July 17, 2025

**7:30 P.M.**

Samuel Barber

**Kim** Collins, flute Erik Andrusyak, oboe Chris Howard, clarinet Sean Maree, bassoon

John Michael Flavetta, French horn

*Summer music*

Francis Poulenc

Allegro vivace

*Sextet for piano and winds*

Divertissement: Andantino Finale: Prestissimo

**Kim** Collins, flute Erik Andrusyak, oboe Chris Howard, clarinet Sean Maree, bassoon

John Michael Flavetta, French horn Gary Chapman, piano

# INTERMISSION

Gabriel Faure *Piano quartet no.1 in* c, op. 15

1. Allegro molto moderato
2. Scherzo: Allegro vivo
3. Adagio
4. Allegro motto

Barbara Vaughan, violin Lauel Thurman, viola Fran Bard, cello Andrew King, piano

# PROGRAM NOTES

*Summer music* Samuel Barber (1910-81)

   I don't surround myself with other composers    . Most composers bore me, because most composers are boring. It seems to me the most practical thing is simply to write your music the way you want to write it. Then you go out and find the interpreters who will give it voice. The point is, composers have never helped me. Performers have *always* helped me. Samuel Barber, 1971

Born in West Chester (PA), Samuel Barber was drawn to music at an early age: he began to play piano at age 6 and to compose a year later. His parents were not overly impressed by his precosity and would have preferred that he go outside and play with other kids. In a note written at about age 8 to his mother, Barber protests, "I was not meant to be an athelet [sic] I was meant to be a composer    ." With the support and encouragement of his aunt, he prevailed and entered the Curtis Institute with its first class in 1924, study­ ing piano, composition and voice there until 1933. Five years later, his *Essay for orchestra* (op.12, 1937) and the *Adagio for strings* from his *String quar­ tet* (op. 11, 1936) were heard in a nationally broadcast concert by the NBC Symphony under Arturo Toscanini. From then on, he was the rare American composer who could make a living from commissions.

*Summer music* evolved from an unusual 1953 commission by the Cham­ ber Music Society of Detroit: to commemorate its 10th anniversary in 1954, the Sociey wanted a septet for three woodwinds, three strings and piano to be played by principals of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO). Lacking fi­ nancial resources to pay Barber his usual fee, it negotiated an agreement with him to fund the commission with donations of at least $2,000 raised by the Society. According to Barber, "The idea was that if this caught on, music so­ cieties around the country would take up similar collections and use the funds to commission young local composers who needed experience and exposure." (Though not consciously inspired by this example, Hop River Chamber Music used a similar model to commission *New England Fall* from Neely Bruce at Wesleyan University, for performance as a companion piece to Aaron Cop­ land's *Appalachian Spring* in 2018.)

The Society had to wait several years to hear what Barber composed for it-a piece that did not call for the exotic septet of instruments the Society had proposed. In summer 1954, having no experience composing chamber music for winds and hearing the New York Woodwind Quintet (NYWQ) play a con­ cert in Blue Hill (ME), he had prevailed upon this ensemble to help him with the Society's commission. He was able to sit in on the NYWQ's rehearsals for insight into the capabilities and limitations of wind instruments, and to submit sections of what would eventually become *Summer music* for the ensemble

to try out. The premiere petformance in spring 1956 was given in Detroit by the DSO's principal woodwinds, but the version heard today is the product of further collaboration between Barber and the NYWQ. The score is marked "Slow and indolent", quarter note= 44. According to Barber, "it's supposed to be *evocative* of summer-summer meaning indolent, not killing mosquitoes."

*Sextet for piano and winds,* FP 100 Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) Among the few composers with whom Samuel Barber enjoyed spending time was Francis Poulenc, whom he consulted in 1950 about settings of po­ ems in French by Rainer Maria Rilke: "Francis and I were very friendly-in fact, I've rarely been that close to another composer. I dedicated *Melodies passageres* [the cycle in which the settings appear] to him, and he dedicated to

me his 'Capriccio d'apres *Le Bal Masque'* for two pianos."

