Music in Mind: *French Impressions*

Aeolus Quartet
SIREN Woodwind Quintet
Bradford Gowen, piano

Sunday, April 28, 2013 . 3PM
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall
Music in Mind: *French Impressions*

**Aeolus Quartet**

**SIREN Woodwind Quintet**

**Bradford Gowen, piano**

**JACQUES IBERT**

Trois Pièces Brèves

Allegro

Andante

Assez lent, allegro scherzando

**MAURICE RAVEL**

String Quartet in F Major

Allegro moderato. Très doux

Assez vif. Très rythmé

Très lent

Vif et agité

**FRANCIS POULENÇ**

Sextuor

Allegro vivace

Divertissement

Finale

Bradford Gowen, piano

**JEAN FRANÇAIX**

Dixtuor

Andante

Scherzando

Allegro moderato

**Music in Mind:** *French Impressions*

Formed in 2008 at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the **Aeolus Quartet** has been praised by *Strad Magazine* for their "high-octane" performances and by the *Dallas Morning News* for their "Sophisticated and committed" music-making. The Aeolus Quartet completed their tenure as the first Graduate String Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Texas in Austin in 2011, and they are currently studying under doctoral fellowship at the University of Maryland with the Guarneri and Left Bank Quartets. Luke Quinton of the *Austin-American Statesman* writes, “The Aeolus Quartet is a powerful and thoughtful group of young musicians who are plotting an ascending course … this vibrant group shows great promise.”

The Aeolus Quartet are Grand Prizewinners of the 2011 Plowman Chamber Music Competition and 2011 Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition. They were awarded First Prize at the 2009 Coleman International Chamber Ensemble Competition, and Silver Medal at the 2011 Fischoff International Chamber Music Competition. They were also awarded the Fischoff Educator Award for 2013. Highlights of the 2013-14 season include a summer teaching residency at the Austin Chamber Music Center, performances with Rita Sloan and Michael Tree, and collaborations on the rare instrument collection at the Smithsonian Institute. www.aeolusquartet.com

**SIREN** is the University of Maryland’s Graduate wind chamber group. Flutist Meghan Shanley, oboist Emily Tsai, clarinetist Emily Robinson and hornist Matthew Gray are joined by bassoonist Tilden Marbit for the 2012-2013 season. Under the invaluable mentorship of oboe professor Mark Hill, SIREN has had a progressive two years of guidance. The group has also been coached by other faculty members of the UMD School of Music such as Sue Heineman, James Ross, Chris Gekker and Robert DiLutis. During spring 2012, SIREN performed Valerie Coleman’s *Afro-Cuban Concerto* for the Imani Winds, and made their European debut in Italy at the Alba Music Festival. The group has also collaborated with musicians from the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Windscape and Eighth Blackbird. Members of SIREN hold degrees from New York University/SUNY at Purchase, the Eastman School of Music, DePaul University/the University of Minnesota and McGill University/Mannes College.

**Bradford Gowen** won the first Kennedy Center/Rockefeller International Competition for Excellence in the Performance of American Music. He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he studied piano with Cicile Genhart and composition with Samuel Adler. He later studied piano with Leon Fleisher and Dorothy Taubman. Besides his extensive solo, concerto, and chamber music appearances, his has played many duo concerts with his wife, pianist Maribeth Gowen. He wrote for more than twenty years for *The Piano Quarterly* and *Piano & Keyboard*, and in 2002 he wrote a major series of three articles on twentieth-century American piano music for the *London-based International Piano*. As a performer and teacher he has remained an advocate for music by American composers, and has premiered numerous significant works, such as the *Sonata for Piano Solo* by Judith Lang Zaimont. Since 1981 he has been on the faculty of the University of Maryland School of Music, where he is Chair of the Piano Division. He is also on the faculty of The Washington Conservatory of Music.

Funded by the SMITH PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE, the Graduate Chamber Ensemble Fellowship fosters the careers of budding chamber musicians through intensive study with UMD faculty, the Guarneri String Quartet and Left Bank Quartet, featured performance at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center and professional development opportunities.

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The 20th century in French music is most often associated with Impressionism. Claude Debussy, by his sheer compositional force and prominence in the minds of listeners the world over, has assured this fact. Paul Dukas and Maurice Ravel, amongst others, followed in the footsteps of Debussy and created what would become an almost uniquely French musical language, the hallmark of which was an abandonment of traditional forward-driving tonality in favor of harmonic stasis. This stasis was achieved through the use of whole-tone scales that have no tonic or central focus, which allowed the music built on them to float above our expectations; never demanding the sense of completion that drives traditional tonal music. As a result, Impressionist music often failed to adhere to the standard formal structures of music.

