73rd Concert Series 2026-27

FRIENDS of MUSIC

is pleased to present

Trio Azura

Yanfeng (Tony) Bai, piano
Duncan McDougall, violin
Yejin Hong, cello

Sunday, October 18, 2026 3:00 p.m.
Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

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Friends of Music Concerts, Inc. celebrates its 73rd season of showcasing artists who represent the best in today's diverse world of chamber music. Additionally, FOMC's Partnerships in Education program in the public schools and free student admission to our concerts give young people enhanced exposure to and appreciation of classical music.

Whether you are new to classical music or a seasoned concertgoer, we would love to welcome you to our enthusiastic volunteer corps – at concerts or behind the scenes. Contact Sandy Galef, volunteer coordinator, at sgalef@aol.com or call 914 450 4086.

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Chamber music is an intimate conversation between musicians and the audience. This unique bond is only possible because of dedicated supporters like you. Ticket sales cover only part of our concert and program costs. Your gift directly funds artist fees, venue rentals, and our youth outreach programs. To donate, scan this QR code or go to **www.friendsofmusicconcerts.org**.

You can help secure the future of our concerts and outreach by making a lasting gift today. Joining the **George Raymond Legacy Circle** (named after our founder) allows you to support extraordinary musical performances for generations to come while aligning with your personal financial goals. To discuss confidentially these and other options, please contact Executive Director Martin Kagan at mkagan@friendsofmusicconcerts.org, 646-522-1661.

Program

Piano Trio in A minor — Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Modéré
Pantoum (Assez vif)
Passacaille (Très large)
Final (Animé)

Piano Trio — Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)
Pale yellow
Fiery red

Intermission

Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor, Op. 66 — Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Allegro energico e con fuoco
Andante espressivo
Scherzo: Molto allegro quasi presto
Finale: Allegro appassionato

Trio Azura appears by arrangement with Young Concert Artists, Inc. www.yca.org

Duncan McDougall plays a 1900 Scarampella violin on generous loan from the Colburn Collection.

Piano by Steinway.

The post-concert reception is sponsored by FOMC President Susan Harris and Secretary Peter Oden.

To inquire about FOMC sponsorship opportunities, please contact Executive Director Martin Kagan at mkagan@friendsofmusicconcerts.org or at 646-522-1661.

Next concert

Sunday, March 14, 2027, at 3:00 pm. Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, NY.
Quartetto di Cremona
Program: Haydn: String Quartet in G Major, Op. 77, No.1; Janáček: String Quartet No. 2, "Intimate Letters;" Grieg: String Quartet in G minor, Op. 27

Program notes

Piano Trio in A minor
Maurice Ravel

World War I had a profound effect on Ravel, and the composition of this piano trio touches the empire-destroying conflict that devastated Europe for the first time in the 20th century, once optimistically (and inaccurately) called the War to End All Wars.

Ravel was 39 in 1914 as Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and Europe was in arms. He immediately volunteered for the French army, but was rejected for being underweight. (Apparently, he was only 106 lbs.) He tried to enlist as a pilot in the *Aéronautique Militaire*, but was rejected there, also. Determined to serve, he successfully signed up as a truck and ambulance driver for the Thirteenth Artillery Regiment.

His imminent callup into the army pressured him to finish the Piano Trio in A minor. "The idea that I should be leaving at once made me get through five months' work in five weeks! My trio is finished," he wrote to Igor Stravinsky. In his composition, Ravel used a remarkable breadth of influences: Basque dance, Malaysian poetry, Baroque structure, Javanese gamelan ensembles.

He composed the work in the summer of 1914, in the French Basque coastal town of Saint-Jean-de-Luz. Ravel felt a great affinity for Basque culture. He was born in the Basque town of Ciboure. His mother was a member of the people of Basque Country, provinces that straddle the border between northern Spain and southwestern France along the Bay of Biscay and the western Pyrenees mountains, with a distinct language and culture.

The trio's first movement, *modéré* (moderate), begins with a melody, touched by melancholy, that Ravel called "Basque in color," based on the zortziko, a Basque dance form. The tempo is notated in 8/8 time, each bar being subdivided into a 3+2+3 rhythmic pattern. (However, Ravel's first biographer and friend, Alexis Roland-Manuel, thought that Ravel picked up the theme from watching ice cream vendors dancing a fandango at Saint-Jean-de-Luz and that Ravel "believed [it] to be Basque, but wasn't.") Roland-Manuel is entitled to his opinion.

