

presents...

JUNCTION TRIO

Stefan Jackiw | Violin

Conrad Tao | Piano

Jay Campbell | Cello

Thursday December 1, 2022 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

TAO

Eventide

IVES

Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano

Andante moderato

TSIAJ (This Scherzo Is A Joke) Presto

Moderato con moto

INTERMISSION

RAVEL

Piano Trio in A Minor

Modéré

Pantom: Assez vif

Passacaille: Très large

Finale: Animé

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The **Junction Trio** is exclusively represented by Kirshbaum Associates Inc.
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Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco



ARTIST PROFILES

Tonight is the San Francisco Performances debut of the Junction Trio.

San Francisco Performances presents Stefan Jackiw for the third time. He made his SF Performances debut in April 2014.

Conrad Tao performed online with the JACK Quartet in the April 2021 virtual PIVOT series. Tonight is his first live appearance with SF Performances.

Jay Campbell returns for a second performance. He made his SF Performances debut in a January 2020 concert with violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja.

Three visionary next-generation artists combine internationally recognized talents in the eclectic new ensemble, **Junction Trio**. Since its formation in 2015, the Trio has performed at Washington Performing Arts, Royal Conservatory in Toronto, Newport Classical, the Aspen Music Festival and for the LA Philharmonic's NowRising Series at The Ford Theater. Known for their unique program combinations and vibrant performances, they bring a fresh approach to the repertoire, dazzling audiences with their virtuosity and unity. "Watching the trio perform, one really couldn't tell who was happier to be there—the rapt audience or the musicians, who threw themselves into repertoire they clearly love...These three are onto something special." (*Boston Globe*)

This season, the Junction Trio gives debut performances at Celebrity Series of Boston, San Francisco Performances, Friends of Chamber Music Denver, Dallas Chamber Music Society, the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, People's Symphony Concerts in New York City, and at

Capital Region Classical in Schenectady, NY. In Denver and in Boston, the group premieres a new work written for them by composer Amy Williams.

2021–22 season highlights include Rockport, Cliburn Concerts, Shriver Hall, and Duke Performances. Past performances in the U.S. have brought them to Cleveland, Philadelphia, Caramoor, Orange County, and Emory. In 2021, the Junction Trio was selected by New York's classical music radio station, WQXR, to be part of their inaugural Artist Propulsion Lab, which allowed them to engage collaborators, tap into new audiences through on-air curation opportunities and commission works.

Admired for combining poetic interpretation with impeccable technique, violinist **Stefan Jackiw** joins cellist **Jay Campbell** and pianist and composer **Conrad Tao**, whom the *New York Times* has called a musician of "probing intellect and open-hearted vision." Campbell, too, has been praised by the *New York Times* as "electrifying," approaching old and new works with the same curiosity and emotional commitment, while Jackiw has been celebrated for his "remarkable purity of tone."

"Bracing technique and jaw-dropping precision...A sense of unity, especially in dynamics and rhythmic thrust, made the Ravel Trio come together impressively."—*Aspen Times*

"I don't expect to hear anything more exciting this summer than the Junction Trio's astounding interpretation, especially the second movement which left me giggling with joy. The third movement sounded simply glorious—so evocative that it seemed these players had the power to change the weather; suddenly the

sun started peeking through after a long spell of rain. There is nothing like hearing—and seeing—electrifying performers work their magic live. This top-notch trio stands at the top of its game. They made this treacherously difficult music sound entirely natural and fun, while still inspiring awe." —*Boston Musical Intelligencer*

PROGRAM NOTES

Eventide

CONRAD TAO

(B. 1994)

This concert opens with music by the pianist of the Junction Trio. At age 28, Conrad Tao has emerged as one of the most dynamic and multi-talented musicians of his generation. Tao studied violin and piano as a boy, gave his first piano recital at age four, and entered Juilliard at age nine; since then he has developed a career as both performer and composer. As pianist, he has appeared with orchestras throughout North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. It is a measure of Tao's talent as a performer that at age 14 he appeared as soloist in Mendelssohn's *Piano Concerto No. 1* and *Violin Concerto* on the same concert, a feat that he has repeated several times since then. Tao studied composition with Christopher Theofanidis at Yale, and he has written works for orchestra, chamber ensembles, piano, and voice. Trying to take measure of Tao's extraordinary talent, Christopher O'Reilly has described him as "the kind of musician who is shaping the future of classical music."

Tao composed *Eventide* for piano trio in 2009, when he was 15. *Eventide* is said to have been "inspired by the gentle arrival of night," and it sustains that restrained and crepuscular mood throughout its 11-minute span: dynamics remain quiet, and the piano's rippling textures are complemented by the string lines that arch above it. Though the journey into night here may grow more animated at moments, it is the quiet mood of the opening that finally prevails, and *Eventide* slips into darkness on quiet piano chords.

Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano

CHARLES IVES

(1874–1954)

Ives began work on his only piano trio in 1904 and finished the first draft early the

next year. Not satisfied, Ives thoroughly revised the score—as he so often did—and did not complete the final version until 1911; the score, though, waited for publication until 1955, the year after the composer's death. Many of Ives' musical fingerprints—complex rhythms, polytonality, quotations of folk material—are evident here, and they are handled with an authority that makes this concise music—by turns hard, sentimental, funny, moving, and original—one of Ives' most successful works.

