UPCOMING CONCERTS

February 4, 2024
The WolfganG
Elegy (for solo viola) - Igor Stravinsky
3 Madrigals, H.313 (for violin and viola) - Bohuslav Martinů
Divertimento in E-flat Major - Wolfgang A. Mozart

April 7, 2024
Thirty Thousand Days
Phantasy Quartet (for string quartet) - Imogen Holst
Thirty Thousand Days (for clarinet and string quartet) - Chris Rogerson
String Quartet, Opus 27 - Edvard Grieg

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November 12, 2023
Trinity Church, Solebury PA
Michelle Djokic, Artistic Director

PROGRAM

"The WGS Series" - Vignettes
for piano, violin, and cello
- William Grant Still
  (1895 - 1978)

Indian Moccasin Game
Carmela
Inca Melody
Clinch Mountain
Hela Grand-père
Garde piti mule la

Grande Sonate Dramatique: Titus et Bérénice
for cello and piano
- Rita Strohl
  (1865 - 1941)

Allegro moderato
Incercitude de Titus... passion... espoir de fléchir Rome qui, "Par une loi qui ne se peut changer Nadmet avec son sang aucun sang étranger" (Racine).

Vivace/Molto movimento
Appartements de Bérénice. Ses femmes par leurs chants et leurs danses s'efforcent de la distraire.

Lento, Tristamente
Bérénice sait tout... Titus malgré son amour, la sacrifie à l'Empire. Bérénice : "Je m'agite, je cours, languissante, abattue La force m'abandonne, et le repos me tue"

Allegro molto movimento
Le terrible moment approche, la séparation s'accomplira. Scène d'amour – déchirements. Titus : "Ce jour surpasse tout. Jamais je le confesse Vous ne fûtes aimée avec tant de tendresse Et jamais..." Bérénice : "Vous m'aimez, vous me le soutenez Et cependant je pars et vous me l'ordonnez! Ah, cruel! Par pitié, montre-moi moins d'amour!"

INTERMISSION

Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 120
- Gabriel Fauré
  (1845 - 1924)

Allegro ma non troppo
Andantino
Allegro vivo

THE ARTISTS
John Novacek – piano, Siwoo Kim – violin, Michelle Djokic – cello
We christen the 2023-2024 Concordia Chamber Players’ season by presenting a concert entitled “Watercolors,” revealing rarely-performed masterpieces from the late 19th-early 20th Centuries. While it may strike you odd, dear audience, that we would fashion the cover of our program with the 1873 oil on canvas by Edouard Manet, “On the Beach” (Sur la plage), the primal element of water is the unifying motif among the three concert pieces, according to Artistic Director Michelle Djokic. Life flows from water and is sustained by it, evoking experiences of tranquility, cleansing and purity. Yet this very life-sustaining element would overwhelm and even drown us. Indeed, it is upon water that the drama of modernity was fashioned both sustaining and suffocating peoples; unifying and sharing human genius while at the same time colonizing and exploiting each other.

William Grant Still, Rita Strohl, and Gabriel Fauré teach us something of that modern, industrialized, and expansive age. In William Grant Still, one hears the flowing rivers of a productive, expanding America. With Rita Strohl, utilizing Jean Racine’s play, *Titus and Bérénice* (1676), the distance over the Mediterranean Sea between Jerusalem and Rome, Judaism and Paganism, represents the impossibility of marriage between the hero and heroine. We might imagine the couple on the beach in Manet’s masterpiece On the Beach to illustrate the paradox of a love drowned by tribal animosity. Gabriel Fauré’s *Piano Trio in D minor* is a fountain of musical phrases, harmonies, progressions, and tone. Michelle expresses it this way, “It is like a wave that starts small and then peaks.” Yet the final movement, *Allegro vivo*, anticipates a flood of modernity to come, cleansing yet perplexing us, by use of dissonances that might be considered as pointers to the new, post-industrial world ahead.

