

COLORADO COLLEGE



Summer
Music
festival

Program Notes
by
Michael Grace

FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

Tuesday, June 9, 2026

7:00 PM

Packard Hall

Sérénade for 12 instruments

Vif

Andantino con moto

Un poco allegretto

Vivace

Jean Françaix
(1912-1997)

Jean Françaix was one of the most prominent French pianists and composers of the 20th century. And while France produced some of the most *avant garde* composers of the century, it has also produced some of the most successful neoclassicists, or anti-modernists, who felt their modernist contemporaries had simply left the audience behind. Françaix is one of these. For example, his *Piano Concertino*, composed in 1932 when he was 20 and, one would assume, at his most experimental age, was heard in a concert of new music in Baden-Baden, Germany. One critic remarked that after so much problematic or labored music, this *Concertino* was like "fresh water, rushing from a spring with the gracious spontaneity of all that is natural." His music was, somewhat like Mozart's or Rossini's - fresh, spontaneous, generally flowing, and always natural-sounding. And it reveals particularly French qualities of urbane wit and elegance.

The *Sérénade for 12 Instruments* is a nearly perfect realization of these more general aesthetic goals. There are five strings and seven winds that combine to present delightful contrasting colors. And the unique characteristics of each instrument are utilized to bring excitement and variety to the overall ensemble. One thing Françaix likes is to compare the "blocks" of wind passages with the "blocks" of string sections. Notice how much fun it is to hear these blocks of sound tossed around among the 12 players like a hot potato!

Each of the four movements of this trio is imbued with a strong character, at times serious, at times funny, but always created with a remarkable sense of control and ease. The first movement, *Vif*, is very fast and with exciting energy. All the instruments participate in one exuberant conversation which ends with satisfying agreement. The second movement, *Andantino con moto*, is much slower and features beautiful legato solo passages for the bassoon and cello.

The third movement, *Un poco allegretto*, is in a puckish mood with delicate little wisps of activity tossed around small groups of instruments. The rhythmic coordination is pleasing to our ears.

The fourth movement, *Vivace*, has some unexpected but fun outbursts in flashy little solos for the trombone. The composer also enhances the panoply of tone colors by including passages for the strings playing pizzicato and the other instruments using mutes.

From *Deux Rhapsodies*
L'Etang (The Pond)

Charles Martin Loeffler
(1861-1935)

Charles Martin Loeffler was born in Alsace, spent his first twenty years in several different eastern and western European countries, and then moved to the U.S. where he spent the rest of his life. Although less well known than many of his contemporaries, Loeffler was a composer who was well-trained, talented and truly cosmopolitan; and while he was perhaps not as innovative as some of his contemporaries such as Debussy, Ravel, Fauré and others, he was certainly skillful and sensitive in a way that compares with his more celebrated modernist colleagues.

Many of his compositions are generally considered impressionistic, similar in style to those of Debussy. They are often based on nonmusical subjects, such as poems. But instead of trying to paint a clear musical picture of the subject, the works convey moods and feelings associated with the subject. Just as outlines are blurred in an impressionistic painting, precise rhythms, harmonies and melodies are often obscured in impressionistic music. The object of all this is for the listener to penetrate the inner being of the subject and not be lost in its outer appearance or form.

Loeffler's *Two Rhapsodies* are based on poems by the French poet Maurice Rollinat. A translation of the first, which is the one we will hear tonight, is printed here.

In the spirit of impressionism, one should not listen for musical descriptions of the images in the poems, but rather for the moods or feelings that they produce. In "The Pond," Loeffler opens with a passage that has a dark and foreboding quality, certainly one that reflects the opening stanzas of the poem. And toward the end of this "rhapsody," the music changes dramatically to a brighter and more clearly defined style that begins with the cello playing pizzicato and the oboe playing short, nearly staccato, notes. The abrupt change of mood probably reflects the third stanza of the poem. The work closes with a very slow, sombre and pensive passage that returns the listener to the "murky mirror" of a pond.

Full of very old, blind fish,
the pond, beneath a low sky rolling with muffled thunder,
displays among its centuries-old reeds
the lapping horror of its opacity.

There, goblins serve as lights
for more than one black, sinister, and dreaded marsh;
but this one reveals itself in this deserted place
only through its dreadful noises like consumptive toads.

Now, the moon, which is just rising at this moment,
seems to gaze at itself so fantastically
that, seeing its spectral face,

its flat nose, and the strange vagueness of its teeth, one would say
a skull lit from within,
come to admire itself in a dark mirror.

