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**Sunday, September 24, 2023 at 4 PM**

Old First Church

1751 Sacramento St. at Van Ness Ave.

San Francisco, CA 94109

(415) 474-1608 [www.oldfirstconcerts.org](http://www.oldfirstconcerts.org)

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Old First Concerts' piano is a New York Steinway D model, circa 1980, with Hamburg action. It was donated by The Stanley Ibler Fund, and is maintained by David Love Piano Service and Restoration.

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- Complimentary refreshments served at intermission or after the concert.
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- Solo, chamber music, and world music concerts year-round since 1970.

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**Friday, October 6 at 8 pm**

**Utsav Lal—Raga Pianist**

with guests **Nilan Chaudhuri**, *tabla* & **George Brooks**, *saxophone*

Indian Pianist/composer Utsav Lal presents a genre colliding concert of Indian Classical Ragas and beyond through his distinctive voice on the piano. His concert features both traditional presentations, as well as new avenues of exploration drawing from raga music.

**Sunday, October 8 at 4 pm**

**Zachary Donaldson**, *lute*

A tour of the lute in renaissance Europe, from the by the free-flowing improvisatory style of 16th century Spanish composer Luís Milán to the fiery and stunning toccatas of early 17th century Italian composers such as Alessandro Piccinini and Giovanni Kapsberger, including hidden gems rarely performed and well-known favorites by John Dowland and Josquin des Pres.

**Sunday, October 15 at 4 pm**

**Monica Chew**, *piano*—*Best Friends*

Oakland composer and pianist presents a program of pairs of pieces she enjoys hearing side-by-side by Joshua Uzoigwe, Ali Osman, Stacy Fahrion, Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Ulvi Cemal Erkin, which make delightfully simpatico companions.

*For tickets & more information visit [www.oldfirstconcerts.org](http://www.oldfirstconcerts.org)*

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## PROGRAM

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)

**Piano Quintet no. 2 in C minor, Op. 115** (1919–1921)

*Allegro moderato*

*Allegro vivo*

*Andante moderato*

*Allegro molto*

### INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

**Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in B minor, Op. 115** (1891)

*Allegro*

*Adagio*

*Andantino*

*Con moto*

### ABOUT THE MUSIC

#### Two Late Works

Ever since biographers began dividing Beethoven's life into three periods, the idea of a distinct "late style" has been a persistent feature of music criticism. For many composers, some combination of biographical circumstances and stylistic characteristics seem to set the works of their last years apart, although not necessarily in a positive way. For every Beethoven who is perceived to have heroically overcome deafness or Leoš Janáček inspired by passionate (if unrequited) love, there is a Robert Schumann or Bedřich Smetana, whose last works are frequently seen as compromised by illness. For both pieces on this program, "lateness" expresses itself through rich sonorities and lyricism, and both works are amongst the most beloved and highly regarded of the respective composers' outputs.

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)

**Piano Quintet no. 2 in C minor, Op. 115** (1919–1921)

For Fauré, his late works were conditioned by both medical and professional circumstances. Towards the end of his life, Fauré both became generally hard of hearing and had specific problems hearing

especially high or low pitches correctly (both extremes sounded disturbingly out of tune to him). During the time that he composed the *Piano Quintet no. 2*, these problems led Fauré's colleagues to encourage him to step down from the Directorship of the Paris Conservatoire, a position that he had held since 1905, and where he had taught since 1896 (his pupils included Maurice Ravel, Georges Enescu and Nadia Boulanger). Fauré retired in 1920, something that he found a relief, telling his wife "I can't emphasize enough how much I'm savoring the idea of my deliverance!"

The *Piano Quintet no. 2* was the first major work to arise from Fauré's liberation from academic administration, and appeared at a time when Fauré, once perceived as too dangerously radical a young composer to be associated with the Conservatoire, was a cherished and honored elder statesman of French musical life. The quintet was an immediate success. According to the composer's son, the audience at the premiere immediately stood after the final chord and turned to Fauré to offer "thunderous applause." The critic Émile Vuillermoz (also a composition student of Fauré's) described the quintet as having "the paradoxical merit of bringing together two generally incompatible virtues, youth and serenity."

