



FAURÉ QUARTETT

Tuesday, March 22, 2022, at 7:30pm
Foellinger Great Hall

PROGRAM

FAURÉ QUARTETT

Dirk Mommertz, piano
Erika Geldsetzer, violin
Sascha Frömbling, viola
Konstantin Heidrich, cello

Gustav Mahler
(1860-1911)

Quartettsatz (Piano Quartet in A Minor)
Nicht zu schnell

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)

Piano Quartet No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 15
Allegro molto moderato
Scherzo: Allegro vivo
Adagio
Allegro molto

20-minute intermission

Modest Mussorgsky
(1839-1881)

Pictures at an Exhibition
Promenade
Gnomus
Promenade
The Old Castle
Promenade
Tuilleries (Dispute between Children at Play)
Bydlo (Cattle)
Promenade
Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks
Samuel Goldenberg and "Schmüjle"
The Market at Limoges
The Catacombs
Cum mortuis in lingua mortua (With the Dead in a Dead Language)
The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba Yaga)
The Great Gate of Kiev

Fauré Quartett appears by arrangement with:
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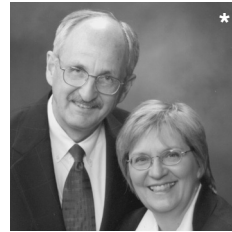
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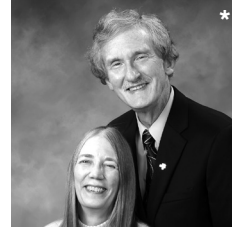
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PROGRAM NOTES

GUSTAV MAHLER

Born July 7, 1860, in Kaliště, Czechia

Died May 18, 1911, in Vienna, Austria

Quartettsatz (*Piano Quartet in A Minor*)

We associate Mahler predominately with his magnificent orchestral music and song cycles, of course, but to omit his one remaining chamber music work from the repertoire is a serious mistake, as you will testify on hearing the seldom-performed A Minor Piano Quartet, also known simply as *Quartettsatz* (quartet movement). The brief, 12-minute work was composed in 1876 when Mahler was still a student at the Vienna Conservatory. Although he composed a number of chamber music works between 1875 and 1883, *Quartettsatz* is the only one to survive. It was not published until 1964.

The piece is often considered fragmentary, probably because it includes an unfinished second-movement scherzo. On hearing the gorgeous and moving first movement, *Nicht zu schnell* (not too fast), however, one could easily understand why Mahler might have wanted to end there since it seems a moment of musical perfection. With just four instruments, the work bears his fine orchestral qualities, yet definitely remains a chamber music work—a great one for sure.

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Born May 12, 1845, in Pamiers, France

Died November 4, 1924, in Paris, France

Piano Quartet No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 15

In light of the contrasting musical styles that flourished within his lifetime—Berlioz to Stravinsky—Fauré remained an ostensible conservative, but at the same time created a bridge between Romanticism and the new music of the first quarter of the 20th century. He escapes any real categorization, however, because of a certain elusiveness that pervades his music. Yet, it has its own form of sophistication and elegance that elicited the highest praise from the severest critics. In a 1924 article in *Musical Quarterly*, Marcel Proust called it “a mixture of lechery and litanies” and in an 1897 letter to Fauré said, “I not only admire, adore, and venerate your music, I have been and still am in love with it.” Debussy compared it to “the gestures of a beautiful woman,” and Albert Roussel said in a 1924 article in the French journal *Comodia*, “Without noise or fuss of meaningless gestures, he pointed the way toward marvelous musical horizons overflowing with freshness and light.” With their graceful beauty, wealth of musical ideas, generous Romanticism, and new sense of harmony, Fauré’s compositions justify all of these comments.

Unlike his French colleagues, Fauré had a dislike of strong colors and dramatic effects which, according to musicologist Jean-Michel Nectoux in his *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life* (Cambridge University Press), he considered “too commonly a form of self-indulgence and a disguise for the absence of ideas.” Fauré, however, seemed to have invented his own sense of powerful color and drama as indicated in his wonderful body of chamber music works. Notably, he was a student of Saint-Saëns and a teacher of Ravel.

Fauré was not without his inner torments despite his success as a composer, as organist at the Madeleine, and as Director of the Paris Conservatoire. By 1916, he was completely deaf and had suffered severe depression. Although his marriage to Marie Femeit remained intact, he had various relationships including the singer Emma Bardac, the composer Adela Maddison, and finally with the pianist Marguerite Hasselmans who remained his companion from 1900 until his death in 1924. One cannot help but think that these situations affected his music, subtly masked though they may have been.