Photos from the recording of 'ela'

*Program Notes*

*by James Wells*

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*Program Notes*

*by James Wells*
WILLIAM GRANT STILL  
(1895 - 1978)

Originally scored for bassoon and oboe, William Grant Still encouraged musicians to express this repertoire with other combinations of instruments, and the Concordia Chamber Players do just that today.

Each short piece comprised by the Vignettes evokes distinctly different feelings, and seems to express the diversity of the American land during the first half of the 20th Century: field, forest, city, river, and all the life that "teems therein" to constitute our country: from the intense and purposeful, to the creative playfulness; from folksy dancing to ballroom steps; from working the farm to resting on a porch with pooch; from pondering deeply to silly conversations… and laughter.

Vignettes may echo themes and the style of Gershwin, Copland, and Barber, but they differ here in their compact and intense repertoire which demonstrate ethnic influences: they are more like social media snapshot posts, than elegant essays. The changes between them come quickly—each vignette "teases" the audience as it evaporates into the next. Still is judicious in his expression of musical phrases and sentences—the Vignettes exude "melodic ditties" that, when woven together, create a pleasant introduction to the drama that follows in our program.

ABOUT WILLIAM GRANT STILL JR.

William Grant Still, born in Mississippi and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, was inspired by his parents’ interest in education and music and supported by their relatively stable financial resources. He demonstrated proficiency in a variety of instruments, became a band leader in his school settings, including M.W.Gibbs High School (Little Rock, Arkansas), Wilberforce University, and the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Despite financial constraints in his college years (where for a time he worked as a janitor to afford schooling), his abilities were identified by his Oberlin Professor Lehman who arranged for George Whitfield Andrews to tutor him gratis. From this point Still drew the attention of important composers, including Edgard Varèse and George Whitefield Chadwick with whom he also studied.

His music was influenced by the spirituals sung to him by his grandmother, his formal university studies, the birth of the Jazz Age, and post-romantic musical styles along with the emergence of the silver-screen and broadcast worlds.

Still married Grace Bundy in 1915 and had a son and three daughters. He played in W.C. Handy’s band in 1916 and served in WW I. After the war he moved to Harlem and was influenced by many of the figures of the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Arna Bontemps, and Countee Cullen. At the same time, since he learned to play several instruments, mostly self-taught, when he was a teen, he was a valuable "studio" musician and hired to play in various pit orchestras noted below.

Still worked with many of the jazz-influenced performers and orchestras of black as well as primarily white society bands during this period: Fletcher Henderson, James P. Johnson, Eubie Blake, Sophie Tucker, Artie Shaw and Paul Whiteman. He recorded and performed for live radio shows of the time. He necessarily expressed himself in "art" and "entertainment" forms to maintain his vocation during this period. It appeared as though his commercial work "paid for" the time he could dedicate to composing—and composing he did indeed.

Composer and conductor Howard Hanson of the Rochester Philharmonic deserves credit for programing and performing Still’s premier orchestral work, Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American" in 1931. It was the first time a major orchestral work of a black composer had been performed in the USA. For 20 years it became the most popular orchestral piece by an American composer of any ethnicity at the time. In 1936 Still conducted his Symphony #1 with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and became the first black person to conduct his own work with a major American orchestra. Still produced over 200 works in his career, including 9 operas, 5 symphonies, 30 choral works and 4 ballets, along with a variety of chamber and solo instrumental compositions. Not unlike Fauré, Still lost or destroyed a significant number of his works.

After receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship, Still moved to Los Angeles and pursued musical compositions, as noted above, for the concert hall, stage, recording studio, opera, and film. He advocated for equality and respect of black people—underscored in 1943 by his leaving Twentieth-Century Fox because, as he said, they "degraded colored people."

