



CONCERT PROGRAM V:

# French Luminaries

**JULY 28 AND 29**

Friday, July 28

7:30 p.m., Stent Family Hall, Menlo School

Saturday, July 29

6:00 p.m., The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton

**SPECIAL THANKS**

*Music@Menlo dedicates these performances to the following individuals and organizations with gratitude for their generous support:*

July 28: Libby and Craig Heimark

July 29: The Martin Family Foundation

**JEAN-MARIE LECLAIR** (1697–1764)

*Sonata in e minor for Two Violins, op. 3, no. 5* (1730)

*Allegro ma poco*

*Gavotte: Andante grazioso*

*Presto*

Chad Hoopes, Arnaud Sussmann, violins

**EUGÈNE YSAÏE** (1858–1931)

*Rêve d'enfant (A Child's Dream), op. 14* (ca. 1895–1900)

Arnaud Sussmann, violin; Hyeeyeon Park, piano

**CÉSAR FRANCK** (1822–1890)

*Violin Sonata in A Major* (1886)

*Allegretto ben moderato*

*Allegro*

*Recitativo-Fantasia*

*Allegretto poco mosso*

Arnaud Sussmann, violin; Orion Weiss, piano

**INTERMISSION**

**PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

As violinists from the Baroque period throughout the nineteenth century nurtured Germany's violin tradition, generations of French virtuosi likewise cultivated a distinct national style. Concert Program V begins with the Sonata in e minor for Two Violins by Jean-Marie Leclair, the first great violinist of the French school, who came to be celebrated as “the French Corelli.” Over a century later, the Belgian violinist, composer, and conductor Eugène Ysaÿe, who combined Joachim's intellect with Paganini's flair, would set listeners aflame with his intrepid approach to the instrument. In addition to composing his own masterpieces, Ysaÿe served as inspiration through his brilliant playing for composers from César Franck and Gabriel Fauré to Claude Debussy.

**CLAUDE DEBUSSY** (1862–1918)

*Petite suite for Piano, Four Hands* (1886–1889)

*En bateau*

*Cortège*

*Menuet*

*Ballet*

Gilbert Kalish, Hyeeyeon Park, piano

**GABRIEL FAURÉ** (1845–1924)

*Piano Quartet no. 1 in c minor, op. 15* (1876–1879, rev. 1883)

*Allegro molto moderato*

*Scherzo: Allegro vivo*

*Adagio*

*Allegro molto*

Wu Han, piano; Chad Hoopes, violin; Paul Neubauer, viola; Clive Greensmith, cello

Henri Le Sidaner (1862–1939). *Sunday*, 1898, oil on canvas. Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai, France.  
Photo credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

# Program Notes: French Luminaries

Notes on the program by Patrick Castillo

## JEAN-MARIE LECLAIR

(Born May 10, 1697, Lyon, France; died October 22, 1764, Paris)

### Sonata in e minor for Two Violins, op. 3, no. 5

**Composed:** 1730

**Published:** 1730, Paris

**Other works from this period:** Twelve Violin Sonatas, op. 2 (Book Two) (ca. 1728); Six Trio Sonatas, op. 4 (ca. 1731–1733); Twelve Violin Sonatas, op. 5 (Book Three) (1734)

**Approximate duration:** 10 minutes

As the succession of instrumental innovators from Corelli to Viotti established a proud Italian tradition of violin playing and virtuosi from Louis Spohr and Ferdinand David to Joseph Joachim established a German school, so did a French violin school emerge in the eighteenth century. The foundational figure of this French school was the violinist and composer Jean-Marie Leclair.

Born in Lyon in 1697, Leclair was both a competent violinist and dancer by his late adolescence. In 1722, he worked as a ballet master in Turin, where he began taking violin lessons with Corelli's student Giovanni Battista Somis. The following year, Leclair published his Opus 1, a set of twelve violin sonatas. The originality of his musical imagination and his ingenuity in approaching the violin were immediately evident. One contemporary critic wrote, "Leclair is the first person who, without imitating anything, created beautiful and new things which he could call his own."

