

COLORADO COLLEGE

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Summer  
Music  
*festival*

**Program Notes**  
*by*  
**Michael Grace**

## FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

June 16, 2022

7:30 PM

Packard Hall

### **Quartet in D minor *Tafelmusik II***

*Andante*

*Vivace*

*Largo*

*Allegro*

Georg Philipp Telemann  
(1681-1767)

Georg Philipp Telemann lived in the height of what we call the Baroque Era. He was born in 1681, just four years before Bach and Handel, the two most celebrated composers of the time. And not only were all three living at the same time, they all knew each other personally. In fact, Bach knew and respected Telemann so much that he asked him to be the godfather of his son Carl Philipp Emanuel. In short, Telemann would have been thought of as one of the top three composers of his generation. And after having held numerous prestigious positions, he wound up in Hamburg as the music director of five churches!

Telemann was one of the most prolific composers of the Western World, having left a corpus of over 3,000 compositions. This has led to occasional criticism of him as an artist who paid more attention to quantity than quality. But his stellar reputation among his peers dispels this criticism. And as listeners we can judge his extraordinary talent for ourselves. Incidentally, if anyone is curious about the collection title *Tafelmusik*, it simply means “table” music, or “supper” music and was used as a marketing tool. It was meant to imply that this music is to be enjoyed.

This quartet is written for a curious combination of instruments – flute, oboe, bassoon and cello. The most curious aspect is that with two of the four instruments (bassoon and cello) in the bass range, the general feeling of the quartet is a strong bass presence.

The four movements are very standard for the time. The first, *Andante*, is in a lilting tempo with music that is created to please an audience with its easy rhythmic flow and participation by all the instruments. The second, *Vivace*, begins with flute, oboe and cello taking the lead until the bassoon suddenly bursts forth with impressive fast scales. The bassoon continues to lead while the others decorate its cadenza. The third movement, *Largo*, gives the lyrical melody to all the players in turn. Finally the fourth movement, *Allegro*, is fast and jovial, but with a few moments of slower tempo relief. It invites participation by each of the four instruments.

## ***Tristan and Isolde (Vorspiel und Isoldens Liebestod)***

*(Prelude and Isolde's "Love/Death" scene)*

Richard Wagner

(1813-1883)

*arr. Max Reger*

Richard Wagner was arguably the most famous German composer in the 19th century. And one of his most famous works was the huge opera *Tristan und Isolde*. In essence, this was about a man and woman who are in love as a result of a magical potion, a love that transcends all human control. But the hitch is that Isolde is married to their King, Mark of Scotland. They are, in effect, in a state of eternal longing for something they cannot have. This idea of longing was, by the way, one of the most popular themes in 19th century art.

Wagner's portrayal of this theme in music is legendary. At the beginning of the opera, he writes an introduction that leads the listener through a chord-progression (known thereafter as the "Tristan Chord"). This progression goes through several chords and winds up on what is known as a dominant 7th chord. That chord musically demands a resolution. But Wagner doesn't give us the resolution until the very end of the opera some 4 1/2 hours later. You have been left in a state of seeming eternal longing for a resolution. Now, you can probably surmise by now that that resolution can come only in darkness where love tends to flourish. And eternal love, for which all lovers long, can come only in eternal darkness otherwise known as death.

In this arrangement of the orchestral score, Max Reger has used two famous sections of the opera. The first is from a long love duet known as *Liebesnacht* (love-night) where the characters sing about love and how it flourishes only in the darkness of night. The second is from the very end of the opera, when Tristan has died and Isolde sings of love and death in the aria called *Liebestod* (love-death). It is only here that the Tristan chord is finally resolved.

## ***Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune***

Claude Debussy

(1862-1918)

*arr. Arnold Schönberg*

Debussy's *Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune* (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun) is often considered landmark in the history of Western music. It is a piece of orchestral music based on a poem by the avant garde French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé. It is the essence of Impressionism in music, a work in which the listener gets merely a vague impression of the subject. In this case, the subject of Mallarmé's symbolist poem is a faun (a half-man and half-beast creature) who is hazily wondering if the nymphs who visited him in his semi-conscious state were real or just part of his daydream. We might even conclude that the real subject of the poem and the music is the vague semi-conscious state we are in when half-asleep and half-awake.

Debussy's music, with its lack of clearly defined rhythms, melodies, harmonies or even cadences (resting points) seems stylistically parallel to the subject of the poem. It opens with a celebrated melody for flute which encompasses the range of a tritone and suggests a whole-tone scale. This tonally amorphous melody recurs many times throughout the composition.

Debussy wrote the work for a large orchestra. This arrangement, by the later Austrian

modernist composer Arnold Schönberg, is a beautiful reduction of Debussy's orchestra for a chamber ensemble of 10 players. It is striking how beautifully Schönberg keeps the amorphous feelings and diaphanous tone colors of Debussy's original work.

### **Piano Sextet, Op. 7 Scène Andalouse**

*Crepuscule du Soir (At Twilight); Serenata (Serenade)*

*A la Fenêtre (At the Window)*

Joaquin Turina  
(1882-1949)

Joaquín Turina was trained in Seville (his birthplace), Madrid and Paris. While in Paris, he studied the works of the principal European composers including, in particular, Claude Debussy. But he soon became most closely affiliated with his fellow Spaniard Manuel de Falla and eventually settled in Madrid in 1914. He was encouraged to compose nationalistic Spanish music and found great success in this area. He was, in fact, one of the best known and beloved Spanish composers during the first half of the 20th century. Subtle elegance, gracefulness, an occasional sense of humor, and simply Spanish sounding idioms are often cited as stylistic elements that tie him to his Andalusian roots in Seville.

