

COLORADO COLLEGE



Program Notes
by
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FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

Tuesday June 10, 2025

7:00 PM

Packard Hall

Sonatine en trio for brass

Allegro

Andante

Fanfare - Allegro

Maurice Bardin
(1921-2010)

Maurice Bardin (1921-2010) was born in Nevers, a small city in central France. Since it was located on the main route through France it was exposed to many elements of French culture in the mid 20th Century. Bardin built an active music career in Nevers where he directed the city orchestra and music school. He also spent time playing more popular music in Parisian nightclubs, adding to his eclectic music career. Finally, he was a collector of decorative visual arts and of unusual musical instruments. His own career was an integral part the Nevers city culture.

An insouciance emerged in Bardin's character which may be sensed in the *Sonatine* heard on this program. While firmly rooted in the classical traditions of which he was a part, it is also a work that seeks to please listeners as he was want to do in his popular piano music. It is in three movements, each with a distinct character. The first, *Allegro*, opens a flashy melody in the trumpet with quick arpeggiated chords in the other two instruments. The second movement, *Andante*, brings all three instruments together in a placid trio. The last movement, *Fanfare*, is just what the title suggests with all instruments combined in brilliant chords, perhaps led most emphatically by the solo trumpet. Enjoy this rarely heard gem.

Duo for bassoon and double bass, L. 35

Andantino

Albert Roussel
(1869-1937)

Albert Roussel was beloved as one of the best French composers whose life spanned the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. In his earlier years, he showed the influence of the French impressionist composers, particularly Debussy and Ravel who were the avant-garde at the time. Later, in the early 20th Century, he was more influenced by classical models like d'Indy and Dutilleul. He also extended his musical scope by showing a moderately strong interest in jazz and its stylistic offshoots.

His Duo for bassoon and double bass was composed in 1925, after he completed his service as an ambulance driver during WWI. The pairing of these two instruments, not often heard as soloists, might be taken as a bit cheeky. This striking work consists of a dialogue between the two instruments that are similar in range but contrast beautifully in their tone colors and articulations. The double bass, like most stringed instruments, is lyrical and smooth while the bassoon is more punctuated. In general, the texture is in dialogue form; the two instruments often seem to be in a long conversation with one another.

This process starts with a slow legato line for the double bass followed by a broken chord passage for the bassoon. They continue trading passages in their characteristic styles so the listener feels the charm of their integrated personalities. The opening has the double bass moving more slowly, contrasted by faster and often staccato notes in the bassoon. But as the music continues, they often begin to sound more and more alike. These changing textures give the work character and charm and keep the listener engaged and eager for the next episode. And even though there is not much jazzy sounding music, the individual lines of the solo instruments often suggest a bluesy lyricism.

String Trio in G Major

Allegretto vivo

Scherzo - Vivo

Andante

Rondo – Vivo

Jean Françaix
(1912-1997)

Jean Françaix (1912-1997) was one of the most prominent French pianists and composers of the 20th Century. And while France had produced some of the most avant-garde composers of the century, it had also produced some of the most successful neoclassicists, or anti-modernists, who felt their modernist contemporaries had simply left the audience behind. Françaix is one of these. For example, his *Piano Concertino*, composed in 1932 when he was 20 and, one would assume, at his most experimental age, earned immediate praise for its pleasing nature. One critic remarked that after so much problematic or labored music, this *Concertino* was like “fresh water, rushing from a spring with the gracious spontaneity of all that is natural.” Now although we can assume that the critic was probably not a supporter of the avant-garde, and had an axe to grind, he does describe just how and why Françaix became so popular. His music was, somewhat like Mozart’s or Rossini’s – fresh, spontaneous, generally flowing, and always natural-sounding. And it reveals particularly French qualities of urbane wit and elegance.

Each of the four movements of this trio is imbued with a strong character, at times serious, at times funny, but always created with a remarkable sense of control and ease. The first movement, *Allegretto vivo*, is played entirely with mutes, but is still full of fast and excited energy. The mutes almost make it sound like excited whispering. All three instruments participate in the conversation. The mutes come off for the second movement which Françaix titled *Scherzo*. The music is now unrestrained and moves from idea to idea, from texture to texture with naturalness and ease. The outbursts on loud *pizzicato* chords followed by more lyrical melodic snippets are particularly notable.

The mutes come back on for the slow third movement marked *Andante*. Set in a minor key and consequently more melancholic, this is mostly an aria for the solo violin with only a few responses by the other instruments. For the subsequent finale, marked *Vivo*, the mutes are again removed and the players take off in an unrestrained effervescent romp. The “rondo” theme heard at the beginning returns from time to time reminding the listener of this classical form. The passages in between these returns of the rondo theme are often delightfully contrasting in mood and style. There is a charming little passage at the end in which the instruments depart with a *pizzicato* sigh rather than a big bang.