Still’s legacy reminds American music lovers of cultures that were largely “invisible” to the dominant media and academic circles of the 20th Century: black and "women" composers. This author was fortunate to be mentored by composer T.J. Anderson and helped sponsor a symposium for black “classical” composers in 2018 at Atlanta, around the time of Olly Wilson’s passing. The depth and diversity of black composition is extraordinary. We often focus on the "African influence" in American, European-styled music, as if that tradition deepens and enhances the white culture. However, in my experience with black composers, the reverse may be true. The language and structure of European music provides a certain framework at times for black classical music, but the musical creation...
Jazz is essentially "new," and not simply a flavoring of European traditions. Jazz is the poster child of the "new idiom," but classical music that emerges from the black community in the 19th and early 20th centuries deserves as much attention as "something new." In both Scott Joplin (composer of the first opera on American soil) and Florence Price, Americans behold and are included into the black experience that has become an American experience, not a subset of a greater musical genre.

The Strohl Sonata is, in my opinion, a delightful combination of the most essential musical aspects a cellist and musician can dream of. ” — The Strad

Sonata Dramatique ‘Titus et Bérénice’

RITA STROHL
(1865 - 1941)

As Lori Goldstein wrote in The Herald last week, strenuous efforts were required to obtain the Sonata manuscript. With the score in hand, the real efforts began. Indeed, mastering such a seldom-performed piece is only for the stout-hearted: enter Michelle Djokic and John Novacek. Michelle Djokic, our artistic director and cellist, said to The Herald: "It's remarkable that Strohl, an accomplished pianist who also studied voice, composed such a technically challenging cello piece that spans the entire register of the instrument. The sonata 'lies perfectly' well on the instrument. It's as if she understood everything that's possible on the cello." It may be that the cellist to whom she dedicated the work gave her lessons, according to Michelle.

Rita Strohl's Sonate Dramatique, based on Racine's Titus et Bérénice, might be considered a Wagnerian-style musical drama. The score is prefaced by a plot summary from Racine: "Titus, who passionately loved Bérénice and who was widely thought to have promised to marry her, sent her from Rome, in spite of himself and in spite of herself, in the early days of his Empire." Titus, a Roman general, directed the brutal siege of Jerusalem (69-70 CE). Bérénice, a Jewish princess, was the sister of King Agrippa II and reigned jointly with him. When Bérénice met and fell in love with Titus, she followed him to Rome and lived with him in his palace, but was forbidden to marry him. The drama begins when he was made Emperor but was forced to abandon her. Racine's tragedy concentrates on the decision by Titus to send Bérénice away. It is unusual in that the play does not lead to the death of any of the characters. Each movement of the sonata is intended as a description of a particular stage of this classical tragedy of two lovers forced apart by circumstance. The magnificent first movement poses the dilemma Titus faces, his great passion for Bérénice set against affairs of state. The music makes clear this contrast, the immediate threat is posed in the opening Recitativ, the torrent of passion soon follows, the cello unfolding long lines of almost uninterrupted melody as the exotic Eastern Queen tries to overwhelm the indecisive Roman soldier with the power of her love and her beauty.

The Scherzo gives a rest from passionate utterance as Bérénice's attendants attempt to distract her with their singing and dancing. Imitating the quality of women's voices, the movement is scored very high and only once rises above a piano dynamic. The tragedy begins to unfold in the Lento movement, where the cello unfurls her unbearably beautiful song of loss and betrayal, first gently and sadly, but later sinking to a song of utter desolation concluding with a single brutal piano chord.

The Finale brings us to the final separation of the lovers, where their passion ignites in one final whirlwind of emotion before Titus turns to leave in a final presto coda with Bérénice's words ringing in his ears: you insist that you love me, and yet it is at your command that I must go! Ah cruel one. Show me less love, for pity's sake!” — David Winter (translations from the French by Paula Kennedy), from Westcorkmusic.ie.

