899 and 1908; nearly all date from before he met Schoenberg in autumn 1904. These early compositions, including *Langsamer Satz,* show how firmly anchored Webern was in the Viennese tradition. Their post-Romantic harmonic language reveals the influence of Wagner, Strauss, and Brahms.

Souvenir of a special springtime holiday

Langsamer Satz means "slow movement." Webern's original is a single movement for string quartet. He wrote it on the heels of an idyllic holiday with his cousin Wilhelmine Mörtl. They had fallen in love in 1902 and would marry in 1911. In spring 1905 during the Pentecost holiday, the pair took a trip to Waldwinkel, a lovely area of countryside about sixty miles west of Vienna. Webern, who adored the outdoors almost as much as his cousin, was twenty one and head over heels in love. His diaries are filled with extravagant descriptions, even on rainy days.

> My heart was jubilant. I spent wonderful hours during the afternoon. When night fell, the skies shed bitter tears, but I wandered with her along a road. A coat protected the two of us. Our love rose to infinite heights and filled the universe! Two souls were enraptured.

Then, the next day:

> We wandered through forests. It was a fairyland! High tree trunks all around us, a green luminescence in between, and here and there floods of gold on the green moss. The forest symphony resounded.

Love music

He composed *Langsamer Satz* in June. It is, quite simply, love music: love of nature, love of Wilhelmine. It is also the work of a twenty-one-year-old composer still finding his way. Writer James Beale calls it "disarmingly conventional . . . almost sugary." Biographer Hans Moldenhauer is more generous: "The music is pervaded by a sweet poignancy; serene happiness rises to triumphant ecstasy in the coda." Most striking are the textural ideas. Webern was a lifelong contrapuntalist, and the independence of his voices adds to the interest of this movement.

String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 13, "*Ist es wahr?*"
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

The genius stories about young Felix Mendelssohn are well known to most music lovers. He had penned the splendid Octet, Op. 20, at age sixteen, and within a year had written his magical Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 21. These two masterpieces on their own would have earned him a place in music history, even had he not gone on to compose the “Hebrides” Overture, the “Italian” Symphony, *Elijah*, the Violin Concerto, and dozens of other magnificent works. Many music lovers know that Mendelssohn played a key role in the “rediscovery” of Johann Sebastian Bach's music in the nineteenth century. During his late teens, he also became engrossed in the music of Beethoven, an absorption that bore fruit in the 1827 string quartet we hear this afternoon.

Beethoven may seem an unlikely model for the refined and elegant Mendelssohn. Generally speaking, Mendelssohn is regarded as the most classic of the German Romantics, taking Mozart as his model. Beethoven *was* indisputably the most influential figure of the first half of the nineteenth century, however, and it makes perfectly good sense that Mendelssohn would make it his business to acquaint himself thoroughly with Beethoven's music. The late quartets held a particular fascination for young Felix, especially the A Minor Quartet, Op. 132. Although that quartet was not published until the end of 1827, Mendelssohn had certainly heard it performed. A comparison of Opus 132 with Mendelssohn's A Minor Quartet, Op. 13 makes it clear that Beethoven's work served as a model for the eighteen-year-old composer.

For those who do not know Opus 132 well, the Beethovenian spirit of Mendelssohn's music should still be apparent. Surprisingly, this quartet borrows more from the stormy, passionate character of middle-period Beethoven than it does the transcendent beauty of the late works. This is particularly evident in Mendelssohn's liberal use of recitative style, most prominently in the finale.

The subtitle of Mendelssohn's quartet is that of his song, *"Ist es wahr?"* ("Is it true?" Op. 9, No. 1, also known as *"Frage"* [Question]). Mendelssohn wrote it in 1827, the same year as the quartet, while on holiday at Sacrow, near Potsdam. He had gone there for a rest and a change of scenery, to visit some family friends. Apparently he became enamored of a young lady there. The attachment was short-lived, and the girl's identity is unknown. "*Ist es wahr?*" is thought to be an expression of his romantic devotion. It is brief: a mere twenty-four bars in A major on one page of music. The declamatory text is by Johann Gustav Droysen, known as Voss, an historian and Felix's good friend.

> *Ist es wahr? ist es wahr? dass du stets dort in dem Laubgang,*
> *an der Weinwand meiner harrst und den Mondschein und die Sternlein auch nach mir befragst?*
> *Ist es wahr? Sprich! Was ich fühle, das begreift nur,*
> *die es mitfühlt, und die treu mir ewig bleibt.*

Essentially the speaker asks his beloved if it is true that she always waits for him in the arbored walk. The song appears in full in the quartet score. In nineteenth-century salon performances, the song would precede the quartet. Mendelssohn incorporates its opening motive as a motto in the quartet's slow introduction and brings it back in the finale. Listeners will note a striking resemblance to the *Absence* motif from Beethoven's piano sonata, *"Les Adieux."*

The least Beethovenian movement is the *Intermezzo*, which encloses a decidedly Mendelssohnian scherzo section within a capricious folk tale. The dramatic recitative-*cum-tremolando* that opens the stormy finale reestablishes the hegemony of Beethoven's influence in this startling work.