

## South Bay Chamber Music Society

April 27 & 29, 2018

Steven Vanhauwaert, piano, Movses Pogossian, violin,

Michele Zukovsky, clarinet, Antonio Lysy, cello

Program Notes by Boglárka Kiss, D.M.A., and Christina Jung A Kim, B.M.

### Suite for Violin, Clarinet and Piano, Op. 157b (1936)

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974)

French modernist composer and educator Darius Milhaud stands out in the history of music not only for embracing jazz, Brazilian music, and polytonality, but also for having written for many different combination of instruments.

Born in Marseille, Milhaud studied at the *Paris Conservatoire* and was one of *Les Six*, a group of six French composers whose output is often seen as an alternative to the German Romantic style of Wagner and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century direction that Debussy and Ravel represent.

In his mid-20s, Milhaud worked for two years as the secretary to poet and dramatist Paul Claudel, who also served as the French ambassador to Brazil. The country's rich musical culture left a lasting mark on Milhaud's musical style. Soon after, the young composer visited the United States in 1922, exposing him to jazz, another musical culture that left an impact on his subsequent musical output.

The Nazi invasion of France forced Milhaud, who was of Jewish heritage, and his family to move to the United States. Milhaud built a substantial and eclectic teaching career here: Aside from his teaching position at Mills College in Oakland, California, he was on the faculty of the Aspen Music Festival and School, and counted Dave Brubeck and Burt Bacharach among his composition students. To the latter, he famously told, "*Don't be afraid of writing something people can remember and whistle. Don't ever feel discomfited by a melody.*"



Milhaud listening to Dave Brubeck play the piano (1940s)

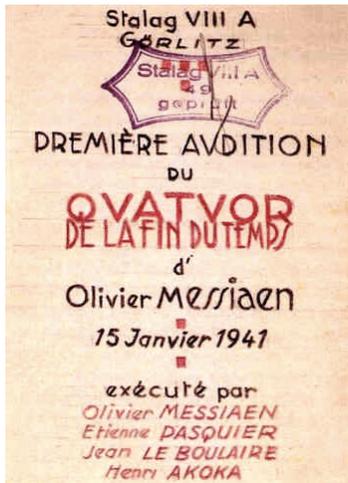
Milhaud's modernist aesthetic is evident in his *Suite*: He uses the Baroque dance suite as his structural vehicle, but he infuses each movement with a variety of styles and musical ideas. Milhaud's affinity for Brazilian music is most evident in the opening movement, with its syncopated rhythms and strong articulations. In the second movement, Milhaud showcases his ease with imitative textures and polytonal techniques. The playful third movement is akin to a folk dance, featuring the clarinet and the violin in a sort of musical joke. After a slow introduction, the finale leads the listener to a bright, jazzy tune, which closes the entire work.

To listen to a rendition of this work, please visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIJIDgZRQ5Q>

## Quartet for the End of Time (1940)

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

Olivier Messiaen is one of the foremost composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, known for his innovative and complex compositional techniques, his love of birdsong, and non-western musical techniques. He was also an accomplished keyboardist and professor at the *Paris Conservatoire*, and a faithful Catholic who held the organist post at the *Sainte-Trinité* church in Paris for over 60 years.



While serving in an army hospital, Messiaen, a Catholic, and two musician friends, a cellist and a clarinetist, were captured by the Nazis in 1940, and were sent on a harrowing journey to a German prisoner-of-war camp. There, they met a fellow French musician, a violinist, as well as a German prison guard who supported the musicians' artistic efforts by providing them with instruments, paper and pencil, and even a room in which to compose. Messiaen composed a trio for violin, clarinet and cello, and later completed the *Quartet for the End of Time*, which premiered in the prison camp in 1941. Inspired by his own dream of the Apocalypse, with angels announcing the end of time, Messiaen inscribed the work with a quote from the Book of Revelation: "In homage to the Angel of the Apocalypse, who raises his hand to the heavens and says, 'There will be no more Time.'"

A fellow-inmate's program announcement, to which an official stamp was affixed: "*Stalag VIII A 49 geprüft* [approved]."

The piece, a contemplative praise for eternity and redemption, features many unusual characteristics. The combination of violin, clarinet, cello and piano was quite unique. Only four of the quartet's eight movements were written with the quartet in mind (movements 1, 2, 6, 7), while the others were earlier works with varied instrumentation: Movement 3, for solo clarinet, was written during the musicians' journey to the prison camp, movements 5 and 8 are reworkings of earlier compositions for cello and piano, and violin and piano, respectively, and movement 4 is the short Trio Messiaen had composed in the prison camp before embarking on the quartet.

