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## Old First Concerts



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Old First Concerts

*presents*

# The Ives Collective

**Hrabba Atladottir,** *violin*
**Susan Freier,** *viola*
**Stephen Harrison,** *cello*
**Keisuke Nakagoshi,** *piano*

**Sunday, October 13, 2024 at 4 PM**
Old First Church
1751 Sacramento St. at Van Ness Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94109
(415) 474-1608 www.oldfirstconcerts.org

## About Old First Concerts

- Great venue for music with beautiful acoustics and amazing Steinway concert grand piano.
- Primarily local emerging and mid-career professional musicians presenting innovative programs.
- Every concert offers new insights and virtuosic performances.
- Complimentary refreshments served at intermission or after the concert.
- An independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization devoted to presenting music at affordable prices, especially for low-income seniors and students.
- Solo, chamber music, and world music concerts year-round since 1970.

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Ticket sales provide about 38 percent of our operating revenue each year. In addition, we rely on support from private foundations and Grants for the Arts from the city of San Francisco. Our generous individual donors complete the picture. We invite you to join us in our mission to connect audiences and local musicians and build up the classical music and world music scene in San Francisco. Donations are tax-deductible and donating on our website is easy and secure: www.oldfirstconcerts.org/give/, or checks can be mailed to:
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Orphic Percussion is a Bay Area based quartet with a passion for commissioning new music, whose musical selections will leave you electrified, taking you on the journey of bringing a new piece from ink on paper to life on the stage.

**Friday, November 8 at 8 pm**
**Ensemble for These Times—*In Motion***
Award-winning new music chamber group Ensemble for These Times performs In Motion, a music conversation around motion, including the World Premieres of three newly commissioned works by Ursula Kwong-Brown, Darian Donovan Thomas, and Mary Bianco, alongsde works by Benjamin Britten, York Bowen, Lisa Bielawa, Vivian Fung, Sage Shurman, and Zhou Tian.

*For tickets & more information visit www.oldfirstconcerts.org*

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## Program

Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959)
**Piano Quartet, H. 287** (1942)
*Poco allegro*
*Adagio*
*Allegretto poco moderato*

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)
**Cello Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 117** (1921)
*Allegro*
*Andante*
*Allegro vivo*

***Intermission***

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)
**Piano Quartet No. 2 in E-flat major, Op. 87** (1889)
*Allegro con fuoco*
*Lento*
*Allegretto moderato, grazioso*
*Allegro ma non troppo*

## About the music

**Bohuslav Martinů *Piano Quartet No. 1, H. 287*** (1942)
Bohuslav Martinů was both a distinctively Czech composer and a thoroughly cosmopolitan one. Raised in a tiny church tower room overlooking the small Czech town of Polička, trained at the Prague Conservatory, and employed as a violinist in the Czech Philharmonic, Martinů spent little of his adult life in the Czech lands, leaving for Paris in 1923, exiled to the United States by World War II, and never returning to post-war communist Czechoslovakia. The 1942 *Piano Quartet No. 1* is an early product of his American years, initially intended for the U.S. League of Composers, and premiered at the Berkshire Music Center (now Tanglewood).

The first movement of the quartet display textures that are very typical of Martinů's works in general. These include the combination of motoric running figures with smoother melodic fragments that are syncopated. This mix creates a constant buzzing rhythmic energy that refuses to settle into a predictable groove. In some ways, this rhythmic propulsion is similar to that of Baroque music, and, perhaps also in a way that recalls the era of Bach, the movement is more about the different sounds and textures that can be created within a constant musical flow, than about distinct themes or large sections. The slow movement in the middle of the quartet stands out from its surroundings in many ways. The long opening section is for the strings alone, and the unsettling syncopations and charged energy of the preceding movement disappear in favor of long lines and steady motion. The piano eventually joins for a more active interlude before the slow string scales return and the movement ends with a hymn-like melody from the viola. The opening of the third movement will be instantly familiar to any classical music lover who lived within range of Southern California's KUSC between 1979 and 2022 and heard it as the theme song of Jim Svejda's *The Evening Program*. Here, the unsettled rhythms of the first movement return, but the spiky liveliness of that movement is replaced with a softer, more swinging feel, and with clear major chords. This is one of Martinů's most appealing movements, with changes in texture always leading back to the lyrical opening material in different guises.

**Gabriel Fauré *Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 117*** (1921)
Much like Beethoven, Gabriel Fauré had a distinctive late style that coincided with a period of hearing loss and poor health. Even some of the characteristics of this late style, including a concentration on chamber music and a preference for counterpoint, seem to overlap with Beethoven's career. Fauré's final period roughly coincides with his 1920 retirement from directing the Paris Conservatoire, a decision that allowed him to put aside his administrative duties and concentrate on composition in his last years. The second *Cello Sonata* is one of four chamber works that Fauré completed between 1921 and 1924, a group that includes the second *Piano Quintet*,

the Schlern and Orfeo Music Festivals (Italy). Susan teaches and performs at the Mendocino Music Festival, the SoCal Music Workshop and the Telluride Chamber Music Festival.

**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.

**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 Parallèle. He resides in San Francisco.

with an exotic melody over a drone in the manner of a Chopin mazurka, and then repeated with the piano imitating a cimbalom (or perhaps a music box?). The finale is a vigorous movement that can't decide what key it is in, wavering between minor and major and different tonics before finally arriving safely home.