The piano played a particularly central role in Fauré's compositions. He was best known for songs and solo piano works, and, with the exception of his final work, a string quartet, all of his chamber music includes piano. Fauré, however, was trained and made his early career as a church organist, and his keyboard writing tends to avoid a soloistic or bravura approach to the instrument. The piano parts in his chamber music are technically difficult, but these difficulties are in the service of collaborative musical textures. Fauré's extremely flexible harmonic language, in which any given sonority is familiar, and the links between the sonorities are logical, but the resulting journeys are surprising and wondrous, also probably grew out of an organists' facility with improvised modulations.

The first movement can be heard as following the sonata form, but it probably makes more sense to describe it as being made up of a small number of very distinct themes and textures that are mixed and matched throughout the movement. The main idea is an expansive melody first presented by the viola, over driving sixteenth notes from the piano (note that the piano is playing a motoric figure with repeated notes, not more idiomatic and conventional arpeggios). After this melody is passed back and forth between the string instruments, a new section is announced by a

as community locations, including San Quentin Prison. In June 2019, Jenny created and produced a Marin Symphony Youth Orchestra tour and took 90 teenagers to Europe for performances in Prague, Vienna, and Budapest. Her proudest achievement was bringing them all back.

Jenny's love for chamber music has taken her to festivals all over the US. Her chamber music partners have included Yo Yo Ma, Joseph Silverstein, Bruno Giuranna, and members of the San Francisco and Boston Symphonies. Ms. Douglass earned degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and the Juilliard School.

**Mariam Adam**, born in Monterey, California to an Egyptian father and a Mexican mother, has lived between New York, Paris and now Nashville, a composite of influences that has shaped her musicianship and collaborations worldwide. She has performed with numerous artists, including Wayne Shorter, Chick Corea, Paquito D'Rivera, Yo-Yo Ma, and Simon Shaheen, and in such venues and series as Carnegie Hall, Hollywood Bowl, Walt Disney Hall, Jordan Hall, and Kennedy Center.

A founding and former member of the twice Grammy-nominated woodwind quintet, Imani Winds, she maintained an active international touring schedule for over 18 years. In November 2021 she reunited with members of the Imani Winds to premier Valerie Coleman's *Phenomenal Women* in London with the Chineke! Orchestra. Since 2016 she has been visiting principal clarinetist for the London-based Chineke! Ensemble and orchestra with return visits to BBC's *Tune In* with Sean Rafferty. They have become a pivotal ensemble in the United Kingdom and Europe championing works of new composers while establishing a firm identity of the new face of classical music. Her TransAtlantic Ensemble, with Evelyn Ulex, an official Steinway Ensemble, specializes in commissions of crossover styles, standard repertoire and presents their concerts in unique formats throughout Europe, South and Central America and the United States.

**Stephen Harrison**, *cellist*, has been on the Stanford University faculty since 1983. A graduate of Oberlin College and Boston University, he has been solo cellist of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players since 1985. Stephen has been on the faculty of the Pacific Music Festival, the Orfeo and Schlern International Music Festivals (Italy) and the Rocky Ridge Music Center. He is currently principal cellist at the Mendocino Music Festival, and performs and teaches at the SoCal Chamber Music Workshop and the Telluride Chamber Music Festival.

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Deutsche Oper, and Deutsche Symphonieorchester. Hrabba also participated in a world tour with the Icelandic pop artist Björk, and a Germany tour with violinist Nigel Kennedy. In 2004, she moved to New York, where she played on a regular basis with the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, Orchestra of St. Luke's and New Jersey Symphony Orchestra among others.

Since August 2008, Hrabba has been based in Berkeley, California, where she has been performing as a soloist as well as with various ensembles, such as The New Century Chamber Orchestra, The Left Coast Chamber Ensemble, The Empyrean Ensemble, The ECO ensemble and the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players to name a few.

