FEB. 12

SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS
Samueli Theater
Concert begins at 3 p.m.

OF M. S. SYMPHONY
CARL ST. CLAIR | MUSIC DIRECTOR
presents

2011–2012 CAFÉ LUDWIG CHAMBER SERIES

ORLI SHAHAM • PIANO AND HOST | BENJAMIN SMOLEN • FLUTE
BENJAMIN LULICH • CLARINET | RAYMOND KOBLER • VIOLIN | ROBERT BECKER • VIOLA
TIMOTHY LANDAUER • CELLO | SUSANA PORETSKY • MEZZO-SOPRANO

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862–1918) Syrinx, L129
Benjamin Smolen

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862–1918) Première Rhapsodie, L116
Benjamin Lulich
Orli Shaham

MAURICE RAVEL
(1875–1937) Chansons Madécasses, Op. 78
Nahandove
Aqua
Il est doux
Benjamin Smolen
Timothy Landauer
Susana Poretsky
Orli Shaham

INTERMESSION

GABRIEL FAURÉ
(1845–1924) Piano Quartet No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 15
Raymond Kobler
Robert Becker
Timothy Landauer
Orli Shaham
FRENCH IMPRESSIONS

That sound! That sinuous, sensuous, seductive French sound. What is it about French classical music of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that makes it so distinctively French?

Dates alone tell much of the story. Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, the anchor composers of the Impressionist movement in French music, were born in 1862 and 1875, respectively, and both survived well into the 20th century. They were experimenters who sought to find new modes of musical expression at a time when music was being transformed. Richard Wagner, The Composer Who Changed Everything, was born almost 50 years earlier than Debussy; by the time the new century dawned, the Second Viennese School would shock the world with its explorations of atonality and serialism. Though Gabriel Fauré was somewhat older (born in 1845), all three matured in a musical world in flux.

By contrast, Gounod and Saint-Saëns — the grand old men of the French old guard in classical composition — were born not long after Wagner (1818 and 1835, respectively). They were active at the same time as Wagner, but worked outside the influence of his revolutionary ideas. Some critics would contend that they were looking backwards while Wagner was at the height of his powers, during the very years when Debussy and Ravel were prodigies absorbing the music around them. By the time they began their advanced musical education Wagner had died, but his impact was everywhere; the musical world seemed to be saying adieu to Romanticism, and modernism lay dead ahead. At the same time, starting in the 1870s, Impressionism was rocking the foundations of French painting.

Nowhere in the musical world — not in Vienna, or anywhere else — is the training more rigorous or style-conscious than in Paris. Debussy and Ravel, like their predecessors in French composition, had great reserves of theory and technique to draw upon, and their works exhibit the traditional French virtues of elegance, economy of expression and a superb sense of orchestral color. But they set out in new directions when it came to the use of modes, harmonies, rhythms and exotic ethnic influences. Their deployment of new scales and crystalline harmonies in the creation of translucent effects has forever linked them with the Impressionist painters. Just as the generation of painters nurtured by Camille Pissarro — once considered daringly experimental — dazzle today’s viewers with their expressiveness, so Debussy and Ravel equipped a generation of French composers to bring Impressionism into music, and equipped the rest of us to listen.

The stylistic parallels are striking: while Impressionist painters seemed to recreate the world through color and light rather than the solidity of objects, Impressionist composers found new ways to create sensual effects suffused with light, texture and motion. They seem to do more with less, conjuring shimmering textures and contours with astonishing delicacy of means. The scales and intervals can sound unfamiliar at first, but they quickly seduce the ear.

Critical consensus holds that Gabriel Fauré is not quite an Impressionist composer, but rather a late-Romantic master. Still, he was progressive enough to be influenced by the emergence of Impressionism in his music, which displays an appealing mixture of new freedom and traditional technique.

Debussy composed Syrinx in 1913 as incidental music to be played offstage during Psyché, a play by Gabriel Mourey. The title references a nymph pursued by Pan, the woody classical god who was never without his pipes and his insatiable libido. In fact, the play was originally to be called Flûte de Pan, which supports Debussy’s choice of the instrument as a central dramatic element in the play. Unfortunately, Mourey’s play was never completed.

