

ArtPower  
University of California San Diego

## ENSŌ STRING QUARTET

January 27, 2017 at 8 pm

Department of Music's Conrad Prebys Concert Hall



ArtPower presents

## **Ensō String**

### **Quartet**

January 27, 2017 at 8 pm  
Department of Music's  
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Scott St. John, *violin\**

Ken Hamao, *violin*

Melissa Reardon, *viola*

Richard Belcher, *cello*

*\*special guest*

## **Program**

### **Hugo Wolf (1860–1903)**

Italian Serenade (1887)

### **Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924)**

*I Crisantemi* (1890)

### **Alberto Ginastera (1916–83)**

String Quartet No. 2, Opus 26 (1958)

Allegro rustico

Adagio angoscioso

Presto magico

Tema Libero e rapsodico

Furioso

INTERMISSION

### **Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)**

String Quartet in F Major (1902–03)

Allegro moderato. Très doux

Assez vif. Très rythmé

Très lent

Vif et agité

## **Thank You**

Sponsors: Jon and Bobbie Gilbert, Eric Lasley and Judith Bachner

## **About ArtPower at UC San Diego**

ArtPower at UC San Diego builds creative experiences in music, dance, film, and food for our collective pleasure and inspiration. We engage diverse audiences through vibrant, challenging, multi-disciplinary performances by emerging and renowned international artists. Through extensive partnerships, ArtPower provides exciting opportunities for research, participation, and creation of new work, igniting powerful dialogue between artists, students, scholars, and the community.

## About the Program

### Italian Serenade (1887)

Hugo Wolf

Born March 13, 1860, Windischgraz

Died February 22, 1903, Vienna

Hugo Wolf's reputation rests on his songs, but throughout his brief creative career (he died at 43 in a mental hospital) he dreamed of composing large-scale works. In 1887, at age 27, Wolf composed, in the space of three days, a movement for string quartet that he called simply *Serenade*. Three years later, he added the word "Italian" to that title, apparently as an act of homage to a land of warmth and sunny spirits, and in 1892 he arranged the serenade for a small orchestra of pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and strings (there is a prominent role for solo viola in both versions). Wolf later planned to add three further movements to make his Italian Serenade a full-scale orchestral work, but these came to nothing. Trapped by frequent periods of creative sterility and—increasingly—by periods of mental instability, he could make no progress on these movements, which survive only as fragmentary sketches.

The one completed movement of the Serenade, however, has become one of Wolf's most frequently performed and recorded works. Some commentators have taken the title quite literally: they claim to hear in this music an actual serenade sung by a young man to his love on a balcony above. They cite the opening pizzicatos as the sound of a guitar being tuned and hear the voice of the young man in the earnest cello and the voice of the young woman in reply.

It is quite possible to enjoy the music without knowing any of this (or searching for it in the music). The Italian Serenade is in rondo form, set at a very brisk tempo—Wolf marks it *Ausserst lebhaft* (Extremely fast)—yet the music manages both to be very fast and to project an easy, almost languorous, atmosphere throughout. He marks individual episodes "tender," "fiery," and "passionate" as this music flows smoothly to its quiet close.

### *I Crisantemi* (1890)

Giacomo Puccini

Born December 22 or 23, 1858, Lucca

Died November 29, 1924, Brussels

Prince Amadeo of Savoy, the second son of King Victor Emanuel II, died on January 18, 1890, and in his memory Puccini wrote—"in a night"—a brief piece for string quartet, which he called *I Crisantemi* (Chrysanthemums). Puccini was at this time almost unknown. At age 31, he had composed only two operas, and neither of these—*Le Villi* and *Edgar*—had achieved much success. Real fame would not come to the young composer for another three years, when *Manon Lescaut* was produced in February 1893.

Puccini wrote very little purely instrumental music, and *I Crisantemi* has become the best-known of this handful of works. The editor of the modern edition of the score notes that in Italy chrysanthemums are invariably associated with funerals, so the title may have seemed a natural one to the composer. He marks this grieving and melodic piece *Andante mesto* (sad), and the music retains a somber hue throughout its brief span. Op-

era lovers may find that *I Crisantemi* sounds familiar. Liking this music, Puccini borrowed two of its themes for use in the final act of *Manon Lescaut*, where they accompany Manon's death. *I Crisantemi* has been arranged for string orchestra and has become familiar in that version, but it is heard at this concert in Puccini's original version for string quartet.

