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Program Notes for CMSFW September 22, 2018 Concert
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“Welcome to My Music Room”

String Trio No. 1 in B-flat, D.471
Franz Peter Schubert (1797-1828)

The Schubert family loved to play chamber music together in the home. On Sundays and feast days, they would congregate for music making. So gifted were they that they had an in-house string quartet, without need for reinforcements from family friends. Franz was the family violist; Papa Schubert and brothers Ferdinand and Ignaz balanced out the ensemble. This extraordinary domestic environment explains the large number of youthful string quartets Franz Schubert composed, *eighteen* of which predate his 21st birthday.

Presumably, the string trio interested him less. After all, if four players were available, why not include everyone? Perhaps there were a couple of nights when Papa Schubert was ill or otherwise unable to play, though, because two string trios survive. Both are in B-flat major, and were written within a year of one another; D.471 was composed in September 1816. Schubert was still in his 'teens, but already employed as a schoolmaster, and chafing at the restraints placed on him by his academic responsibilities.

The trio we hear this afternoon is incomplete. Not all its component movements have survived. A fragment of an *Andante* in E-flat major exists, but the "little" B-flat Trio is generally performed as this single, sprightly movement. In its original guise, it was probably for two violins and cello, as opposed to violin, viola, and cello, as it is performed today. His models were clearly Mozart and Haydn, and this B-flat *Allegro* has a decidedly 18th-century cast to it. Themes are simple, folk-like and melodic. Schubert sets them forth in clean, foursquare phrases. He uses triplets for rhythmic variety and occasional sextuplets for a dramatic flourish. Chromaticism appears discreetly, and modulations only hint at the daring journeys Schubert would make later in his career. Any clouds that appear in this landscape are the small fluffy variety, against a background of brilliant sunshine and clear blue skies.

String Trio (1985)
Alfred Schnittke (b. 1934)

Regarded by many to be the most important living Russian composer, Alfred Schnittke has a fascinating bicultural background. Although he currently teaches in Hamburg in northern Germany, Schnittke also maintains a residence in Moscow. He was born of German parents, in Engels, near Saratov, in an area of the USSR that was once the German Republic of Volga. His

father was a correspondent with a German-language newspaper published in the Soviet Union, which meant that the family traveled an unusual amount during Schnittke's childhood.

From 1946-1948 they lived in Vienna. Those were key years in Schnittke's musical development, exerting a long-range influence of particular importance for the Trio on this evening's program. Many of his instrumental compositions grew out of training in Soviet orthodox musical views. Schnittke also produced more than 60 film scores between 1961 and 1984. He acknowledges the influence of Gustav Mahler, Charles Ives, and the serialist music of Henri Pousseur.

The String Trio was commissioned by the Alban Berg Foundation to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Berg's birth. In a 1988 interview with *New York Times* critic Allan Kozinn, Schnittke cited the Trio, along with his Second Violin Sonata (1968), Piano Quintet (1976), and a then-new Piano Sonata (1988) as "four works that cover the main points of [his] life as a composer." He feels that his own musical voice emerges clearly in his works, in spite of the eclectic quotations from other musical eras with which he has become associated. That eclecticism takes many forms: humor, nostalgia, even patches of 12-tone music. Schnittke has said:

When I use elements of, say, Baroque music, I do it not simply because I want to juxtapose different styles, but because I feel it's what I have to do in the piece at hand. Sometimes I'm tweaking the listener, and sometimes I'm thinking about earlier music as a way of writing that has disappeared and will never come back, and in that sense, it has a tragic feeling for me. I see no conflict in being both serious and comic in the same piece. In fact, I cannot have one without the other. They are two sides of the same consciousness.

The Trio is a thoughtful, intense work in two movements, each approximately 13 minutes long. Shadows of Mahler and Schubert are quite noticeable in the fragments that Schnittke manipulates in his music; indeed, the piece might be subtitled "Postcards from Vienna." A waltz fragment runs through like a *Leitmotif*; its evocation of the past provides a shocking contrast to the bitter, impassioned commentary the three players declaim in the musical language of the present. This trio's origins in observance of the Berg centenary exercised a further Viennese influence on Schnittke, whose music is characterized by an intimate expressiveness that has much in common with Berg.

Piano Quartet in C minor, Op.15 Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Gabriel Fauré was both the embodiment of French romanticism and, paradoxically, a contributor to the breakdown of traditional tonality. In a career that spanned more than half a century, he wrote music that embraced 19th-century passion and lyricism, while adopting an expanded musical vocabulary that drew on whole tone harmonies and unusual modulations.

Fauré's highly personal, instantly identifiable language is remarkable in light of the Wagnerian influence that dominated French music in the late 19th century. Even though he was

well acquainted with Wagner's operas, Fauré was preoccupied with creating something new. He studied the music of the past and present with the express purpose of avoiding imitation. That stated, if one seeks a model for the C minor Piano Quartet, one finds it not in Wagner but rather in Schumann.

Fauré spent seven years under the tutelage of Louis Niedermeyer at the Ecole Niedermeyer in Paris, pursuing a curriculum dominated by church music. Upon Niedermeyer's death in 1861, sixteen-year-old Fauré continued piano study with Camille Saint-Saëns, who was by then among the most famous musicians in France. Soon the lessons expanded to include composition as well as piano.

He began his professional career as a church organist in Rennes and retained a reputation as a fine keyboard player for the duration of his life. His music has become popular with the general public in large part through his chamber music with piano.

For three months in 1877, Fauré was engaged to Marianne Viardot, daughter of the celebrated mezzo-soprano Pauline Garcia Viardot. When Marianne severed the liaison in October 1877, the composer was heartbroken. His lifelong friends, Camille and Marie Clerc, helped him to regain emotional stability. During this turbulent time, he produced his first two masterpieces, the Violin Sonata in A, Op. 13 and the Piano Quartet, Op.15. In a touching letter written in 1919, Marie Clerc reminded him that the quartet's opening idea had occurred to him at her home, "on the little balcony at Ste.-Adresse." He worked on the piece from summer 1876 through 1879.

At this point, he lacked self-confidence, one reason that these earlier works gestated for so long. Four years after completing the quartet's first version, he discarded the finale, composing an entirely new one – thereby forcing a delay in publication until 1884. Inasmuch as he destroyed his original finale, we do not have the luxury of comparing his first inspiration to his more mature labors.

The opening Allegro molto moderato is bold, masculine, and forceful. A unison string theme supported by offbeat piano chords sets the tone for the movement and, indeed, for much of the quartet. Fauré recognized that the strings had a superior singing quality for his rich themes. Only rarely does he give the melody to the piano. Instead, he uses the keyboard to spin a web of textures from arpeggios, chords, and running scales, often in counterpoint to the strings. Fauré's structure is a clear sonata form, with contrasting first and second themes. Viola introduces the latter, followed in imitative succession by the other strings. Delicious, unexpected modulations provide transition between theme groups and propel much of Fauré's development section. The syncopated chords of the first measures return at the end in a *pianissimo* coda.

The scherzo is noteworthy for its barely contained energy and schizophrenic switches between 6/8 and 2/4 meter, as the wild dance runs its course. Its central trio section surprises with a shimmering chorale for muted strings.

Rhythmic drive characterizes Fauré's music, even in his slow movements. Once he establishes a pattern, its reiteration provides continuity and momentum for the music. Violin, viola and cello assume more independent roles in the Adagio, now emphasizing the dark hues of

C minor. Fauré's gift for rhythm permeates the piano figuration, which is as integral and essential to the texture as it was in the first movement. Here again, he favored the lush, sustained sound of strings for his themes.

Ironically, Fauré's finale has been criticized as the weakest movement in the quartet. Most musicians disagree, savoring its release from the heavy, quasi-Wagnerian feel of the first movement. Here, by contrast, Fauré's finale seems to embrace a Gallic sense of occasion, with more delicate and subtle interplay among the four musicians. Individual solos are fleeting rather than ponderous or declamatory. Textures are akin to crystallized water particles: etched, weightless, and sparkling.

Piano arpeggios and sweeping upward melodic ideas provide the finale with its surging energy. Fauré closes his quartet with a strong and masculine coda. It caps an exciting and dramatic quartet that remains Fauré's most frequently performed chamber composition.