

4

WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 2019 ■ 7:30 P.M.

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND FINE ARTS CENTER CONCERT HALL

FRENCH CONFECTIONS

SPONSORED BY A FRIEND OF BEAUTIFUL DAY AND KCMF
AND SAM AND LYNDIE ERSAN

POULENC **Sextet for Piano and Wind Quintet, Op. 100**

Allegro vivace
Divertissement: Andantino
Prestissimo

FLUTE: MIMI STILLMAN
OBOE: HSUAN-FONG CHEN
CLARINET: IGOR BEGELMAN
BASSOON: ROSE VRBSKY
FRENCH HORN: GEOFFREY PILKINGTON
PIANO: NATALIE ZHU

RAVEL **String Quartet in F Major**

Allegro moderato — tres doux
Assez vif — tres rythme
Tres lent
Vif et agite

VIOLINS: AYANO NINOMIYA, ZACH DEPUE
VIOLA: REN MARTIN-DOIKE
CELLO: PRISCILLA LEE

INTERMISSION

FAURÉ **Piano Quartet in C Minor, Op. 15**

Allegro molto moderato
Scherzo: Allegro vivo
Adagio
Allegro molto

CLAROSA PIANO QUARTET ▶
NATALIE ZHU, PIANO
JULIETTE KANG, VIOLIN
CHE-HUNG CHEN, VIOLA
CLANCY NEWMAN, CELLO

Please join us for a post-concert Q&A

Sextet for Piano and Wind Quintet, Op. 100

FRANCIS POULENC (1899–1963)

Poulenc's music always brims with the delicious intersection of the profoundly serious and the frivolousness of the music hall. This sextet is a prime example, one in which we can imagine the composer laughing as the notes land on the manuscript paper. Written between 1930 and 1932, it was completely revised in 1939 into the version now usually performed.

A one-time student of Ravel, Poulenc also loved the music of Debussy. Nevertheless, he preferred writing for the more outdoorsy sound of wind instruments than strings, though that didn't prevent him from eventually composing fine sonatas for both violin and cello.

The sonata begins with vivacious, flurrying layers of tunes and flutter-tongue demands on the flute. Suddenly only the bassoon is heard in a short, slow cadenza, and the piano introduces a more somber mood which continues with kaleidoscopic entries by the whole ensemble. The gaiety of the opening returns, with the horn signaling a march-like coda.

Divertissement usually means a light-hearted trifle, but Poulenc means something a little more serious as the oboe melody begins a jaunty excursion through the ensemble. This time, the central transition flows to a jubilant middle section before returning to the opening mood.

All the instruments except bassoon jump into the finale, in which rhythmic passages combine with lyrical, songful lines usually announced by the piano, some charming and a few almost funny. A sudden, slow coda reminds us of the opening movement, and the sextet ends with a surprisingly dissonant chord, Poulenc telling us that music doesn't always have to be only serious.

String Quartet in F Major

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

One of Ravel's many flaming masterpieces, this quartet was actually composed while he was still a student at the Paris Conservatoire. He must have been humbled to follow Debussy's earlier quartet, and yet Debussy famously wrote to him, "In the name of the gods of music, and in mine, do not touch a single note of what you have written in your Quartet." Eventually, the comparisons of the two works by Parisian newspapers and café society caused a minor rift between the two, and Ravel was later to comment with regret, "It's probably better for us, after all, to be on frigid terms for illogical reasons."

Both works represent the epitome of the French spirit, although Ravel also loved the incredible organization and transparent textures found in Mozart. He insisted on technical perfection, yet later in life he admitted he would trade it for the 'artless strength' of his youth, found in his string quartet.

The quartet begins with a warm, languorous theme played by the entire ensemble, followed by a first violin melody played over swift figuration by the second violin and viola. After rushing into a climax and a return of the opening, the mood quiets and the second melody is restated, played two octaves apart by the first violin and viola. This whole movement is magical, with Ravel saying what he wanted to say, no more and, luckily for us, no less.

Many musicologists have remarked that the pizzicato opening of the second movement replicates the sound of Javanese gamelan orchestras, which Debussy and many other musicians had heard at the famous 1909 World's Fair (Exposition Universelle) in Paris. The solo

CONCERT 4: WEDNESDAY, JULY 31

cello plays a yearning figure leading into a slow, exquisite middle section, with the pizzicato trying to break into the dominant role, and finally arriving with plucked flourishes.

An ominous opening to the slow third movement gives the sense of searching, and there's an improvisatory feel as the instruments intertwine with almost-orchestral combination harmonies and a melody that feels like a question.

The finale begins with an angry punctuation, its forward motion feeling a little unsettling in sections of five-beat meter. The declarative nature of the themes rises into highly expressive heights, with interjections of slightly-disguised previous themes and a sizzling coda ending.

This quartet was first played in March 1904, and is dedicated to Ravel's mentor and teacher Gabriel Fauré, whose piano quartet follows in this concert.

Piano Quartet in C Minor, Op. 15

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845–1924)

Fauré began composing this piece in 1876, finished it three years later, and revised it in 1884. Though it's now one of his most popular works, and a standard of French chamber music, a publishing firm accepted it only on condition that he give up all his rights and accept no fee.

In 1872, Fauré's teacher and friend Camille Saint-Saëns had introduced him to a beautiful acquaintance, Marianne Viardot, to whom he was eventually engaged. She was the daughter of the famous mezzo-soprano and composer Pauline Viardot, who urged Fauré to write grand opera instead of chamber music. Marianne soon broke off their engagement, however. After his melancholy spirit had mostly passed, he became inspired by seeing Wagner's "Ring" in Bayreuth. Soon after, Fauré began work on the Piano Quartet in C Minor.

Much of the string writing is fashioned of close chords in the lower middle register. Though some have said this was owed to an ongoing deafness, its undercurrent is perfect for the supple, scampering, and incisive keyboard excursions.

The work begins with a unison statement of the first theme, which is soon adapted into a tender, plaintive melody. Another theme, announced by the viola, is imitated and caroms off the other instruments. The almost-liquid piano emphasizes both major themes, and they return for a relatively conventional resolution and ending.

With another delicate melody supported by pizzicato chords in the strings, the scherzo second movement is defined by a shift into several simultaneous rhythmic patterns. A sweet new flavor of attractive tonal interest is given by mutes in the strings before the opening phrases of the scherzo return.

The following adagio is built on two themes, each involving a series of rising, searching scale passages; the first has a sad and yearning quality, the second is much more songful. For the return of the opening, the piano dominates with virtuoso elaborations.

Fauré may have intended his use of the rhythmic pattern of the first movement, combining with the scalar, rising patterns of the adagio, to bring a kind of unity to the piece. This finale begins urgently, followed by a long, nervous and agitated melody in the viola, soon shared by the other strings, and rampaging runs by the piano. The blending of voices leads to a very passionate climax, followed by a quiet feeling of anticipation, and the expected blazing conclusion.

Notes by Tom Di Nardo