**Susan Freier**, *violin/viola*, and co-Artistic Director of the Ives Collective, earned degrees in music and biology from Stanford University as a Ford Scholar and continued her studies at the Eastman School of Music where she co-founded the award-winning Chester String Quartet. The Chester went on to win the Munich, Portsmouth (UK) and Discovery Competitions and were the quartet-in-residence at Indiana University, South Bend.

In 1989 Susan returned to her native Bay Area and joined the Stanford faculty and the Stanford String Quartet. She performs with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players and has been an artist/faculty member at the Newport Music Festival, Garth Newell, Music in the Mountains, Rocky Ridge Music Center, and the Schlern and Orfeo Music Festivals (Italy). Susan teaches and performs at Mendocino Music Festival, the SoCal Music Workshop and Telluride Chamber Music Festival.

**Jenny Douglass** has created a rewarding portfolio career as a violist, educator, event producer, and writer. She has been a member of the New Century Chamber Orchestra since 2008 and Principal Violist of the Marin Symphony since 1999. Ms. Douglass is a frequent substitute with the San Francisco Symphony, performing with them in Davies Concert Hall, Carnegie Hall, and on several European tours. Jenny has also toured North and South America, Europe, and Asia with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and can be heard on several of their recordings for Deutsche Grammophon.

From 2015-2023, Jenny served as the Marin Symphony's Director of Education and Community Engagement. She developed several initiatives that send Marin Symphony musicians into Marin County schools as well

short, but assertive, passage for the strings alone. While the opening is lush and Romantic, the following section provides a strong contrast. The melodic material is now made up of large and awkward leaps, the piano accompaniment shifts to stumbling off-beats, and the harmonic language becomes more wayward, shifting quickly to distant chords and occasionally featuring harmonically ambiguous whole-tone scales. Both of these sections return later in the movement, but much of the rest of it is devoted to combining the themes, and presenting them over different accompaniment figures. In particular, a section in the middle of the movement mixes all of the thematic material while the piano accompaniment relaxes into triplets, making the tempo seem slower (and, in practice, this section often is played a little under tempo). Like all of the movements in the quintet, the first movement ends securely in the major.

The lightning-fast scherzo that follow seems initially as if it will be about the scintillating scales tossed between piano and strings, but this quickly is balanced by a lyrical idea that feels slower than it is, as it moves in half notes rather than quarters. Rather than keeping his material compartmentalized into the conventional scherzo/trio format, Fauré freely combines his ideas and textures, frequently allowing the rapid scales to mix with the singing contrasting melody. The achingly nostalgic slow movement suggested "arms stretched out towards a past that is never to return" to the composer Charles Koechlin. In this movement, Fauré works with larger sections that remain distinct. The opening is a sort of harmonically lush hymn for the strings, packed tightly in their lower registers (the melody begins in the viola, and is continued by the first violin). The piano joins, and the texture blooms into expressive fragments for all the instruments over rippling arpeggios from the piano. The contrasting section is a more extended expressive melody over light off-beats, first heard in the piano.

The vivacious finale returns to the rhythmic games of the scherzo, combining material that moves in a fast, waltz-like triple meter with figures that are only half as fast. While the different rhythms are juxtaposed in the scherzo, they are initially presented simultaneously in the last movement. Subsequent sections allow both the fast waltz tempo and the broader figures to be presented on their own and used for rhapsodic melodies. All metric confusion disappears at the end for the brilliant conclusion. The entire work justifies the composer Albert Roussel's description of it as displaying "youthful inspiration, freshness of thought, and intense vitality."

**Johannes Brahms** (1833–1897)

*Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in B minor, Op. 115* (1891)

It is almost obligatory to describe Brahms's late works as "autumnal," and to situate them at the end of Brahms's career or even of the Romantic era itself. The *Clarinet Quintet* is also the product of Brahms' encounter with a specific musician. Brahms traveled to Meiningen in 1891, where he spent some time listening to the principal clarinetist of the court orchestra there, Richard Mühlfeld. Mühlfeld was by all accounts an extraordinary player, and Brahms was deeply impressed, coming up with a number of nicknames for him, including "the nightingale of the orchestra," "my prima donna" and "Fraülein Klarinette [Miss Clarinet]." It is notable that most of these nicknames position Mühlfeld as feminine. The obvious metaphor that Brahms "fell in love" with Mühlfeld's playing seems almost too on-the-nose. Brahms composed the present quintet for Mühlfeld the next summer.