Leclair's distinct style was on public display in 1728 on a trip to Kassel: he performed at court alongside Locatelli, the Italian master whose *L'arte del violino* stood among the day's most influential volumes of violin music. Leclair and Locatelli's performance was seen as an exhibition of the French versus the Italian style; the organist and composer Jacob Wilhelm Lustig remarked that Leclair played "like an angel," with a beautiful tone and rhythmic freedom, while Locatelli played "like a devil"—with a harsh sound and heavy-handed virtuosity.

Leclair's music reflects a full absorption of Corelli's language, modified to appeal to French tastes—an aesthetic descendant of the harpsichord music of François Couperin and the court dances of Jean-Baptiste Lully. His Opus 3 Six Sonatas for Two Violins, published two years after his performance with Locatelli, illustrate the "angelic" quality of his art. The fifth sonata of the set, despite its dour key of e minor, is a three-movement study in nimble elegance. The opening *Allegro ma poco* is declamatory yet refined. The second movement, a delicate *gavotte*, demonstrates a similar duality, managing gracefulness and dolor. The sonata concludes with a light-on-its-feet *Presto* finale.

## EUGÈNE YSAÏE

(Born July 16, 1858, Liège, Belgium; died May 12, 1931, Brussels)

### Rêve d'enfant (A Child's Dream), op. 14

**Composed:** ca. 1895–1900

**Published:** 1901

**Dedication:** "À mon p'tit Antoine" (Ysaïe's youngest son)

**Other works from this period:** Two Mazurkas for Violin and Piano, op. 10 (ca. 1893); *Poème élégiaque* for Violin and Orchestra, op. 12 (ca. 1895); *Chant d'hiver* for Violin and Orchestra, op. 15 (1902)

**Approximate duration:** 5 minutes

In 1874, the sixteen-year-old Belgian violinist (and burgeoning composer) Eugène Ysaïe received a scholarship that enabled him to study with Henryk

Wieniawski in Brussels and subsequently with Henry Vieuxtemps in Paris. In addition to exposing him to a bustling concert life, Ysaïe's studies in Paris afforded him the opportunity to cultivate important artistic contacts, including the city's most celebrated composers, Camille Saint-Saëns, César Franck, and Gabriel Fauré, as well as the rising generation of Vincent d'Indy, Ernest Chausson, and others. Around this time, Ysaïe moreover enjoyed the support of Anton Rubinstein, who arranged for the young virtuoso's first appearances in Russia, Hungary, and Scandinavia, thus helping to kick-start his international career.

His rich pedigree groomed Ysaïe to inherit the mantle of a French violin lineage that had increased in stature over the previous century; in Ysaïe's care, this essentially Romantic tradition entered into a new era of instrumental virtuosity. In this respect, his accomplishments in the realm of violin playing are analogous to the contributions of his generation's leading composers—Franck, Fauré, and others, who bridged Romanticism and modernism. (Indeed, Ysaïe became a vital figure in contemporary music, premiering numerous major compositions dedicated to him, including Franck's Violin Sonata, Chausson's *Concert* and *Poème*, and Debussy's String Quartet. When neuritis and diabetes curtailed his abilities as a performer, Ysaïe turned increasingly to conducting; he served as Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra from 1918 to 1922, where he continued to champion modern French music.)

The greatest violinist of the generation following Paganini, Ysaïe in turn had a profound influence on the subsequent class of great virtuosi, including Enescu, Flesch, Szigeti, and Kreisler. "He abandoned the old style of Joachim, Wieniawski, Sarasate, and Auer," writes musicologist Michel Stockhem, "for one that combined rigorous technique and forceful sound with creative freedom on the part of the interpreter...He also represented a synthesis of the qualities of Franco-Belgian violin playing before virtuosity became an end in itself."