One might ponder the Racine opera, along with the Roman Empire, as one listens to this extraordinary adventure, and compare it to some events in the life of Rita Strohl. It seems to this author that insights from the Symbolist movement might be equally as instructive to the listener: the movements, moods, progressions, and development of sounds the audience beholds in such a live performance as ours, may evoke in an inner, mystical journey unique to each listener. While on that journey, do remember to come back for the Fauré! Musical expression of such depth may be "classic" in the sense that it is beyond labels.
of philosophical, aesthetic, or musical eras—it helps us to feel a humanity that transcends seasons of time, place, culture, tribe, and family. This is redemptive for a world at war.

ABOUT RITA STROHL
(born Aimée Marie Marguerite Mercédès Larousse La Villette)

Rita Strohl was born on the West Coast of France and her mother Élodie La Villette (1842–1917), was a successful and recognized French female painter—a unique occurrence in the 19th century. Perhaps it was her mother’s groundbreaking and audacious incursion into a male-dominated art world that gave Strohl both confidence as a musician as well as a profound inner spirituality that surfaces in her Hindu and Celtic operas, as well as her embrace of nature.

A precocious child prodigy pianist, she was admitted to the Paris conservatoire at the age of thirteen. She was also a composer, librettist, and ardent Wagnerian. Her music was first heard in public in Paris in 1884 (Piano Trio), then in Rennes and Chartres in 1885 (Messe à six voix, orchestre et orgue). As noted, her compositions demonstrate aspects of mysticism, combining a wide range of religious inspirations: these influences culminate in Les Noces spirituelles de la Vierge Marie (1903), Le Suprême Puruscha, a cycle mystique in seven parts (1908), and the drame lyrique La Femme pécheresse (1913), all works with evocative titles. Her Symphonie de la forêt (1901) and Symphonie de la mer (1902), display traces of pantheism. As reported in the archives from Palazzetto Bru Zane Centre De Musique Romantique Francaise, Rita Strohl was strongly influenced by Symbolist theories, an outgrowth of symbolism combining religious mysticism with the perverse, the erotic, and the decadent. “Symbolism was both an artistic and a literary movement that suggested ideas through symbols and emphasized the meaning behind the forms, lines, shapes, and colors” as written in TheArtStory.org, 2023: “It developed new and often abstract means to express psychological truth and the idea that behind the physical world lay a spiritual reality.”

She married and had three children, then divorced her first husband and remarried. She published some fifty works including sonatas, trios, quartets, songs, and orchestral pieces.

In 1912, with the financial support of subscribers and the backing of Odilon Redon, Gustave Fayet, and her second husband, the master glassmaker Richard Burgsthal—who was also a “Wagnerian”—she created the short-lived Théâtre de La Grange, where she presented operatic works composed in her mystical, Symbolist vein. Her sometimes-esoteric experiments and her taste for mystery appear in her prefaces and in the annotations of her scores. She also composed piano music, chamber works, and mélodies, including Les Chansons de Bilitis (1898, settings of twelve poems with erotic overtones by Pierre Louÿs), which proved very successful.

Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 120
GABRIEL FAURÉ
(1845 - 1924)

Fauré was 78 and most likely deaf when he wrote the Piano Trio. Kai Christiansen writes in Earsense, “Fauré’s final years yielded the single Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 120 and his only string quartet, both unquestionable master works in a late style of considerable formal freedom, graceful lyricism and an unmistakable, personal language.

“The first movement follows the contours of a sonata form with rich and constant variation eluding such simple ideas as development and recapitulation. Like a flowing river in which one can never step twice, ideas recur but always in fresh treatments. The notion of water is more than mere metaphor: the music begins with a gently rippled piano figuration and a long, swaying melody from the cello that immediately evokes the Venetian gondolier’s barcarolle that Fauré frequently used. A signature of Fauré’s musical technique, the melodies build seamlessly from small rhythmic motifs that form chains, sequences and long lines as well as producing a mosaic of tiny fragments echoed throughout the ensemble in fluid imitation, the overlapping counterpoint of rich dialog.”

