



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES
Thursday, April 22, 2021 at 1 P.M. ET
Streaming at [youtube.com/usmarineband](https://www.youtube.com/usmarineband)

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé

“Soupir”
“Placet futile”
“Surgi de la croupe et du bond”

GySgt Sara Sheffield, mezzo-soprano
MSgt Elisabeth Plunk and GySgt Kara Santos, flute
SSgt Parker Gaims and SSgt Zachary Gauvain, clarinet
GySgt Chaerim Smith and SSgt Foster Wang, violin
GySgt Tam Tran, viola
SSgt Clayton Vaughn, cello
MSgt AnnaMaria Mottola, piano

John Harbison (b. 1938)

Four Songs of Solitude (1985)

I.
II.
III.
IV.

MSgt Erika Sato, violin

Marc Mellits (b. 1966)

Escape (2016)

Enter
Swerve
Cortex
Escape
Antique
Pendulum
Exit

SSgt Connor Mikula, alto saxophone
SSgt Darren Lin, marimba

Max Bruch (1838–1920)

Eight Pieces for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, Opus 83

Rumänische Melodie: Andante
Nachtgesang (Nocturne): Andante con moto
Allegro vivace, ma non troppo
Moderato

SSgt Harrison Burks, clarinet
GySgt Tam Tran, viola
MSgt AnnaMaria Mottola, piano

PROGRAM NOTES

Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

Maurice Ravel was a French composer most often associated with the impressionist school at the turn of the twentieth century. One of his great influences was the contemporary French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, a leading figure of the late nineteenth-century artistic movement known as symbolism. Symbolists utilized imagery and indirect suggestion to express absolute truths. The movement developed as a reaction against naturalism and realism, movements whose followers believed in depicting the world as it existed.

In 1913, Ravel decided to set three of Mallarmé's poems to music using the same combination of instruments that Igor Stravinsky used in his *Trois poésies de la lyrique japonaise*, even styling the title of the song-cycle after its predecessor: *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*. The work premiered in 1914 at the Société Musicale Indépendante, which was founded by Ravel and several contemporaries to counter the more conservative Société Nationale de Musique, whose programs included more traditional classical music.

Each of the three poem settings in *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* is dedicated to a different composer: Igor Stravinsky, Florent Schmitt, and Erik Satie, respectively. The first song, "Soupir" ("Sigh"), opens with the strings playing delicate harmonic arpeggios, creating a dream-like atmosphere. The vocalist joins, followed by the other musicians. The string quartet then plays as a unit in a low register accompanying the vocalist, with the winds joining shortly thereafter. Ravel maintains this sparse and haunting atmosphere throughout. In the second song, "Placet futile" ("Futile petition"), the winds take on more soloistic roles, interjecting above a consistently lush string texture. The piano enters with an elaborate set of flourishes halfway through the song. Ravel utilizes the singer's entire vocal range through the movement. In the third song, "Surgi de la croupe et du bond" ("Rising up from its bulge and stem"), Ravel calls for doubling by the flutist on the piccolo and by the clarinetist on bass clarinet, thus expanding the range of the wind section. The song opens with a busy and rhythmically complicated texture of strings and winds, then shifts to a dark and thinly scored section. The winds trade off the same motive one after another through many octaves, while the piano oscillates nervously in the background, bringing the work to a quiet conclusion.

"Soupir"

Mon âme vers ton front où rêve,
ô calme sœur,
Un automne jonché de taches de rousseur,
Et vers le ciel errant de ton œil angélique
Monte, comme dans un jardin mélancolique,
Fidèle, un blanc jet d'eau soupire vers l'Azur!
— Vers l'azur attendri d'octobre
pâle et pur
Qui mire aux grands bassins sa langueur infinie
Et laisse, sur l'eau morte où la fauve agonie

"Sigh"

My soul rises towards your brow o calm sister,
where there lies dreaming
An autumn strewn with russet freckles,
And towards the restless sky of your angelic eye,
As in a melancholy garden,
A white fountain faithfully sighs towards the Azure!
— Towards the compassionate azure of pale and
pure October,
Which mirrors its infinite languor in the great pools
And, on the stagnant water where the tawny agony

Des feuilles erre au vent et creuse un froid
sillon,
Se traîner le soleil jaune d'un long rayon.