### String Quartet No. 2, Opus 26 (1958)

Alberto Ginastera

Born April 11, 1916, Buenos Aires

Died June 25, 1983, Geneva

Alberto Ginastera trained first in his native Argentina and later received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study in the United States, where he spent a summer at Tanglewood with Aaron Copland and Serge Koussevitzky. Following his return to Argentina in 1948, Ginastera created a large body of work that includes operas, ballets, orchestral works, and chamber music. Though his early works were based on a nationalist idiom, incorporating the melodies and rhythms of Argentinian music, his later music makes use of serialism and other complex compositional procedures. The first of Ginastera's three string quartets came from the year of his return to Argentina, while the third, for soprano and quartet, dates from 1973. His Second String Quartet represented a major turning point in his career. Its first performance, by the Juilliard String Quartet, took place on April 19, 1958, at the first Inter-American Music Festival in Washington, D.C. This music proved one of the triumphs of that festival and helped establish Ginastera's international reputation.

The Second String Quartet is one of the first works in what Ginastera himself called his late style: at some points it uses serial techniques, yet the color and virtuosity of the writing for the four instruments are fully characteristic of his early, nationalist music. The quartet is in five movements, and he appears to have been influenced by Bartók's arch-form: the outer movements are full of power and vitality, while the second and fourth movements are slow. At the center of the quartet is a *presto magico*, a reminder of Ginastera's lifelong fascination with magic.

The first movement—Allegro rustico—opens brilliantly, with all four instruments in unison. Despite his growing interest in new techniques of composition, this movement is in sonata form. The Adagio angoscioso (anguished), described as a song with five sections, is based on the viola's grieving opening melody. Despite occasional outbursts, the middle movement—Presto magico—remains very quiet, and Ginastera makes use of a wide palette of color: *pizzicato*, *glissando*, harmonics, *col legno* (bowing with the wood of the bow), and *ponticello* (bowing on top of the bridge to produce a grainy, buzzing sound). The fourth movement is a theme with three variations—Ginastera presents the theme in the first violin, then gives each of the other instruments one of the variations, in effect allowing each instrument a cadenza of its own. The concluding Furioso is aptly-named. Extremely fast and brilliant, it falls into three sections before racing to a final chord that Ginastera marks quadruple *forte*.

## String Quartet in F Major (1902–03)

Maurice Ravel

Born March 7, 1875, Ciboure, Basses-Pyrenees

Died December 28, 1937, Paris

Ravel wrote his only string quartet in 1902–3, while still a student at the Paris Conservatory, and the first performance was given by the Heymann Quartet in Paris on March 5, 1904, two days before the composer's twenty-ninth birthday. His quartet is in many ways similar to the Debussy quartet, written in 1893—there are parallels between the structure, rhythmic shape, and mood of the two works—but Ravel dedicated his quartet “To my dear teacher Gabriel Fauré,” who was directing Ravel's work at the Conservatory.

One of the most distinctive features of Ravel's quartet is its cyclic deployment of themes: the first movement's two main themes return in various forms in the other three movements, giving the quartet a tight sense of unity. Some have charged that such repetition precludes sufficient thematic variety, but Ravel subtly modifies the color, harmony, and mood of each reappearance of these themes so that from this unity comes enormous variety.

The first movement is marked *Allegro moderato*, but Ravel specifies that it should also be *Très doux*. This movement is built on two distinct theme-groups. The calm first subject is heard immediately in the first violin over a rising accompaniment in the other voices, and this leads—after some spirited extension—to the haunting second theme, announced by the first violin and viola, two octaves apart. The relatively brief development rises to a huge climax—Ravel marks it triple *forte*—before the movement subsides to close with its opening theme, now gracefully elongated, fading gently into silence.

The second movement, *Assez vif–Très rythmé*, is a scherzo in ternary form. The opening is a *tour de force* of purely pizzicato writing that makes the quartet sound like a massive guitar. Some of this movement's rhythmic complexity comes from Ravel's use of multiple meters. The tempo indication is  $6/8(3/4)$ , and while the first violin is accented in  $3/4$  throughout, the other voices are frequently accented in  $6/8$ , with the resulting cross-rhythms giving the music a pleasing vitality. The slow center section is a subtle transformation of the first movement's second theme. At the conclusion of this section comes one of the quartet's most brilliant passages, the bridge back to the opening material. Here the pizzicato resumes quietly, gathers speed and force, and races upward to launch the return of the movement's opening theme. This is wonderful writing for quartet, and the scherzo drives straight to its explosive pizzicato cadence.

The third movement—*Très lent*—is in free form, and perhaps the best way to understand this movement is to approach it as a rhapsody based loosely on themes from the first movement. Beneath these themes Ravel sets a rhythmic cell of three notes that repeats constantly, but it remains an accompaniment figure rather than becoming an active thematic participant. The movement's impression of freedom results in no small part from its frequent changes of both key and meter.

After the serene close of the third movement, the fourth—*Agité*—leaps almost abrasively to life. Agitated it certainly is, an effect that comes from its steadily-driving double-stroked passages, and this mood continues across the span of the movement.

The basic metric unit here is the rapid  $5/8$  heard at the beginning, though Ravel changes meter frequently, with excursions into  $3/4$  and  $5/4$ . Once again, material from the first movement returns, and after several lyric interludes the finale takes on once again the aggressive mood of its opening and powers its way to the close.