Coming early in Fauré’s career between 1876 and 1879, the C Minor Piano Quartet appears tied to his broken engagement with the beautiful Marianne Viardot, daughter of a French family prominent in operatic circles. The disconsolate Fauré was later comforted when he returned to his first love, the composition of chamber music and specifically the C Minor Quartet.

The definitive opening statement of the first movement dispels our notions of watery Impressionism. Elusive yes, watery no. Thrilling arpeggios and scales announce the pianistic challenge of the work while the string parts signal its melodic gifts. The long-short-long rhythmic pattern lends much intensity to the movement.

The second-movement Scherzo is almost comic except for its delicacy. A quieter trio-like section intervenes before a return to the opening delicacy with much melody for the strings.

While the Adagio might well be an expression of Fauré’s grief, the movement is too infused with light to be simply a statement of loss. One is reminded of the transcendent qualities of his famous *Requiem*.

The last-movement Allegro molto is in ABA sonata form and brings a return of the rhythmic pattern of the first movement, lending the work great cohesiveness. Like a good French novel, the Quartet builds to a passionate climax followed by a quiet recapitulation and, finally, to a brilliant conclusion.

Despite its undeniable dark underpinnings, the work is ultimately celebratory as suggested in the final Allegro molto and seems almost to contradict Fauré’s declaration that he had been reserved all his life and was able to free himself only occasionally. Perhaps the C Minor Quartet is one of those times.

MODEST MUSSORGSKY

Born March 21, 1839, in Karevo, Russia

Died March 28, 1881, in Saint Petersburg, Russia

Pictures at an Exhibition

Mussorgsky's inspirations for *Pictures at an Exhibition* were the paintings of his brilliant young artist and architect friend Victor Hartmann, whose early death at 39 so grieved Mussorgsky that he decided to write a piece in his memory. The 1874 memorial exhibition of Hartmann's work in St. Petersburg gave Mussorgsky impetus for a piano suite. In turn, the solo piano version cried out for the glorious orchestration given it by Maurice Ravel in 1922. Here the Fauré Quartett gives us a new version for piano quartet by Fauré Quartett member Dirk Mommertz.

The 15 movements of the work are punctuated by four "Promenade" sections suggesting the starting and stopping of a walk through an art gallery. To hear the return of the majestic theme lends both integrity and continuity to the work as a whole. "Gnomus" is based on Hartmann's drawing of a toy nutcracker in the form of a gnome with huge jaws, while "The Old Castle" refers to Hartmann's watercolor of an Italian castle with a troubadour standing before it holding a lute. "Tuilleries" or "Dispute between Children at Play" pictures the French garden near the Louvre with, as the title suggests, children at play in it. "Bydlo" is the musical interpretation of a Polish oxcart. The cheeping, chirping scherzo, "Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks," is based on Hartmann's costume designs for the

ballet *Trilbi*. "Samuel Goldberg un Schmuyle" is often retitled as "Two Polish Jews, Rich and Poor" in which a beggar tries to wheedle something out of a rich man on a street corner in a Polish ghetto. "The Market at Limoges" pictures the bustling market in the central France city. In "Catacombs" Hartmann depicts the subterranean tombs of Paris where the architect himself studies a pile of skulls. The "Cum mortuis in lingua mortua" is a darker restatement of the "Promenade" theme and is best explained by its translation from Latin: "With the Dead in a Dead Language." (Mussorgsky's own footnote to the music reads: *The creative spirit of the departed Hartmann leads me to the skulls, calls out to them, and the skulls begin to glow dimly from within.*) "The Hut on Fowl's Legs" portrays a carved clock on the hut of Baba Yaga, a witch of Russian legends, who rides through the air in a mortar that she uses to grind up human bones for food. The final "Great Gate of Kiev" represents Hartmann's drawing of a monumental gate for Tsar Alexander II. Mussorgsky's music evokes a great procession and the ringing of bells. The Promenade theme recurs for the last time, binding together the entire suite. While Hartmann's drawing won the design competition for the gate, the gate itself was never built. Fortunately, the music in all its versions remains.

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FAURÉ QUARTETT

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 and Sven Helbig; appearances in clubs like the Berghain, Cocoon Club, and Le Poisson Rouge in New York; and TV shows in KIKA and Rhapsody in School, 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. The following year, the ensemble was awarded the ECHO Classic for their album *Classic Beyond Borders*, their second award after their recording of Brahms' 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 Fauré Quartett are pioneers in many ways. After they met during their studies in 1995 in Karlsruhe for the 150th anniversary of Gabriel Fauré, 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, Mendelssohn, and pop songs from Peter Gabriel and Steely Dan.

Worldwide tours raise their profile abroad, and international masterclasses are part of their work with students. The members teach at the universities of Berlin and Essen. Moreover, they are artistic directors of Festspielfrühling Rügen as well as 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.