

Program Notes



CHAMBER MUSIC AT ETOWN HALL

A Harp Celebration

MARGUERITE LYNN WILLIAMS,
harp
JOSEPH MEYER, violin
ANN OKAGAITO, violin
JAREK POLAK, violin
MARK DEATHERAGE, viola
PETER LORENZO ANDEREGG, cello

**BAX: Quintet for Harp
and Strings**

**SAINT-SAËNS: Fantaisie for
Violin and Harp, Op. 124**

**BEETHOVEN: String Quartet No. 10,
in E-flat major, Op. 74, "Harp"**

Poco adagio — Allegro
Adagio ma non troppo
Presto
Allegretto con variazioni

THIS EVENING'S CONCERT SPONSORED BY
Boulder County Arts Alliance

Quintet for Harp and Strings (1919)

Sir Arnold Bax

Born November 8, 1883, in London, England

Died October 3, 1953, in Cork, Ireland

Sir Arnold Bax was an English romanticist whose privileged upbringing enabled him to indulge his interests in music, poetry and the literature of Ireland without the bother of having to earn a living. He entered London's Royal Academy of Music at age 17, studying piano and composition, and soon established his reputation as a composer with four colorfully orchestrated tone poems based on Celtic legends and poetry. His stature was cemented in 1922 with a London concert devoted entirely to his music. Bax was also an accomplished poet and writer of fiction, publishing under the pseudonym Dermot O'Byrne. He was awarded a knighthood in 1937 and ended his years living quietly in retirement, reluctantly accepting the fact that his romantic style of music had gone out of fashion.

Bax loved Irish literature, particularly the poetry of William Butler Yeats, which he first encountered in 1902. He developed an infatuation with Celtic culture and the landscape of Ireland, which he visited often, returning to the little village of Glencolumbkille in County Donegal annually for almost 30 years. It was during such a visit in 1919 that he wrote the Quintet for Harp and Strings, evoking the familiar sights that gave him so much pleasure and inspiration. The one-movement Quintet is dedicated to Raymond Jeremy, the violist of the Philharmonic Quartet, which gave the first performance of the work in 1921. Bax uses a varied palette of timbres in the complex string writing, while the harp serves mainly to add touches of color to the impressionistic harmonies.

Fantaisie for Violin and Harp, Op. 124 (1907)

Charles Camille Saint-Saëns

Born October 9, 1835, in Paris, France

Died December 16, 1921, in Algiers, Algeria

Saint-Saëns was a virtuoso pianist who wrote five scintillating concertos for the instrument, but later in life he seems to have developed a preference for the lighter, more transparent sonority of the harp and used it often in place of the piano in his ensemble music. After overseeing a production of his opera *Le Timbre d'Argent* ("The Silver Bell") in Monte Carlo in 1907, Saint-Saëns relaxed at the city of Bordighera, on the Italian Riviera. He wrote the Fantaisie for Violin and Harp while he was there, dedicating it to harpist Clara Eissler and her sister, violinist Marianne Eissler.

The Fantaisie is, as its title implies, a free-flowing, improvisatory work passing through rapid changes of mood in several contrasting sections. The overall feeling is lyrical and passionate, but with Saint-Saëns' characteristic clarity and elegance of expression. The writing for both instruments is virtuosic and idiomatic, with each player given equal weight in the dialog. An especially effective Spanish-flavored section has the harp repeating a two-measure *ostinato* bass line while the violin swirls in increasingly fiery variations above it. The work closes with a tender recollection of the lyrical opening material and fades away dreamily into the soft Mediterranean air that Saint-Saëns was enjoying as he wrote it.

String Quartet No. 10, in E-flat major, Op. 74, "Harp" (1809)

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn-on-Rhine, Germany

Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Before Joseph Haydn's six Op. 33 quartets were published in Vienna in 1781, a string quartet was considered merely a bit of light, entertaining music to be played at social functions. In his "Russian" quartets Haydn raised the genre to a new level of sophistication that inspired his friend Mozart to publish his own masterful set of six

quartets (dedicated to Haydn) in 1785. Two years later a young composer arrived in Vienna, eager to study with Mozart. The lessons may have begun, but young Ludwig van Beethoven was soon forced to return to Bonn to be with his dying mother. When he returned to Vienna in 1792, Mozart was dead and the budding genius began lessons in counterpoint with Haydn.

Beethoven knew the marvelous quartets of both masters and approached the genre with some trepidation. Haydn and Mozart had made the string quartet both the most intellectual and the most intimate form of chamber music. Here a composer could indulge himself in ingenious motivic development, subtle “conversations” between the four instruments and innovative experiments in sonic texture and musical structure. Beethoven felt the challenge and met it with six quartets that, when they were published together as his Op. 18 in 1801, matched his illustrious teachers in refined craftsmanship and inspired invention. Five years later Count Andreas Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador to the court in Vienna, commissioned Beethoven to write three new quartets. His creative imagination energized by the prospect of writing chamber music for such an intelligent and appreciative patron, Beethoven produced three massive, ground-breaking masterpieces that decisively and permanently pushed a musical genre that had been a source of intimate pleasures for musicians and aristocratic connoisseurs into the public realm. No longer would the string quartet be considered *Kammermusik* (“chamber music”) intended only for

the edification of a chosen few in the private rooms of a villa or palace. This was music for the concert hall, ambitious and grand both in structural scale and emotional scope.

In 1809 Beethoven wrote a new string quartet for another music-loving aristocrat who had long been one of his most generous patrons, Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian von Lobkowitz. The work was written at a difficult time; Vienna was besieged and occupied by Napoleon’s armies that May, and Beethoven had spent several days hiding in the basement of his brother Carl’s house writing counterpoint exercises for Prince Lobkowitz (who was his pupil as well as his benefactor) while the French bombarded the city. With the notable exception of its stormy, impetuous *Presto* third movement, the quartet bears little evidence of the strife that surrounded Beethoven at the time; in fact, it is one of his sunniest, most serene works. The quartet gets its nickname (added some time after it was published in 1810) from the plangent, harp-like plucked arpeggios that occur several times in the first movement. The lovely *Adagio* second movement (perhaps inspired by his infatuation with an 18-year-old piano student, Therese Malfatti) is one of Beethoven’s most lyrical and heartfelt love songs, and the final *Allegretto* is a lighthearted set of variations on a deceptively simple-sounding theme whose off-kilter rhythmic pulse gives Beethoven ample opportunity for musical invention.

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