Program
Quartet in C Major, Op. 20, No. 2
Joseph Haydn
Born: March 31, 1732
Died: May 31, 1809
Composed: 1772
Last PCMS performance: Orion Quartet, December 2012
Duration: 20 minutes

Haydn realized the full bounty of his exploration with Op. 20, six masterpieces conceived as an integrated set immediately regarded as a towering achievement, the very first crucial landmark in the history of the string quartet. The cover of the first printed edition featured an illustration of the sun, and they have been known as the “Sun” quartets ever since. The second quartet in C Major is perhaps the finest of the set, a diamond among its fellow precious jewels. Throughout this quartet, the cello is finally emancipated from its humble role as a keeper of the base line to become a fully independent voice in a four-part texture. The cello sings the first theme of the opening movement in its higher register, initiating a brief three-part fugato for a sonata exposition that is uniquely and strikingly contrapuntal. As if a signature of the quartet, the cello renews its featured role at least three times more: the first solo theme in the second movement, the lead in the minuet’s trio, and an equal voice in the elaborate fugal finale.

Shroud
Mark-Anthony Turnage
Born: June 10, 1960
Composed: 2016
Philadelphia Premiere
Duration: 25 minutes

Mark-Anthony Turnage is one of the most distinctive voices in British music today. Turnage established both his reputation and the daring, eclectic nature of his compositions with Night Dances for orchestra and Lament for a Hanging Man. He composed Shroud for the Emerson String Quartet in 2016 on a commission from an international consortium of sponsors. Turnage said, “I grew up listening to the Emerson Quartet, having been a huge fan of their many recordings since my early 20s— their precision and fabulous interplay. It was a real honor to write a work for this ensemble.” Shroud is Turnage’ s first piece for the Emerson, though he wrote a concerto in 2010 for the ensemble’ s cellist, Paul Watkins. Shroud is music of dual purpose: the outer movements (Threnody and Lament) are memorials to Milly (Christopher Mills), a long-time friend who, Turnage recalled, “introduced me to a lot of non-classical music like Howlin’ Wolf and black soul music,” and Dag Jiggens. The work’ s three internal movements, dedicated to the Emerson String Quartet—a March sandwiched between two Intermezzos— are lighter in mood.

Quartet in A Major, Op. 41, No. 3
Robert Schumann
Born: June 8, 1810
Died: July 29, 1856
Composed: 1842
Last PCMS performance: Modigliani Quartet, Nov 2016
Duration: 30 minutes

Schumann was a composer who tended to concentrate on one musical genre at a time. After a number of earlier essays that were either to remain incomplete or to be lost, Schumann turned his attention in 1842 to chamber music, and to such purpose that he produced by the end of the year all three of his surviving string quartets. His detailed study of the quartets of Haydn and Mozart conspired with his heightened interest in contrapuntal writing in general to result in music remarkable almost as much for its technical polish as for its personality and charm. At all events, the opus went far to establish Schumann as a major composer in the eyes of such contemporaries as Mendelssohn. The Third Quartet is the most spacious of the three, but the delicacy of texture and thematic treatment in the first movement clearly reflects the composer’ s espousal of a chamber-music aesthetic. The second movement is highly original in form, combining aspects of scherzo with the feel of a set of variations.