



# LOS ANGELES PIANO QUARTET

**Yehonatan Berick**, violin  
**Katherine Murdock**, viola  
**Steven Doane**, cello  
**Xak Bjerken**, piano

2:30 PM, February 12, 2012  
Faye Spanos Concert Hall  
In cooperation with Pacific's  
Conservatory of Music

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## *Program*

**Quartet in E-flat Major, K.493 (1786)**

Allegro  
Larghetto  
Allegretto

**Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART**

(1756–1791)

**Piano Quartet (2004-05)**

Allegro—Lento, molto cantabile—Allegro—  
Scherzando e molto leggero—Comodo, non affrettato

**Steve STUCKY**

(b. 1949)

*—intermission—*

**Quartet No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 45 (1885-86)**

Allegro molto moderato  
Scherzo: Allegro molto  
Adagio non troppo  
Finale: Allegro molto

**Gabriel FAURÉ**

(1845–1924)

## Artists

Bold, exhilarating performances and exploration of interesting repertoire have earned the Los Angeles Piano Quartet international stature as "the premier ensemble of its kind." Since its 1977 debut in Los Angeles, the ensemble has been in demand for appearances on concert series across North America. The Quartet has performed in many of the great halls of Europe, including Hamburg's Musikhalle and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. Its commissions have contributed significantly to the repertoire for piano quartet, and its recordings have won wide acclaim.

The vibrant ensemble has been repeatedly re-engaged by major chamber music presenters, and hailed by the public and press in New York, Washington, Detroit, St. Louis, Chicago, Dallas, St. Paul, Phoenix, Houston, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The Quartet has been a popular guest on Minnesota Public Radio's "St. Paul Sunday" and New York's "Live from WNCN," and has been featured at the Bermuda and Tucson Festivals and the Eugene and Carmel Bach Festivals.

Following an impressive international debut at the Cheltenham Festival in England, the LA Piano Quartet was engaged for an extensive tour of Europe. Highlights of subsequent European tours have included concerts at the Hamburg Musikhalle, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and Rome's Santa Cecilia.

The Los Angeles Piano Quartet has been an active force in the creation of new works for piano quartet. The Quartet has commissioned works from such prominent contemporary composers as Stephen Hartke, Gerard Schurmann, and Pulitzer Prize-winner Steven Stucky, whose piano quartet had its premiere performance by the LAPQ at the 2005 Tucson Festival. The ensemble has been supported in this activity by the National Endowment for the Arts and Chamber Music America.

## Program

At our last concert, we discussed how the piano determines the style of the chamber music that includes it, contrasting the close texture and integration of the string quartet with the

difficulties of balancing the instruments of the piano trio. While the piano quartet may be a combination of piano with any three other instruments,<sup>1</sup> today we have the traditional instrumentation comprising a string trio—a violin, viola and cello—plus piano. The addition of the viola enhances the string sonorities and facilitates integration and balance of the four instruments compared to the piano trio. Contrast today's performances with our last to hear how these three composers have used the addition of viola to enhance the piano trio format.

### **Mozart—Quartet in E-flat, K.493**

A substantial amount of keyboard and string music was composed during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. What this music had in common was that the keyboard served as bass continuo to support the solo string lines. Haydn wrote no piano quartets. When the Mannheim composers wrote for piano, it was either piano sonatas or piano concertos. So Mozart's two piano quartets completed in October 1785 and June 1786 were the first to treat the four instruments as equals...well, almost the first!

In 1785 the 15-year-old Beethoven was a member of the Electoral orchestra in Bonn, where he found time to produce his first chamber music compositions: three piano quartets in which the four instruments are also equals. These works were published posthumously and because Mozart was entrenched in Vienna at the time, it is extremely unlikely that either man saw or knew of the other's work. It is hard to ignore the probability that the two composers, one a boy of 15, the other a mature genius of 30, developed this new medium simultaneously and independently.

Mozart was originally contracted to provide three piano quartets, but when the first, K.478 in G minor, arrived, Hoffmeister declared it too difficult for amateur musicians to perform<sup>2</sup> and the

contract was canceled with Mozart keeping the money already paid. Wolfie went on to compose a second quartet—the piece we hear today—but never completed the third.

The opening Allegro begins with a dark, dramatic, and fierce tutti that little prepares us for the several lyrical passages over piano accompaniment in quavers that round out the first subject. These lyrical themes are important because Mozart uses them to create a fascinating dialog among the strings in the development. Listen for the second theme in the piano after two strong chords because this motto appears at least twenty times in the development in various keys, dynamics, and combinations of instruments.

The Larghetto is crafted with a delicate and light touch, restrained and formal, even for Mozart, and of exquisite beauty. Listen for the distinguishing feature of echoes of almost every phrase. The overall effect is great inner tension but with a tender and wistful feeling.

Mozart usually composed completely in his head without preliminary sketches. But for the final Allegretto, there are two extant preparatory versions of the principle theme. Mozart's aim seems to be to create a conclusion that is mostly light in character but with dramatic strokes. You will hear virtuosic running passages in quavers in the piano, especially in the central episode, which comprise the development. The second and first themes return and the piece ends with a coda replete with more running scales in the keyboard.

### **Stucky—Piano Quartet**

Stucky's piano quartet, commissioned by the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music and composed between November 2004 and January 2005, was premiered on March 13, 2005 by the Los Angeles Piano Quartet at the Tucson Winter Chamber Music Festival.