We think of gods, nymphs and flutes, with their breathy sensuality, as figuring prominently in Debussy’s music — especially in the famous introduction to his Apres midi d’un faune. So it is remarkable to consider that Syrinx was the first major work for solo flute written since C. P. E. Bach’s Sonata in A minor, which dates back to 1763, preceding Debussy’s work by a century and a half. Though the play was never fully produced, Debussy’s music vividly captures its magical, erotic qualities in a musical narrative in which the irascible Pan is attracted to Syrinx, a beautiful nymph who is loyal to Artemis the hunter. After failing to woo her, he chases her to a riverbank where, stranded between the amorous Pan and the rushing waters, she calls out to her friends for help. Rescued by faithful water nymphs, Syrinx leaves the bereft Pan with a breathtaking image: just as he believes he has her within his embrace, he is left with only an armful of reeds.

Unaccompanied works for solo flute remain scarce, and Syrinx is the first such composition for the modern transverse flute. In this work as well as the opening bars of Apres midi — one a rhapsodic, self-contained composition, the other a solo passage lasting mere seconds — Debussy puts the flute at the center of an intensely romantic drama that affords the flutist room for interpretive freedom and virtuosic display; in fact, it is unclear whether the original performing edition’s barlines and breath marks were provided by Debussy himself, or left to the soloist’s discretion and added later by
flutist Marcel Moyse or the work’s dedicatee, Louis Fleury.

Either way, *Syrinx* is a cornerstone of the modern flute repertory. Its ethereal air of enchantment is achieved through relaxed, pliant rhythms, softly contoured lines, and ambiguous harmonies that suggest tone and mood without ever quite resolving. Indeed, Debussy might well have had *Syrinx* in mind when he wrote, “my favorite music is those few notes an Egyptian shepherd plays on his flute: he is a part of the landscape around him, and he knows harmonies that aren’t in our books.”

Such comments can make the magical qualities of Debussy’s narrative sound easy, but they are achieved only with precise, sophisticated craft. Part of *Syrinx*’s exoticism stems from Debussy’s extensive use of the whole-tone, or “perfect” scale consisting only of seven whole steps per octave. You can try this at home on your piano keyboard by playing, for example, C/D/E/F-sharp/G-sharp/A-sharp/C. As a little more experimentation will prove, this highly emotive scale, which lacks simple intervals such as fifths, is devilishly difficult to work with.

**Première Rhapsodie, L116**

Though it is relatively brief and intimately scaled, this masterly chamber work — written as an examination piece for the Paris Conservatory — signals Debussy’s rising international success as a composer.

The years just preceding Debussy’s composition of the rhapsody in 1910, when he was in his mid-40s, were a period of mature artistry and major composition for the composer. His most important breakthrough as a composer came in 1909, when — having been coolly received at its 1902 premiere seven years earlier — his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* was rapturously received at Covent Garden, where it was recognized as an important masterpiece. Following successful performances of *La mer* and *L’après-midi d’une faune* the previous year, the success of his great opera confirmed Debussy’s status as a composer of international stature.

His stronger ties to the prestigious and status-conscious Paris Conservatory were a result of this growing recognition, and the *Première rhapsodie* for clarinet and piano arose from the happy circumstance of his appointment to the board of directors of the Paris Conservatory by its director, Gabriel Fauré. As a director, Debussy was immediately faced with the responsibility of composing two works for the following year’s clarinet examinations, and the rhapsody was written to satisfy this demand. It was used in the examinations in the summer of 1910 in its original piano-and-clarinet scoring. Debussy’s fascinating commentaries survive regarding both the performances and the quality of the composition itself, and his seriousness on these subjects indicates the substantial effort that both composer and pupils lavished on this commission.

“The clarinet competition went extremely well,” he wrote to his editor Jacques Durand, “and to judge by the expressions on the faces of my colleagues, the rhapsody was a success... One of the candidates, Vander Cruyssen, played it by heart and very musically.