Of the leaves stirs in the wind and digs a cold
furrow,
Lets the yellow sun drag itself out in a long ray.

English translation © Nicolas Gounin

“Placet futile”

Princesse! à jalouser le destin d'une Hébée
Qui poind sur cette tasse au baiser de vos lèvres,
J'use mes feux mais n'ai rang discret que
d'abbé
Et ne figurerai même nu sur le Sèvres.

“Futile petition”

Princess! in envying the fate of a Hebe,
Who appears on this cup at the kiss of your lips,
I use up my ardor, but my modest station is only
that of abbé
And I won't even appear nude on the Sèvres
porcelain.

Comme je ne suis pas ton bichon emparbé,
Ni la pastille ni du rouge, ni Jeux mièvres
Et que sur moi je sais ton regard
clos tombé,
Blonde dont les coiffeurs divins sont des
orfèvres!

Since I am not your bewhiskered lapdog,
Nor lozenge, nor rouge, nor affected games,
And since I know that you look on me with
indifferent eyes
Blonde whose divine hairdressers are goldsmiths!

Nommez-nous...toi de qui tant de ris
framboisés
Se joignent en troupeau d'agneaux apprivoisés
Chez tous broutant les vœux et bêlant aux
délires,

Appoint me...you whose many raspberried
laughs
Are gathered into flocks of docile lambs,
Nibbling at all vows and bleating deliriously,

Nommez-nous...pour qu'Amour ailé d'un
éventail
M'y peigne flûte aux doigts endormant ce
bercaïl,
Princesse, nommez-nous berger de vos sourires.

Appoint me...in order that Love, with a fan as his
wings,
May paint me fingering a flute and lulling this
sheepfold,
Princess, appoint me shepherd of your smiles.

English translation © Nicolas Gounin

“Surgi de la croupe et du bond”

Surgi de la croupe et du bond
D'une verrerie éphémère
Sans fleurir la veillée amère
Le col ignoré s'interrompt.

“Rising up from its bulge and stem”

Rising up from its bulge and stem
of fragile glassware
– with no flowers to crown its bitter vigil –
the vase's neglected neck stops short.

Je crois bien que deux bouches n'ont
Bu, ni son amant ni ma mère,
Jamais à la même chimère,
Moi, sylphe de ce froid plafond!

I do believe the mouths
of my mother and her lover
never drank from the same love-cup
(I, sylph of this cold ceiling).

Le pur vase d'aucun breuvage
Que l'inexhaustible veuvage
Agonise mais ne consent,

The vase untouched by any drink
except eternal widowhood
is dying yet never consents

Naïf baiser des plus funèbres!
À rien expirer annonçant
Une rose dans les ténèbres.

– oh naïve funereal kiss! –
to breathe out anything that might herald
a rose in the darkness.

English translation ©2012 Peter Low

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Four Songs of Solitude (1985)

John Harbison (b. 1938)

John Harbison was born in Orange, New Jersey. One of his earliest musical loves was jazz, and he started his own jazz band at age twelve. He did his undergraduate work at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he studied composition with Walter Piston. Graduate studies followed at Princeton University in New Jersey, where Harbison worked with Roger Sessions. According to the composer, Johann Sebastian Bach's cantatas, Igor Stravinsky, and jazz have been the most important influences on his music, and it is possible to discern these inspirations throughout his compositional output. Harbison won the Pulitzer Prize in 1987 for *The Flight into Egypt*, a choral work based upon biblical text taken from the Gospel of Matthew, and in 1998 he won the Heinz Award for his leadership and contributions in the arts and humanities. On December 20, 1999, Harbison's long-awaited opera *The Great Gatsby*, based upon F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel, received its première by the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Harbison is currently on faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, where he is an institute professor, the highest academic honor the school offers to its resident faculty.

