

# Season Premiere

## October 9 & 10, 2010

Franz Joseph Haydn  
(1723 – 1809)

Symphony No. 73 in D Major, *La Chasse*

- I. Adagio – Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Menuetto & Trio: Allegretto
- IV. La Chasse (The Hunt): Presto

Maurice Ravel  
(1875 – 1937)

Piano Concerto in G Major

- I. Allegramente
  - II. Adagio assai
  - III. Presto
- Kelly Zuercher, piano

INTERMISSION

Gabriel Fauré  
(1845-1924)

Elégie for cello and orchestra, op. 24  
Ramona McConkie, cello

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770 – 1827)

Symphony No. 8 in F Major, op. 93

- I. Allegro vivace e con brio
- II. Allegretto scherzando
- III. Tempo di menuetto
- IV. Allegro vivace

*I know that God has bestowed a talent upon me, and I thank Him for it. I think I have done my duty and been of use in my generation by my works. Let others do the same.*—Haydn

**Franz Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809) was born in the Austrian town of Rohrau, and in 1761, after a conspicuously ordinary early life, was engaged as vice-Kapellmeister by Prince Paul Esterházy, a Hungarian nobleman. He remained exclusively in that family's employment for the next thirty years, working for Prince Paul and then for his son Nikolaus. Unlike Mozart, whose relationships with his patrons were neither easy nor consistent, Haydn lived happily within the confines of his master's world and benefited enormously from seclusion and from having a permanent orchestra with which to work. Haydn later remarked, "There was no one there to confuse me, so I was forced to become original." In 1790, Nikolaus died and the court musicians were dismissed by his successor. Haydn moved to Vienna, but shortly afterward received an invitation to visit England, where he proved incredibly successful in 1791-92. Oxford University even gave Haydn an honorary degree. Having returned from London, he bought a house in Vienna where he taught Beethoven and others, but in 1794 he returned to England, this time with even more success. He returned to Europe again in 1795, returning to employment with the Esterházy family and concentrating all of his time on composing. His health began to fail in 1802, and after a long struggle, Haydn died in 1809. In some ways, Haydn was more radical than Mozart, experimenting with unusual-length phrases and using unconventional forms in his symphonies. Above all, Haydn is the most humane and comforting of composers. In his own words, he wrote music so that "the weary and worn, or the man burdened with affairs, may enjoy a few moments of solace and refreshment."

Haydn composed his **Symphony No. 73 in D Major** in 1782. The nickname *La Chasse* (The Hunt) was given to the symphony later, due to the hunting horn calls of the final movement. The horn calls are based on a hunting melody from *La Chasse du cerf*, a divertissement for vocal soloists, chorus, and small orchestra by French composer Jean-Baptiste Morin. Other distinguishing features are the main theme of the first movement, with a repeated-note structure that, when used elsewhere as accompaniment, constantly reminds the listener of the main theme. The second movement is based on a song by Haydn, *Gegenliebe*, Hob. XVIIa:16, with the song used as a refrain for a rondo form. The finale was originally composed as the overture to Haydn's opera *La fedeltà premiata* (Fidelity Rewarded), with a coda that fades away for a rising curtain, so *La Chasse* is one of the few Haydn symphonies to end softly.

*Ravel's music has been compared to those formal French gardens in which the trees and shrubs are trimmed to precise shapes and the flowers laid out in well-ordered patterns ... Within the forms that he chose to cultivate, his inspiration seldom waned, his artistry never lost its consummate skill. Even those who hold that there is too much artifice in his art must admit that he conceals this artifice with infinite grace.*—Gilbert Chase, American music historian, critic, author and ethnomusicologist.

If Vienna was notoriously incapable of appreciating its local talent in the time of Mozart, so also was Paris for the entire nineteenth century, overlooking luminaries like Berlioz, Gounod, Massenet and Saint-Saëns. It wasn't until the early twentieth century that France would concern itself with a true French sound, and the leaders of this French musical Renaissance were Claude Debussy and **Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937).

Ravel grew up in Paris, enrolling at the Paris Conservatoire in 1889. His early style is clearly influenced by his studies with Gabriel Fauré, and he was fascinated with new harmonies emerging in the French school that threw out all conventions of harmony in Western music (known as "functional harmony") from 1650 to 2000. His modernism cost him dearly in academic circles, as he entered the Prix de Rome four times (1901-1903, 1905) and was failed each time, including failing

the preliminary rounds in 1905. Nonetheless, he soldiered on and the next decade was extremely productive, including several masterpieces—*Rhapsodie Espagnole*, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, and *Daphnis et Chloé*.

Ravel tried to enlist during World War I, but was turned away by both the army and air force because he was too thin and too short, so he assisted the war effort by driving ambulances. Still reeling from his academic rejections, he quipped, “They tell me that Saint-Saëns announced that during the war he has composed theatre music, songs ... If instead he had been servicing Howitzers, his music might have been the better for it.”