The second movement is marked "Pantoum" because it mirrors the structure of a traditional form of Malaysian verse (pantoum), while "assez vif" means "quite lively." The verse form, well-known in French literary circles at the time, consists of four-line stanzas where the second and fourth lines of one stanza repeat as the first and third lines of the next. Ravel interwove two alternating musical themes, mimicking the interlocking repetition of the poetic style.

The third movement, marked *passacaille (très large)*, uses the traditional Baroque compositional form of a passacaglia, where a recurring bass line serves as the foundation for continuous variations. In Ravel's hands, a solemn eight-measure bass line is shared and passed among the piano, violin, and cello.

The finale, *animé* (lively, animated), incorporates sparkling textures, shifting asymmetric meters and resonant percussive effects that evoke the sonic world of the Javanese gamelan. Ravel, like Claude Debussy, was fascinated by the Indonesian gamelan music he heard at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle.

Having finished the piano trio, Ravel served two years in the army. After his release, he composed Le Tombeau de Couperin for solo piano. Each movement is dedicated to a friend who died in the war.

Piano Trio
Jennifer Higdon

This work was commissioned in 2003 by the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival in Vail, Colo. Breaking with traditional movement markings such as "allegro" or "largo," Higdon labeled the movements as colors.

Higdon's father, Charles, was a painter and introduced his children to different types of art. About this piece, she has written, "Can music reflect colors and can colors be reflected in music? I have always been fascinated with the connection between painting and music. In my composing, I often picture colors as if I were spreading them on a canvas, except I do so with melodies, harmonies and through the instruments themselves. The colors that I have chosen in both of the movement titles and in the music itself, reflect very different moods and energy levels, which I find fascinating, as it begs the question, can colors actually convey a mood?"

One might ask audience members if keeping the colors in mind enriches the enjoyment of listening to this trio.

The first movement, Pale Yellow, opens with a pensive melody on the keyboard, joined by long notes on the cello, then quicker beats on the violin. "Beautiful, lyric, elegant when cello first comes in, then violin. True trio of each instrument's different timbres weaving in & out and joining together. Exciting," wrote one listener on YouTube.

The calm, lyrical mood of this movement and its flowing melodies often leads to comparisons with the expansive American style of Aaron Copland. "The first movement - the yellow - was a thing of rare beauty," commented a review in the New York Sun.

The second movement, Fiery Red, "is music with its finger in a light socket," wrote Robert R. Reilly in Crisis magazine. Drawing light from the hot color of its namesake, Fiery Red builds intense excitement, demanding the utmost technical skills from the performers.

In 2016, Higdon wrote a second piano trio, "Color Through," with movements titled "Wondrous White" and "Brilliant Blue."

The four movements may be programmed in any combination or order and the combined titles may be read as "Piano Trio Color Through" or "Color Through Piano Trio." Higdon wrote, "I had to be careful that tempi and character, as well as the starting and ending keys, were different enough but could also sound logical if played together, one after the other," she says.

Higdon is one of the most honored and accomplished contemporary classical composers, with numerous commissions from major orchestras, chamber music groups and solo artists. She won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2010 for her Violin Concerto and multiple Grammy Awards for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Her orchestral piece, "blue cathedral," is one of the most frequently performed modern classical works in the standard repertoire. Her first opera, "Cold Mountain," won the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere in 2016, the first American opera to do so in the award's history.

Her music has been hailed by Fanfare Magazine as having "the distinction of being at once complex, sophisticated but readily accessible emotionally," with the Times of London citing it as "traditionally rooted, yet imbued with integrity and freshness."

Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor, Op. 66
Felix Mendelssohn

A musical prodigy on the Mozartean level, Mendelssohn grew up in a music-loving household, his gifts nurtured by Sunday gatherings attended by a variety of musicians. The family circle included Felix's brother, Paul, for whom he wrote his first cello sonata, and the violinist Ferdinand David, who was the dedicatee of the E-minor Violin Concerto. An exceptional pianist himself, Mendelssohn was well-prepared to tackle the piano trio form.

This trio was begun by Mendelssohn in 1845, dedicated to his close friend and violinist, Louis Spohr, who played through the piece with the composer. It was finished on April 30, 1846 and presented to the composer's sister, Fanny (a composer in her own right) on her birthday on Nov. 14.

The work offered inspiration to Johannes Brahms, with the opening theme of the finale being referenced in the scherzo of his Piano Sonata No. 3, Op. 5, as well as the opening of the first movement of this trio being the basis for the piano line in the finale of Brahms' Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60, according to Mendelssohn's biographer, R. Larry Todd.

The rolling, lush theme of the first movement in the stormy key of C minor, *allegro energico e con fuoco* (with energy and fire) is reminiscent of Mendelssohn's "Hebrides Overture (Fingal's Cave)" and Scottish Symphony.

The second movement, marked *andante expressivo* (play at a moderate pace, with emotion), features a graceful melody and gentle rhythm, reminiscent of Mendelssohn's own Lieder Ohne Worte, (Songs Without Words), Op. 19, No. 6 ("Venetian Boat Songs"). Beginning with a gentle melody on the piano, the violin and cello enter in unison, forming a duet with the piano voice.

The third movement, *scherzo: molto allegro quasi presto* (fast, almost very fast) builds on the energy of the first two movements with a "flight of the bees" quality. "The high energy of the movement has been likened to that of Mendelssohn's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' scherzo, while also featuring motives that harken back to the scherzo in Mendelssohn's Octet. The music abruptly softens, ending on crisp pizzicato chords," writes Todd. The composer called this movement "a trifle nasty to play."

The finale, *allegro appassionato* (fast and passionate), returns to heroic C minor with driving rhythms and plenty of virtuosity required from the players. Mendelssohn uses the melody of a chorale, *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* (Praise be to you, Jesus Christ), and then expands to also include a sixteenth-century Genevan psalter tune, known in English as "Old Hundredth" from its association with the Psalm 100 in a translation by William Kethe, as the culminating melody. Hymn singers may recognize it as "All People That on Earth Do Dwell." Finally, the dark emotions turn toward C major and a triumphant finish.

— *Solange De Santis*

About the Artists

Trio Azura appears with Friends of Music Concerts as a recipient of our Performance Award, granted to a winner of the annual Young Concert Artists Susan Wadsworth International Auditions. The trio was named a winner in 2025 as well as becoming YCA Jacobs Fellows, becoming the organization's first Ensemble-in-Residence.

YCA audition winners receive a three-year management contract with Young Concert Artists, debut recitals in New York and Washington, D.C. plus a 14-month artist training program, ongoing guidance from YCA leadership and alumni, and education/community engagement training.

Trio Azura is quickly emerging as one of today's most promising young ensembles, characterized by "intelligence and imagination" and "profound emotion" (Gramophone). They are currently the Ensemble-in-Residence at the Colburn School in Los Angeles where they formed in 2022 and study with Jonathan Brown, Martin Beaver, Clive Greensmith and Fabio Bidini.

Trio Azura consists of Canadian violinist Duncan McDougall, South Korean cellist Yejin Hong, and Chinese pianist Yanfeng (Tony) Bai. Although they come from different backgrounds, their unique perspectives are a constant source of inspiration.

This year, the Colburn School announced a new recording partnership called the Colburn Collection with the label Delos. The Colburn Collection's first album, Storytellers, will feature Trio Azura and include a piece on today's program, Jennifer Higdon's Piano Trio.

In 2024, the Trio won the Grand Prize, Gold Medal, Lift Every Voice prize, and Horszowski Trio Prize at the 5lst Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition. They are also prize winners at the Schoenfeld International String Competition in Harbin, China.

During the 2024-25 season, Trio Azura completed their Fischoff Double Gold Tour of the U.S. Midwest, where they mentored over 500 students in Indiana and Michigan; they undertook a residency at the American University of Sharjah in the UAE, which was a unique opportunity for cultural exchange with Arabic poets; and they performed at the Chamber Music America National Conference, La Jolla Music Society, Music Guild, Friends of Chamber Music of Troy, Boston Court in Pasadena, Mimir Chamber Music Festival, and the Emilia Romagna Festival in Italy.

Other recent appearances include the Brisbane Festival in Australia, Nevada Chamber Music Festival, South Bay Chamber Music Society, Pelican Chamber Concerts, and the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Belgium.

Trio Azura's 2026–27 season brings the ensemble to stages across the United States, highlighted by debut performances at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall in New York and the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.

Additional recital engagements include the Lied Center of Kansas in Lawrence, Newport Classical in Rhode Island, the Main Line Committee for the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Forte Chamber Music in Virginia.

The trio will also appear as soloists with the Santa Monica Symphony in Beethoven's Triple Concerto. The season continues with performances presented by Washington Performing Arts' Music in the Country series, Merkin Hall at Kaufman Music Center, Colgate University, the Jewish Community Alliance in Jacksonville, and South Bay Chamber Music Society in Los Angeles.

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