



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES  
Sunday, October 30, 2022 at 2:00 P.M.  
John Philip Sousa Band Hall  
Marine Barracks Annex  
Washington, DC

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Mélanie Bonis (1858–1937)

*Soir et matin*, Opus 76

Soir: Andante cantabile

Matin: Andantino

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Piano Trio in C minor, Opus 1, No. 3

Allegro con brio

Andante cantabile con variazioni

Menuetto: Quasi allegro

Finale: Prestissimo

## INTERMISSION

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor, Opus 66

Allegro energico e con fuoco

Andante espressivo

Scherzo: Molto allegro quasi presto

Finale: Allegro appassionato

*SSgt Ryo Usami, violin*

*SSgt Clayton Vaughn, cello*

*SSgt Christopher Schmitt, piano*

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# ***PROGRAM NOTES***

## ***Soir et matin, Opus 76***

Mélanie Bonis (1858–1937)

The works of Paris-born composer Mélanie Hélène Bonis embody the qualities of the Impressionist movement in music. The music of this style emphasizes one's personal perception in the moment, often portraying a sense of fleeting textures, ephemeral harmonic progressions, and an overlap of blended sonorities. *Soir et matin* showcases this aesthetic, representing the contrasts between the gentle lull of evening, and the quiet brimming potential of the day's first moments, but hides both behind a restrained dynamic and gentle texture. The use of mutes in the strings and the *una corda* pedal in the piano add to this understated, *sotto voce* aura.

Bonis was a student in the Paris Conservatory at a time when it was uncommon for women, and her studies were only possible because of the efforts of César Franck, a prolific and respected composer who recognized Bonis' talents. She even went so far as to publish music under an androgynous pseudonym, Mel Bonis. Other influential figures helped to launch her career in Paris, but she still suffered considerable judgment; the composer Camille Saint-Saëns, after hearing *Soir et matin*, remarked to its dedicatee, "I never thought a woman could write something such as this. She knows all the clever tricks of the composer's trade," which, although likely intended as high praise, was revealing of the times.

## **Piano Trio in C minor, Opus 1, No. 3**

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Although the set of three Piano Trios, Opus 1 were Ludwig van Beethoven's first published works, they certainly were not his first composed. The budding composer was careful to select repertoire for publication that would ensure his success in Vienna. His mentor, Joseph Haydn, advised against publishing the Piano Trio, Opus 1 No. 3, to which Beethoven took great offense, suspecting that Haydn's advice reflected some jealousy towards the young composer. Still, Beethoven delayed publication, heavily revising the work; "When I re-read the manuscripts I wondered at my folly in collecting into a single work materials enough for twenty."

The "folly" in combining many disparate musical ideas, often with stark juxtapositions and contrasts, is part of what gives early Beethoven its charm. This trio opens a window into Beethoven's nascent personal inspiration, before his later masterpieces coalesced. Early Beethoven works preserve this sense of innocence and humor, but the indicators of his personal struggles inject the music with a resistance and sense of premonition. Beethoven's struggles share a haunting sublimity that can't quite be forgotten.

## **Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor, Opus 66**

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

Felix Mendelssohn's early life did not seem to reveal a sense of struggle commonly associated with many composers; he was born into a wealthy and loving family, was a natural prodigy and enjoyed immense success at a very young age. He had a warm, caring personality, and had countless close friends and acquaintances. His writing often expresses this joy and ease; as a virtuoso pianist, the

keyboard textures are usually light, airy, and quick, and, much like his outward personality, the harmonic language does not generally linger in the minor mode for long.

The Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor represents an exception to Mendelssohn's output and portrays a frenzied state of anxiety; pleas of desperation escape for mere moments from the teeming textures held back by the relentless open C string of the cello. The brief respite of the major theme quickly moves back into the minor mode, and the culmination of the movement is anything but light and airy; the ferocious octave passages in the piano give a sense of bewilderment and anger. The second movement begins simply, but this calm atmosphere is quickly supplanted by the desolate cries of the cello. The third movement is a frenetic scherzo highlighting fugal counterpoint and imitation which make the biting intensity of the subject more striking. The finale begins melancholically, but the sorrow begins to alternate with a thematic sense of hope, vacillating between the two without a clear resolution. Uncertainly intensifies, but is placated with a recognizable, sixteenth-century Lutheran chorale. Perhaps Mendelssohn's interior life was not as effortlessly lighthearted as his outward appearance would suggest; it's possible he experienced the same inward struggles as his musical compatriots. Mimicking the progression of this piano trio, Mendelssohn might have found a way to hold and express this internal struggle, yet move joyfully and triumphantly forward.