The rest were straightforward and nondescript.” The following year Debussy published his own orchestrated version of the rhapsody in the familiar performing edition we know today, and upon hearing its première performance by clarinetist Prosper Mimart, the maestro declared it one of the most pleasing pieces he had ever written.

Though the designation “premier” suggests he intended to write another such rhapsody, and perhaps more than one, he did not survive to fulfill this ambition.

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**Chansons Madécasses, Op. 78**

One of the glories of Impressionist music is its dazzlingly descriptive tone-painting of foreign locations and exotic climes. Maurice Ravel, of course, loved sunlit landscapes and seemed to have Spain in his blood. But this remarkable suite of songs, scored for voice, flute, cello and piano, is set in a more distant, southerly, and artistically challenging location: Madagascar.

The exoticism of the African island-nation’s location not only engages Ravel’s powers of atmospheric description, but also seems to engage a sense of France’s history as a colonial power; the setting represents both the specific environment of Madagascar and the general sense of the less developed, colonialized locale colored by a kind of generalized ethnic exoticism. The texts, adapted from the 18th-century Creole poet Evariste-Désiré de Parny, seem to confirm this view — especially in the second song, which expresses a rather modern anti-colonial feeling and has been called a “cry for freedom” by more than one critic.

Whatever else they may be, these songs are beautiful. Often liquid and languorous, they evoke a strong sense of place yet stand on their own as art songs. They may also rank among Ravel’s most progressive compositions, at least judging from his own assessment.

“I am quite conscious of the fact that my *Chansons madécasses* are
in no way Schoenbergian,” he said of them, referencing the giant of Viennese modernism and atonality. “But I do not know whether I should have been able to write them had Schoenberg never written.”

Gabriel Fauré wrote two chamber works in the conventional combination of piano, violin, viola and cello. Of these, his No. 1 in C minor is by far the more widely admired and programmed. Despite its minor key signature, a positive tone predominates in this work, with major-key developments and an overall quality of warm, dreamy lyricism.

Fauré’s work on the quartet coincided with his effortful courtship of Marianne Viardot, daughter of the celebrated opera star Pauline Viardot: he began the quartet in the summer of 1876 and became engaged to Marianne in 1877, after wooing her for five years. But their engagement was severed after only four months, and evidence of its emotional toll is cited by some analysts of the quartet.

Perhaps only his therapist could hear Fauré’s love life in the quartet, but his musical influences seem less certain. Critics cite the very disparate figures of Saint-Saëns and Brahms for their impact on Fauré — Saint-Saëns for his limitless invention, superb craft and French style; and the very un-Gallic Brahms for the organic, flowing quality of his chamber music and his structural mastery. The impact of Ravel and Debussy was yet to be felt (Ravel was born just a year before Fauré began composing the quartet).

No critic has surpassed Carl Dahlhaus’ description of the quartet’s first movement, with its “almost opulent cantabile and extreme refinement of texture.” The flowing first theme contrasts with a second theme with lightly stressed off-beats. In the second movement, a buoyant scherzo marked allegro vivo, Fauré allows his instrumentalists to indulge in a bit of showing off: the scherzo balances the more understated passages of the quartet with brilliantly virtuosic writing — rapid articulations of pizzicato and bowed notes.

Following the energetic good cheer of the second movement comes an adagio pervaded with sadness conveyed through truncated harmonic progressions and ascending melodic fragments that seem to express unfulfilled yearning. Is this the lament of the rejected lover? The critic Stephen Johnson thinks so, asserting that the movement provides “more than a hint” of Fauré’s response to his broken engagement. But he notes that “the emotion is always nobly restrained, with not even the slightest hint of self-indulgence.” And Fauré returns to his more upbeat emotional form in the brisk final movement, in which the initial theme, introduced in C minor, is united with a second theme that resolves in C major, concluding the quartet on an affirmative note.

Michael Clive is editor-in-chief of the Santa Fe Opera and blogs as The Operahound for ClassicalTV.com.

Piano Quartet No. 2

Gabriel Fauré wrote two chamber works in the conventional combination of piano, violin, viola and cello. Of these, his No. 1 in C minor is by far the more widely admired and programmed. Despite its minor key signature, a positive tone predominates in this work, with major-key developments and an overall quality of warm, dreamy lyricism.

