

66th Concert Series 2019-20



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is pleased to present

**Musicians from the
Orpheus Chamber
Orchestra**

Saturday, November 9, 2019
Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York



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Who We Are

Friends of Music Concerts, Inc. is an award-winning, non-profit, volunteer organization now celebrating its 66th season of showcasing, right here in Westchester, artists chosen from among the finest in today's diverse world of chamber music. Additionally, our Partners 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.

In order to help sustain what one of our artists called this “legendary series,” we need people who can join the volunteers listed above, either as Board members or equally valued off-Board committee members. Specifics we are looking for include, but are not limited to, people with networking, editorial, business development, and/or fund-raising skills. Call us at 914-861-5080 or contact us on our website (see below); we can explore the range together.

Acknowledgments

Our concerts are made possible, in part, by an ArtsWestchester Program Support grant made with funds received from Westchester County Government. Additional support is received from many friends of Friends of Music, including subscribers and other ticket holders listed in this program.* If you, too, can contribute, please send your gifts to Friends of Music Concerts, Inc., P.O. Box 675, Millwood, NY 10546.

Program

Octet in F Major, Op. 166, D.803

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Adagio – Allegro

Adagio

Allegro vivace

Andante

Minuetto: Allegretto

Andante molto – Allegro

Intermission

Octet for Winds and Strings

Jean Françaix
(1912-1997)

Andante – Allegrissimo

Scherzo

Andante

Mouvement de Valse

Musicians from the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra appear by arrangement with Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, 490 Riverside Drive, 11th floor, New York, NY 10027. www.orpheusnyc.org.

Next concert

Saturday, March 28, 2020, 8:00 pm at **Pleasantville High School, Pleasantville, NY**

The PUBLIQuartet

Program: Voodoo Dolls, by Jessie Montgomery; Valencia, by Carolyn Shaw; Hasaposerviko, by Elektra Kurtis; Middleground, by Shelley Washington; Get in to NOW, by Jessica Meyer; and improvisations on other works.

Program notes

Octet in F Major, Op. 166, D. 803

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Franz Schubert succumbed to typhus when he was just thirty-one years old. Unlike Mozart and Mendelssohn, who also had brief lives, were prolific composers, and were well-known figures in the musical world of their day, Schubert, although not completely unknown, never really gained an established position in public musical life. He was born when Beethoven was twenty-seven years old and died only sixteen months after him, but they inhabited different Viennas. The wealthy, noble families who for several generations were involved in the careers of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven did not support Schubert. Some of his friends belonged to established society in Vienna, but for the most part Schubert conducted his life as an ordinary Viennese of the lower middle class, the son of a schoolmaster and, for several years, one himself.

During Schubert's last few years, however, some members of Vienna's musical society that still revolved around the aging Beethoven became aware of Schubert's composing ability. One mark of such recognition was the commission for this octet, which Schubert began in February 1824 and completed barely a week later on March 1. Although there never was direct contact between Schubert and a member of the Imperial family, the commission approached that. Archduke Rudolph of Austria, the Emperor's younger son, had a Chief Steward named Count Ferdinand von Troyer. Troyer, an amateur composer and a talented clarinetist, wanted to commission a piece of chamber music, but could not approach Beethoven because doing so would have been encroaching on imperial prerogative. That year Beethoven had written the *Missa Solemnis* and a piano sonata for the Archduke, so Troyer asked Schubert, the lesser-known composer, to write this work for him. It has been surmised that perhaps Troyer actually asked Schubert for a composition resembling Beethoven's extremely popular *Septet*, Op. 20, of 1800, because there are so many formal details in the octet that resemble those in the septet. For instance, the wind instruments used (clarinet, bassoon, and horn) are the same in both, but Schubert adds a second violin.

In the six-movement sequence, Schubert followed Beethoven's example; Beethoven, in turn, had taken Mozart's serenades as his own model. In each, it is essentially that of the familiar, four-movement symphony, with the addition of an additional slow movement and a minuet (or scherzo). It became a favorite structure for ensemble entertainment music, and still was used many years later. In the late 1850's Brahms adapted it for his two *Serenades*.

Schubert's Octet first was performed early in 1824, at Troyer's residence in Vienna, with the Count as clarinetist. The string players were friends of Beethoven's who formerly had been in the employ of Count Razumovsky for whom Beethoven had written his three *String Quartets*, Op. 59. The Octet's first public performance on April 16, 1827, included many of the same professionals, but not the Count. Critics who reviewed the concert were pleased to discover Schubert's mastery of large forms, but at the same

time they complained the work was too long. Schubert countered that the Octet and the quartets he was working on simultaneously were steps toward an extensive symphony that he planned to write. The intricate instrumental writing, its orchestral texture, and the broad themes he thoroughly developed all are indications of his concentration on the completion of future large-scale works.

The Octet's first movement opens with a solemn, slow introduction, *Adagio*, whose melodic material hints at the two subjects of the body of the movement, *Allegro*. The second movement, *Adagio*, is a glorious song for County Troyer's clarinet. Third, a brilliant scherzo, *Allegro vivace*, features an expansive, galloping, dotted-rhythm theme of the type that Schubert wrote often and well. Next comes a set of seven variations and coda, *Andante*, which highlights the virtuosic skills of individual instrumentalists; the subject is one Schubert had written in 1815 as a love duet in a play with music that never was performed during his lifetime. The following *Minuetto – Allegretto* contains echoes of Beethoven's Septet. The finale begins *Andante molto*, with the Octet's only somber music, functioning as a short introduction to the light-hearted *Allegro* that closes the work.