The war, however, was tough on Ravel. His haunting *Le Tombeau de Couperin* was written in memory of the dead, and not long after, Ravel suffered a serious physical collapse. Soon, his mother and Claude Debussy would pass away, leaving Ravel feeling very much alone in the world despite being regarded as France’s greatest living composer. Despite some excellent new compositions—*L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, the *Piano Concerto in G Major*, *Tzigane*, and *Bolero*—Ravel spent most of his creative energy revising his earlier works. In 1937, he was stricken with a serious degenerative brain condition which led him to a risky brain operation that December, from which he never regained consciousness.

Ravel’s **Piano Concerto in G Major** was begun in 1929, as Ravel had recently returned to France after a successful piano recital tour of America and the new sounds of jazz were raging in Paris. Despite the use of jazz idioms, the piece is structured very much like a Classical-period concerto in three movements—fast, slow, fast. Ravel had hoped to give the premiere of the concerto himself in 1931, but his declining health left Marguerite Long with the responsibility; Ravel conducted the orchestra and later dedicated the piece to Long. Ravel was so deeply impressed with jazz during his American travels he later remarked, “Jazz is a very rich and vital source of inspiration for modern composers and I am astonished that so few Americans are influenced by it.”

*It is not difficult to see why Fauré’s example was inspiring to a generation of composers who were quickly tiring of impressionism. They easily overlooked the fact that Fauré had his roots in the Romantic movement, because his was a pre-Wagnerian brand of romanticism—delicate, reserved, and aristocratic. Moreover, no matter what its derivation may have been, it possessed all the earmarks of the French temperament: harmonic sensitivity, impeccable taste, classic restraint, and a love of clear lines and well-made proportions.—Aaron Copland*

*Music moves me all the more when the methods used are clear, correct, precise, and even concise.—Fauré*

**Gabriel Fauré** (1845-1924) wrote those words in 1896 at the age of fifty-one. By then he had composed a large quantity of orchestral music, but there were no symphonies or concertos and none to follow. Instead, he applied his principles of clarity, precision and concision to smaller musical forms. Composition for Fauré was primarily “for music’s sake”—the pure *idea*.

Fauré was the youngest of six children and a precocious talent. When he was nine, his parents sent him to the Niedermeyer school in Paris, known for its training in church music, and that training influenced Fauré throughout his career. In 1861, Saint-Saëns arrived at the school to teach piano, broadening Fauré’s outlook with music of Wagner and Liszt, and a lifelong friendship formed between them.

Fauré started his professional career as an organist but was pulled away for service in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. After returning to church music, he was deeply moved at hearing the Wagner’s *Ring* cycle. He managed to take the best aspects of Wagner without joining the legions of Wagner imitators of the day. In 1896, he obtained a professorship of composition at the Paris Conservatory, where his influence was felt for decades through influential students like Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger. He eventually became director of the Conservatory, which proved a mixed blessing, as he found less and less time for composition. Worse yet, his hearing started to fail,

forcing him to pare down his harmonic language and leaving him looking outdated and obsolete during the rush of late Impressionism and modernism that was sweeping through France.

Fauré's **Elégie for cello and orchestra, op. 24** was written in 1880, originally for cello and piano, and may have been intended as a slow movement for a complete sonata. Fauré wrote, "My cello piece was very well received, and that greatly encourages me to go on and do the whole Sonata." Despite this success, Fauré would wait another forty years to write his two cello sonatas and wouldn't include the Elégie in either, since the piece stood so well on its own. He decided to orchestrate the piece in 1895 and it quickly became an icon of his orchestral music, so quintessentially identified with his music that it would be used as the subject of an extended improvisation by the organist at Fauré's state funeral.

*Keep your eye on him; he will make the world talk about him some day.*—Mozart, in a letter to his father dated 1787, after meeting Beethoven.

*Beethoven was the pillar of smoke that led to the Promised Land.*—Franz Liszt.

**Beethoven's** time was one of revolutions and wars, terror and reform, poverty and extravagance and in many ways his music reflects the turbulence of the age in which he lived. Austria was at war with Ottoman Turkey, the French were in dispute with Austria, and England with France. The fall of the Bastille in 1789 was a sign of the end of the old order, extinguished forever. The period brought wide cultural changes, changes in political philosophy and society, and in the arts. Beethoven is seen as the bridge from the restraint and preoccupation with form of the Classical era, to the wildly personalized and emotional Romantic era.

Beethoven had a remarkable musical output. Just to name a few: 32 piano sonatas, 16 string quartets, 6 piano concerti plus a fragment (of which only 5 remain in the repertoire), 10 violin sonatas, 4 cello sonatas, 172 folk song arrangements, 60 canons and "musical jokes," at least 2 ballets, an opera ("Fidelio"), and a large number of other works for chamber ensembles, choir, voice ... *and* 9 great symphonies that still represent the highest consistent level of symphonic output by any composer in history.

