

February 18, 2024 - James D'León and Friends

Program notes by J. Michael Allsen

Pianist James D'León returns again this season for a program of chamber works with members of the Arizona Philharmonic: Principal Violin II Luke Hill, Principal Viola Kimberly Hankins, and Acting Principal Ruthie Wilde. The program opens with Gabriel Fauré's fine *Piano Trio*, one of his very last compositions. James D'León and Ruthie Wilde then present an enigmatic contemporary piece by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt. We close the first half with the 1921 *Piano Trio* of Rebecca Clarke. The largest work on the program, Robert Schumann's *Piano Quartet in E-flat Major*, is one of the works he wrote for his wife, the pianist Clara Schumann.

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 110

Fauré completed this work in March of 1923. After a private performance at the home of a friend, it was formally premiered on June 21, 1923 in Paris. Duration 19:00.

Gabriel Fauré was a tremendously influential figure in France during the decades surrounding 1900. He studied initially at the Ecole Niedermeyer, a musical school in Paris that primarily trained church musicians. He would eventually teach there, and held an increasingly prestigious series of church positions, culminating in his appointment as organist at La Madeleine in Paris in 1874. He was a founding member of the Société Nationale de Musique, which was devoted to promoting the work of younger French composers, and many of his works appeared on the Société's concerts. In 1896, he was appointed composition professor at the Paris Conservatory—very much over the objections of more conservative faculty, who considered his music too radical. Eventually in 1905, he was appointed director of the Conservatory, and proved to be an able administrator, modernizing the curriculum and bringing in faculty with new ideas, including Debussy. Fauré's personal style was



unique, and he is often cited as an important transitional figure spanning musical Romanticism and the early 20th century. Though he was interested in the music of Wagner, he avoided the Wagnerian style taken on by so many of his contemporaries. He remained essentially a conservative, grounded in the Romantic tradition, but he openly admired the more *avant garde* experiments of Debussy and his own student Ravel. Fauré was a particularly gifted writer of melodies, often free and wide-ranging, supporting them with colorful harmony.

The *Piano Trio* is one of his final works. After many years when his duties at the Conservatory left him little time to compose, Fauré retired in late 1920, to devote himself to composition. Though he composed actively and successfully in the first two years of his retirement, by 1922 fatigue and poor health increasingly prevented him from working. He completed only two works between 1922 and his death, the *Piano Trio* and *String Quartet*, but these are generally considered to be his finest chamber works. In early 1922, his publisher Jacques Durand, asked him for a piano trio, and while Fauré made some initial sketches, he was unsatisfied. However, that summer, when he was enjoying a summer holiday in the alpine town of Annecy-le-Vieux, Fauré wrote to his wife that he had completed a movement of a trio for clarinet or violin, cello, and piano: what would eventually become the trio's *Andantino*. He completed the work back in Paris that winter, at some point abandoning the clarinet in favor of the classic piano trio scoring: violin, cello, and piano. Its public premier in June 1923 was played by one of the greatest chamber ensembles of the day: the trio of violinist Jacques Thibaudet, cellist Pablo Casals, and pianist Alfred Cortot. This concert of the Société Nationale was held in honor of Fauré's 78th birthday, though the composer was too ill to attend. (He was, however, able to hear the work at a 79th birthday concert a year later.)

The opening movement (*Allegro non troppo*) begins with an unsettled main theme played by the cello above a restless piano background. Piano introduces a second idea that is driven forward by rhythmic instability. The movement is set in loosely in sonata form, where the development section includes one particularly striking passage where the piano works with the second theme against unison strings. Instead of a conventional recapitulation, Faure brings back the opening ideas with considerable decoration and continues to develop them until the end. The central and longest movement (*Andantino*) is set in a broad three-part form. In the opening, violin and cello lay out a wide-ranging main idea, eventually combining in a calm duet, and the piano introduces a gentle contrasting idea. The piano begins a middle episode with a new idea, answered by brief string responses. When the strings pick up this idea, it is in a long unison line. The movement ends with a varied reprise of the opening music that rises to a moment of great passion before closing quietly. The closing *Allegro vivo* begins with operatic outbursts by the strings and flashy answers from the piano. Eventually the brighter mood prevails. and the movement continues with mostly lighter, dancelike music.

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)
Spiegel im Spiegel

Spiegel im Spiegel (Mirror in the Mirror) was written for Russian violinist Vladimir Spivakov, who played its first performance at the Moscow Conservatory with pianist Boris Bekhterev, on December 27, 1978. Duration 9:00.

Estonia's greatest living composer, Arvo Pärt, began his career when Estonia was under Soviet control. His early works were neoclassical in character, but by the early 1960s he had begun exploring serialism (controlling all aspects of a composition with a predetermined plan) and collage technique, and at the same time emulating the music of Bach—often in the same work. His style earned him increasing disapproval from Soviet authorities, and Pärt himself was growing increasingly dissatisfied with his own music. By 1968, he had reached a kind of creative crisis, and largely withdrew from composing for several years, concentrating



on studies of counterpoint, Gregorian and Orthodox chant, and early music. In the late 1970s he emerged again as a composer with works in a new, largely tonal and simple style. Pärt was in fact one of several European composers, including his contemporaries John Tavener, Henryk Górecki, and Pēteris Vasks, who turned to what writers of the time dubbed the “new simplicity” —partly a reaction against the atonal complexity of modernist styles. Increasingly frustrated with the artistically oppressive atmosphere in the Soviet Union, he left Estonia in 1980, settling briefly in Vienna, and eventually in Berlin, where he still lives. Though he continued to compose instrumental music after 1980—his *Symphony No. 4*, for example, was premiered in 2008—it has been Pärt's exquisite and moving sacred vocal works that have earned him an international reputation.

Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel (Mirror in the Mirror)* was written in 1978 shortly before he left the Soviet Union. It was initially composed for violin and piano, but like many of his works, it exists in multiple versions, including the piece for cello and piano heard here. This is deceptively simple music. The piano sets up a quiet, static background with few changes in harmony. The cello's phrases, slow and deliberate, and played mostly without vibrato, all pivot around a single note, A (the “mirror” of the work's title), moving stepwise through the pitches of the F Major/D minor scale. This piece can be meditative—even hypnotic—and the challenge for the performers (and listeners) is to maintain focus and intensity as this piece unfolds over the course of nine minutes, without a great deal of “interpretation.” As Pärt puts it: “Everything redundant must be

left aside. Just like the composer has to reduce his ego when writing the music, the musician too must put his ego aside when performing the piece.” It is well worth the effort! into the main theme.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Piano Trio

Clarke composed this work in 1921. It was premiered in New York City in June 1922.

Duration 24:00.

British-American composer and violist Rebecca Clarke was born near London, to a German mother and an American father. She studied at the Royal College of Music, eventually becoming the first female composition student of composer Charles Villiers Stanford. Her studies at the RCM were cut short when her abusive father withdrew all support. She then earned a living as a performer, eventually becoming one of the first female musicians in the Queen’s Hall orchestra. During the first world war, Clarke made her first extended trip to America. (She claimed dual British and American citizenship throughout her life.) She worked successfully as a touring musician, but also enjoyed some initial success as a composer, winning honors in the Berkshire Festival chamber music competition for her *Viola Sonata* and *Piano Trio*. Returning to Britain in the late 1920s, she continued to work primarily as a violist, finding great difficulty as a woman in publishing her compositions. At the outbreak of World War II, Clarke was visiting relatives in the United States, and found herself unable to return to Britain. She spent most of the rest of her long life in America. With very little encouragement in the form of performances or publication of her music, she composed only sporadically late in life. Though she had not exactly been “forgotten,” Clarke did enjoy some attention and a revival of some of her music when she was in her 90s, and in the decades since her death, her works—particularly her early chamber music—have been performed and recorded regularly.



The Berkshire Festival was among the most important venues for chamber music in the United States, and when Clarke entered her *Viola Sonata* in its composition competition in 1919, she used the pseudonym “Anthony Trent,” knowing that a composition by a woman was unlikely to be taken seriously. It was runner-up that year, losing by a single vote to the *Viola Suite* by Ernest Bloch. When it was revealed that “Anthony Trent” was in fact Rebecca Clarke, one critic went so far as to suggest that, a woman could *not* have written the piece and that it was instead a second

entry in the composition by Bloch—that, as Clarke later put it, “that I didn’t exist.” She used the Trent pseudonym again in 1921 for her *Piano Trio*, again earning second place. (When it was first performed in New York City in 1922, it was under her own name.) This time, however, the competition’s sponsor, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, came through with a consolation prize, a \$1000 commission for the *Rhapsody for Cello and Piano*, which Clarke completed in 1923. Coolidge was one of the one of the most important patrons of contemporary music in early 20th century America, and this would be her only commission to a female composer.

Like much of Clarke’s music, the *Piano Trio* is a work rooted in the German Romantic tradition, though some of its harmonies show that she was also influenced by Debussy and Ravel. It begins (*Allegro ma appassionato*) with muscular, dissonant music from the piano. The opening figure, a kind of fanfare, will reappear throughout the piece as a musical “motto.” The movement hints at sonata form, based upon two main ideas: a dark expansion of the opening music by the strings, and a *misterioso* second idea with sliding Debussian harmonies introduced by the piano. The development is focused at first on the aggressive first theme, and when Clarke turns her attention to the second theme, the section ends with a strikingly modern-sounding passage. There is no formal recapitulation, but instead a pensive coda, constantly interrupted by the insistent motto. The second movement (*Andante molto semplice*) begins with a quiet melody from muted strings, derived from the motto and again making a few harmonic nods to Debussy. There is a more flowing middle episode before the opening mood returns and the movement ends with a haunting passage for solo violin. The final movement (*Allegro vigoroso*) opens with an angular, oddly-accented dance theme. The more sedate second idea is based upon the second theme of the first movement. After a piano cadenza that explores the motto, Clarke ends with a quiet meditation on the movement’s second theme and a wild coda based upon the first.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Piano Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 47

Schumann wrote this work between October 25 and November 26, 1842. Its premiere was at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on December 8, 1844, by violinist Ferdinand David, violist Niels Gade, cellist Franz Wittmanns, and pianist Clara Schumann. Duration 28:00.

In his early career, Schumann famously approached composition in a systematic, almost single-minded way. In 1840-41, which he referred to as his *Liederjahre* (“year of songs”), he concentrated almost entirely on art songs—composing over 160 *Lieder* over the course of 1840 alone. Beginning early in 1841 he turned to the symphony, completing the works now known as his symphonies *No. 1* and *No. 4*, and the *Overture, Scherzo, and Finale, Op. 52* during what he called his “year of symphonic fire.” 1842-1843 was devoted just as compulsively to chamber music: producing three string quartets, the *Piano Quintet* and the *Piano Quartet* heard here, and he wrapped up a year of work with a pair of innovative pieces, the *Phantasiestück* for piano trio, and an *Andante and Variations* for two pianos, two cellos, and horn. Schumann completed the *Piano Quartet, Op. 47* between October 25 and November 26, 1842, directly on the heels of

finishing his *Piano Quintet*. He had actually sketched out no fewer than three different piano quartets in 1829, when he was a student at the University of Leipzig. One of these, a *Piano Quartet in C minor*, was completed and performed in the home of one of the teenage Schumann's friends. Unpublished until 1979, it is played occasionally today, and it is a fine student composition, but his 1842 *Piano Quartet, Op. 47* is a mature masterpiece, and it remains, indisputably, *the Schumann Piano Quartet*.



The piano parts for the *Piano Quintet*, *Piano Quartet*, and *Phantasiestück* were all intended for his wife, Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-1896), one of the great piano virtuosos of the 19th century, and a fine composer in her own right. A child prodigy, she made her solo debut at the Leipzig Gewandhaus at age eleven, and toured Europe in the years following. She and Robert Schumann met while she was still in her teens, and they married in 1840, very much against the wishes of her father. They would have eight children together, but she continued to tour intermittently through the early years of their marriage. Though Robert occasionally chafed at comments referring to him as “Mr. Clara Schumann,” their marriage seems to have been a genuine and affectionate partnership with mutual respect for one another's talents. After her husband's untimely death in 1856, she continued to tour in order to support their children, and eventually became one of the most respected piano teachers in Germany, taking a prominent position at the Frankfurt Conservatory—a role that was very rare for a 19th-century woman.

