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NEW YORK CHAMBER SOLOISTS

JENNIFER GRIM, flute

ROBERT INGLISS, oboe

ALLEN BLUSTINE, clarinet

ANDREW SCHWARTZ, bassoon

SHARON MOE, horn

DAVID KAPLAN, piano

2:30 PM, Sunday, April 12, 2015
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific

JEAN FRANÇAIX QUARTET FOR FLUTE, OBOE, CLARINET & BASSOON (1933)
(1912–1997) Allegro—Andante con moto—Allegro
 Andante
 Allegro molto
 Allegro vivo

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN QUINTET FOR PIANO, OBOE, CLARINET, HORN AND BASSOON
(1770–1827) IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 16 (1796)
 Grave—Allegro ma non troppo
 Andante cantabile
 Rondo: Allegro, ma non troppo

— INTERMISSION —

DARIUS MILHAUD SUITE D'APRÈS CORRETTE FOR OBOE, CLARINET & BASSOON (1937)
(1892–1974) Entrée et Rondeau
 Tambourin
 Musette
 Sérénade
 Fanfare
 Rondeau
 Menuet
 Le Coucou

ARTHUR BERGER QUARTET IN C MAJOR FOR FLUTE, OBOE, CLARINET & BASSOON (1941)
(1912–2003) Allegro moderato
 Andante
 Allegro vivace e leggermente

FRANCIS POULENC SEXTET FOR PIANO & WIND QUINTET, OP. 100 (1931-32, '39)
(1899–1963) Allegro vivace—Très vite et emporte
 Divertissement: Andantino
 Finale: Prestissimo

The NEW YORK CHAMBER SOLOISTS are represented by
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ARTIST PROFILE

Acclaimed as an outstanding ensemble of distinguished virtuosi, performing widely diverse repertoire in creatively programmed concerts, the New York Chamber Soloists, of which our artists today are members, have maintained a unique niche in the chamber music world for over five decades. This twelve-member ensemble of strings, winds, and keyboard can increase to as many as twenty with the addition of guest artists, giving it the flexibility to offer many works that are seldom heard due to the unusual instrumental combinations for which they were written.

With more than 250 works in their repertoire, the Chamber Soloists have made a valuable contribution to the musical life of this country, and have helped to expand the audience for chamber music. Their programming innovations have included Bach's complete Brandenburg Concerti in a single concert; "Paris in the '20s"; an American Classics program; the complete Mozart horn concerti; and song cycles, cantatas, and operas from Monteverdi to Aitken.

They have added substantially to the catalog of 20th century chamber works, with more than 25 compositions written for them by such significant composers as Gunther Schuller, Mario Davidovsky, Ezra Laderman, and Mel Powell. The group has also commissioned works for children, including *Ferdinand the Bull* from noted American composer Hugh Aitken, and compositions based on Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland* by Gerald Fried and Tania French.

The ensemble has compiled an impressive record of repeat engagements in North America and abroad, including eleven European tours, six Latin American tours, and numerous tours of the Far East and South Pacific.

In the United States, the Chamber Soloists have appeared frequently in New York City at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Lincoln Center, in Washington at the Library of Congress, the National Academy of Sciences, the Kennedy Center, and the National Gallery of Art, at major universities across the country from Boston to Berkeley, and at the Mostly Mozart, Sun Valley, and Caramoor Festivals. Recent performances include two at the Casals Festival, as well as the debut of the Chamber Soloists' new initiative, a large-scale orchestral program featuring luminaries such as Richard Stoltzman, Menahem Pressler, and Anton Kuerti. These programs have been huge successes at venues including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Kravis Center, UCLA, and the University of Arizona. The New York Chamber Soloists were in residence at the Vermont Mozart Festival every summer from its inception in 1974 through its last year in 2010.

Currently the domain of chamber music is entirely dominated by string music, and with a reasonable basis: composers since Haydn and Mozart have put their best creative efforts into genres such as string trios, quartets and quintets. Still, it is rewarding to hear a program devoted to wind chamber music on occasion, particularly when it bears the stamp of quality we've come to expect from the composers and players we hear today.

Françaix: Quartet for 4 Winds

Jean Françaix was born in Le Mans, and lived his entire life in France. His parents (father the Director of the Conservatoire of Le Mans, mother a singing teacher) recognized early that he was a musically talented child and encouraged him. He took up composing when he was six, and his first published piece (1922) resulted in him being steered at age 10 to Nadia Boulanger, noted pedagogue at the Paris Conservatory, who encouraged his career. She considered the young composer to be one of the best, if not the best, of her many students. Françaix often played his own works to public acclaim, notably in the premier of his Concertino for Piano and Orchestra at the festival of Baden-Baden in 1932.

