



PROGRAM: SUNDAYS WITH THE ST. LAWRENCE MAY 7 / 2:30 PM BING CONCERT HALL

ARTISTS

St. Lawrence String Quartet

Geoff Nuttall, *violin*

Owen Dalby, *violin*

Lesley Robertson, *viola*

Christopher Costanza, *cello*

Tyler Duncan, *baritone*

Erika Switzer, *piano*

Sundays with the St. Lawrence is presented in partnership with Music at Stanford.

This program is generously supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.



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PROGRAM

Gabriel Fauré: *La bonne chanson* (The Good Song), op. 61 (1892–1894)

Une sainte en son auréole

Puisque l'aube grandit

La lune blanche

J'allais par des chemins perfides

J'ai presque peur, en vérité

Avant que tu ne t'en ailles

Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d'été

N'est-ce pas?

L'hiver a cessé

John Adams: *Second Quartet* (2014)

Allegro molto

Andantino – Energico

INTERMISSION

Oswaldo Golijov: *Drag Down the Sky* (2016)

Text by Connor McPherson, with excerpts from the book of Job

Ludwig van Beethoven: *Quartet in F*, op. 135 (1826)

Allegretto

Vivace

Lento assai, cantando e tranquillo

Grave, ma non troppo tratto – Allegro

PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE. Please be considerate of others and turn off all phones, pagers, and watch alarms. Photography and recording of any kind are not permitted. Thank you.

PROGRAM: SUNDAYS WITH THE ST. LAWRENCE

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845–1924) *LA BONNE CHANSON (THE GOOD SONG)*, OP. 61 (1892–1894)

Thirty years after he composed this superb song cycle, Gabriel Fauré wrote, “I’ve never written anything as spontaneously as I did *La bonne chanson*.” As he composed, he workshopped each new song with a neighbor, the soprano Emma Bardac, whose advice he carefully listened to. Bardac cast a spell over Fauré (and later, Debussy), and their affair lasted for several years. “The pleasure of feeling those little sheets of paper come alive as I brought them to her was one I have never experienced since,” he wrote. The result is a work of extraordinary cohesion and unity, bound together by recurring musical themes. For the text, Fauré chose nine poems that Paul Verlaine had written for his young fiancée, Mathilde Mauté, organizing them into a sequence that tells the story of two young lovers.

In the first chanson, *Une sainte en son auréole* (A saint in her halo), a lover’s name conjures up an image of medieval times and courtly love. Fauré’s music is gentle, sensuous, loving. The radiant dawn portrayed in *Puisque l’aube grandit* (Since dawn is rising) is set to a rippling piano accompaniment with subtle changes of key. In *La lune blanche* (The white moon), we enter that very French mood of half-light, mystery, and exoticism; it’s a Fauré nocturne, describing the witching hour. *J’allais par des chemins perfides* (I walked along treacherous paths) describes a solitary, rather anxious journey toward the loved one. The anxiety continues in *J’ai presque peur, en vérité* (I am almost afraid), in which Fauré captures the fear and trepidation of a lover as he waits for a sign of love from his beloved. *Avant que tu ne t’en ailles* (Before you fade away) and the following song both highlight Fauré’s sensitivity to contrasts of mood and tempo. The earlier song is a miniature tone poem, alternately painting a picture of the lover’s dreamy personal feelings and the exuberant dawn of a new day. That new day turns into a shimmering summer wedding day and then to

a sensuous evening in *Donc, ce sera par un clair jour d’été* (So it will be on a bright summer’s day). In *N’est ce pas?* (Is it not so?), the young lovers find pleasure in the isolation from the rest of the world that intoxicating love can bring. Finally, in *L’hiver a cessé* (Winter has ended), we hear of the release and joy that spring brings after the long winter’s chill.

After Fauré’s death, one of his pupils made an arrangement for voice and orchestra. But a happier balance is to be found in an arrangement that Fauré himself made for voice, piano, and string quintet (or quartet), an arrangement that was lost until a few years ago. —© 2017 by Keith Horner

JOHN ADAMS (B. 1947) *SECOND QUARTET (2014)*

Both of John Adams’ string quartets were composed with the St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) in mind. But this latest work is actually the third he has composed for them, and it received its world premiere in 2015 at Bing Concert Hall. The original String Quartet (now likely to be known as the First Quartet) was written in 2008 and premiered January of 2009 at the Juilliard School, the work’s principal commissioner. The St. Lawrence String Quartet went on to perform that work many times throughout the world and made the first recording of it for Nonesuch Records.