These harmonic techniques were a means — one of many — through which the Impressionist composers endeavored to express emotion as directly as possible. In many ways, their music transcended the Romantic ideals of the 19th century; rather than trying to evoke emotion from the listener — making music an empathetic art — the Impressionists sought to depict the emotions themselves. This process necessitated a deep sincerity, however, since a composer could not possibly compose an emotion he did not feel.

In stark contrast to the harmonic vagueness and sincerity of Impressionism, Neoclassicism thrived on irony and an adherence to musical forms and structures codified hundreds of years earlier. In the wake of the First World War, many composers felt that the surfeit of emotion found in Romantic and Impressionistic works was not suited for a global political and cultural landscape that was so obviously broken. The restoration of detachment logically flourished in war-ravaged France, and was the basis for Neoclassical music. By using musical forms that had been popularized hundreds of years earlier — such as the sonata — in conjunction with modern musical language, composers hoped to add a level of irony to their music. In many cases, Baroque or Classical counterpoint techniques would be married with 20th-century harmonies, with the result being a music that focused on individual lines as much as it did an overall sound.

Despite the outward differences between Impressionism and Neoclassicism, they were both primarily incubated in France within a few decades of one another. What, then, could be the link between the two? In 1911, Ravel gave an interview in which he may have unwittingly answered this question. In speaking of French music, he said that “its great qualities are cleanness and order … . The French composers of today work on small canvases but each stroke of the brush is of vital importance.” Ravel’s words, coming as they did before Neoclassicism truly began, are surprisingly prescient.

While the two styles used strikingly different palettes, they both featured an emphasis on small details that made each musical brush stroke vital. In Impressionism, it was often small changes in tone color that were used to denote changes in the emotion being depicted. Neoclassicism stressed clean, coherent writing that focused on the effect that could be had by small gestures.

The four works presented this afternoon showcase both Impressionism and Neoclassicism in a way that highlights the unique qualities of each. Jacques Ibert’s (1890–1962) Trois Pièces Brèves (1930), which opens the concert, is scored for two instruments and provides a chance to showcase the instrumental colors of the ensemble as a whole in a kinetic setting.

The opening movement sets the stage for the entire work, both formally and thematically. It is in a standard sonata form, with a statement, development and recapitulation that would fit perfectly in Mozart’s time. From this point the quartet moves to a scherzo and a rhapsodic third movement followed by a dance-finale with a stilted modern rhythm. It is not just a Classical structure that unifies the work, however. The themes heard in the first movement — especially the one that begins the work — come back in different guises throughout the rest of the piece. For example, the pizzicato strings of the second movement are playing an idea derived from the first theme, and the third movement can be heard as an almost improvisatory take on the first movement’s melodic material.

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) was a part of the famous Les Six, the group of six composers who epitomized French music in the wake of Debussy and Ravel’s Impressionistic ways. His Sextuor (1932–1939) captures the humor that was a foundational principle of much Neoclassical music. The work, for wind quintet and piano, has been compared to attending a carnival only to find that one’s wallet has been stolen at the end. The Allegro vivace opening gives way to a slow middle that features a maudlin bassoon introduction before the fast opening material can return. Divertissement, the work’s second movement, flips the pattern of the first and is written in a three-part slow-fast-slow structure. Finally, a rondo-form finale closes the work and provides a chance to showcase the instrumental colors of the ensemble as a whole in a kinetic setting.

The afternoon’s concert closes with the newest piece of the program. Jean Françaix (1912–1997) wrote his Dixtuor (1987) as a commission for the Linos Ensemble, who premiered it in July 1987. Written for the unusual combination of a wind quintet and a string quartet — two violins, viola, cello and double bass — this work shows the restraint and formal characteristics that are standard of Neoclassical music. Françaix’s work is noted for its grace and wit — perhaps a result of the composer’s stated goal of writing music “to give pleasure” — and the Dixtuor is no different. Throughout the piece, Françaix deftly blends the timbres of the strings and winds to form a delicate whole that seems somehow lighter than one would expect of either group on its own.

— Robert Lintott
In aeternum

This performance is funded in part by your Graduate Student Activities Fee. Special thanks to the Theory/Composition Department.

Monday, April 29, 2013 . 8PM
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall

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The Washington Toho Koto Society is a 501(c) nonprofit cultural and educational organization incorporated in Maryland to promote goodwill and enjoyment of koto music.

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