Born into a well-to-do Parisian family, Francis Poulenc was introduced to piano at age 5 by his mother, an amateur pianist. Playing the piano quickly became his passion: "When I recall my childhood I see myself always sitting at a piano." Had she run the house, Francis would have studied at the Paris Conservatoire. As it was, he acceded to his father's wish that he get a clas­ sical education, and looked elsewhere for musical nourishment. Private study (1914-17) with virtuoso pianist Ricardo Vifies was the impetus for a life in music as a pianist and composer, as he would later attest: "It is to Vifies that I owe my fledgling efforts in music and everything I know about the piano."

Until studying composition with Charles Koechlin in the early 1920s, he was largely self-taught as a composer. Nonetheless, *Rapsodie negre* for bari­ tone and chamber ensemble (1917) so impressed Stravinsky that he arranged for its publication. More recognition came in 1920, when Poulenc was in­ cluded in a group of young French composers united in their admiration for the music of Erik Satie and announced to the musical world as "Les six Fran�ais;' and in 1924 with the great success of his ballet for Serge Diaghilev's Bal­ lets Russe, *Les biches* (literally 'The does', figuratively 'The flirts'), of which Poulenc remarked that "as in certain paintings by Watteau, nothing is actually seen but the worst can be imagined."

By about the time he graduated from high school (1917), both his parents had died. The substantial estate Poulenc and his older sister inherited-his father had been one of the brothers from whom the chemical manufacturer Poulenc Freres took its name-enabled him to do as he wished without ever having to worry about making a living. In 1928 he bought a beautiful 18th century house in the Loire valley, so that he might compose without the dis­ tractions of Paris, where he kept a small apartment and maintained a busy social life whenever he was in town.

Poulenc's chamber music consists largely of pieces he would petform with other musicians, particularly songs for voice and piano, many of them written for baritone Pierre Bernac with whom Poulenc toured extensively as a duo.

The sextet for piano and wind quintet on today's program is among a much smaller number of instrumental chamber works, in which winds are prominent. In some form, it was performed in June 1931 at a concert in Paris financed

by Poulenc. Substantially revised by 1939, the version heard today was first performed at the end of 1940 by Poulenc with the Quintette a vent de Paris.

*Piano quartet no. I inc,* op.15 Gabriel Faure (1845-1924) Gabriel Faure was born in Pamiers, south of Toulouse, in the *department* of Ariege, up against the Pyrenees in southern France. The youngest of six chil­ dren, he was baby-farmed out until age four, when his father was appointed director of the Montgauzy Teachers' College in Foix. Gabriel's introduction to music seems to have been amusing himself by playing a harmonium in a chapel at the school. Musically gifted, he was-perhaps with some rudimen­ tary keyboard instruction from College students-sufficiently accomplished by age 8 to impress the parliamentary deputy for Ariege, who persuaded his father to enroll him in Louis Niedermeyer's School of Religious and Classical

Music in Paris (three days travel from Foix).

At Ecole Niedermeyer, rations were meagre and discipline tough, but the opportunity to make music and the interest that Niedermeyer himself and oth­ ers took in him made up for it: his piano teacher, Camille Saint-Saens (1835- 1921), became a life-long friend, opening many doors for him. Gabriel spent eleven years at the school, graduating as Maitre de Chapelle (choirmaster) in 1865. Thereafter, he served as organist or choirmaster in Rennes and for var­ ious churches in Paris, as professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire from 1896, and as its director (1905-20).

Faure was a fine pianist, and most of his compositions call for piano­ alone, with voice, orin small ensembles. The piano quartet on today's program is the first of two he composed. Begun in 1876, following favorable reception of his *Sonata for violin and piano in A,* op. 13, it was not completed until 1883. A version performed in 1880 with other musicians of the Societe nationale de musique, formed by Saint-Saens to promote French music, was well-received. But concerns about the finale Jed Faure to re-write this movement from scratch, and the revised version was finally heard in 1884. It's doubtful that these performances did justice to Faure's intentions. A friend remembered in 1919:

Faure told me how carelessly and casually the music had been played by artists who were then fashionable. And how, when summoned to a rehearsal on the eve of the first perforance, he had dared to make some timid observations about tempi and had asked them to put in some dynamic nuances. The 'cellist of the quartet immediately interrupted him: 'My dear fellow, we're in a hurry, it's all we can do to get the notes right: we haven't got time to worry about nuances.'

Notes by S. K. Lehmann