## About the musicians

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 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

performed by the Ives Collective last season, and the *String Quartet,* which Susan and Stephen recorded with the Stanford Quartet; all works of a distinctive elegance and austere beauty.

Fauré's fondness for contrapuntal dialogue is audible from the very beginning of the sonata, which opens with the cello following the piano melody, and imitating it with a modified variant. This polyphonic interplay has no sense of academic rigor, but is part of a lively and lyrical texture that remains energetic throughout the movement. The cello and piano switch roles and the conversation eventually intensifies as the statements and answers occur closer and closer together. This leads to a contrasting theme, which, although at the same tempo, is a passionate melodic outburst, first from the piano, and then joined by the cello. Fauré continues to alternate these two musical ideas, with the high point of the movement the final appearance of the contrasting theme, now in close imitation between the two instruments, thereby combining the texture of the first idea with the melody of the second.

The second movement of the sonata is a transcription of a funeral march that Fauré was commissioned to compose as part of a commemoration of the 1921 centennial of Napoleon's death. The two-day celebration in Paris, which overtly linked France's recent victory in the Great War to Napoleon's conquests, was a grand jingoistic spectacle that was unlikely to have aroused Fauré's sympathies. Although patriotic, he avoided public political statements, supported internationalism in musical life, and what political leanings he had seem to have aligned with the leftist coalition that governed France when he was the director of the Conservatoire. Nonetheless, he accepted the commission and produced a highly effective march that was arranged for large wind ensemble and performed at the final ceremony of the celebration, as Napoleon's remains were interred in the Royal Chapel. Although the sonata movement is an exact transcription of the wind band original (save some trivial alterations to the final chords), the intimate effect created by the reduction to two players is entirely different from the grand public statement made by

massed winds. This movement is also constructed from two ideas. The first, in the minor mode customary for funeral marches, has the cello playing a noble and angular melody over soft and steady chords in the piano that eventually rise in volume to match the strength of the cello line. This is followed by shift to the major, with a singing duet between the cello and the pianist's left hand accompanied by faster and more gentle pulsations from the pianist's right hand. This is initially presented at a restrained dynamic, but rises to an agitated high point and returns the minor. The movement ends with brief restatements of both ideas.

Like the first movement, the third and final movement is in a fast and steady tempo, and, like both of the preceding movements, is built from two contrasting ideas. The movement opens with a jaunty syncopated theme over cascades of arpeggios and scales in the piano. The contrasting idea is calmer and more lyrical, with a melody first presented by the piano and then echoed by the cello, but Fauré specifically warns the performers not to slow down here. Again, like the first movement, this movement is marked by Fauré's distinctive harmonic practices, in which harmonies often slide and creep into unexpected areas. These patterns would have fallen easily under Fauré's fingers, reflecting his early training as an organist, but were not what was being taught in the Conservatoire classrooms at the time. The sonata may be a late work, but it is also a lively and vigorous one, and it is easy to understand the reaction of Fauré's friend and fellow-composer Vincent d'Indy, who heard the piece and wrote to Fauré "how lucky you are to stay young like that!"

**Antonín Dvořák** ***Piano Quartet No. 2 in E-flat major, Op. 87***

In July of 1888, Dvořák's publisher Simrock wrote to him, "I would always be happy with a piano quartet from you. You promised me one some time ago. How do things stand with it?" Simrock also complained that Dvořák's works were not selling in Vienna on account of nationalist tensions, and discouraged Dvořák from describing his work as "Slavic."

When Dvořák did finally provide Simrock with a piano quartet in 1889, he had crafted a work that would appeal to audiences in public performances by professional musicians, while also taking into account the amateur performers who were most likely to purchase the sheet music. He also faced a conundrum in deciding whether to use overtly Czech musical elements. As Simrock had pointed out, these would probably be poorly received in Vienna, but it was exactly this kind of musical exoticism that had made works like the *Slavonic Dances* so successful of outside of Austria. Despite Dvořák's long-standing reputation as a sort of uncomplicated man of the countryside, he was a highly sophisticated and clever manipulator of musical styles to suit his ends, and the E-flat major piano quartet is an excellent example of his ability to speak to multiple audiences at the same time.

The piano quartet opens with a distinctive and declamatory motive, stated by all three stringed instruments without accompaniment. This is the sort of gesture that would immediately communicate to a concert audience and be easily recognized when returning in various guises later in the movement. The more attentive audience member might notice that the fourth note of the motive sounds out of place, perhaps even wrong, and hear it as a sort of problem to be addressed. Indeed, the climax of the movement is a grand statement of the opening motive in the piano, with the fourth note "corrected" to a more conventional pitch. Meanwhile, the amateur performer, looking at the music, would realize that the "wrong" note – B natural – is a clue that keys that include that pitch will be important (the second theme occurs in both G major and B major).

Similarly, the slow movement is attractive by virtue of its concentration on the presentation of melodies, to the near-total exclusion of development or connective material, and by the strong contrasts of character between sections, while also playing the kinds of subtle harmonic games alluded to above. The third movement is the one that probably would have been most appealing and accessible, both to audiences and to domestic players. The main theme, a kind of graceful waltz, is juxtaposed