Octet for Winds and Strings

Jean Françaix (1912-1997)

Jean Françaix, the son of the Conservatory director in his hometown of Le Mans, began his musical studies early, composing his first suite when he was nine. In addition to his later studies at the Paris Conservatory, he, like many other composers of the 20th century, studied composition with the famed teacher Nadia Boulanger. He composed prolifically and won many awards. Most of his works have been performed more often in France and elsewhere in Europe than in the United States.

Lightness of touch and effervescence of spirit and irony characterize Françaix's music. Conciseness, brevity, and clarity are all values for him. He never moved away from familiar tonal forms, choosing to preserve classical exposition-development-recapitulation structures. Françaix's musical compositions, full of charm and elegance, were always aimed directly at his single artistic goal, one that Debussy called the highest purpose of music: to give pleasure. The hallmarks of his musical style are grace, wit, clarity, and a natural, easy flow of ideas. He was a neo-classicist who openly rejected atonality; although some dismissed his work as frivolous, most realized his forms are precise, his emotions reserved, and his music both modern and accessible. "Between my earlier and more recent years," Françaix explained in what was his legendary self-deprecating manner, "I have gained in experience, but the foundation of my way of thinking has always remained the same. If it is only fools who do not change, then I must be a fool, because I do not change."

He was most influenced by composers he admired, including Stravinsky (for his neo-classicism) and his countrymen Ravel and Poulenc, the latter who praised his distinctive

French take on neo-classicism. Françaix wrote more than 200 compositions in many different genres, but instrumental music occupied his main creative interest. He composed symphonies, concertos, opera, ballet, and even film scores in addition to chamber music.

Françaix was a gifted pianist; he transferred his love for the piano to the works he composed in which he had included that instrument. But in addition, as was characteristic of many French composers, he had a fondness for wind instruments; the music he wrote for them is challenging both musically and technically for the performers.

Françaix was commissioned to compose the **Octet for Winds and Strings** by the Vienna Octet, which premiered it on November 7, 1972. He inscribed it “To the revered memory of Franz Schubert,” composing it for the same instruments that Schubert had chosen for his own Octet. The work begins with a slow, restrained introduction that sets the mood with the clarinet and bassoon alternating autumnal solos in a wistful, nostalgic dialogue. After a climax, the music shifts to scherzando, *Allegriissimo*, with the theme, introduced by the clarinet, derived from the opening theme with a tinge of the blues as well as a pizzicato accompaniment. Then the horn interjects a new subject, a variant of the original theme; both themes are thoroughly explored and developed by different instrument groupings before a slower, calmer coda.

The second movement, *Scherzo*, is sophisticated, quick, and delicately scored, with a beginning that traces its origins to the first few notes of the first movement’s theme. The central trio features busy winds placed over a string trio melody with a bass line pizzicato. The *Andante* generally feels relaxed, although there are hints of tension. It begins with a short introduction and ends with a coda, while in the movement’s center Françaix features three variations on a theme that derives from the theme with which the Octet opens. It first is heard in the muted strings, then in the winds, and finally by all of the movements together.

The last movement, *Mouvement de Valse*, contains the most evidence of this Octet’s relationship to that written by Schubert. All the instruments join together to prepare for the conclusion, an old-fashioned waltz that is not only charming but full of character. Françaix dresses the waltz, which feels full of suggestions of the actual Viennese dance, in subtle varieties of orchestration tending toward an evocation of its French provenance, alternating it with contrasting episodes before the marvelous coda brings the work to its end.

- Notes provided by Susan Halpern

About the Artists

We welcome musicians from this innovative orchestra, famous in part for its unique collaborative method of performing without a conductor. It was founded in 1972 by a group of like-minded young musicians determined to combine the intimacy and warmth of a chamber ensemble with the richness of an orchestra. Orpheus rotates musical leadership roles for each work, with a focus on presenting diverse repertoire through open dialogue. The ensemble has commissioned and premiered 48 original works. Its recordings include the Grammy Award-winning *Shadow Dances: Stravinsky Miniatures* for Deutsche Grammophon, and more than 70 other recordings for DG, Sony Classical, EMI Classics, BMG/RCA Red Seal, Decca, and others, including its own label, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra Records.

Orpheus presents an annual concert series in New York City that features performances at Carnegie Hall and the 92nd Street Y, as well as an intimate Twilight chamber series in the elegant instrument showroom at Taxisio Fine Instruments and Bows in mid-town Manhattan. During the 2018-19 season it began a new initiative, *Now Hear This*, dedicated to reimagining musical gems of the past with new arrangements by top-notch composers.

Orpheus has trademarked its mode of operations, the Orpheus Process®. It has been the focus of studies at Harvard University and of leadership seminars at IBM, Morgan Stanley, and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Hospital, among others. Orpheus aims to bring this unique approach to students of all ages through its worldwide education and engagement programs: *Access Orpheus-NYC*, *Orpheus Music Academy*, *Orpheus Leadership Institute*, and *With Music in Mind*. *Access Orpheus-NYC* shares the orchestra's collaborative music-making process with K-12 public school students from all five boroughs in New York City, utilizing in-class visits, invitations to working rehearsals, Instrument Discovery Days, public master classes, and free tickets for its performances at Carnegie Hall.



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