Quartet in D Major for flute, violin, viola and cello, K V 285

Allegro

Adagio; Rondeau

W. A. Mozart
(1756-1791)

While Mozart and his mother were in the city of Mannheim in the fall of 1777, they were welcomed by a professional and well-connected flutist, Johann Wendling. Through him Mozart met a wealthy Dutchman and amateur flutist named De Jean (a.k.a. Dechamps) who in turn commissioned several flute quartets for himself to play. Although it is clear from Mozart's letters that he was not very enthusiastic about the project, he did complete three of the four commissioned quartets. When he was still working on the commission in February of 1778, he wrote to his father explaining why he was having such a difficult time finishing: "I could, to be sure, scribble off things the whole day long, but a composition of this kind [a commissioned one] goes out into the world, and naturally I do not wish to have cause to be ashamed of my name on the title-page. Moreover, you know that I become quite powerless whenever I am obliged to write for an instrument which I cannot bear[!]." Needless to say, this famous comment has brought chagrin to most flute players ever since.

Of the three quartets, only the D Major (K. 285) stands out musically; the others reflect Mozart's disinterest in the project. Finished on Christmas day in 1777, the D Major Quartet is a delightful work that contains some memorable music and certainly does not sound like the work of a flute hater!

The opening *Allegro* exemplifies the concertante style, in which there is primarily one solo part that is contrasted in style and tone color with the rest of the instruments. This, of course, would have satisfied the flutist De Jean who commissioned the work, but not necessarily the other players. From time to time, the violin is given melodic material and often that instrument plays in duet with the flute, but still the latter predominates.

The *Adagio* is a particularly striking movement, for here Mozart turned to B-minor and wrote one of his inscrutably beautiful slow melodies for the flute accompanied by the strings playing pizzicato throughout. The strings take on a lute or mandolin quality and create the aura of a lover's serenade, while the "serenade" melody itself unfolds in the voice of the solo flute. The movement ends with the harmony unresolved in an almost humorous way and with an indication to "attacca" the final *Rondeau*. This closing movement ranks with any of Mozart's gay and delightful finales. The D-major rondo theme is contrasted effectively with the inventive melodic episodes; these occur between statements of the rondo theme and are often of contrasting character and key. The beauty of this quartet almost makes us wish that Mozart hated all the solo instruments for which he composed!

Piano Quintet No. 2 in C minor, Op. 115

Allegro moderato
Allegro vivo
Andante moderato
Allegro molto

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)

Fauré was born into a time in the 19th century that came on the heels of the extraordinary progressive age of Mendelssohn, Schumann, Berlioz, Chopin and Liszt. It is hard to imagine how a young French composer could aspire to continue such innovation, and indeed Fauré never did. Instead of continuing to break new ground he tried to refine what had been done and to bring his own particularly French personality into a strong and still new musical tradition that we associate with 19th-century Romanticism. At times fast and virtuosic, at times lush and lyrical, and at times nearly Wagnerian (reminiscent of his great German contemporary), the music of this quartet is always expressive but also born from an inner control.

The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, illustrates the predominant texture of the composition. The strings form a homogenous quartet playing drawn-out harmonies while the piano is often like a soloist with more aggressive arpeggios (broken chords). The second movement, *Allegro vivo*, is much faster. It continues the basic texture of the first movement, but the piano becomes more and more prominent, at times almost like a concerto soloist.

The third movement, *Andante moderato*, is a beautiful and peaceful moment of introspection. In this gem, all the instruments come together in rich polyphony. A few distinctive melodies emerge from the shadows in each of the individual parts and give a sense of order and unity to the otherwise lush flowing texture. This moment of peacefulness is one of the most fulfilling moments of the entire quintet. The fourth movement, *Allegro molto*, revives somewhat the texture of the opening movement with the drawn-out chords in the strings and the more articulate and percussive keyboard part. During the last few minutes, the texture thickens and the tempo increases, building to a gentle concluding climax.

UPCOMING SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL EVENTS

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Festival Artists Concert

June 13, 7 p.m. - Packard Hall, ticketed event

Music at Midday

June 15, 12:15 p.m. - Packard Hall, free

Festival Orchestra Concert

Scott Yoo, *conducting*

June 16, 7 p.m. - Celeste Theatre, ticketed event

Pre-Concert Lecture with Michael Grace begins at 5:45 p.m. in the CAC Screening Room

Music at Midday

June 17, 12:15 p.m. - Packard Hall, free



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