

Orenda Quartet Takes Top Honors at 2026 Saint Paul String Quartet Competition Junior Division

SAINT PAUL, MN — April 26, 2026

The 21st Annual Saint Paul String Quartet Competition (SPSQC) proudly announces the prize winners of its 2026 Junior Division, held Saturday, April 18 in Saint Paul. The event brought together outstanding young ensembles from across the country for a day of compelling performances, collegial exchange, and celebration of chamber music at its highest pre-professional level.

Claiming the Gold Medal, the Orenda Quartet of California captivated both jury and audience with their expressive depth, technical command, and unified musical vision. Members of the Young Chamber Musicians, the ensemble is coached by Susan Bates and Zakarias Grafilo. In addition to the top prize, the quartet earned the Haydn Prize for their stylistically compelling interpretation, as well as the Audience Favorite Award, with strong support among the 3110 votes cast by viewers that day from 16 countries and 31 states.

The Silver Medal was awarded to the **Takaani Quartet** from the Music Institute of Chicago Academy, coached by Sang Mee Lee. Their refined and communicative performance of Caroline Shaw's *Blueprint* also earned them the Composer Spotlight Prize, recognizing exceptional advocacy for contemporary repertoire.

Representing Minnesota, **Quartet Selene** of the Artaria Chamber Music School received the Bronze Medal under the guidance of Nancy Oliveros, distinguishing themselves with a poised and nuanced performance that reflected the strength of the region's musical training.

The three other excellent finalist ensembles were the **Amare String Quartet** from the Chamber Academy of the St Louis Symphony, the **Blair Quartet** from the Maryland Classical Youth Orchestras, and the **Huxsoll Quartet** from the Center for Gifted Musicians in Philadelphia.

The full day event was guided by returning emcee Steve Seel, whose warmth, insight, and deep knowledge of music created a welcoming and engaging atmosphere throughout the day.

Founded in 2006 by Ray Shows, the SPSQC has grown from a regional initiative into a nationally and internationally respected competition dedicated to the advancement of young chamber musicians. Over the past two decades, it has served as a vital launching platform for emerging ensembles, many of whom have gone on to major conservatories, professional careers, and prominent festival appearances.