But Françaix was chiefly a composer not a concert pianist, composing over 200 pieces in a wide diversity of styles, 20 of which are for winds. He described himself as "constantly composing," barely finishing one piece before beginning another. He continued in this fashion until his death at 85.

Françaix's compositional character is denoted by nimbleness and humor presented as a dialogue of interplay among the musical lines. He credited the influence of Chabrier, Stravinsky, Ravel, and Poulenc, all composers he admired. However, he integrated those influences into his own distinct artistic sense.

Françaix wrote this quartet (or at least the first movement) in 1933 at age 21 for the staff of the Le Mans Conservatoire, claiming to have provided the performers with a smooth journey. He explained the origins of the quartet: "As the horn tutor who was there at the time was never quite sure what sound would emerge from his instrument – his fame was as a specialist in the art of playing several notes at the same time – I had decided not to 'rouse the volcano,' and

wrote a quartet without horn which would be less likely to produce disconcerting surprises."

Disconcerting surprises aside, this work reveals prodigious vitality. The composer emphasizes the difficulty of the task: "Writing for this instrumental combination is not especially easy. Whereas a string quartet consists of four evenly matched players, a wind quartet combines very different characters. To bring these disparate elements together, the composer needs great diplomatic skill—a fusion of Machiavelli and magic."

This is a technically demanding work whose snappy syncopations, wit, and humor evoke the style of Francis Poulenc. If you are in the mood for something immaculately composed, clever, deceptively easy-sounding, and silly as can be, Françaix more than adequately delivers that "magic."

Beethoven: Quintet Op. 16

Much of Beethoven's earliest chamber music was written for various combinations of wind instruments, culminating with the well-known Septet, Op. 20. Beethoven's debt to the music of Mozart is evident in his early works. He had admired Mozart, and had envisioned studying with his hero, whose death, in 1791, put an end to that idea. Mozart and Beethoven were the first composers to utilize the unusual scoring of piano with winds in their quintets, K. 452 (1784) and Op. 16 (1796) respectively. As a result, many scholars have been inclined to state that Beethoven's was written in imitation of Mozart's. However, being written in the same key of E-flat Major and scored for the same ensemble, comprising a slow introduction to a sonata-form first movement, a slow second movement, and a rondo finale seems to be as far as the superficial similarities go.

The differences, on the other hand, are significant: Mozart was already a recognized genius in 1784 when his Quintet appeared. The 26-year-old Beethoven had published piano trios and sonatas by this time, but his recognition had come chiefly from the astounding showcasing of his improvisational skill and keyboard brilliance. He was still in process of investigating instrumental sonorities before turning to a full-fledged symphonic piece. Opus 16 offered a chance for him to

showcase both his compositional skill and his performing prowess. Where Mozart had treated the five voices as equals, Beethoven has written more of a piano mini-concerto with wind accompaniment; remember that the piano was the central vehicle of his musical development, both as composer and as a virtuoso improvisational artist.

The winds announce the extended slow opening movement producing an introduction that is as long as the two remaining movements combined. Listen for the sonorities of the wind group in the very first "fanfare" phrase of the *Grave*. Following this, the piano quickly interjects a solo flourish. The players then trade thematic materials in a generally equal fashion, until another cadenza-like piano embellishment finally leads into the *Allegro* proper in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, displaying the theme first on the piano alone, and then on the strings – a setting typical of the work as a whole. After this energizing and lively theme is stated, developed, and repeated in a refreshingly non-dramatic way, matters become more restless and the dynamic level upsurges as the development begins. After the recapitulation, a cadenza on the piano leads to an extended coda, which hands the horn the treacherous-to-play, arpeggio figure heard earlier in the piano.

The *Andante cantabile* affords chances for each instrument to flourish, both alone and in ensemble. The gentle theme introduced by the piano serves to separate the occurrences and begins a new lyrical dialogue among the players.

Beethoven concludes the quintet with an amusement: the *Rondo*'s offhand theme soon accelerates as it is elaborated and embellished by all the instruments in a whirl of activity. As we find in a piano concerto, Beethoven leaves room for a solo cadenza in the first half of the finale. Reports are that the composer (who played the piano part himself when the work was new) would indulge in some extended improvisation, repeatedly deceiving the wind players, who—at first entertained and then irritated—were waiting to come back in.

Milhaud: Suite d'après Corrette

Milhaud was born in Marseilles but grew up in Aix-en-Provence, which he regarded as his true ancestral city. He was one of the 20th century's most prolific composers, credited with nearly 450 works, many of which were chamber pieces.

Milhaud was a member of a group of young, iconoclastic composers who emerged in Paris in the 1920s, voicing opposition to the music of France's past: in their words, "the eloquence of Franck, the impressionism of Debussy, and the scholasticism of D'Indy."