The first movement, *Andante moderato*, is an example of an Ives technique that has been referred to as “layering.” The music opens with a duet for cello and piano, but this is a very original duet: the piano part, played only by the pianist's right hand, is accompanied by the cello's bass line. To make this clear to the performers, Ives writes the cello part beneath the piano part in the score; obviously, no listener can hear this, but the layout on the page makes clear the musical priorities. Then the cello drops out, and there follows a duet for violin and piano, but now the pianist accompanies the violinist only with his left hand. Finally, Ives combines all of this and presents it simultaneously: the cellist and violinist repeat their lines together, while the pianist finally can play both hands simultaneously. Rhythmically, this movement is complex and sometimes tinged with stinging dissonances, but it is also bracing and engaging, and it comes to a quick close (typically, Ives includes no dynamic or phrase markings, leaving that entirely to the performers).

The second movement has a strange title—“TSIAJ”—but a footnote in the score explains that this stands for “This scherzo is a joke” (a further play on words, since *scherzo* is Italian for “joke”). At an early stage in this movement's composition, Ives had thought to call it “Medley on the Campus Fence,” and a medley it certainly is; listeners will make out bits and snatches of old American tunes, sometimes rhythmically transformed (no point in the naming them here—it's more fun to pick them out on your own). This movement features those quick changes of mood so typical of Ives: full of manic energy one instant, the music can be at utter peace the next, built of quiet, unresolved chords that sound not like Ives but Debussy (who was in fact composing *La Mer* while Ives was writing this trio). At the very close, Ives gives the pianist an elaborate cadenza said to be a depiction of a sunrise, and the movement closes abruptly.

Longer than the two previous two movements combined, the *Moderato con moto* opens with fanfares from all three instruments. Musically, the finale shows the most variety, ranging from hymn-like tunes to passages of Mahlerian intensity and Bartókian terseness. Ives asks for a huge repeat—virtually the entire movement is repeated—before the unusual close, where the cello quotes the old hymn “Rock of Ages.” Ives writes that title over the music in the cello part and includes the composer's name: Thomas Hastings. This impressive movement trails off into silence on that quiet hymn. Harmonically, absolutely nothing has been resolved—and that may be Ives' point.

Piano Trio in A Minor

MAURICE RAVEL
(1875–1937)

In February 1914 Ravel went to St. Jean-de-Luz, a small village on the French coast near the Spanish border, to work on two projects he had planned for some time: a piano concerto using Basque themes and a piano trio. He soon abandoned plans for the concerto, but the first movement of the trio went much better, and he had it complete by the end of March. He struggled with the rest of it, though. It took until mid-summer to get the middle movements done, and by the time he began the last movement, he had something else to worry about—World War I broke out just as he began work. Anxious to serve in the military (he would later drive an ambulance for the French army), Ravel was nevertheless extremely agitated, particularly about leaving his aged mother behind. To a friend, he wrote: “If you only knew how I am suffering. From morning to night I am obsessed with one idea that tortures me...if I leave my poor old mother, it will surely kill her...But so as not to think of all this, I am working—yes, working with the sureness and lucidity of a madman. At the same time I get terrible fits of depression and suddenly find myself sobbing over the sharps and flats!” Pushed on by this furious work, the *Piano Trio* was complete by the end of August.

The *Piano Trio* is one of Ravel's finest chamber works, featuring brilliant writing for all three performers and a range of instrumental color rare in a piano trio. The first movement, *Modéré*, opens with the piano alone playing a theme of delicate rhythmic suspension. Ravel called

this theme, in 8/8 time, “Basque in color.” A second idea, first heard in the violin, is taken up by the other instruments, but the development section of this sonata-form movement is relatively brief. The movement ends as a fragment of the first theme dissolves to the point where the piano is left quietly tapping out the rhythm in its lowest register.

Ravel called the second movement *Pantoum*, and exactly what he meant by that is still open to question. A “pantoum” is a form of Malay poetry in which the second and fourth lines of one stanza become the first and third of the next. Whatever Ravel meant, this movement is colorful, full of racing rhythms, harmonics, and left-handed pizzicatos. The center section is particularly dazzling: the strings stay in a racing 3/4, while the piano's chorale-like chords are in 4/2. At the close, the opening material returns.

The third movement is a passacaglia with ten statements of the eight-bar theme. These begin quietly, become freer and louder, then gradually resume their original form as the movement comes to its quiet close. The third statement of the theme—for violin accompanied by simple chords from the piano—is ravishing.

The finale, marked *Animé*, is agitated. Whether this reflects Ravel's own agitation at the time of its composition remains an unanswerable question, of course, but what is clear is that this movement has an energy and sweep unknown to the first three. It opens with swirling harmonic arpeggios from the violin, and this sensation of constant motion is felt throughout. The main theme—first heard in the piano—bears some rhythmic resemblance to the opening theme of the first movement, but the mood of this movement is far different. The finale is big music—not big in the sense of straining to be orchestral, but big in scope and color. Full of swirling arpeggios, trills, and tremolos, the movement flies to its searing conclusion on a stinging, high A-major chord.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger