

Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth presents
Dover Quartet with Romie de Guise-Langlois, clarinet
Saturday, 21 March 2026 - Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2026

String Quartet No. 4 (1950)

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969)

In her seminal study of musical life in Poland, Lidia Rappoport-Gelfand calls Grażyna Bacewicz “the brightest and most talented representative of neo-classicism in Poland.”

Born in the central Polish city of Łódź, Bacewicz grew up playing violin and piano. She started composing at age thirteen but elected to study philosophy at Warsaw University. Remarkably, she pursued music simultaneously, enrolling in violin and composition classes at the Warsaw Conservatory. In the early 1930s, she continued her musical education in Paris, working with violinist André Touret and, at Fontainebleau, with the legendary composition pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. She also had violin lessons in Paris with the Hungarian-born virtuoso Carl Flesch. After returning to Poland, Bacewicz became concertmaster of the Polish Radio Symphony in 1936 and had a burgeoning career as both soloist and composer when Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939, catalyzing the Second World War and bringing a screeching halt to Poland’s musical life.

She wrote her fourth quartet in 1950 on commission from the Polish Composers Union, which sought to submit an entry to the 1951 Concours International pour Quatuor à Cordes in Liège, Belgium. The premiere took place in September 1951, and Bacewicz’s quartet took the

competition's first prize. It remains among her best known compositions, exceptionally well written for strings and rich in musical content.

Bacewicz is said to have disliked the term “neoclassical,” but her three movements adhere to traditional forms, and her musical language is modernist but not atonal. The first movement is substantial, clocking in at about ten minutes. It comprises an elegiac slow introduction with closely intertwined parts, followed by a free sonata-allegro. Tempo and meter change frequently. When melodies emerge, they are reminiscent of folk song but harmonized creatively. The texture is an imaginative balance of homophonic passages — often in rhythmic unison — and polyphonic writing. There are cameo solos for cello and viola, but much of the movement stretches the confines of the string quartet in quasi-orchestral textures.

The slow movement is a tripartite structure rich in imitative elements. Here again the mood often shifts rapidly: intense passages interrupt serene ones. A recurrent rhythmic cell unifies the movement.

Bacewicz's finale is the most overtly Polish: a dance-like rondo clearly rooted in folk music. The theme, in 6/8 meter, is played staccato. She uses hemiolas — shifting the pulse from triple time to duple, or vice versa — for rhythmic variety. The movement is distinctly lighter in character than its predecessors and often quite witty, as in episodes played *sul ponticello* (on or near the bridge) and all pizzicato. An emphatic coda brings the quartet to a decisive close.

***Equilibrium* for clarinet and string quartet (2024)**

Pierre Jalbert (b. 1967)

North Texas premiere

During the past three decades, Pierre Jalbert has quietly and steadily made his way into the ranks of America's most prominent composers. Focusing primarily on instrumental music, he brings to his compositions a refined sense of color and impressive handling of instrumental resources.

Jalbert's family came from Quebec; however, he was born in New Hampshire and grew up in Vermont. He holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and the University of Pennsylvania, where his principal composition teacher was George Crumb. Since 1996, Jalbert has been professor of composition and theory at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music in Houston. From 2002 to 2005, he served as composer-in-residence with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

From his early *Rhythmus* for piano quartet (1991) through his *Sweet and Doleful Timbres* for soprano saxophone and guitar (2021), Jalbert has been an avid proponent of instrumental works for small ensemble. His chamber compositions have attracted commissions from several high profile ensembles. The work that receives its North Texas premiere today is a joint commission with the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Chamber Music Houston, and CMSFW.

The quality, imagination, and diversity of Jalbert's chamber works earned him the Elise Stoeger Prize in 2007. Unlike the Pulitzer Prize and the Grawemeyer Award, which are presented to a composer to acknowledge a specific work, the Stoeger prize recognizes lifetime achievement in the field of chamber music composition. It is administered every two years by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Along with its purse of \$25,000, the Stoeger prize

carries enormous prestige. Previous winners include Gunther Schuller, Aaron Jay Kernis, Stephen Hartke, Michael Daugherty, and Chen Yi. Jalbert's other honors include the Rome Prize, the BBC Masterprize, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Jalbert finds his inspiration from multiple sources, ranging from medieval plainchant to the beauties of the natural world. His composer's note for *Equilibrium* describes its complex back story.