Adams followed several years later with a grander idea: *Absolute Jest*, a 25-minute work for solo quartet and orchestra based on fragments from Beethoven, primarily from the Op. 131 and 135 string quartets. Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony to celebrate its centennial season, *Absolute Jest* was given its first performance in March of that year under that orchestra’s music director, Michael Tilson Thomas, with the St. Lawrence String Quartet performing the solo parts. The orchestra has twice toured with *Absolute Jest* and has also recorded it for a forthcoming CD release. Adams and SLSQ have performed the work together in London, in Toronto, and with the New World Symphony in Florida.

The Second Quartet is thus the third piece to result from this exceptionally fruitful relationship between a composer and his favorite chamber group. Speaking of their working relationship, Adams says, “String quartet writing is one of the most difficult challenges a composer can take on. Unless one is an accomplished string player and writes in that medium all the time—and I don’t know many these days who do—the demands of handling this extremely volatile and transparent instrumental medium can easily be humbling, if not downright humiliating. What I appreciate about my friends in the St. Lawrence is their willingness to let me literally ‘improvise’ on them as if they were a piano or a drum and I a crazy man beating away with only the roughest outlines of what I want. They will go the distance with me, allow me to try and fail, and they will indulge my seizures of doubt, frustration, and indecision, all the while providing intuitions and frequently brilliant suggestions of their own. It is no surprise then for me to reveal that both the First Quartet and *Absolute Jest* went through radical revision stages both before and after each piece’s premiere. Quartet writing for me seems to be a matter of very long-term ‘work in progress.’”

Although not a string player himself, Adams admits to a lifelong absorption in the literature, having discovered the Beethoven, Mozart, and Bartók quartets as a teenager. While still a teenager, he often played clarinet in the great quintets by Mozart and Brahms, and during that formative time, he attended what he called “life changing” performances by both the Juilliard and the Budapest Quartets.

This quartet uses the same tropes as *Absolute Jest* in that it too is based on tiny fragments—“fractals,” in the composer’s words—from Beethoven. But the economy here is much stricter. The first movement, for example, is entirely based on two short phrases from the scherzo to the late Op. 110 piano sonata in A-flat major. The transformations of harmony, cadential patterns, and rhythmic profile that occur in this movement go way beyond the types of manipulations favored in *Absolute Jest*.

Like the First Quartet, this new work is organized in two parts. The first movement has scherzo impetus and moves at the fastest pace possible for the performers to play it. The familiar Beethoven cadences and half cadences reappear throughout the movement like a homing mechanism, and each apparition is followed by a departure to an increasingly remote key and textural region.

The second part begins *Andantino* with a gentle melody that is drawn from the opening movement of the same op. 111 piano sonata. Here the original Beethoven harmonic and melodic ideas go off in unexpected directions, almost as if they were suggestions for a kind of compositional free association.

The *Andantino* section grows in range and complexity until it finally leads into the *Energico* final part of the piece, a treatment of one of the shortest of the *Diabelli Variations*. This particular variation of Beethoven's features a sequence of neighbor-key appoggiaturas, each a half step away from the main chord. Adams amplifies this chromatic relationship without intentionally distorting it. Like its original Beethoven model, the movement is characterized by emphatic gestures, frequent uses of *sforzando*, and a busy but convivial mood of hyperactivity among the four instruments.

—Notes courtesy of Boosey & Hawkes

OSVALDO GOLIJOV (B. 1960)
DRAG DOWN THE SKY (2016)

The situation: The Greek armies are assembled at Aulis, ready to sail to Troy, but for a month, there has been no wind to push their sails. The oracle tells Agamemnon that Artemis, the goddess of the place, has decreed that the wind will come only if he sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon agrees to the sacrifice and then realizes the consequences of his decision. The work had its premiere at the 2016 Spoleto Festival, USA, with the same performers.

—Note courtesy of Boosey & Hawkes

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)
QUARTET IN F, OP. 135 (1826)

Op. 135 is Ludwig Van Beethoven's final string quartet and his last word in a medium he had chosen to explore life's journey. Written in poor health, after a traumatic period in his life resulting in an uneasy reconciliation with his nephew Karl, its music was nevertheless composed quickly. Its directness and clarity of language appear to be far removed from the crescendo of complexity and soul searching of the other late quartets. But beneath the surface, there is a subtlety and richness to the music, together with an intricacy of emotional worlds. Take the opening movement, for example. A calm, meditative exterior presents a smooth facade. But underneath, all is complexity and a wealth of invention, wit, and terseness of expression. Then there's the scherzo. It is uncomplicated enough in its structure. But the music works itself up into a frenzy as the first violin plays a wild dance over a furious phrase in the lower strings. The phrase is repeated nearly 50 times! Then, the slow movement brings a complete contrast. Half as long as Beethoven's previous slow movement, it is profound in its timeless gravity, as the music adds layers of emotion, one on top of another. Without doubt, this is among the most moving of all Beethoven's slow movements. It's as though all his troubles and emotional conflict during the summer of 1826 find brief expression in the gentle, occasionally painful solemnity of the music.