Introduction and Allegro

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) wrote his “Introduction and Allegro” in 1905. This was ten years earlier than the masterworks of composers like Debussy and represents the voice of a relatively young composer. To start, he described the work as follows: *Introduction and Allegro for harp, with accompaniment by string quartet, flute and clarinet*. There is no doubt that he intends the harp to be the soloist. That does not mean, however, that it will carry all the melodies. The other instruments are very important, particularly in the Introduction, and reveal to the listener many of the important melodic ideas of the work. Yet these other instruments do not often engage in a conversation with the harp as we might expect in good chamber music. Instead, they present melodies, support the harp, and add color to the multi-hued textures of this wonderful combination of instruments.

In this context, it might be recalled that Ravel was himself a virtuoso pianist. He was clearly interested in writing something for the harp which, if he could play it like he played the piano, would make considerable demands on his technique. And much to the joy of qualified harpists, the work does just that. The skill in using not only the harpist’s fingers, but also the instruments unique pedals, was innovative for the time.

The Introduction, *Très lent (very slow)* begins with three measures in which the winds present a theme which is germinal for the entire work. Then the harp enters with a grand arpeggio. The winds and strings do present more melodies, seemingly accompanied by the harp, although one wonders if in fact what the harp is doing is not more important than the melodies in the string and winds. The second movement, *Allegro*, begins with an extended harp solo which is soon joined by the others. From here, the movement may be heard as a kaleidoscope of exquisite colors. There is little thematic development we normally associate with chamber music. Toward the end, the harp is given more exposed virtuosic music which should give pleasure to the listener.

Sextour for piano and winds

Trés vite et emporté-Allegro vivace
Divertissement – Andantino
Finale – Prestissimo

Francis Poulenc
(1899-1963)

Francis Poulenc is often considered the senior statesperson of a group of French composers who were active after WWI and who brought about some major changes in the directions of French Music. The group was known as “Les Six” (“The Six,” so named as an analogy with the “Mighty Five” Russian nationalist composers of the 19th Century). The famous French writer, Jean Cocteau, summarized the ideas of this group: “their music was to be direct in its approach, light in spirit and free from all the pretensions of the concert hall.” In other words, it was to be eminently listener friendly (to borrow modern computer jargon) and, more often than not, fun!

Poulenc embodied these ideas of Cocteau in his music perhaps more directly than any of the other composers in the “Six.” In general, his music is quite conservative. His harmonies are more tonal than his French forbears, especially Debussy, and his melodies are always clear in their direction and innately lyrical. And often, his music sounds rather close to more popular idioms that were prevalent in Parisian music halls in the 1920’s and 30’s.

His Sextet for wind instruments and piano was begun in 1932 but not completed until 1939. It was clearly a work that had special importance to him and that he was not going to release until he knew he had achieved what he wanted. And it does achieve his ideal balance of

sounding both innovative for the time yet immediately appealing. The first movement, *Allegro vivace*, opens aggressively with driving rhythms and a fairly dense interplay between the instruments, one often imitating another. Soon, however, more lyrical passages lead to a slow middle section after which the movement returns to the energetic music of the opening.

The second movement, *Divertissement* (literally “diversion”), is, as the title might suggest, a musically pleasing relief from the relative seriousness of the first movement. It opens with a slow tender melody. A faster section ensues that is irresistibly charming, fun, and reminiscent of Poulenc’s love of popular French chansons. The charm slowly dissolves into a kind of melancholy twilight, however, and the movement ends in a plaintive slow conclusion cast in a minor key. The *Finale* opens with a very fast *prestissimo* section that romps through a series of delightful melodies, some slower and more lyrical than others, and ends in a dramatically slower tempo with a very loud final closing cadence.

UPCOMING SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL EVENTS

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Festival Artists Concert

7 p.m. June 14, Packard Hall, ticketed event

Music at Midday

12:15 p.m. June 16, Packard Hall, free

Festival Orchestra Concert

Scott Yoo, *conducting*

7:00 p.m. June 17, Celeste Theatre, ticketed event

Pre-Concert Lecture with Michael Grace begins at 5:45 p.m. in the CAC Screening Room

Music at Midday

12:15 p.m. June 18, Packard Hall, free

Children’s Orchestra Concert

Featuring Dr. Seuss’s *Green Eggs and Ham*

9 & 11 a.m. June 19, Celeste Theatre, free ticketed event

Festival Artists Pre-Concert Recital

5:45 p.m. June 19, Packard Hall, free

Festival Artists Concert

7 p.m. June 19, Packard Hall, ticketed event

Music at Midday

12:15 p.m. June 20, Packard Hall, free

Faculty/Fellow Concert at First Congregational

7 p.m. June 20, First Congregational Church, Colorado Springs, free

Fellow Concerto Readings

2 p.m. June 21, Celeste Theatre, free

