

Program Notes

SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO IN A MAJOR – *César Franck*

Composed in 1886 as a wedding gift for the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, the Violin Sonata in A major is the most celebrated chamber work by César Franck and a cornerstone of the violin-piano repertoire. Written during the final period of his life, the sonata reflects Franck's mature style, combining deep lyricism with architectural unity through his characteristic cyclical form, in which themes recur and evolve across movements. The first movement, *Allegretto ben moderato*, unfolds with warmth and poetic intimacy, establishing a gentle dialogue between violin and piano. The second movement, *Allegro*, brings dramatic intensity and restless energy, demanding virtuosity and emotional power from both players. The third movement, *Recitativo-Fantasia*, is free and improvisatory in spirit, resembling a reflective monologue filled with rich harmonic color. The final movement, *Allegretto poco mosso*, is built around a luminous canon, bringing the work to a serene and radiant conclusion. Throughout the sonata, Franck treats both instruments as equal partners, creating a deeply expressive and unified masterpiece that remains central to the chamber music tradition.

PIANO TRIO IN A MINOR – *Maurice Ravel*

Completed in 1914, just before Ravel enlisted in the military, the Piano Trio in A Minor is widely regarded as one of the most technically demanding piano trios in the history of chamber music. The trio reflects Ravel's meticulous craftsmanship and his fascination with rhythm, color and exotic forms. The first movement, *Modéré*, unfolds with lyrical grace and subtle Basque rhythmic patterns, giving the music a floating, modal quality. The second movement, *Pantoum (Assez vif)*, takes its form from a Malay verse structure, weaving playful and sparkling textures in a lively dialogue between instruments. The third movement, *Passacaille (Très large)*, is a solemn set of variations built upon a repeating ground bass, gradually intensifying to a powerful climax before receding into quiet dignity. The final movement, *Animé*, bursts with rhythmic drive and brilliant sonorities, its shifting meters and dazzling virtuosity pushing all three instruments to their limits. It is in passages like these that the trio earns its reputation as one of the most difficult chamber works ever written, demanding not only precision but also tremendous stamina and artistry from the performers.

As French composers, César Franck and Maurice Ravel represent two very different musical worlds. Franck, rooted in late Romanticism and Germanic tradition, emphasized spiritual depth, rich harmony, and cyclical form, often aiming for emotional and structural unity. Ravel, by contrast, was a master of precision and color, associated with Impressionism and modernism, favoring clarity, refined craftsmanship, and innovative rhythm and orchestration. While Franck's music tends toward introspection and organic development, Ravel's reflects elegance, control, and a fascination with timbre and exotic influences.