The word equilibrium implies balance. It seems to me that the world, especially recently, is careening towards being very unbalanced and out of sorts. From climate change to politics, extremes seem to rule the day. This work focuses on the striving for a sense of equilibrium and is in three contrasting movements. The first movement, *Still/Animate*, seeks to balance two types of music: the first, static and calm, and the second, rhythmically active. The back and forth between the two, and the proportion of each, results in a kind of conversation through form. The second movement, *Chant*, uses Gregorian chant as its basis, but expands and weaves the lines into a more contemporary texture. The third movement, *Tipping Point*, is fast-paced and at times frantic, always pushing to the edge and constantly propelling itself forward to the end.

Jalbert and his wife are both pianists; however, both their sons are clarinetists, which has given him broader exposure to the clarinet literature — and an affinity for the instrument. In a 2025 interview shortly before the premiere of *Equilibrium*, he observed, “To me, the clarinet is really at least three instruments because of changes in timbre when you go from the lowest register, which has its own unique quality, to the mid register, to the upper register.”

He likes the combination of clarinet and strings, noting that the wind instrument's ability to produce sound from virtually no volume to *forte* compensates for its lack of vibrato. “The clarinet is really good at *niente* beginnings and endings — that is, starting a note from nothing, absolutely nothing, or doing a *diminuendo* to absolutely nothing. *Equilibrium* starts with the

strings entering on this cluster, extremely soft. The clarinet enters as well but you don't even hear it, it just gradually [emerges]. This static, soft chord at the beginning slowly evolves. It blossoms and builds and ascends, and I'm treating the whole ensemble as one unit together.”

As for his title, he notes that virtually every world culture has symbols for equilibrium. His switchbacks in this quintet between slower, static music and driven, energetic music reflect the imbalances in our world and its propensity for extremes.

Quintet in A Major for Clarinet and Strings, K. 581

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)

In his letters, Mozart alludes to this work as "Stadler's quintet." Anton Stadler, the leading clarinetist in Vienna in the 1780s, was a friend and colleague of the composer. Stadler played in the court orchestra in Salzburg, and Mozart probably met him no later than 1784. Mozart obviously admired Stadler greatly, for he composed at least one other chamber work (the Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, K. 498) and the beloved Clarinet Concerto, K. 626, specifically with Stadler in mind. Stadler's instrument was actually a basset clarinet, a forerunner of the modern instrument with a slightly lower range. Mozart first heard clarinets years before leaving Salzburg to settle in Vienna, but he did not become acquainted with the basset clarinet until he encountered Stadler in Vienna. He was delighted with the novel, reedy timbre of the new instrument. In letters to Leopold, he wrote with enthusiasm about the advantages of adding clarinets to scoring for full orchestra.

The particular genius of the clarinet quintet lies in the way Mozart has interwoven the woodwind sound with the string quartet. He does not treat the clarinet as a solo instrument, nor does he merge it with the strings so as to subjugate its individual timbre. Rather, Mozart takes maximum advantage of the clarinet's warm reedy color to contrast with the strings. With his remarkable gift for clarity and balance, Mozart gives each of the five players moments in the spotlight.

The Clarinet Quintet adheres to the standard four movement format for large chamber works and symphonies. From a structural standpoint, it is unusual because Mozart composed two trios (instead of one) for the *Menuetto* and because of the splendid variation set, which concludes the quintet.

In the opening Allegro the themes are shared equally by the first violin and the clarinet. In the later movements, theme entrances are distributed still more democratically. Even the viola, sometimes forgotten in an ensemble, has the opportunity for a solo in the last movement's variations. It is the piquancy of the clarinet, however, that ultimately gives this wonderful quintet its warm lyricism and delicate beauty.