The chamber works Schumann wrote for Clara are not merely showy pieces for the piano, but true chamber music—in explaining his approach to writing string quartets, for example, Schumann said that “the proper quartet should avoid symphonic *furore* and aim rather for a conversational tone in which everyone has something to say.” This is certainly his approach in the *Piano Quartet*...though the piano may have just a bit more to say than the strings. For her part, Clara Schumann called it “a beautiful work, so youthful and fresh, as if it were his first.”

The quartet opens with a calm chorale (*Sostenuto assai*)—a sedate version of the lively main theme heard when the tempo speeds up suddenly (*Allegro ma non troppo*) and the body of the movement begins. The second theme is a dramatic minor-key idea with rising scales in the strings. The opening chorale returns to signal the beginning of an intense development section. Schumann continues to vary his themes during the recapitulation, and just as the movement seems to be drawing to a close, he inserts the chorale one more time, before an agitated coda. The *scherzo* (*Molto vivace*) opens with a fiery theme that alternates with a pair of contrasting trios. The first of these is a tragic idea constantly interrupted by reminiscences of the *scherzo* theme. The second trio is a series of piano chords answered by the strings. There is a wry “blink and you'll miss it” moment at the end where Schumann appropriates one of Beethoven's favorite

scherzo movement jokes. The movement ends with a reprise of the opening music, but in the final bars, the piano clearly makes it sound like we were about to return one more time to the first trio...only to abruptly end the movement a few measures later. The *Andante cantabile* is a set of variations on a gorgeous theme sung by the cello though with a surprise: Schumann inserts a version of the opening movement's chorale after the first variation. At the end, there is a mysterious episode where all four instruments pass a three-note motive among themselves. The mystery is quickly solved: these are the opening notes of the finale (*Vivace*). This movement is notable for its intense contrapuntal writing, the product of Robert and Clara Schumann's close study of Bach at the time. The main theme is presented as a fugue, and alternates with a pair of more lyrical contrasting ideas. The movement is capped by an exuberant fugal coda.

PROGRAM

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 110

Allegro non troppo

Andantino

Allegro vivo

Luke Hill, violin

Ruthie Wilde, cello

James D'León, piano

ARVO PÄRT

Spiegel im Spiegel

Ruthie Wilde, cello

James D'León, piano

REBECCA CLARKE

Piano Trio

Allegro ma appassionato

Andante molto semplice

Allegro vigoroso

Luke Hill, violin

Ruthie Wilde, cello

James D'León, piano

INTERMISSION

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Piano Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 47

Sostenuto assai—Allegro ma non troppo

Scherzo: Molto vivace

Andante cantabile

Finale: Vivace

Luke Hill, violin

Kimberly Hankins, viola

Ruthie Wilde, cello

James D'León, piano

BIOGRAPHIES

Born in South Korea into a musical family, **James D'León** began the piano at the age of 4 and performed his first recital at the age of 5. After receiving early piano training from his mother, he was awarded a full scholarship to the San Francisco Conservatory of Music as a pre-college student. As the winner of both the San Francisco Symphony and the Palo Alto Chamber Orchestra competitions, he performed the Grieg Piano Concerto and Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 at the age of 12. He then relocated to Pennsylvania where he honed his technique and performance skills. By the age of 14, he had won every regional competition culminating in his debut performance of the Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He continued his piano studies with the late George Sementovsky in Philadelphia, which resulted in top honors as a summa cum laude graduate from Temple University in Philadelphia. This study greatly influenced his style, refined his technique, and formulated his philosophy of piano performance, especially in regard to physical movement. He was subsequently awarded a fellowship to the Eastman School of Music in New York where he received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance and Literature.



From there, he won praise in many international piano competitions such as the Bachauer, Kapell, Leeds, and the Van Cliburn Competition. He was also a top-five finalist in the Naumburg International Competition where he was selected out of 250 extraordinary pianists. In 2009, he was selected as an official Steinway Artist on both the prestigious New York and Hamburg, Germany rosters. Since then, he has performed in England, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Canada, and 40 states throughout the continental United States.