The composer has this to say about the work: "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

<sup>1</sup> Webern's *Quartet* for piano, violin, clarinet and tenor saxophone, Hindemith's *Quartet* and Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* both for piano, violin, cello and clarinet, and Franz Berwald's *Quartet* for piano, horn, clarinet and bassoon

<sup>2</sup> *Galant* music suitable for amateurs to perform comprised the bulk of profitable music publication at the time

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 coming home to familiar, much-loved surroundings.”

Even though Stucky's Quartet is in one continuous movement, you should easily detect, even on first listen, that it is naturally comprised of a number of clear divisions. You may think of the piece as a set of variations with unambiguous changes in tempo and character defining the series of linked segments.

To begin, a resolute allegro states the theme and defines the bell-like resonances (first in piano then later strings) that will be key to the piece. Listen in the slow segment that follows for the strings singing lyrically against the piano that continues to imitate bells. Next is a fast interlude where the roles of piano and strings reverse: you will hear sharp interpolations by the piano into the bell-like milieu provided by the strings. This is followed by an even faster scherzo in which remembrances of popular tunes trifle with recurring interruptions over passage-work highlighting chordal structure. The piece ends with a second slow movement in which the piano is soloist, then a hurried coda in which you again hear the resonant bell sounds from the opening.

The composer describes the form of his *Piano Quartet* as “several linked sections and alternations between fast and slow, as 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.”

### **Fauré—Quartet No. 2, Op. 45**

Gabriel Fauré, born in the south of France, studied in Paris at the École Niedermeyer, where he received an unusually broad musical education in three respects that set him apart: a

thorough understanding of Renaissance and Baroque music; familiarity with Bach and Beethoven; and a substantial awareness of the “dangerous moderns” Schumann, Liszt, and Wagner. His introduction to Wagner was by way of the young Saint-Saëns, who was professor of piano at the school. Fauré himself went on to become one of the most distinguished teachers of the *fin de siècle* era: his students included Ravel, Enesco and Nadia Boulanger.

French music in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was divided into decidedly politicized factions, but to a certain extent Fauré's oeuvre remains remote, sometimes unnoticed and misjudged. Fauré's strong suit is in the realms of song and chamber music; many of his works in both categories are treasured by performers and probably already familiar to you (the First Piano Quartet is one of his most frequently performed compositions).

It is strange that the Second Quartet, one of his finest works, is heard relatively rarely. Robert Orledge, Fauré's biographer, considers the writing of this piece to mark Fauré's attainment of full artistic maturity. All we know of its origin is Fauré's explanation of his inspiration: “In the slow movement of my Second Quartet, I recalled a peal of bells we used to hear of an evening drifting over to Montgauzy from a village called Cadirac whenever the wind blew from the west” and that it was premiered with Fauré at the piano in a concert of the Société Nationale on January 22, 1887. Although all details are lacking, we must suppose that he completed it the preceding year or two following the successful performance of his violin sonata and first piano quartet at the Société Nationale.

The quartet is the only major Fauré work that experiments with cyclic form, a technique of musical creation in which unity is achieved by using a theme, melody, or thematic material in more than one movement—an extremely popular approach at the time and something to listen for throughout.

The piece opens with a broad unison string theme whose initial octave leap is followed by a series of short, tightly compressed motives. The piano repeats the main theme leading to the viola's soft, lyrical second subject. The main

theme returns briefly serving as a transition to the third melody, an effortlessly curving theme offered by cello and viola in octaves. The development section deals with permutations of the main theme first and then with the curving theme. At this point, the principal subject returns as a plangent unison and marks the start of the recapitulation. The movement is brought to a dying close by the viola singing its expressive subsidiary theme in the apprehensive coda.

The Scherzo, according to Jean-Michel Nectoux in his study of Fauré, “casts a spell in its headlong career through a night illuminated by mysterious flashes: we are reminded of Schubert's *Erl Koenig*, Berlioz's *Faust* and Franck's *Accursed Huntsman*.” The movement is possessed of an intense, frantic, or wild force that is uncommon in Fauré's writing. This demonic energy is created by alternating two contrasting themes: first, a restless and rhythmically uneasy piano melody of scale steps alongside a background of plucked strings; secondly, a suave string motive derived from the opening movement's second theme. There is a quiet reprise.

The third movement is a serene adagio inspired by those village bells, of which Aaron Copland wrote: “Its beauty is truly classic if we define classicism as intensity on a background of calm.” You will hear calm that is remote from the intense emotions of the other movements, in no way sharing their musical substance.

The finale, thematically rich and somewhat protracted and rambling, revisits the fervent vitality of the opening movement. The strings introduce strong triplet rhythms as a main theme over a restive piano accompaniment. Then you can hear further balancing thematic concepts: a syncopated, lyrical motif in the piano; a piano theme in hammered chords; and a smooth, open melody in long notes in the viola and cello. Listen for the opening triplet motive in the development followed by the four themes of the exposition in the recapitulation. All of this leads the Quartet to its sunny, victorious close in a brilliant coda.

## FIFTY-SIXTH SEASON

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- The use of cameras and recording devices of any kind is forbidden.
- There is no smoking in the lobby or auditorium.
- Please turn off cellular phones and disengage audible alarms on pagers and watches.
- Students are admitted free on a space-available basis.
- Concert programs are subject to change without notice.
- Seating is unreserved for the current Season.
- Contributions, including memorials, are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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General Admission: \$25

Pacific/Delta Faculty & Staff: \$10

Students with ID card: Free

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