

Isidore String Quartet and Jeremy Denk collaborate for Cleveland Chamber Music Society season finale

by Stephanie Manning



When the Isidore String Quartet performed in Northeast Ohio last year, they faced some unusual circumstances. On the way to their Tuesday Musical engagement with pianist Jeremy Denk, violist Devin Moore came down with a painful case of strep throat, and the group had to find a substitute player at the last minute.

In their more than three years of touring, the Isidore have faced obstacles like flight delays and other illnesses. But “that was actually the first time that we’ve had to call someone else in,” said violinist Phoenix Avalon. Eva Kennedy, the violist of the Callisto Quartet, drove up from Columbus in time for the day-of rehearsal and soundcheck. “It was very last-minute, but we were glad that she could come in.”

Next Tuesday, the Isidore will return to the area — with all four members thankfully in good health — for their 7:30 pm concert at the Cleveland Museum of Art, presented by the Cleveland Chamber Music Society. The Juilliard-trained group will present quartets by Haydn and Ligeti and reunite with Jeremy Denk for Brahms’ Quintet for Piano and Strings in f minor. Tickets for the May 19 concert are available [online](#).

Performing with Denk “is like getting into a Ferrari,” Avalon said. “He has all of this energy and all of this drive, and he just takes you with him.” The Isidore — Avalon, Moore, violinist Adrian Steele, and cellist Joshua McClendon — have regularly collaborated with the pianist for the past three years. “Rehearsing with him is really amazing, because he pushes us in different directions, which is really useful for us, especially as a young quartet.”

This will be the third or fourth time the group will be playing the Brahms Quintet together, and the violinist said that there is something new to look forward to each time.

“There’s always so much more to explore — getting really deep into it and seeing different ways that we can bring stuff out.”

The same approach applies to the quartets by Haydn and Ligeti, which the Isidore have been touring this season. For Haydn’s “Sunrise” Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 76 No. 4, “we’ve played it so many times, and it’s so fun,” Avalon said. “Even though it’s comparatively simple, there’s so much nuance.”

While Haydn effectively invented the genre of the string quartet, “Ligeti kind of took that to an absolute extreme,” he said. Ligeti’s Quartet No. 2 is an example of how the composer “completely turned the genre on its head and created these new textures, these new ways of experiencing string instruments.”

Presented the two pieces back to back “is a little scary from a performance point of view,” Avalon added. “Obviously, the way you approach them and the kind of things that you’re listening to are so different. But it’s interesting to snap back and forth in that kind of way.”

The violinist said he’s looking forward to returning to Cleveland, where spent three years of high school as part of the Cleveland Institute of Music Young Artist Program. On his list of places to revisit: the Coventry neighborhood, University Circle, and Mama Santa’s pizza in Little Italy.

While his colleagues have all visited the city at some point, “we’ve never been as a quartet,” he said. “I love Cleveland, so I’m very excited to go back.”

The past few months have been quite busy for the Isidore, who released their album *Adoration* in March and are gearing up for a European tour in August. “We’re planning to make future albums, of course,” Avalon said.

Next season, their collaboration with Jeremy Denk will continue, as well as partnerships with cellist Sterling Elliot and clarinetist Anthony McGill. It’ll be “a very nice full season — a lot of collaborations, a lot of fun working together with people.”

Photo by Jiyang Chen

Published on [ClevelandClassical.com](https://www.clevelandclassical.com) May 13, 2026

[Click here for a printable copy of this article](#)

[Return to the Front Page.](#)