As a chamber musician, he has performed with the world's finest chamber groups including the Muir String Quartet, and the Shanghai String Quartet, with whom he performed the Brahms Piano Quintet to a capacity audience that resulted in a 10-minute standing ovation. He is also in

great demand as a master-class presenter and adjudicator. To date, he has given master classes at more than 75 universities around the world and has served as a judge in international piano competitions of all ages. As a recording artist, the American Record Guide stated “D’León’s performance is a revelation and a real treasure!” In addition, E-Music Magazine called his performance of the Schubert and Liszt “amenable and remarkable!” He has also been a guest conductor of the Prescott Pops and the Associate Conductor of the Prescott Chamber Orchestra.

Today, D’León is known as a rare and completely versatile pianist who is just as comfortable performing a concerto as he would be playing a solo recital or collaborating with a chamber music group. He continues to dazzle audiences and keep them on the edge of their seats with his commanding technique, expressive body movement, and searching interpretations.

Ruthie Wilde, an Arizona native, believes that music has the power to transform the world, and is amazed by its ability to heal people and reveal higher truths. She is Principal Cellist of the West Valley Symphony, a founding member of the Evox Ensemble, and Music Associate for Children and Youth at Pinnacle Presbyterian Church. She also serves on the board of the Arizona chapter of the American String Teachers Association and maintains a private cello teaching studio.



Ruthie is passionate about music as both a performance art and an educational art. She has been a cello instructor for nearly two decades, and before her recent move to Flagstaff was the teacher of both general music and orchestra in an elementary school setting. Prior to that she was on faculty within the Maricopa County Community College District, where she taught private lessons and led a cello ensemble, and was the founding Orchestra Director at Glendale Community College.

Ruthie is grateful to Mrs. VanWee, Jamie Kellogg, and Tom Landschoot, for investing their time and hearts into developing her as a musician through private cello instruction. She earned both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Cello Performance from Arizona State University.

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Dr. Kim Hankins has a fulfilling career as a chamber musician and educator. She is the violist of Tetra String Quartet, an Arizona Non-Profit dedicated to expanding access to quality music education and performances in the community, and inspiring and empowering youth through chamber music education. Dr. Hankins has been featured as a guest presenter multiple years at the American Viola Society Festival and has performed as a soloist and chamber musician throughout the United States, Germany, Luxembourg, and Iceland.



Dr. Hankins has a Doctorate of Musical Arts from Arizona State University, where she was a Teaching Assistant for Nancy Buck and violist of the Herberger String Quartet. Before moving to Arizona in 2017, she completed a Performance Diploma in Solo Viola Repertoire and a Masters of Music degree at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music as a four-year recipient of the Artistic Excellence Award. She has also worked closely with members of Pacifica Quartet, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Juilliard String Quartet, St. Lawrence String Quartet, and Brooklyn Rider. With a desire to expand the viola repertoire, Dr. Hankins completed her DMA Research Project on her transcriptions and recording of Ernest Bloch's Three Suites for Solo Cello. She plays on a 1974 Marten Cornelissen viola. For more information visit: kimhankinsviola.com

Luke Hill is a graduate with his Master's degree in violin performance from Arizona State University, having studied with Dr. Katherine McLin. Before ASU, Mr. Hill received his Bachelor of Music from the University of Colorado at Boulder, having studied with Charles Wetherbee. As Concertmaster of the West Valley Symphony since 2018, Mr. Hill has had the opportunity to perform as soloist on Prokofiev's *First Violin Concerto* and has enjoyed performing many of the great orchestral Concertmaster solos, such as those from Brahms' *First Symphony*, Ravel's *Ma mère l'Oye*, and many others. In addition, Mr. Hill was recently appointed Principal Second Violin for the Arizona Philharmonic. Mr. Hill has performed all over the United States and Europe primarily while attending summer music festivals such as Brevard Music Festival, Green Mountain Chamber Music Festival, and Saarburg Music Festival in Saarburg, Germany, as well as study abroad in Florence, Italy. Mr. Hill performs on a 1912 W.E. Hill & Sons violin.

