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THE LOS ANGELES PIANO QUARTET

Michi Wiancko, violin
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Program

Piano Quartet in D Major, Op. 23

Antonín Dvorák
(1841-1904)

Allegro moderato
Andantino
Finale: Allegro scherzando

Piano Quartet (2005)

Steven Stucky
(1949-)

Intermission

Quartet in g minor for violin, viola, cello and piano, Op. 45

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)

Allegro molto moderato
Allegro molto
Adagio non troppo
Allegro molto

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The Los Angeles Piano Quartet is a Steinway Ensemble

Antonin Dvorák (1841-1904)

Piano Quartet in D Major, Op. 23

Dvorák was born into Bohemian peasant stock in what we now know as the Czech Republic. His father, a butcher and innkeeper, played the zither at local weddings and dances, and the young Antonin began accompanying him on the violin at an early age.

By age 16, the composer was studying music in Prague, obtaining a sound foundation in the classical tradition, while strongly influenced by the works of Mozart, Schumann, and especially Beethoven. By the 1860s, however, the Czechs were struggling to break free of Hapsburg rule from Vienna, and a wave of nationalism swept through the country. One of the most influential composers linked with this movement was Bedrich Smetana; he had a powerful influence on Dvorák, who realized that the tunes he had learned from his father could be a source of musical inspiration.

In 1875, Dvorák, employed as a violist in the National Theater of Prague, was awarded the Austrian State Prize for young, talented, and impoverished artists. He was thus stimulated to compose a number of chamber works – including the Op. 23 Piano Quartet.

The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, begins with a wistful and nostalgic theme stated in the cello, and unfolds in a languid manner. The lyrical second theme contains an augmentation of a triplet figure heard earlier in the movement, which serves to lead the musical development to its climax. In the coda, the two themes are vigorously combined.

The b-minor *Andantino* is in variation form with a mournful main theme, though the fourth variation, diverging into the key of E-flat Major, helps dispel some of the sense of sadness. The movement ends with a plaintive coda, so powerful in its melodic intensity that it may be seen as the climactic moment of the quartet.

The last section uses a novel device, combining a scherzo and finale into one movement. It is planned in two parts, each with its own independent theme; the motif of the *Allegro scherzando* in 3/8 time moving in a quiet dance, while the *Allegro agitato* in 4/4 time has the character of an undeveloped finale. Both sections flow naturally into each other, with the waltz-like scherzando being taken over by the agitato in a rousing jig, bringing into play once again the Czech folk heritage that informs so much of Dvorak's work.

-- C. Graves

Steven Stucky (1949)

Piano Quartet (2005)

When I was a young and enthusiastic if not very skilled violist, I loved nothing better than to play chamber music, any time, any place, with anybody who would have me. Thus I have carried that repertoire around with me ever since. Forty years later, I still can't live without the two piano quartets by Mozart or the three by Brahms, but lodged almost as near my heart are later examples, too: both Fauré piano quartets (yes, even No. 2), and great twentieth-century piano quartets by composers like Copland, Palmer, Hartke, and Weir. Attempting my own first work in this medium at the comparatively late age of fifty-five, therefore, has stirred conflicting emotions: intimidation on the one hand at the idea of "competing" against the masters, but on the other hand a feeling of come home to familiar, much-loved surroundings.

My Piano Quartet is in one continuous movement, but it falls into several sections easily noted by ear, even on first acquaintance. The raw musical material is the same throughout — think of the piece as a kind of variations set — but stark changes in tempo and character define a series of connected mini-movements. At the outset, a short allegro (marked *Risoluto*) announces the thematic material and serves notice that bell-like sonorities (first in the piano, later in the strings) will be crucial. The piano continues to imitate bells in the slow movement (*Lento, molto cantabile*) that follows, against which the strings sing lyrically. A fast interlude (*Allegro*) reverses the roles: bell sounds in the strings as a backdrop for spiky interjections by the piano. This leads quickly to even faster music, a full-fledged scherzo (*Scherzando e molto leggero*) featuring breathless rhythmic hiccups and chordal passage-work that flirt with memories of pop music; the oily trio (*Comodo, non affrettato*) might allude to pop memories, too, but of a different sort. The quartet concludes with a second slow movement, with the piano now cast as soloist, and a brisk coda recalling the clangorous bell sounds of the opening. The form of my Piano Quartet, with its several linked sections and alternations between fast and slow, is thus a sort of "remake" of a work I wrote for mixed septet twenty years earlier, *Boston Fancies* — though the two pieces sound nothing alike. It is their skeletons that are similar, not their skins.

The work was composed between November 2004 and January 2005. It was commissioned by the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music and first performed on March 13, 2005, by the Los Angeles Piano Quartet at the Tucson Winter Chamber Music Festival.