True to its title, Messiaen seemingly suspends time—musical time, that is—in several of the work's movements. He achieves this by using palindromic rhythms, obscuring regular meter by adding or subtracting note values, and using ostinato patterns that rarely line up among the instruments.

The opening movement introduces the listener to the sounds of paradise, with birdsong in the clarinet and violin, and complex isorhythmic patterns in the cello and piano parts. The second movement ushers in the angel who announces the end of time: The angel's presence in the opening and the close of the movement surrounds the eternal stillness of heaven, represented in the middle. Movement five is the first of two musical prayers, reflecting on the eternal world of Jesus. The cello's reverent melody is infinitely slow, encouraged by gentle piano chords, leaving the listener with the quiet sense of infinite yearning.

To hear a performance of this work, please click this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6id-Q0kWuLA>

## F-A-E Sonata for Violin and Piano (1853)

Albert Dietrich (1829-1908), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Musicians have been using musical cryptograms—sequences of musical notes that may refer to extra-musical meaning—for centuries. Such cryptograms emerged soon after the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when musicians assigned letter names to notes, making “secret messages” possible in music notation. One famous musical cryptogram is the “Bach motif,” used by Johann Sebastian Bach himself as well as countless later composers. In this cryptogram, the letters B-A-C-H are assigned to their corresponding note names in German (Bb-A-C-B), forming the foundation of the musical context.

The F-A-E Sonata for Violin and Piano includes a cryptogram, referring to the personal motto of one of the most significant violinists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hungarian Joseph Joachim (1831-1907). Joachim, known for being “restrained, pure, antivirtuosic, expressing the music rather than the performer,” adopted the phrase “*Frei aber einsam* [free but lonely]” as his personal motto, a practice common among 19<sup>th</sup> century artists.

Joachim had close personal and professional ties to the likes of Mendelssohn, Liszt, Robert and Clara Schumann, and Brahms. To surprise Joachim for his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, Robert Schumann suggested the idea of a violin and piano sonata written by himself and his young protégés, Albert Dietrich and Johannes Brahms. Dietrich composed the first movement, Schumann wrote the second and fourth movements, with Brahms contributing the third. Throughout the work, the musical notes F, A, E serve as a recurring motivic element, connecting the acronym of Joachim’s motto with the work’s musical material.

The composers presented Joachim with the sonata at an evening gathering, and challenged him to identify the author of each movement. Joachim sight-read the work with Clara Schumann on the piano, assigning each movement to the correct composer with ease. The complete work was not published until 1935, with individual movements appearing in other compositions (Schumann: Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 3), or as standalone pieces (Brahms: Sonatensatz).



Clockwise from top left: Dietrich, Brahms, Schumann, Joachim

Please follow this link to hear the complete work:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYUk7Su9RuM>

## Trio in A minor for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano, Op. 114 (1891)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Two months before his 58<sup>th</sup> birthday, Johannes Brahms heard clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907) for the first time in Meiningen. So taken by Mühlfeld's artistry, Brahms emerged from retirement to write some of his greatest masterpieces, twenty short piano works, which have become a staple in pianists' repertoire, and four chamber works involving the clarinet: two sonatas, the beloved Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet, and this Trio.

Brahms composed the *Clarinet Trio in A Minor* during the summery days of 1891. The piece was premiered in Berlin with great success a few months later, with Brahms himself at the piano, Mühlfeld on clarinet, and another significant friend of Brahms, Robert Hausmann, on cello.

In the opening *Allegro*, with no introduction, the cello announces the opening somber theme, and the clarinet closes the phrase. After the unrest that ensues, again it is the cello that expresses the 2<sup>nd</sup> theme in the relative C Major. The conversational and stark minor atmosphere that greets the listener from the outset remains for the rest of the movements. It is in the second movement, *Adagio*, where Brahms showcases the delicate and lyrical qualities of the clarinet, exploiting the instrument's range, dynamic palette, and agility. For a breath of fresh air, the third movement, *Andante grazioso*, is a beautiful and graceful waltz. And by contrast, the finale is a muscular piece with more than a tinge of the gypsy style which had fascinated Brahms so much throughout his life.

A week before his death from liver cancer, Brahms had one last lunch with Mühlfeld and other close friends, and referred to Mühlfeld as "my dear clarinetist/nightingale" (*Fraülein Klarinette/Nachtigall*).



Richard Mühlfeld



Mühlfeld and Brahms

To hear the Johannes Brahms Trio perform this piece, please click here:

[https://youtu.be/Nya0zpMI\\_Xk](https://youtu.be/Nya0zpMI_Xk)

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