Meanwhile, Ysaïe developed into an accomplished composer in his own right, as most famously manifested in his Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, op. 27. These sonatas illustrate Ysaïe's approach to the principle of virtuosity: indeed, not an end in itself but a technique to be deployed in the service of musical expression. His *Rêve d'enfant*, op. 14—a *bagatelle* overshadowed by the solo sonatas—is dedicated "À mon p'tit Antoine," Ysaïe's youngest son. It is a beguiling lullaby in gently rocking 6/8 time and featuring a simple violin melody, played *piano, dolce*—far short of the technical wizardry of the solo sonatas but revealing, in exquisite distillation, their underlying lyrical soul.

## CÉSAR FRANCK

(Born December 10, 1822, Liège, Belgium; died November 8, 1890, Paris)

### Violin Sonata in A Major

**Composed:** 1886

**Published:** 1886

**Dedication:** Composed as a wedding present to Eugène Ysaïe

**First performance:** December 31, 1887, Société Nationale

**Other works from this period:** *Prélude, Choral et Fugue* for Solo Piano (1884); *Danse lente* for Solo Piano (1885); String Quartet in D Major (1889); Symphony in d minor (1886–1888)

**Approximate duration:** 28 minutes

With the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 came a marked shift in Europe's balance of power. The Second French Empire under the reign of Napoleon III collapsed. The war brought about a newly unified Germany, which would claim the French territory of Alsace-Lorraine until the end of the First World War. This course of events inspired deep nationalist sentiments throughout France—a spirit that would be reflected as much in the country's

\*Bolded terms are defined in the glossary, which begins on page 92.

musical activity as in other cultural spheres. In 1871, one year after France's military defeat, the Société Nationale de Musique was formed; three years later, the French conductor and violinist Édouard Colonne founded the Concerts de l'Association Artistique. For several decades leading to this point, lyric opera had dominated France's musical life; now, these fledgling organizations spurred a flurry of instrumental composition, laying the foundation for a strong tradition of French chamber music towards the turn of the twentieth century. This charge was led by some of France's most prominent composers, including Camille Saint-Saëns, Ernest Chausson, and César Franck.

Franck represents an important dimension of France's musical climate in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In addition to his role in the renewal of French instrumental composition, Franck was one of his generation's great musical pedagogues, cherished by his students at the Paris Conservatoire as a surrogate father figure. He taught organ at the Conservatoire, but owing to his greater emphasis on counterpoint and improvisation rather than on keyboard technique, he was widely regarded as the academy's premier composition professor.

Above all, Franck guided a generation of French composers wrestling with the influence of Richard Wagner on Europe's musical landscape. Wagner's revolutionary philosophies on art and music in the late nineteenth century seduced many young composers, who strove to emulate his stylistic innovations; others, such as Claude Debussy, developed a strong ambivalence towards Wagner and regarded him as a symbol of the prevailing German aesthetic—a backdrop against which to define their own language.

Franck's fascination with Wagner is evident in his *au courant* approach to **harmony** and form. But rather than reverently mimicking Wagner, Franck absorbed that influence and integrated it with the fundamental values of the Classical era to ultimately serve his own musical vision. John Trevitt and Joël-Marie Fauquet have noted in Franck's late chamber works “a balance between his inherent emotionalism and his preoccupation with counterpoint and Classical forms...[a] double allegiance to the Viennese tradition on the one hand and to Liszt and Wagner on the other.” The result of this duality is a compelling and individual voice that pointed French music towards the twentieth century.

Franck composed his Violin Sonata in A Major in 1886, as a wedding present to Eugène Ysaÿe. The sonata embodies Franck's musical language in both form and substance. In addition to its dramatic heft, the work demonstrates cyclic form, the use of thematic material to unify multiple movements, a technique characteristic of Franck's music. Vincent d'Indy praised the sonata as “the first and purest model of the cyclical use of themes in sonata form” and considered the work a “true musical monument.”

The sonata moreover testifies to Ysaÿe's art, demanding instrumental dexterity and a robust tone while eschewing virtuosity merely for showmanship's sake. Thanks in large part to Ysaÿe, who performed it regularly for more than forty years, the sonata has become one of Franck's best-known works and one of the most beloved sonatas in the violin-and-piano repertoire at large.