The *Clarinet Quintet* has been heard as having a special place in Brahms's output since its earlier performances. Clara Schumann called it "marvelous," "moving" and "deep and full of meaning," and the violinist Joseph Joachim described it as "one of the most sublime things" that Brahms ever wrote. Some of this is due to the acoustic characteristics of the clarinet, which not only has an unusually wide range for a woodwind instrument but also is capable of producing distinctly different tone colors in its different registers. Brahms exploits these characteristics by using the clarinet as a leading voice in all of these registers. This is easy to hear at the very beginning of the quintet, where Brahms presents the instruments of the string quartet from high to low, starting with the pair of the violins, then the viola beneath them and finally the cello lower still. Only after the strings have been introduced does the clarinet enter, playing an upwards arpeggio that fills in the space established by the strings and exposes the different registers of the instrument, soaring above the strings before plunging down to the very bottom of its range and supplying a bass line for cello and viola. The quintet is dominated by music that is lush and warm, almost entirely in moderate and slow tempi and mostly smooth and legato. Some of the warmth can also be attributed to the tonal qualities of the clarinet. When the clarinet is the upper voice in the ensemble, it tends to sit lower than the first violin part does in Brahms all-string chamber music. This both compresses the other string parts into closer proximity in lower (and warmer) registers and allows for glowing moments when the first violinist doubles the clarinet an octave above, suddenly expanding the available musical space.

Other unusual characteristics of the quintet include the middle section of the second movement, which is filled with improvisatory flourishes from the clarinet and agitated tremolos from the strings in what was understood at the time as a "Hungarian" or "Gypsy" style. The third movement, instead of the expected scherzo, begins as yet another singing movement in a gentle tempo. This eventually does prove to be a long introduction to something faster and more scherzo-like, providing a rare stretch of music that is lively and uses staccato articulations. The last movement is a theme and variations, initially similar in tempo and character to the beginning of the preceding movement. The variations culminate with a wistful waltz, led by the viola over a plucked cello bass line. In a final gesture, the waltz tune is transformed into the music heard at the very beginning of the quintet, both providing narrative closure and revealing similarities between the themes and motives of the different movements.

### ABOUT THE MUSICIANS

**Keisuke Nakagoshi**, *pianist*, began his piano studies at the age of ten, arriving in the United States from Japan at the age of 18. Mr. Nakagoshi earned his Bachelors degree in Composition and Masters degree in Chamber Music from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Graduating as the recipient of multiple top awards, Keisuke was selected to represent the SFCM for the Kennedy Center's Conservatory Project, a program featuring the most promising young musicians from major conservatories across the United States.

Mr. Nakagoshi has performed to acclaim on prestigious concert stages across the United States, including the Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, the Hollywood Bowl, and Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco. He has received training from some of the most celebrated musicians of our time – Emanuel Ax, Gilbert Kalish, Menahem Pressler, Robert Mann, Paul Hersh, David Zinman – and enjoys collaborating with other accomplished musicians such as Lucy Shelton, Ian Swensen, Jodi Levitz, Robin Sutherland, Lev Polyakin, Axel Strauss, Mark Kosower, Gary Schocker and also conductors such as Alasdair Neale, George Daugherty, Nicole Paiement, Michael Tilson Thomas and Herbert Blomstedt. Mr. Nakagoshi is Pianist-in-Residence at The San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the award winning Opera Parallele. He resides in San Francisco.

Icelandic violinist **Hrabba Atladottir** studied in Berlin, Germany with Professor Axel Gerhardt. After finishing her studies, she worked as a freelancing violinist in Berlin for five years, regularly playing with the