The composer offered the following insight into *Four Songs of Solitude*:

Four Songs of Solitude was composed during the summer of 1985 as a present for my wife, Rose Mary, who gave the first performance the following winter. They are songs, not sonatas or fugues. The first song often returns to its initial idea, always to go a different way; the constant lyrical outward flow is balanced by a refrain line that occurs twice. The second song begins with a folksong-like melody, which is immediately answered by a more athletic idea in a key a half-step higher. The dialogue between these ideas eventually fuses them together. The most intense piece is the third song, its melody carrying large intervals and leading toward increasingly brief and intimate reflections upon itself. The last song is the most virtuosic and intricate. Starting from a slow emblem, which is often restated, it begins a dance with an obstinate lower voice as accompaniment. This cycles out of control twice, but manages a fragile reconciliation at the end. The solitude is the composer's, but even more the performer's. The player's world is like that of the long-distance runner, especially in challenging pieces like these, and I wanted our conversation in those hours of preparation to contain subjects of equal interest to both. The listeners can, if they wish, add in their own inner distance.

***Escape* (2016)**

Marc Mellits (b. 1966)

Marc Mellits began his musical career as a child, composing piano works before he even began taking lessons at age six. Currently an associate professor of music at the University of Illinois at Chicago, his compositions have been performed by major ensembles around the world, from orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony, Boston Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, and Detroit Symphony, to

chamber ensembles such as Eighth Blackbird, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York, and the Kronos Quartet. Much of his music features driving rhythms, soaring lyricism, and colorful orchestrations. His works are often miniature in nature, using short and contrasting movements, and the piece *Escape* certainly fits this mold. Of his composition, Mellits offered the following:

Google defines “escape” as to “break free from confinement or control.” The music for *Escape* does much the same thing. The alto saxophone and marimba in this work are often treated as two halves of the same musical machine. Their rhythmic and melodic patterns intertwine and play off of each other in order to create a musical entity that relies on each other and that, in effect, controls one another. This play and control gets shifted back and forth to the players sometimes complete, and sometimes partial. Eventually, musical ideas that can only exist with the other player will surface. This new material then often escapes and forms the basis of the next movement. Neither instrument can completely control this escape mechanism, and its process helps inform the musical material of the next section or movement. Formally, the first three movements directly relate to the last three movements in the same order. They are separated by the middle movement *Escape*, which acts as a safe haven for harmonic ideas that have broken free and join up with melodic ideas escaping from other parts of the piece. The first letters of the other 6 movements spell “escape,” so with this in mind, *Escape* escapes *Escape*.

Eight Pieces for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, Opus 83

Max Bruch (1838–1920)

The son of a police official, Max Bruch was born in Cologne, Germany. His initial musical education came from his mother who was a singer. Bruch was composing by age eleven and, at age twenty-five, had written at least two operas. His musical style was rooted in his Germanic heritage and the music of his contemporaries, particularly Johannes Brahms.

Bruch was more than seventy years old when he composed his Eight Pieces for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano, Opus 83. Each movement is a character piece reflecting traditional Romanticism, which at that time was giving way to a new, contemporary style of composition. These autumnal pieces constituted a tonal swan song, as Bruch remained loyal to his Romantic origins, even as the times and the musical style changed.

Throughout the Eight Pieces, within the context of the ensemble, each instrument is afforded ample opportunity for soloistic expression. The Rumänische Melodie features, as the name suggests, a lyrical Romanian melody that is first introduced by the solo viola. It is then passed to the solo clarinet and finishes in counterpoint between both instruments. Nachtgesang has a gentle andante feel and is a delicate nocturne, wherein the clarinet enters with a charming melody that provides a basis for Bruch’s thorough integration of all three instruments. The Allegro vivace movement is a lively rondo, full of Mendelssohnian energy, which includes a contrasting alternating section that hints at an Italian folk dance. The Moderato, which concludes this set of four pieces and also serves as the finale for the entire work, brings a darker color and includes emotional outbursts at a *forte* dynamic not often seen earlier in the composition.