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Michael Clive is editor-in-chief of the Santa Fe Opera and blogs as The Operahound for ClassicalTV.com.
A consummate musician recognized for her grace, subtlety and vitality, Orli Shaham has established an impressive international reputation as one of today's most gifted pianists. Hailed by critics on four continents, Shaham is in demand for her prodigious skills and admired for her interpretations of both standard and modern repertoire. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch recently praised her “wit, passion, delicacy and humor,” and London’s Guardian has called Shaham’s playing “perfection.”

Shaham has performed with most major orchestras in the United States, as well as with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Filarmonica della Scala, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Stockholm Philharmonic and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, among others. She is a frequent guest at numerous summer festivals from Mostly Mozart to Verbier, and has given recitals at Carnegie Hall, The Kennedy Center, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, and many more around the world. She has worked with many eminent conductors including Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Roger Norrington, Christopher Hogwood, David Robertson, Wolfgang Sawallisch, Leonard Slatkin, Robert Spano and Gerard Schwarz.

Shaham’s international performance schedule in 2011-12 includes the world premiere of a piano concerto written for her by Steven Mackey, with the St. Louis Symphony conducted by David Robertson. Shaham releases three new recordings in 2011-2012: a CD of Hebrew Melodies (Canary Classics), recorded with her brother, the violinist Gil Shaham; a recording of the Brahms Horn Trio and Schubert’s lied “Auf dem Strom” (Albany) featuring Richard King; and Saint-Saëns’ “Carnival of the Animals” with pianist Jon Kimura Parker and the San Diego Symphony (San Diego Symphony). Also in 2011-2012, Shaham begins a new role as host of the public radio series America’s Music Festivals, a two-hour weekly program broadcast on more than 100 stations.

Shaham’s highly acclaimed classical concert series for young children, “Baby Got Bach,” continues in New York City and around the country. For preschoolers, “Baby Got Bach” provides hands-on activities with musical instruments and concepts and concert performances that promote good listening skills.

Driven by a passion to bring classical music to new audiences, Shaham maintains an active parallel career as a respected broadcaster, music writer and lecturer. In 2005, she began a collaboration with Classical Public Radio Network as the host of “Dial-a-Musician,” a feature she created especially for the radio network. Her program hosted over 60 guests including composer John Adams, pianists Emanuel Ax and soprano Christine Brewer. Shaham has taught music literature at Columbia University, and contributed articles to Piano Today, Symphony, and Playbill magazines and NPR’s Deceptive Cadence blog. Shaham has served as artist in residence on National Public Radio’s Performance Today.

Shaham was recognized early for her prodigious talents. She received her first scholarship for musical study from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation at age five to study with Luisa Yoffe at the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem. By age 7, she traveled to New York with her family to begin study with Nancy Stessin, and became a scholarship student of Herbert Stessin at The Juilliard School a year later. She has also won the Gilmore Young Artist Award and the Avery Fisher Career Grant, two prestigious prizes given to further the development of outstanding talent. In addition to her musical education, Shaham holds a degree in history from Columbia University. Shaham lives in New York and St. Louis with her husband, conductor David Robertson, college-age stepsons Peter and Jonathan, and preschool twins Nathan and Alex.
Benjamin Smolen was appointed principal flutist of Pacific Symphony in September 2011. Since beginning his studies at the age of 10 in Charlotte, North Carolina, he has won top prizes at the Haynes International Flute Competition, the Jannick Pappoutsakis Memorial Flute Competition and the New York Flute Club Young Artist Competition. He has also given solo performances with the Princeton University Orchestra, Charlotte Civic and Youth Orchestras, Gardner Webb Symphony Orchestra, and on National Public Radio’s From the Top with pianist Christopher O’Riley. His performances have been featured on NPR, WGBH-Boston, French National Radio, and the Naxos and Mode record labels. During the summer, Smolen has participated in the Manchester Music Festival, the American Institute of Musical Studies Festival Orchestra in Graz, and twice as a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center.