No matter which genesis tale you believe, Milhaud and his five individualistic colleagues, Arthur Honegger, Germaine Tailleferre, Georges Auric, Francis Poulenc, and Louis Durey, became identified as *Les Six*, a rag-tag group of convivial musical iconoclasts formed while students at the Paris Conservatory under the guidance of Erik Satie. Their music was, in part, a reaction to German opera composer Richard Wagner and the musical impressionism of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. They tested all manner of musical venture, from opera to jazz; they flouted convention and took singular delight in listener provocation — displaying a defiance Prokofiev called (in reference to his own music) "teasing the geese."

But you will not hear the assertive radicalism advocated by *Les Six* in Milhaud's *Suite d'après Corrette*; instead listen for the expression of the composer's firm roots in the musical past and his interest in both folk music and the composers of the French Baroque. Milhaud's specific inspiration for this piece was the early 18th century rococo composer Michel Corrette, whose compositions 200 years before inspired Milhaud to treat both harmony and melodic alignment very freely.

The Suite began as an accompaniment for a 1937 French language production of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet staged in Paris. When performed off-stage, the music takes the form of a neo-Baroque suite of dance pieces intermingled with self-described parts (for instance the *Fanfare*, the gentle *Serenade*, and the graphic *Cuckoo* finale). The tiny *Pastorale* is a sort of miniature prelude and fugue in which the oboe takes the leading role.

Berger: Quartet in C Major

Arthur Victor Berger was an American composer who has been derogatorily described as a New Mannerist. He was born in New York in 1912 and studied composition at New York University. As a fellowship student he enrolled in the Longy School of Music and concurrently attended Harvard, where his teachers included Walter Piston, earning a MA in 1936. Berger also studied for two years in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and wrote the piece we hear today two years after returning from her studio. He held several teaching positions, beginning with Mills College and continuing at Brooklyn College, the Juilliard School, and Brandeis University. In 1979 he became a member of the faculty of the New England Conservatory, retiring from teaching composition in 1998 at age 86.

Also an important writer and editor, Berger was music critic for the Boston Transcript, New York Sun, and New York Herald Tribune. He also wrote a monograph on Aaron Copland.

So not unexpectedly, the piece is greatly indebted to Copland. Expansive and rich, but meticulously efficient, it uses open placement of registrars, enriched by phrases constructed of large interval jumps. Throughout there is also a merging of the old and new. For example, in the opening of the first movement you can hear an especially attractive rhythmic gusto that seems to arise from the rushing energy of Bach evocative of the C-minor Fugue in Book I of The Well-Tempered Clavier, and in the second oboe solo of the second movement, you may hear the supple and graceful syncopation redolent of jazz.

The Quartet for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet and Bassoon is a sturdily crafted piece that springs from the lineage of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and especially Copland. Yet the style is all Berger's own. It was described by fellow composer and critic Virgil Thomson as "one of the most satisfactory pieces for winds in the whole modern repertory."

Poulenc: Sextet, Op. 100

Francis Poulenc is an enigma amid modern composers: academic intelligentsia are keen to disdain his work as insubstantial and that which bring up the harmonic structural

hindmost compared to well-knowns such as Schoenberg or Stravinsky. In contrast, audiences and musicians are quick to find his music irresistible, delighting in its élan, solace, and wit. But Poulenc also attains a singular level of genuine, candid, intensely spiritual expression in his sacred works.

Poulenc had a fortunate birth just before the start of the 20th century: his father and uncles founded the company that became Rhône-Poulenc, a pharmaceutical giant, and he also had the prenatal insight to be born in Paris as its art, music, and literature were being redirected and redefined by the likes of Satie, Diaghilev, Picasso and Apollinaire. It did not hurt that he also had an uncle who escorted him on the rounds of café concerts and Parisian nightspots. Finally, Poulenc was, with Milhaud, also one of *Les Six* and this influenced his creativity. While each of "the six" followed separate creative paths, the group's high-spirited impudence persisted in Poulenc's style throughout his life.

Originally composed from 1931 to 1932 when Poulenc was still in his *Les Six* persona, it was received with mixed reviews. He completely reworked the sextet in 1939, probably more a result of his learning from (rather than criticizing) the musical past and a reflection of his compositional maturation.

Listen for how Poulenc shows his grasp and awareness of the attributes of each instrument through inclusion of tonal qualities, melodies, and flourishes unique to each. The outer two movements are spirited, lively, at times jazzy, and unable to rest on a melody before another is introduced. The inner movement is reminiscent of the piano works of Mozart, with lyrical and playful melodies that are balanced well between the winds and piano.

Poulenc's Sextet masterfully pays homage to the many influences in his musical life, but still creates a piece that is distinctly the composer's own.

—notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

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- Concert programs are subject to change without notice.
- Seating is unreserved for the 2014-15 Season.
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