

## ***Creative Capitals* (2018) disc 2.**

The sixteenth edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* visits seven of Western music's most flourishing *Creative Capitals*—London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Berlin, Budapest, and Vienna. Each disc explores the music that has emanated from these cultural epicenters, comprising an astonishingly diverse repertoire spanning some three hundred years that together largely forms the canon of Western music. Many of history's greatest composers have helped to define the spirit of these flagship cities through their music, and in this edition of recordings, Music@Menlo celebrates the many artistic triumphs that have emerged from the fertile ground of these *Creative Capitals*.

No city captivates the imagination quite like Paris, the musical destination proffered in Disc 2. For generations, the world's leading artists, writers, and thinkers—to say nothing of its young lovers and starry-eyed dreamers—have flocked to *La Ville Lumière*. Her splendor has inspired some of the Western world's most innovative cinema, elegant cuisine, and irresistible music. Towards the turn of the century, after opera had dominated French musical life for decades, César Franck and others led a resurgence of chamber music. In their wake came some of the twentieth century's most refreshing musical voices, from Jean Françaix to Francis Poulenc and the *enfants terribles* of *Les Six*.

- 1–4 **String Trio** (1933)  
**JEAN FRANÇAIX** (1912–1997)  
*Allegretto vivo*  
*Scherzo: Vivo*  
*Andante*  
*Rondo: Vivo*

ANGELO XIANG YU, *violin*; MATTHEW LIPMAN, *viola*;  
EFE BALTACIGIL, *cello*

- 5–7 **Sextet for Wind Quintet and Piano, op. 100** (1932–1939)  
**FRANCIS POULENC** (1899–1963)  
*Allegro vivace*  
*Divertissement: Andantino*  
*Finale: Prestissimo*

DEMARRE MCGILL, *flute*; STEPHEN TAYLOR, *oboe*;  
JOSE FRANCH-BALLESTER, *clarinet*; PETER KOLKAY, *bassoon*;  
KEVIN RIVARD, *horn*; JON KIMURA PARKER, *piano*

- 8–10 **Piano Quintet in f minor** (1879)  
**CÉSAR FRANCK** (1822–1890)  
*Molto moderato quasi lento – Allegro*  
*Lento, con molto sentimento*  
*Allegro non troppo, ma con fuoco*

JON KIMURA PARKER, *piano*; PAUL HUANG,  
ANGELO XIANG YU, *violins*; MATTHEW LIPMAN, *viola*;  
DMITRI ATAPINE, *cello*

Liner notes by Patrick Castillo © 2018

## **JEAN FRANÇAIX** (1912–1997) **String Trio** (1933)

The composer and pianist Jean Françaix produced an oeuvre, comprising more than two hundred works across genres, as characteristically French as his name. Françaix's neoclassical language betrays the influence of his compatriots in *Les Six* and, by extension, their guiding light, Stravinsky. In his personal pantheon of musical idols were Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, and, shoulder to shoulder with these, Emmanuel Chabrier and Francis Poulenc. Françaix made numerous orchestral transcriptions of these composers' music, including, most famously, Poulenc's *L'histoire de Babar*, arranged at Poulenc's request. The melodic and textural clarity that characterizes these composers' music would likewise distinguish Françaix's. Add to this a sense of irony, most apparent in his theatrical works but which permeates his instrumental chamber music, as well.

Françaix's String Trio, composed when he was only twenty-one, nevertheless reflects an assuredness of style and illustrates these hallmarks of his musical language. The opening *Allegretto vivo*, played *con sordino* (with mutes) throughout, features brisk, skittish, staccato sixteenth notes, underpinned by cello pizzicati. Snatches of suave melody briefly emerge, only to quickly cede the floor back to the fleet staccato figures. Clipped staccati and piquant pizzicati continue into the scherzo, giving the movement a similar impish energy to the *Allegretto*—but now *senza sordino* (without mutes). The full-throated color becomes especially salient in the unapologetically boorish trio section. Mutes are replaced for the debonair *Andante*. Cantabile melody carries the movement, first in the violin and then taken up in turn by the cello and viola, supported by a crooning accompaniment. The rambunctious energy of the *Allegretto* and scherzo returns for the work's rondo finale.

## **FRANCIS POULENC** (1899–1963) **Sextet for Wind Quintet and Piano, op. 100** (1932–1939)

From the onset of the First World War into the 1920s, Paris was, more than ever before, an international hotbed of cultural activity. Gertrude Stein's salon frequently hosted fellow American expatriates Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, and Thornton Wilder. Picasso kept a home in Montparnasse, where he fraternized with the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, among others. Composers from across Europe and the United States, including Prokofiev, Arthur Bliss, and Aaron Copland, likewise flocked to Paris. Wagner's influence steadily evaporated and gave way to a wild new potpourri of musical styles. In 1920, France became the adoptive home of the thirty-eight-year-old Igor Stravinsky, whose *Rite of Spring* had set Paris on fire seven years earlier; Stravinsky's newly cultivated neoclassical style became a great influence on a group of rising young composers known as *Les Six*: Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, and Germaine Tailleferre. These six initially came together in 1917 in support of the composer Erik Satie, who had come under fire for his ballet *Parade*. Based on a book by Jean Cocteau and featuring cubist décor designed by Picasso, *Parade* was an exceedingly modern production for its time and scandalized Paris. The iconoclastic Satie mentored *Les Six* as the young firebrand composers steadily conquered Parisian musical society. Although Satie remained the subject of

much public indignation among French audiences, his protégés would become modernist darlings of 1920s Paris.