Smolen completed his undergraduate studies in the music and Slavic departments at Princeton University, during which time he also completed a performance diploma at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He subsequently earned a master of music degree in flute performance at the New England Conservatory and a performance certificate from the University of Michigan. His primary teachers include Paula Robison, Michael Parloff, Amy Porter, Jayn Rosenfeld and Jennifer DiOr.

Benjamin Lulich was appointed principal clarinet of Pacific Symphony in May of 2007. He has also performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Cleveland Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony and the IRIS Chamber Orchestra. An avid chamber musician, Lulich has appeared on Pacific Symphony’s Café Ludwig series and has been a guest artist for chamber music at Azusa Pacific University, Chapman University, California State University Fullerton, and UCLA. Also interested in new music, Lulich was a member of the Second Instrumental Unit, a contemporary music ensemble based in New York City, where he took part in a concert honoring Milton Babbitt at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall. Lulich has won concerto competitions at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Interlochen Arts Academy, Marrowstone Music Festival and twice at Music Academy of the West. He has also performed for record albums and film scores, including Water for Elephants and The Tourist. Lulich occupies the Hanson Family Foundation Chair.

Violinist Raymond Kobler was appointed concertmaster of Pacific Symphony in 1999. During his illustrious career he has appeared as soloist on numerous occasions with the Cleveland Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony, Zurich Chamber Orchestra and San Francisco Symphony. In this capacity, he has collaborated with such conductors as André Previn, Lorin Maazel, Sir Neville Marriner, Leonard Slatkin, Christoph Eschenbach, Neemi Järvi, and Herbert Blomstedt. At the festivities surrounding the opening of Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco in 1980, he performed the Bach Double Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin. In 1995, Kobler was appointed by Sir Georg Solti to be concertmaster of the World Orchestra for Peace, an ensemble comprised of concertmasters and principal musicians from major orchestras around the globe. Kobler occupies the Eleanor and Michael Gordon Chair.
Principal viola of Pacific Symphony since 1982, Robert Becker was recently appointed to the position of full-time director of string studies at Chapman University’s Conservatory of Music. Internationally known as a pedagogue of the viola and chamber music and founder of the Viola Workout in Crested Butte, Colo., he is dedicated to the training of young violists and string players for a future career in performing, teaching, chamber music and orchestral playing.

Continuing his tenure as principal viola of Pacific Symphony, he served as principal and solo viola for American Ballet Theatre’s West Coast performances at Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and Segerstrom Center for the Arts in 2009-10. Becker occupies the Catherine and James Emmi Chair.

Pacific Symphony principal cellist Timothy Landauer was hailed “a cellist of extraordinary gifts” by The New York Times when he won the coveted Concert Artists Guild International Award in 1983 in New York. Landauer is the winner of numerous prestigious prizes and awards, among them the Young Musicians Foundation’s National Gregor Piatigorsky Memorial Cello Award, the Samuel Applebaum Grand Prize of the National Solo Competition of the American String Teacher’s Association and the 1984 Hammer-Rostropovich Scholarship Award. Landauer’s extensive engagements include his highly acclaimed recitals at Carnegie Recital Hall, the Ambassador Auditorium in Los Angeles, the Orford Arts Center in Montreal, the City Hall Theater in Hong Kong and in Hanover, Germany.

Hailed by the San Francisco Chronicle for having a voice of “extraordinary passion and power” and her “grand but emotionally transparent” characterizations, Susana Poretsky’s future engagements include a return to San Diego Opera as Fenena in Nabucco and performances of Verdi’s Requiem with the Washington Chorus. She also joins the San Francisco Ballet for Leonid Desyatnikov’s Russian Seasons as a part of Alexei Ratmansky’s Diamond Project, a work she premiered in the 2005-06 season and reprised the following season with the New York City Ballet. In the 2007-08 season, she returned to the role of Pauline in Pique Dame at the Saito Kinen Festival under the baton of Seiji Ozawa as well as sang Anna in Maria Stuarda with San Diego Opera. She also joined the Royal Danish Ballet to reprise her sought-after performances of Leonid Desyatnikov’s Russian Seasons.