**Ludwig van Beethoven** was born in the provincial court city of Bonn, Germany, probably on December 16, 1770. Beethoven's talent was such that, at the age of 12, he was already assistant to the organist Christian Gottlob Neefe, with whom he studied. Attempts to establish him as a prodigy in the mold of Mozart had little success, however.

In 1787 Beethoven was sent to Vienna, but his mother fell ill, and he had to return to Bonn almost immediately. She died a few months later, and in 1789 Beethoven himself requested that his alcoholic father be retired, a move that left him responsible for his two younger brothers. Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna a second time in November of 1792, in order to study with Haydn.

In 1794 French forces occupied the Rhineland; consequently, Beethoven's ties with and support from the Bonn court came to an end. His father had died a month after his departure from Bonn, and his brothers joined him in Vienna. He remained there the rest of his life, leaving only for holidays and concerts in nearby cities. His only extended journey was to Prague, Dresden, and Berlin in 1796. Beethoven never held an official position in Vienna. He supported himself by giving concerts, by teaching piano, and increasingly through the sale of his compositions. Members of the Viennese aristocracy were his steady patrons, and in 1809 three of them—Prince Kinsky, Prince Lobkowitz, and the Archduke Rudolph—even guaranteed him a yearly income with the sole condition that he remain in Vienna.

The last 30 years of Beethoven's life were shaped by a series of personal crises, the first of which was the onset of deafness. The early symptoms, noticeable to the composer already before 1800, affected him socially more than musically. His reaction was despair, resignation, and defiance.

Resolving finally to "seize fate by the throat," he emerged from the crisis with a series of triumphant works that mark the beginning of a new period in his stylistic development.

A second crisis a decade later was the breaking off of a relationship with an unnamed lady (probably Antonie Brentano, the wife of a friend) known to us as the "Immortal Beloved," as Beethoven addressed her in a series of letters in July 1812. This was apparently the most serious of several such relationships with women who were in some way out of his reach, and its traumatic conclusion was followed by a lengthy period of resignation and reduced musical activity.

During this time Beethoven's deafness advanced to the stage that he could no longer perform publicly, and he required a slate or little notebooks (now known as "conversation books") to communicate with visitors. The death of his brother Caspar Carl in 1815 led to a 5-year legal struggle for custody of Caspar's son Karl, then 9 years old, in whom Beethoven saw a last chance for the domestic life that had otherwise eluded him. His possessiveness of Karl provoked a final crisis in the summer of 1826, when the young man attempted suicide. Shortly thereafter, Beethoven's health began to fail, and he died on March 26, 1827 in Vienna.

The real significance of **Beethoven's Symphony No. 8 in F Major, op. 93**, is difficult to see at first. Beethoven was at the height of his compositional powers, and composed his monumental *Symphony No. 7 in A Major, op. 92* at the same time, yet the two pieces are radically different. The bold, heroic character of the Seventh Symphony was expected from Beethoven, but the Eighth Symphony makes no sense in that context. Not surprisingly, it had some of Beethoven's harsher critics whispering that the deaf composer had lost his touch. Then again, some people have no sense of humor, and the Eighth Symphony is precisely that—a comic symphony. The first movement is bold and heroic enough, giving little indication of Beethoven's intentions but taking a definite step backward from the emotional intensity which had begun to be associated with Beethoven's compositional style. The humor takes over in the second movement, as Beethoven pokes fun at a new invention by one of his friends, Johann Maelzel—the metronome. A steady pulse of slow sixteenth notes imitates a metronome as the orchestra "practices" the melody, trills and wide intervals, all with the occasional frustrated outbreak of loud sixty-fourth notes. Though starting the movement in B-flat major, Beethoven establishes E-flat major so strongly near the end of the movement that final resolution in B-flat major sounds more like a half-cadence—deliberately awkward and leaving the listener wondering if the movement has truly ended. The third movement begins normally enough in its first repeated section but quickly turns to the ridiculous, as the orchestra seems almost to fall apart at the conclusion of the second section (the woodwinds sounding especially lost), while the hunting horns and impossibly high clarinet of the trio suggest that the hunting party might not be entirely sober. The last movement, in the home key of F Major, begins harmlessly and softly, but is quickly interrupted by what sounds to the listener like a D-flat but is actually a C-sharp (different name, same note) in the music—part of an inside joke. Throughout, the movement is plagued by odd C-sharps in a riotous melee of backhanded rhythms, awkward key changes and uncomfortable pauses. Proportionately, the last movement arrives exceedingly early at its coda (usually a short, concluding bit of music), which Beethoven magnifies beyond all reasonable proportion—nearly half the measures of the movement!—and calls upon the trumpets and timpani to stamp out the pesky C-sharps once and for all. All things considered, this comic symphony by the most serious of all composers is a rather unique gift in the orchestral repertoire. It was composed in 1812 and premiered on February 27, 1814, in a program alongside the Seventh Symphony, with Beethoven conducting. When asked by his pupil, Carl Czerny, why the Eighth Symphony was less popular than the Seventh, Beethoven replied, "Because the Eighth is so much better."