The second movement is introduced by the piano, and new themes with layered textures emerge. The lines are long, as seamless fabric, creating a sense of deep breathing and centeredness. Christiansen writes “The long, practically unbroken line of development throughout gives a wonderful taste of Fauré’s progressive harmonies... Fauré’s gift for melody is evident throughout the trio but especially charming in the gentle repose of the central Andantino. A particularly French character pervades this tender, singing duet for violin and cello with the piano eavesdropper, an indescribable mood one might attempt to describe as wistful nostalgia or sad joy.

“The finale is a marvel of color, energy, and contrast. It begins with the same peculiar octave doublings of the strings found throughout the trio (and also, curiously, in the chamber music of Debussy and especially Ravel) in a slow articulated melody that seems like an overflow from the previous movement. This is immediately interrupted by a dazzling flourish from the piano announcing the energetic rhythm that, despite attempts to foil it, will animate this Allegro vivo.
Fauré seems to interleave and ultimately superimpose two different conceptions of time in this movement, each with its own recurring theme."

The Trio would tempt us to overstatement but ought not to be overplayed, despite its drama and contrasts—it seems to beckon us to a deeper appreciation of new tonal colors in the framework of robust rhythmic structures.

ABOUT GABRIEL FAURÉ

Fauré was born into a dynamic period of artistic, technological, and political expression for Western Europe. From a family of moderate resources, he created a life rich in many experiences: pianist, organist, composer, choirmaster, teacher, composer, administrator, member of the elite society of artists Institut de France, soldier, refugee, husband, father, itinerant musician, musical reformer, recipient of France's highest honor, Légion d'honneur, and internationally acclaimed artist. His mentors, Louis Niedermeyer and Camille Saint Saens, opened pathways for him to engage a bevy of colleagues, enormous in number, and of the highest as well as diverse artistic expressions of the time: from Richard Wagner and Charles-Marie Widor to Jules Émile Frédéric Massenet and Sir Edward William Elgar. He taught and mentored Maurice Ravel, Charles Koechlin, Jean Roger-Ducasse, George Enescu, Paul Ladmirault, Alfredo Casella, and Nadia Boulanger among others. His connections and network would be the envy of social media devotees in our current century!

Accordingly, Fauré experienced a vast array of musical influences, from the heart of Romanticism to the unfolding of modern orchestral and jazz-influenced music. Grounded and launched from church music, Fauré composed for many musical settings: piano, chamber, organ, choral, French art song (mélodie). A significant number of his compositions have been lost, mostly by his own doing.

The biography of Fauré found in Wikipedia is of noteworthy quality and completes this brief tour with the more “visceral” aspects of Fauré’s life. His life story, explored from a variety of sources, causes one to wonder why a movie hasn’t been made of this artist’s fruitful, dramatic, and successful career.

❖
THE ARTISTS

Michelle Djokic  
Artistic Director  
Cello

Grammy-nominated cellist Michelle Djokic enjoys a versatile career as chamber musician, soloist, and orchestral player. Michelle's lifelong passion for chamber music and the collaborative process of rehearsing was her inspiration for the launching of Musikiwest in 2017. Musikiwest harnesses the collaborative power of chamber music to engender empathic awareness, promote conflict resolution, and build peaceable communities. Using scripted "open rehearsals" in a unique and creative format, Musikiwest addresses difficult issues in young people's lives such as bullying, shaming, and exclusion. The most sought-after performing artists of today gather for this meaningful opportunity to share with adolescents through their incredible artistry and generosity of spirit. Hundreds of lives continue to be impacted by this powerful experience.

In 1997, Michelle founded Concordia Chamber Players based in New Hope, PA and remains the artistic director. Concordia Chamber Players has produced five exceptional film/recordings during the 2020-2021 season, shared with the public free of charge. Since its inception, Concordia has presented remarkably gifted and generous artists with creative programming in the bucolic setting of Bucks County. Concordia is very proud to have commissioned a new chamber work from the sought-after, Brooklyn-based composer, Paul Wiancko. This new work for clarinet, violin, viola, and cello was premiered in September, 2021 as part of Concordia ChamberFest.