The main characteristics of the two middle movements resurface with the interplay of rhythmic assertiveness and lyrical affirmation in the finale. Beethoven writes, "*Muss es sein?*" ("Must it be?") over the former, with a rising, questioning sort of musical figure. Over the latter, with its assertive, answering figure, he writes, "*Es muss sein!*" ("It must be!"). Over the whole, he writes, "The Resolution reached with difficulty." It is as though Beethoven is pushing the language of music toward the rhetoric of speech—much as he did with the cello and double bass recitative leading to the *Ode to*

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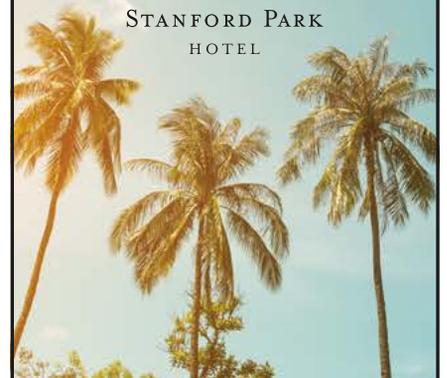
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Joy in the Ninth Symphony. He then proceeds to attempt a resolution of the argument posed in the introduction to the finale, eventually finding resolution in a mood of positive, even joyous reconciliation, tinged with questioning. Just as comic moments can illuminate the darkest sides of a Shakespearean tragedy, so Beethoven's final string quartet ends with a touch of good humor and wit.

—© 2017 by Keith Horner

ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

Established in 1989, the St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) has developed an undisputed reputation as a truly world-class chamber ensemble. Called “witty, buoyant, and wickedly attentive” (*Montreal Gazette*) with a “peerless” sense of ensemble (*Financial Times*), the quartet is celebrated for its “smoldering intensity” (*Washington Post*) and “flexibility, dramatic fire, and...hint of rock ‘n’ roll energy” (*Los Angeles Times*). The SLSQ performs internationally and has served as ensemble-in-residence at Stanford University since 1998.

The St. Lawrence continues to build its reputation for imaginative and spontaneous music making through an energetic commitment to the great established quartet literature as well as the championing of new works by such composers as John Adams, Osvaldo Golijov, Ezequiel Viñao, and Jonathan Berger. Of the ensemble's collaborations with Adams, the *Washington Post* asserted, “If good relationships are built on trust, the bond between the St. Lawrence String Quartet and composer John Adams is a marriage made in chamber music heaven.”

In late summer 2015, the quartet toured Europe with the San Francisco Symphony, performing Adams' *Absolute Jest* under the baton of conductor Michael Tilson Thomas for audiences in the United Kingdom, Germany, Romania, and Switzerland. Later in the season, the SLSQ performed at Carnegie Hall in New York and in Vancouver and Toronto; Madison, Wisconsin; Worcester, Massachusetts; Eugene, Oregon; and East Lansing, Michigan. Spring highlights included

a residency at the University of Maryland and a special Haydn-themed performance at the 92nd Street Y in New York. During the summer season, the SLSQ also continued its long association with Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina.

In recent seasons, the SLSQ has been highlighting first violinist Geoff Nuttall's admiration for Haydn with a series of concerts in which the foursome explores and unpacks the composer's string quartets from various perspectives and then performs the works in their entirety. Nuttall, hailed as “the Jon Stewart of chamber music” (*New York Times*), explains, “To be really devastated by the genius of Haydn's music, the performers and audiences have to be connected...exploring the material in a really active way.” The quartet will continue to offer these Haydn discovery programs at least through the 2016–17 season.

The quartet's residency at Stanford includes work with music students as well as extensive collaborations with other faculty and departments, using music to explore myriad topics. Recent collaborations have involved the School of Medicine, the School of Education, and the Law School. In addition to their appointments at Stanford, the members of the SLSQ serve as visiting artists at the University of Toronto. The foursome's passion for opening up musical arenas to players and listeners alike is evident in the group's annual summer chamber music seminar at Stanford.

Lesley Robertson and Geoff Nuttall are founding members of the group and hail from Edmonton, Alberta, and London, Ontario, respectively. Christopher Costanza is from Utica, New York, and joined the group in 2003. Owen Dalby, from the San Francisco Bay Area, joined in 2015. All four members of the quartet live and teach at Stanford University.