Over a beguiling piano introduction, the violin, *molto dolce*, presents the lilting theme in 9/8 time. Following a fortissimo climax comes a luxurious passage for piano alone; a briefly tempestuous duet with the violin quickly subsides to a reprise of the opening. Franck's expressive markings urge the two players' increasingly ardent discourse, as if stoking the flames of passion: *più forte e con calore* and then *con tutta forza*. The movement ends in a soft, satisfied pianissimo.

The *Allegro* second movement is fiery and intense. Roiling sixteenth notes in the piano swirl about the violin's take-no-prisoners melody. Partway through the movement, the music's ferocity abates; the violin croons a gently arching musical idea. A dramatic segue leads back to the inclement A section, now seemingly more volatile than before.

The sonata's centerpiece, the **Recitativo-Fantasia**, begins with a recollection of the first movement's *molto dolce* theme. The violin responds with a declamatory utterance. The movement proceeds in pseudo-improvisatory fashion, traversing a wide variety of moods and colors. A serene middle section sets a simple, affecting melody in the violin above hypnotic triplets in the

piano. Before the movement's conclusion, Franck transfigures the sonata's opening theme once more.

He follows the preceding movements' Romantic fervor with a freely flowing finale. Its opening melody, marked *dolce cantabile* and redolent perhaps of Schubert, appears in **canon**. The melody from the *Recitativo-Fantasia*'s tranquil middle section reappears in the piano, colored with delicate filigree by the violin. Another melodic fragment from the preceding movement likewise returns—before the sonata builds to its triumphant climax.

## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

(Born August 22, 1862, St. Germain-en-Laye, France; died March 25, 1918, Paris)

### **Petite suite for Piano, Four Hands**

**Composed:** 1886–1889

**Published:** 1889

**First performance:** February 2, 1889, by the composer and his publisher, Jacques Durand

**Other works from this period:** Detailed in the notes below

**Approximate duration:** 12 minutes

Claude Debussy is universally recognized as one of the most consequential musical voices of the twentieth century. To the ears of many music lovers, his landmark work of 1894, **Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun**, represents the beginning of a new era in music. The composer and conductor Pierre Boulez wrote that, with this work, “The art of music began to beat with a new pulse.” In 1971, the eighty-eight-year-old Igor Stravinsky surmised, “Debussy is in all senses the century's first musician.”

Debussy's unique approach to harmony, rhythm, and orchestration was driven as much by a conscious resistance to the prevailing German musical language of Richard Wagner as it was by the instinctive desire to express himself in an original way. This approach yielded a distinctly French musical voice, as distinguishable by its color and inflection from the German idiom as the actual spoken languages are different.

The musical language cultivated by Debussy became known as Impressionism, a term borrowed from the visual arts and specifically the work of Claude Monet. As applied to the music of Debussy, the term describes a rich palette of harmonic colors and instrumental timbres, often treated in ways contrary to the dictates of Classical tradition. The composer once said, “Generally speaking, I feel more and more that music, by its very essence, is not something that can flow inside a rigorous, traditional form. It consists of colors and of rhythmicized time.” Even during his days as a student at the Paris Conservatoire, when presenting sketches in a class taught by César Franck, Debussy was challenged by Franck to modulate to a new key. Debussy replied, “Why should I modulate when I am perfectly happy in the tonality I am in?”

Debussy's *Petite suite*, completed in 1889, is one of five four-hand piano works from Debussy's pen. (In addition, Debussy composed two works for two pianos: *Lindaraja* (1901) and *En blanc et noir* (1915).) Though scored for just one instrument, these pieces, benefiting from the extended reach of two players, nevertheless display a broad spectrum of instrumental colors.

The *Petite suite* was likely composed at the request of Debussy's publisher, Jacques Durand, himself a competent pianist, who gave the work its first performance alongside the composer at a Paris salon. Typical for the genre, the suite was probably conceived with skilled amateur pianists in mind; its character is light and its demands on the performer are modest, relative to Debussy's more audacious works from this period, including the *Fantaisie* for Piano and Orchestra (begun in 1889, completed in 1896); *La damoiselle élue* for Soprano, Female Chorus, and Orchestra (1888); *Ariettes oubliées*, songs for voice and piano on texts by Verlaine (1888); et al.

