

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Real-life theft of Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" in 1911 inspired new work by composer Dinuk Wijeratne, which receives its Atlantic premiere by Boston's Balourdet Quartet in K'jipuktuk/Halifax

K'jipuktuk Mi'kma'ki/Halifax, Nova Scotia (January 30, 2023): On Saturday, February 18th at 7:30pm, Cecilia Concerts presents the Boston-based multiple gold prize-winning string ensemble Balourdet Quartet in performance at The Stage at St. Andrews, 6036 Coburg Road in K'jipuktuk/Halifax.

The quartet, comprised of violinist Angela Bae and Justin DeFilippis, violist Benjamin Zannoni, and cellist Russell Houston, performs the Atlantic premiere of a new work by composer Dinuk Wijeratne entitled "The Disappearance of Lisa Gherardini." This virtuoso musical escapade for string quartet is inspired by the audacious, real-life theft of Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre Museum in 1911.

"The extraordinary true story of the theft of the *Mona Lisa*," says composer Dinuk Wijeratne, "reads like the plot of some sensational Hollywood movie. An inconspicuous Italian handyman named Vincenzo Peruggia hid overnight in one of the Louvre closets and chose exactly the right moment to emerge and lift the painting off the wall. As a former museum employee, he was familiar with the rhythm of the guards. The whole thing was, as they say, an inside job. The music of this piece is fueled by the knowledge that it was, in fact, a high-profile theft – and a subsequent two-year disappearance – that skyrocketed the *Mona Lisa* from a relatively unknown artwork into legend." The composition is built upon two main themes representing "Lisa" and "the heist" and unfolds in three sections.

Former Haligonian, now Ottawa-based, Wijeratne is a Sri Lankan-Canadian composer, conductor, and pianist. He is known for his innovative and cross-cultural compositions, which blend elements of classical, jazz, and traditional music from around the world. Wijeratne has received numerous awards and commissions for his work, and has been performed by leading orchestras and ensembles around the world. He has also been a guest conductor and lecturer at universities and music festivals, and is a strong advocate for promoting diversity and inclusivity in the classical music world.

Originally formed in Houston, Texas at Rice University, the now Boston-based Balourdet Quartet received the Gold Medal in the 2020 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, the top prize at the 2021 Borciani Competition in Italy, Grand Prize at the 2021 Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition, and received Chamber Music America's 2021 Classical Commissioning Grant. The quartet is currently in residence at the New England Conservatory's Professional String Quartet Program and it recently earned a spot in the top three international quartets competing in the 2022 Banff International String Quartet Competition.

For this concert, the quartet also performs Hugo Wolf's operatic "Italian Serenade", Felix Mendelssohn's warm and tender String Quartet No. 4 in E minor, Op. 44 No. 2, and Ludwig van Beethoven's masterpiece String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat Major, Op. 130 with Große Fuge, Op.

133. “We are often asked how we develop unity in our voice as a quartet,” say the members of the ensemble, “and one of the answers we love to give is that we sing together. Singing is humanity’s key to musical expression and this program celebrates the human voice and the voice of the Balourdet Quartet. From the operatic nature of the Wolf, the tender lyricism and warmth in the Mendelssohn, and the Cavatina in Beethoven op. 130, this program showcases some of the quartet repertoire’s most touching lyrical moments.”

Tickets for the concert (\$12.50 Student and Child, \$27.50 Senior, \$37.50 Adult) are available online at ceciliaconcerts.ca and will be available at the door while they last. The Cecilia Concerts Mainstage Concert Series is generously supported by Major Sponsor Scotiabank and Season Sponsor Jules Chamberlain / Red Door Realty.

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For further information, high-resolution musician photography, promotional MP3s, or to book an artist interview or media appearance please contact:

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About Cecilia Concerts: For more than thirty years, Cecilia Concerts has been presenting diverse world-class chamber music experiences in welcoming, bilingual, accessible, and intimate settings that connect our communities, educate and inspire audiences and artists, and enhance the rich heritage and culture of K'jipuktuk/Halifax.

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