-program note by the composer, Steven Stucky

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Quartet in g minor, Op. 45

Fauré was born in Pamiers, Ariège, Midi-Pyrénées, to Toussaint-Honoré Fauré and Marie-Antoinette-Hélène Lalène-Laprade. Fauré was sent to live with a foster-nurse for four years. At the age of nine he was sent to study at the École Niedermeyer, a school which prepared church organists and choir directors in Paris, and continued there for eleven years. He studied with several prominent French musicians, including Camille Saint-Saëns, who introduced him to the music of several contemporary composers, including Robert Schumann and Franz Liszt.

In 1870 Fauré enlisted in the army and took part in the action to raise the Siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War. During the Paris Commune he stayed at Rambouillet and in Switzerland, where he taught at the transported École Niedermeyer. When he returned to Paris in October of 1871, he was appointed organist at Saint-Sulpice, and became a regular at Saint-Saëns' salon. Here he met many prominent Parisian musicians and with those he met there and at the salon of Pauline Garcia-Viardot he formed the Société Nationale de Musique.

In 1874 Fauré stopped working at Saint-Sulpice and began to fill in at the Église de la Madeleine for Saint-Saëns during his many absences. When Saint-Saëns retired in 1877 Fauré became choirmaster. In the same year he became engaged to Marianne Viardot, daughter of Pauline, but the engagement was later broken off by Marianne. Following this disappointment he travelled to Weimar, where he met Liszt, and Cologne in order to see productions of Richard Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Fauré admired Wagner, but was one of few composers of his generation not to come under his influence.

In 1883 Fauré married Marie Fremiet, with whom he had two sons. In order to support his family Fauré spent most of his time in organising daily services at the Église de la Madeleine and teaching piano and harmony lessons. He only had time to compose during the summers. He earned almost no money from his compositions because his publisher bought them, copyright and all, for 50 francs each. During this period Gabriel Fauré wrote several large scale works, in addition to many piano pieces and songs, but he destroyed many of them after a few performances, only retaining a few movements in order to re-use motives.

During his youth Fauré was very cheerful, but his broken engagement combined with his perceived lack of musical success led to bouts of depression which he described as "spleen". In the 1890s, however, his fortunes reversed somewhat. He had a successful trip to Venice where he met with friends and wrote several works. In 1892 he became the inspector of the music conservatories in the French provinces, which meant he no longer had to teach amateur students. In 1896 he finally became chief organist at the Église de la Madeleine, and also succeeded Jules Massenet as composition instructor at the Conservatoire de Paris. At this post he taught many important French composers, including Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger.

From 1903-1921 Fauré was a critic for *Le Figaro*. In 1905 he succeeded Théodore Dubois as director of the Paris Conservatory. He made many changes at the Conservatoire, leading to the resignation of a number of faculty members. This position meant that he was better off in terms of money, and he also became much more widely known as a composer.

Fauré was elected to the Institut de France in 1909, but at the same time he broke with the old stodgy Société Nationale de Musique, and supported the rogue group which formed out of those ejected from the Société which was mainly comprised of his own students. Unfortunately, during this time Fauré's hearing began to weaken. Sound not only became fainter, it was also distorted, so that pitches on the low and high ends of his hearing sounded like other pitches.

His responsibilities at the Conservatoire, combined with his hearing loss, meant that Fauré's output was greatly reduced during this period. During World War I Fauré remained in France. In 1920, at the age of 75, he retired from the Conservatoire. In this year he also received the Grand-Croix of the Légion d'Honneur, an honor rare for a musician. He suffered from poor health, partially brought on by heavy smoking. Despite this, he remained available to young composers, including members of Les Six, who were devoted to him.

The g minor Quartet, written in 1885 and 1886, has great rhythmic drive. With the Second Violin Sonata it is the only work where Fauré used the fashionable cyclical method of composition: the same themes are used, transmuted, in different movements. But unlike Franck's conscious thematic quotations, Fauré's themes generate their own organic transformations: the unity is felt rather than proclaimed. The first theme of the first movement (reputedly connected with the sounds of a forge in his youth at Montgauzy) is built up of short nuclear cells that are self-generating. The Scherzo features some of the devices of the first Quartet such as pizzicato, but here there is a new, fantastic, almost violent, streak. The Adagio opens with a viola solo that could not have been written for any other instrument. The mood of reverie was subconsciously reminiscent, according to a letter to his wife, of the evening bells of Cadirac from his childhood: the later section has a typically rocking movement so often featured in his *Barcarolles* for piano. The Finale is a driving, energetic waltz. The Quartet belongs to the same year as another masterpiece, the *Requiem*.

Gabriel Fauré died in Paris from pneumonia in 1924. He was given a state funeral at the Église de la Madeleine and is buried in the Cimetière de Passy in Paris.