Ravel's quartet generated a mixed reaction at its premiere in 1904. One of those most critical was the dedicatee, Gabriel Fauré, who was especially bothered by the unorthodox finale, which he thought “stunted, badly balanced, in fact a failure.” But when Ravel, troubled by such criticism, turned to Debussy for his estimation, the latter offered the best possible response: “In the name of the gods of music and for my sake personally, do not touch a note of what you have written.”

Program notes by Eric Bromberger

## About the Artists

### Ensō String Quartet

One of its generations most compelling string ensembles, the Grammy-nominated Ensō String Quartet has risen to the front rank of chamber music performers. Founded at Yale University in 1999, the quartet has been described by *Strad* magazine as “thrilling,” and praised by the *Washington Post* for its “glorious sonorities.” The quartet quickly went on to win numerous awards, including top prizes at the Concert Artists Guild competition and the Banff International String Quartet Competition. In the words of *Classical Voice*, it is “one of the eminent string quartets of our era.”

In 2015–16, the Ensō String Quartet toured from coast to coast in the U.S. with concerts in many of the country's most prestigious venues such as Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center and New York's Lincoln Center, as well as in California for the Coleman Chamber Music Association. International tours this season take the quartet to Colombia, Brazil, and a 25-city, 30-concert tour of Australia and New Zealand. Sought after as teachers and coaches, the quartet started their own highly successful Ensō Chamber Music Workshop for advanced students and young professional musicians at Music Mountain in Connecticut in 2015.

Apart from a busy touring and teaching schedule, the New York-based quartet has made several critically acclaimed recordings for the Naxos label. In appraising the Ensō's album of works by Alberto Ginastera, *MusicWeb International* declared, “The performances here by the Ensō Quartet from America are quite staggeringly brilliant. I don't think I have been so thrilled by the sound of a string quartet in a long time . . . If I could give this disc a standing ovation of one . . . I would!” Of the group's recording of Strauss, Puccini, and Verdi, the American Record Guide wrote that “The Ensō Quartet plays . . . with a beautifully blended sound and . . . heartrending sensitivity.” *Gramophone* described their album of the two Piano Quintets by Dohnanyi as “performances that are astutely musical and very well executed . . . about as good as it gets . . . all-round musical excellence.”



## Scott St. John, violin

Scott St. John lives in London, Canada with his wife Sharon Wei and daughter Julia. He was a member of the St. Lawrence String Quartet and faculty member at Stanford University for seven years, from 2006–13. Currently he coaches chamber music at Western University (Canada), plays chamber music at the Marlboro Music Festival (Vermont), and plays concertmaster of the ROCO Chamber Orchestra in Houston. He is a partner in the new Rebelheart Collective at Aeolian Hall in London Ontario, an innovative chamber orchestra and youth mentorship program connected with El Sistema.

A recent recording of Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* with his sister Lara St. John won a Juno Award for best recording: solo with orchestra. Working with composers has been important throughout his career; he has worked with John Adams and Oswald Golijov in the U.S., and Arsenio Giron, Gary Kulesha, Elizabeth Raum, and many others in Canada.

St. John began his violin studies at age three with Richard Lawrence, in London. He is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music where he studied violin with David Cerone, Arnold Steinhardt, and chamber music with Felix Galimir. Current nonmusical activities include serving on the boards of the London Organic Food Co-op and Transport Action Ontario. He also supports HanVoice, a lobby organization for North Korean refugees in Canada.



## DUBLIN GUITAR QUARTET

Friday, March 3, 2017, at 8 pm

Department of Music's Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Tickets: \$23–30

They might play traditional Spanish-style classical guitars, but they're not your standard guitar ensemble. Described as a "quartet with a difference" by the *Irish Times*, the Dublin Guitar Quartet is the first classical guitar quartet entirely devoted to new music. Since their formation, the quartet has worked to expand the genre's limited repertoire by commissioning new works and adapting modern masterpieces. With the help of 8- and 11-string guitars, the quartet has created an original catalogue of arrangements by composers such as Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Arvo Pärt, and György Ligeti. Expect a dynamic, entertaining, and completely novel concert experience at their San Diego debut with ArtPower.

**PROGRAM** Bryce Dessner: *Aheym*; Philip Glass: *Saxophone Quartet*; Rachel Grimes: *Book of Leaves*; William Kanengiser: *Gongan*; Nikita Koshkin: *Changing the Guard*; György Ligeti: *Inaktelki Nóták* and *Mátraszentimrei Dalok*; Marc Mellits: *Quartet*; Urmas Sisask: *Songs in Honour of the Virgin Mary*

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## Ariel Quartet

Fri. April 21 at 8 pm

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## St. Lawrence String Quartet

Fri. May 5 at 8 pm

Works by Ludwig van Beethoven,  
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