*Escena andaluza* (the original title of this work when it was composed in 1912) was first published in Paris in 1913. The work is somewhat unusual. To start with, Turina's choice of instruments is innovative – there are very few, if any, chamber music works written for solo viola, piano, and string quartet. This unusual scoring would suggest that the viola is the real soloist and that the “piano quintet” would serve as an orchestra in a concerto. But as we will hear, there is greater balance than one might expect. It is as if the solo viola is a kind of protagonist, even a sultry Spanish lover, and the piano quintet the respondent. At times, the piano is treated as a solo instrument as well, particularly at the beginning where it alone creates the mood.

The overall mood of the piece exudes the warm perfumed air of an Andalusian evening. There is lots of pizzicato in the strings, suggesting the sounds of guitars, and a kind of lyricism that seems appropriate for the voice of an Iberian lover. On the other hand, the work is full of rich and sophisticated writing. There are complex harmonies and countermelodies to the main tunes that impart a sense of musical sophistication. Turina was still young and perhaps wanted to show his teachers that he had mastered the craft of cosmopolitan composition.

The first movement, titled *Crepuscule de soir* (“Twilight”), opens for the solo piano, as if it is setting the mood. Soon the viola enters with what Turina labels in the score a *Serenata* (serenade). This soon gives way to a new section which Turina indicates as *Mouvement de Habanera* (in the style of a Habanera – an Afro-Cuban dance very popular in Spain in the late 19th century). Although he doesn't use the traditional rhythm associated with this dance, it is implied. The movement ends with a reprise of the “serenade.”

The second movement, titled *A la fenêtre* (“At the window”), is presumably at the window of the beloved to whom the viola has just sung the serenade. In it we hear the viola in dialogue with the string quartet and with the piano. My advice to the audience: Let yourself go with the amorous flow.

## **Portraits by El Greco, Book II (Colorado premiere)**

George Tsontakis  
(b. 1951)

*Postlude to Book I, Prelude to Book II*

*Mary Magdalen in Repentance*

*St. Francis*

*Laocoon*

*Agony in the Garden*

*St. Sebastian*

*Repentant St. Peter*

*Resurrection*

*Dormition of the Virgin*

George Tsontakis has been the recipient of two of the richest prizes awarded in all of classical music: the International Grawemeyer Award in 2005 for his Second Violin Concerto and the 2007 Ives Living Award from the American Academy. He studied with Roger Sessions at Juilliard and in Rome with Franco Donatoni. Born in Astoria, NY, into Cretan heritage, he has become an important figure in the music of Greece and his music is increasingly performed abroad, with several performances in Europe every season. He served as Composer-in-Residence with the Aspen Music Festival for 40 years, where he was founding director of the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble. He is Distinguished Composer-in-Residence at the Bard College Conservatory. His 2016-17 premieres include commissioned chamber works for Maverick Concerts, London's Mobius Ensemble and large-scale pieces for the Boston Symphony, the Albany Symphony and the St Paul Chamber Orchestra. He lives in New York's Catskill Mountains.

Tsontakis wrote *Portraits by El Greco, Book I*, in 2014 to honor of the 400th anniversary of the death of the Greek artist Doménikos Theotokópoulos who, because he worked for much of his career in Spain, was known simply as "El Greco." The work is scored for piano quartet (piano, violin, viola and cello) with an added clarinet. "Each of the six movements in this suite were inspired by a particular painting of El Greco, all but one of them religious. The work was so successful that he was inspired to compose another set of musical depictions. Book II, which we will hear tonight, was composed in 2021 also for clarinet quintet. It opens with a movement Tsontakis considered a postlude to Book I and prelude to Book II. After that, there are eight movements, each based on a particular painting. While hearing the piece, the painting will be projected.

*Mary Magdalen in Repentance* portrays the famous prostitute whom Jesus forgave and her subsequent state of redemption. *St. Francis* portrays the famous Franciscan saint who, in his humility and closeness to Jesus, received the stigmata, or the wounds on his hands and feet from being nailed to the cross. *Laocoon* was a Trojan priest who, with his two sons, was attacked by giant serpents sent by the Greek Goddess Athena. *Agony in the Garden* refers to Jesus in Gethemene, where he suffered and was arrested before his crucifixion. *St. Sebastian* was a Christian martyr who was persecuted by the Roman emperor Diocletian. *The Repentant St. Peter* portrays the famous saint who had denied knowing Jesus at the last supper but was overwhelmed by remorse when Jesus looked at him. The subject of *Resurrection* should need no explanation. And finally, the *Dormition of the Virgin* portrays Mary in the peaceful sleep of death entering into heaven.

It is now up to the listener to feel just how Tsontakis's music captures the mood of each painting. As you listen to the music associated with these portraits, let your imaginations be free to relate certain musical sounds to the images. Notice for example the speed of the music, the quality of the melodies and harmonies, and the controlled use of dissonance and consonance. One can easily sense just how these beautiful paintings moved the composer to create analogous feelings in his musical art.