TYLER DUNCAN

Canadian baritone Tyler Duncan recently performed at the Metropolitan Opera as Prince Yamadori in Puccini's *Madama*

Butterfly. At the Spoleto Festival, he debuted as Mr. Friendly in the 18th-century ballad opera *Flora*, returning the next season as the Speaker in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Other appearances have included the role of the Journalist in Berg's *Lulu* and Fiorello in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, both at the Metropolitan Opera; Raymondo in Handel's *Almira* at the Boston Early Music Festival; Dandini in Rossini's *La Cenerentola* with Pacific Opera Victoria; and Demetrius in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Princeton Festival. Issued on the CPO label is his Boston Early Music Festival recording of the title role in Blow's *Venus and Adonis*.

Duncan's concerts include Mahler's Eighth Symphony with the American Symphony Orchestra and the Toronto Symphony; Berlioz's *Lenfance du Christ* with the Montreal Symphony; both Bach's and Mendelssohn's *Magnificat* with the New York Philharmonic; Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Munich Bach Choir, with the Montreal Symphony, and at the Oregon Bach Festival; Haydn's *The Creation* with the Québec, Montreal, and Winnipeg Symphony Orchestras; Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Calgary Philharmonic and Philharmonie der Nationen in Munich, Berlin, Stuttgart, and Frankfurt; Haydn's *The Seasons* with the Calgary Philharmonic; Handel's *Messiah* with Tafelmusik, the Montreal and Toronto Symphony Orchestras, the Handel and Haydn Society, San Francisco's Philharmonia Baroque, and the Portland Baroque Orchestra; and Mozart's *Requiem* with the Montreal, Toronto, and Salt Lake City Symphony Orchestras. He has also performed at the Handel Festival Halle, Verbier Festival, Vancouver Early Music Festival, Montreal Bach Festival, Oregon Bach Festival, Lanaudière Festival, Stratford Festival, Berkshire Choral Festival, and New York's Carnegie Hall.

Frequently paired with pianist Erika Switzer, Duncan has given acclaimed recitals in New York, Boston, and Paris as well as throughout Canada, Germany, Sweden, France, and South Africa. Duncan has received prizes from the

Naumburg Foundation, London's Wigmore Hall, and Munich's ARD International Music competition, and he won the 2010 Joy in Singing competition, 2008 New York Oratorio Society of New York Solo Competition, 2007 Pro Musicis International Award, and Bernard Diamant Prize from the Canada Council for the Arts. He holds music degrees from the University of British Columbia and Germany's Hochschule für Musik (Augsburg) and Hochschule für Musik und Theater (Munich). He is a founding member on the faculty of the Vancouver International Song Institute.

Duncan's recordings include Bach's *St. John Passion* with the Portland Baroque Orchestra and a DVD of Handel's *Messiah* with Kent Nagano and the Montreal Symphony from CBC Television. On the ATMA label are works by Purcell and Carissimi's *Jepthe* with Les Voix Baroques.

ERIKA SWITZER

Canadian collaborative pianist Erika Switzer made her American debut at the Kennedy Center in 2003. Since that time, she has established herself as the frequent partner of several notable vocalists, including baritone Tyler Duncan, tenor Colin Balzer, and soprano Martha Guth.

Switzer has performed recitals at New York's Frick Collection, Rockefeller University, Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall (Weill Hall), and the 5 Boroughs Music Festival. In Europe, she has performed as a guest of Pro Musicis at Paris' Salle Cortot and for the Poulenc Academy at L'Hôtel de Ville de Tours. Other European performances include appearances at the Göppingen Meisterkonzerte, the New Discoveries series at the Baden-Baden Festspiele, and the Winners and Masters series in Munich. In her native Canada, she has performed at the Chamber Music Festivals of Montreal, Ottawa, and Vancouver and for presenters including Music on Main, Debut Atlantic, Prairie Debut, Roy Thomson Hall Presents: Canadian Voices, and the André Turp Musical Society.

Switzer has been recorded by the CBC, Dutch Radio (Radio 4), SWR and the Bayerischer Rundfunk in Germany, WQXR New York, and WGBH Boston. Together with Martha Guth, Switzer is cocreator of *Sparks & Wiry Cries: The Art Song Magazine*, which can be found at www.sparksandwirycries.com.

Switzer is on the music faculty at Bard College and the Bard Conservatory of Music. She is a founding faculty member of the Vancouver International Song Institute and codirector of its program in contemporary performance studies.

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