The suite comprises four movements. The first, *En bateau* (*On a boat*), lilts to and fro with an endearing life-is-but-a-dream quality. Despite the music's seeming innocence, Debussy's forward-looking harmonic sensibility is on display, as well, as when whole-tone scalar figures leave the ear momentarily at sea. The brisk *Cortège* (*Procession*) follows. The third movement is an

enchanting *Menuet*, marked by the faintest air of mischief. The suite closes with an animated *Ballet* finale.

## GABRIEL FAURÉ

(Born May 12, 1845, Pamiers, Ariège, France; died November 4, 1924, Paris)

### Piano Quartet no. 1 in c minor, op. 15

**Composed:** 1876–1879 (finale rev. 1883)

**Published:** 1884, Paris

**First performance:** February 14, 1880

**Other works from this period:** *Après un rêve* for Voice and Piano, op. 7, no. 1 (1877); Violin Concerto in d minor, op. 14 (1878–1879); *Les berceaux* for Voice and Piano, op. 23, no. 1 (1879); *Berceuse* for Violin and Piano, op. 16 (1879)

**Approximate duration:** 30 minutes

“In the years 1877 to 1879,” wrote the pianist Marguerite Long, a friend and regular collaborator of Gabriel Fauré’s, the composer “still had not escaped from the Wagnerian influences he had come under on his visits to Bayreuth with Saint-Saëns. But however overwhelmed he may have been, his music still retained its individuality. His inspiration, devoid of grandiose gestures, showed itself through charm, modesty, restraint, and freshness of expression.”

These descriptors may be taken to tidily sum up the musical language of Fauré, the preeminent French composer of the late Romantic era. Add to these the music critic Harold C. Schonberg’s assessment of Fauré’s work: “It is music that contains the essence of everything Gallic—form, grace, wit, logic, individuality, urbanity...Those who love the music of Fauré love it as a private, cherished gift from one of the gentlest and most subtle of composers.”

The gentleness and subtlety of his creative instincts moreover led Fauré to pursue intimate forms of music making: chamber music, piano miniatures, choral pieces, and songs, which dwarf his orchestral output. The Piano Quartet in c minor, op. 15, one of his earliest chamber works, may stand as exhibit A of Fauré’s singular gifts.

Fauré completed the quartet in 1879, in the wake of his broken engagement to Marianne Viardot. The Viardots were a prominent family in French cultural circles; Pauline Viardot, Marianne’s mother, was a noted composer. With her daughter’s financial security likely in mind, Madame Viardot had a notion towards her future son-in-law’s vocation: that he should satisfy French audiences’ demand for opera. Fauré had no such inclination. “Perhaps the break was not a bad thing for me,” he concluded. “The Viardot family might have deflected me from my proper path.”

The quartet begins with a vigorous theme, stated in **unison** by the strings and underscored by **syncopated** chords in the piano. From this musical idea, Fauré extrapolates a sweeping and impassioned melody. The theme returns in the violin, colored expressively by the lower strings. The viola introduces the second theme, taken up subsequently by each of the other voices. In the development section, Fauré juxtaposes these two themes in an amorous duet.

The second movement scherzo begins on a delicate note. Pizzicato chords in the strings provide a hushed accompaniment to the piano’s playful melody. When the strings take over the tune, the meter changes from 6/8 to 2/4; the piano quickly resumes control, and the meter shifts back into 6/8. This metric interplay animates the entire movement. The trio section retains the scherzo’s rhythmic vitality.

The heartbreak of Fauré’s broken engagement is most evident in the deeply felt *Adagio*. Above stoic chords in the piano, a somber melody emerges, played first by the cello and subsequently joined in turn by the viola and violin. The movement’s contrasting B section offers a sunnier melody as if casting a nostalgic gaze upon happier times. The finale counters the morose *Adagio* with quiet but focused agitation.

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