Michelle recently launched a multidisciplinary performing arts space in the warehouse district of Sand City, CA. SandBox will be the home of countless collaborations and sharing in a vibrant and eclectic community long known for attracting artists.

John Novacek  
Piano

Pianist John Novacek regularly tours the Americas, Europe, and Asia as solo recitalist, chamber musician, and concerto soloist; in the latter capacity he has presented over thirty concerti with dozens of orchestras. Mr. Novacek begins his new season with an appointment to the Piano and Collaborative Piano faculty of The Mannes School of Music at The New School's College of Performing Arts.

John is a much sought-after collaborative artist and has performed with Joshua Bell, Matt Haimovitz, Leila Josefowicz, Cho-Liang Lin, Yo-Yo Ma, Truls Mork, Elmar Oliveira, and Emmanuel Pahud, and, as well as the Afiara, Colorado, Harrington, Jupiter, New Hollywood, St. Lawrence, SuperNova, and Ying string quartets. He also tours widely as a member of Intersection, a piano trio that includes violinist Kaura Frautschi and cellist Kristina Reiko Cooper. Mr. Novacek has also given numerous world premieres and worked closely with composers John Adams, John Harbison, Jennifer Higdon, George Rochberg, John Williams, and John Zorn.

John Novacek took top prizes at both the Leschetizky and Joanna Hodges international piano competitions, among many others. He studied piano with Polish virtuoso Jakob Gimpel at California State University, Northridge, where he earned a Bachelor of Music degree, summa cum laude. Subsequently, he earned a Master of Music degree from New York City's Mannes College of Music where his instructors were Peter Serkin in piano and Felix Galimer in chamber music. Mr. Novacek's coaches in composition included Frederick Werle, Aurelio de la Vega, and Daniel Kessner.

John Novacek's original compositions have been widely performed and frequently recorded by major international soloists and ensembles.
Siwoo Kim
Violin

Siwoo Kim is an “incisive” and “compelling” (Zachary Woolfe, The New York Times) violinist who plays with "stylistic sensitivity and generous tonal nuance" (John von Rhein, Chicago Tribune). Siwoo performs as a soloist and a chamber musician and is also the founding co-artistic director of the VIVO Music Festival in his hometown of Columbus, Ohio.

Siwoo made his New York concerto debut at Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium with James DePreist and the Juilliard Orchestra. He made his Walt Disney Concert Hall concerto debut shortly after. In addition, he has given concerto performances with the Columbus, Houston, Johannesburg, Kwazulu-Natal, Seongnam, Springfield (MO), and Tulsa symphony orchestras, among others. Siwoo gave the world premiere performance of Samuel Adler's Violin Concerto and will be recording the work in Germany this season to coincide with the composer's 90th anniversary.

Siwoo was named the recipient of the 2012 King Award for Young Artists. He took second place at the 2010 Corpus Christi International Competition for Piano and Strings where he was also awarded special prizes for the best performance of a solo Bach work and for violin performance. He has also been named a top prizewinner in the California, Chengdu, Crescendo, Hellam, Ima Hogg, Juilliard, Schadt, Sejong, and WAMSO competitions.

Siwoo studied with Roland and Almita Vamos at the Music Institute of Chicago. He went on to receive both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from The Juilliard School where he studied with Robert Mann, Donald Weilerstein, and Ronald Copes.
bravo concordia!

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Foundation Academies was founded in 2007. Since then, they have grown to serve more than 1,000 students, operating with four schools on two campuses. They are the largest and highest-ranking K-12 free public charter school in New Jersey’s capital city, Trenton. They were founded with the vision of a world where every child, irrespective of race, gender, or socioeconomic background, has access to a high-quality public education—and they work relentlessly to live up to this promise.

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