

Candlelight Concert Society Presents

FAURÉ QUARTETT

Dirk Mommertz, piano
Erika Geldsetzer, violin

Sascha Frömbling, viola
Konstantin Heidrich, cello

Sunday, October 1, 2023, 4:00 pm
Smith Theatre, Horowitz Visual and Performing Arts Center
Howard Community College

This performance is sponsored by Bryan Young

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845-1924)

Songs for voice & piano, Op. 23 (arr. for piano quartet)
Les berceaux
Notre amour
Le secret

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Piano Quartet No. 2 in G minor, Op. 45
I. Allegro molto moderato
II. Allegro molto
III. Adagio non troppo
IV. Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor
I. Allegro
II. Intermezzo: Allegro, ma non troppo — Trio: Animato
III. Andante con moto
IV. Rondo alla zingarese — Presto

Fauré Quartett appears by arrangement with Marianne Schmocker Artists International | marianneschmockerartists.com, faurequartett.de/en/



PROGRAM NOTES

SONGS FOR VOICE & PIANO, OP. 23

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)



Gabriel Fauré has been referred to by some as “the most advanced composer of his generation in France.” In particular, classical singers have considered him to be the greatest master of French song.

From the age of nine, Fauré studied at the Ecole Niedermeyer under the tutelage of Niedermeyer himself. When Niedermeyer passed away in 1861, Fauré continued his studies with Saint-Saëns, and the two became great friends. It was through Saint-Saëns that, after his studies at the Ecole, Fauré met many important composers and performers. He also met his first love, Marianne Viardot, with whom he got engaged after five years of courtship.

When Marianne broke off their engagement in 1877, Fauré became extremely depressed in the years to follow. Yet, he evidently harnessed his heartbreak to compose a plethora of early masterpieces, including all of his art songs (also known as “*chansons*”) on this program.

Tonight’s art songs all come from Fauré’s Op. 23, composed between 1879 and 1881. The first, *Les Berceaux* (“*The Cradles*”) is considered one of his most somber songs; a lullaby of death, depicting grieving women wailing for ships of men that will never return. Fauré gave *Les Berceaux* the largest vocal range of any song he wrote, lending the chanson an epic sense of drama and scale. *Notre amour* (“*Our Love*”) presents a different kind of drama, its speedy stanzas and nimble accompaniment creating a vision of musical fireworks. Although the original poem featured six stanzas of an excited narrator describing their love, Fauré set only five to music, creating some

interesting tonal asymmetry across the piece. The third and final song, *Le secret* (“*The Secret*”), focuses on a set of three: morning, day, and night. A technically simple work, the hypnotic repetition of chords beneath a floating melody creates a stunning, impressionistic landscape for listeners.

Note by Mira Fu-En Huang

PIANO QUARTET NO. 2 IN G MINOR, OP. 45

Fauré’s six major chamber music compositions extended over most of his musical life. Except for his final composition (the String Quartet, Op. 121), they all assign a prominent role to the piano. Fauré had a special affinity for keyboard instruments, having supported himself for many years as an organist. In France, his piano works, along with his chamber music are considered the constitute the summit of his art.

Fauré chose the piano quartet as the medium for his first piece of chamber music (Op. 15), then waited seven years until 1886 to compose his second, the Piano Quartet in G minor (Op. 45)—he devoted the interim mainly to the songs and song cycles on which his early reputation was based. After the publication of Op. 45, chamber music was again set aside for another seven years while he worked on the popular and delicately written Requiem (Op. 48).

The first movement, *Allegro molto moderato*, begins with an ardent unison string melody from whose contours many subsequent themes are derived. The two middle movements exist in complete contrast: an unusually violent C minor scherzo with a syncopated piano theme and a serene *Adagio*. The gentle, undulating piano figure which opens the slow movement was apparently inspired by a memory of the evening bells of the village of Cadirac, which Fauré frequently heard as a child.

Passion and violence make their return in the final movement, *Allegro molto*. The relentless drive and energy of this movement are unlike anything else in Fauré’s output: even the finale of the First Quartet manages an occasional

pause for reflection. Incredible though it may seem, Fauré builds excitement even within the coda, through an electrifying crescendo that culminates in a massive and joyous end.

Note by James Cannon

PIANO QUARTET NO. 1 IN G MINOR

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)



By the time **Johannes Brahms** was 14, he was already a professional pianist, contributing to the modest family income by playing the piano in the bars and sailors' taverns of his native Hamburg. His

early piano compositions earned the approval of such eminent composers as Franz Liszt and Robert Schumann. Schumann was an influential music critic as well as a composer, and his enthusiastic endorsement provided Brahms with easy entry into the musical life of mid-19th century Germany.

The Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25 gradually took shape and received its first run-through performance in 1861, with Clara Schumann as the pianist. The official premiere in 1862, featuring members of the renowned Hellmesberger Quartet and the composer himself at the keyboard, marked Brahms's debut before the Viennese public, both as a composer and a performing artist.

Brahms and his piano quartet were an instant success. Julius Epstein, one of the foremost pianists of his day, was overwhelmed and implored Brahms to arrange a solo concert. That concert, in which Brahms played works of Bach and Schumann as well as his own, was met with the same enthusiasm. Joseph Hellmesberger uttered words which must have been dear to

Brahms's heart: "This is Beethoven's heir!"

In concept, in style, and especially in its concert-like relationship of piano to strings, the Op. 25 piano quartet is symphonic in scope, a characteristic not uncommon in the chamber music of Brahms. This orchestral quality is most evident in the outer movements and in the march section of the third movement. The opening movement is somber and expansive, overflowing with musical ideas and inventiveness. The second movement was originally called a *Scherzo*, but at Clara Schumann's suggestion, Brahms changed that to *Intermezzo*, a title more keeping with its poignant understatement and gentle, wistful character. The third movement begins and ends with a wonderfully Romantic outpouring of melody, interrupted by a sharp, contrasting march-like interlude. In the last movement, Brahms reveals the rambunctious side of his musical personality in a *Rondo alla Zingarese* ("Rondo in Gypsy Style"), whose Hungarian-inspired idioms and driving rhythms bring this fresh and youthful work to a wild and boisterous *molto presto* finale.

Note by James Cannon

Please...

- **In the event of an emergency, note at least two exits, especially your nearest exit, which might be behind you. Walk, do not run, and calmly evacuate the concert hall.**
- **Turn off cell phones, pagers, and watch alarms.**
- **Do not use cameras or electronic recording devices during Candlelight Concert productions.**
- **Unwrap cough drops or mints before the concert begins.**

TONIGHT'S ARTISTS

FAURÉ QUARTETT



“This quartet thinks and breathes as one, focused on a singular, clear vision for their music making.”

Toronto Star

The requirements have changed. Whoever is playing chamber music today can't be limited to the rules from decades ago. The expectations regarding the diversity of repertoire have changed, which creates room for ensembles like the **Fauré Quartett**, which has established itself as one of the world's leading piano quartets within just a few years. Dirk Mommertz (piano), Erika Geldsetzer (violin), Sascha Frömbling (viola) and Konstantin Heidrich (cello) use the opportunities arising from these developments. They discover new sound fields in chamber music and perform compositions outside the mainstream repertoire.

They are visionary in their approach and highly regarded for their experiments and discoveries; be it performances with the NDR Big Band, collaborations with artists like Rufus Wainwright or Sven Helbig, or appearances on TV shows, getting children excited about chamber music. When they released their album “Popsongs” in 2009, there was a great deal of buzz in the press and audience. In the following year, the ensemble was awarded the ECHO Classic for their album “classic beyond borders,” their second award after their recording of Brahms's piano quartets (Chamber Music recording of the year, 2008).

Other prizes include the German Music Competition, the ensemble prize from Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, international competition and recording awards, Music Prize Duisburg and Brahms prize Schleswig Holstein.

The musicians of the Faure Quartett are pioneers in many ways. After they met during their studies in 1995 in Karlsruhe for the 150th anniversary of Gabriel Faure, they quickly realized that this combination offered new insights into undiscovered repertoire. In 2006, they signed a contract with Deutsche Grammophon, promoting them to the Champions League of the classic music business. They made highly regarded benchmark-recordings with works by Mozart, Brahms, and Mendelssohn, pop songs from Peter Gabriel and Steely Dan, and works from Mahler and Richard Strauss on a single album.

Worldwide tours raise the Quartett's profile abroad and international masterclasses are part of their work with students. The members teach at the universities of Berlin and Munich. Moreover, they were Artistic Directors of “Festspielfrühling Rügen” and are ‘Quartet in Residence’ at the University of Music Karlsruhe. During their tours, the musicians appear in the world's most important chamber music venues; including Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Berlin Philharmony, Teatro Colon Buenos Aires and Wigmore Hall London. All these mosaics form a unique profile for this defining chamber music ensemble.