*Les Six* sought to cultivate a music that was distinctly their own, a musical perspective unique to France, which moreover captured the vitality of their time. “We were tired of Debussy, of Florent Schmitt, of Ravel,” Poulenc noted. “I wanted music to be clear, healthy, and robust—music as frankly French in spirit as Stravinsky’s *Pétrouchka* is Russian.” Poulenc’s musical ideal was one that integrated the élan of jazz, cabaret, and other popular styles into the Western classical tradition. His lighthearted sextet testifies to this ideal and remains one of the composer’s most popular works. The sextet’s instrumentation—a standard wind quintet of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and horn plus piano—gives perfect voice to Poulenc’s compositional language. The ensemble affords the vivacity and variety of color necessary to allow Poulenc’s sharp and, at times, biting humor to come through. His deployment of wind instruments in the *Allegro vivace* presents a Technicolor palette of timbres to match Poulenc’s impish melodic and harmonic language. This ebullient opening movement betrays as much a debt to vaudeville or even circus music as to Stravinsky’s neoclassical style, in its textural clarity and melodic immediacy. Each voice excitedly emerges to the fore and then, just as quickly, recedes to background, as in a game of Whaca-Mole.

Poulenc was moreover his generation’s leading composer of *mélodie* (a Romantic French song), and throughout the sextet, the winds issue cantabile lines in pseudo-vocal expressive fashion. A thoughtful bassoon monologue leads to a slow middle section, featuring noirish solo lines supported by a pulsating piano accompaniment, before a reprise of the mischievous opening music. A honeyed oboe melody, *trés doux et expressif*, begins the sextet’s second movement, a divertissement rife with piquant chromaticism. As in the preceding movement, each voice soon comes to the fore for its melodic turn, whether in solo passages or various duo combinations. This vaguely sultry music gives way abruptly to music of almost inane glee, but the movement returns to its earlier material to close on a more contemplative note. Despite the piece’s overall lightness in character and, in particular, its middle movement’s designation as a divertissement, this music nevertheless lends the work a certain gravity. It attests to Poulenc’s appraisal of the music of France: “You will find sobriety and dolor in French music just as in German and Russian. But the French have a keener sense of proportion. We realize that somberness and good humor are not mutually exclusive. Our composers, too, write profound music, but when they do, it is leavened with that lightness of spirit without which life would be unendurable.” Witness, too, the sextet’s high-spirited *Prestissimo* finale, whose good humor is tempered by an introspective coda. The work bears a dedication to the French art historian Georges Salles.

**CÉSAR FRANCK (1822–1890)**  
**Piano Quintet in f minor (1879)**

César 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 father figure. Franck taught organ at the Conservatoire, but owing to his greater emphasis on counterpoint and improvisation than on keyboard technique, he was widely regarded as the academy’s premier composition professor. 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 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 mimic 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’s Piano Quintet in f minor, completed in 1879, impresses with its sheer, intense, expressive passion. The work’s overwhelming pathos has even offended some: following the quintet’s premiere in 1880, with Franck’s close friend Camille Saint-Saëns at the piano, Franck joined Saint-Saëns onstage and presented the piece’s original manuscript to him as a token of his gratitude. Saint-Saëns, to whom Franck had dedicated the quintet, expressed his displeasure with the work by refusing the manuscript and walking offstage. Another listener whose favor the Piano Quintet failed to win was Franck’s wife, who suspected that its visceral power could have only been inspired by amorous feelings for another woman.

Despite Saint-Saëns’s reservations, the Piano Quintet is an expertly wrought work. It is cast in cyclic form, a compositional device particularly associated with Franck, in which thematic material from one movement resurfaces in later movements. This technique serves to unify the separate movements of a piece into an organic whole; the disparate contexts in which one musical idea appears moreover infuse it with multiple layers of meaning. Cyclic form is closely related to Wagner’s use of leitmotifs and Liszt’s principle of thematic transformation; the way in which Franck uses cyclic form also evokes Beethoven’s penchant for dramatically recalling earlier themes at climactic points in his music. The quintet opens with a powerful declamation in the strings; the piano answers with a thoughtful, lilting soliloquy. This dialogue launches the movement’s slow introduction, in turns tender and ardent. The temperature rises considerably as the introduction yields to the main *Allegro* section. Within the *Allegro*, Franck transfigures the piano’s earlier soliloquy into the movement’s second theme. The French pedagogue Nadia Boulanger surmised that Franck’s Piano Quintet contained more instances of the extreme dynamic markings *pianississimo* and *fortississimo*—very, very soft and very, very loud—than any other work in the chamber literature. Indeed, the atmosphere remains relentlessly feverish throughout this first movement. Franck’s thick chromatic harmonies further fuel

the music's anxious energy. Though markedly less extroverted, the second movement, marked *Lento, con molto sentimento*, loses nothing of the first movement's ardor. Amidst the movement's melancholic sighs, the lilting piano soliloquy from the first movement reappears. Following a quietly frenzied introduction, the finale's impassioned first theme sweeps in above a diabolical triplet accompaniment in the piano. The understated second theme recalls the melancholy of the slow movement. Franck develops each of these themes throughout this dramatic sonata-form finale, restlessly expanding its emotive breadth. Before the work's fiery conclusion, Franck looks wistfully back once more to the quintet's cyclical theme: the first violin part—marked *pianississimo, dolcissimo, molto espressivo*—longingly reprises the first movement's piano soliloquy.

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