



For Immediate Release
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London Chamber Ensemble Performing at Carpenter Center May 9

Academy of St. Martin will bring fresh, polished interpretations of the work of classical greats Strauss, Mendelssohn and Schoenberg.

LONG BEACH, California — Direct from London, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields will grace the Carpenter Performing Arts Center stage May 9 at 8 p.m. in their octet string configuration, performing works by Richard Strauss, Arnold Schoenberg and Felix Mendelssohn.

Washington Post classical music critic Stephen Brookes described the ensemble as “a modern musical icon, its name synonymous with impeccable musicianship, irreproachable British taste and performances so polished that they fairly gleam.”

Violinist Tomo Keller will both lead the ensemble and perform. The octet will be comprised of four violins, two cellos and two violas.

This performance will be preceded by a 7 p.m. talk delivered by classical music radio announcer/producer Rich Capparella. Capparella will present a history of this renowned ensemble with a short discussion of the evening’s repertoire. Capparella’s presentation is made possible through the Carpenter Center’s Arts for Life initiative, which brings free performing arts events to the community throughout the year.

The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble was created in 1967 to perform the larger chamber works—from quintets to octets—with players who customarily work together, instead of the usual string quartet with additional guests.

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Strauss's sextet from *Capriccio* will open the performance—an uncommon opportunity to hear an overture produced for a string chamber ensemble. “I can do no better than this,” Strauss has said of *Capriccio*.

Schoenberg's *Verklaerte Nacht* ("Transfigured Night"), based on a racy poem, is often credited as the world's first programmatic chamber music. Daring in its use of the bold harmonies and “forbidden chords,” this piece is perhaps more accessible to audiences today than it was when it was written in 1905.

Mendelssohn was only 16 years old when he wrote “Octet,” the piece that will conclude the ensemble's Long Beach performance. Critic Conrad Wilson praised the work, noting that “its youthful verve, brilliance and perfection make it one of the miracles of nineteenth-century music.”

Single tickets are still available and on sale now. Single tickets start at \$55. For tickets and more information, visit CarpenterArts.org or call the Carpenter Center Ticket Office at (562) 985-7000. This program is made possible in part by Season Media Partner KPCC 89.3-FM.

ABOUT THE ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN

The Academy of St Martin in the Fields was formed in 1958 from a group of leading London musicians. Working without a conductor, the Academy gave its first performance in its namesake church on Nov. 13, 1959. Their first three recordings led to a succession of long-term contracts and the Academy quickly took their place among the most recorded ensembles in history.

The Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chamber Ensemble was created in 1967 to perform the larger chamber works, from quintets to octets, with players who customarily work together, instead of the usual string quartet with additional guests. Drawn from the principal players of the orchestra, the Chamber Ensemble tours as a string octet, string sextet and in other configurations to include winds. (They are performing at the Carpenter Center as a string octet.) Its touring commitments are extensive, with regular visits to France, Germany and Spain and frequent tours to North and South America, Australia and New Zealand.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

RICHARD STRAUSS

String Sextet from Capriccio, Op. 85 (1941)

Capriccio is Strauss's last opera, completed in 1941, in his 78th year. As a late work, it is full of nostalgia. Its subject matter deals with a topic dear to any composer of opera: the relative merit of the music versus that of the words. Although it looks to the past, Strauss's opera is far from indulgent. It is composed to a tight, elegant and pointed libretto by the conductor Clemens Krauss, based on the libretto of an earlier opera by Salieri.

Capriccio is set in Pre-Revolutionary Paris around 1775. The Sextet is heard at the very opening, as a piece of chamber music played off-stage for the central character, a Countess, who is in her salon. Strauss's delectable music is scored for pairs of violins, violas and cellos and leaves the impression of being an homage to Brahms. *Capriccio* won admirers from the time of its première. "I can do no better than this," Strauss concluded.

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG

Verklaerte Nacht ("Transfigured Night") in D minor, Op. 4 (1905)

Verklaerte Nacht is often credited as the first programmatic chamber music—that is, music that attempts to tell an extra-musical story. Inspired by a mystical poem by Richard Dehmel, *Verklarte Nacht* is the story of a woman confessing to her lover that she is carrying the child of another man whom she never loved but nevertheless yielded to for fulfillment. Schoenberg later rejected the poem as "repulsive," and urged critics to focus on the music rather than the story.

As for the music, *Verklaerte Nacht* melds the formal harmonies and variation structure of Brahms with the uninhibited, sensual sonorities of Wagner. In this way it unites two distinct tendencies in late 19th-century music. Contemporaries rejected the piece for its bold harmonies and "forbidden chords." Its structure and style are more easily received today. Don't expect the atonality which characterizes Schoenberg's later work: this piece functions as a final affirmation of the traditional values of tonality.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Octet in E-flat, Op. 20 (1825)

With this Octet, the 16-year-old Mendelssohn earned a place in the line of great composers in the Western classical tradition. He had started daily composition at age 11. By 16, he could look back on a catalog of four operas, three piano quartets, a virtuoso sextet, and, most significantly, a dozen string symphonies. These were the apprentice works that allowed the precocious young man to appear to burst forth at 16 as a fully mature and, indeed, original composer. Everything came together to favor early development. His family was rich and highly cultivated, with weekly Sunday musicals in the family's magnificent Leipziger Straße estate in Berlin. Later, the philosopher Friedrich Hegel, a family friend,

taught Mendelssohn at the University of Berlin. Even as an adolescent, Mendelssohn was a gifted all-rounder. He painted, he fenced, he wrote verse as well as a copious quantity of letters. As a musician, he was an accomplished pianist and played both violin and viola tolerably well.

In the Octet, Mendelssohn opens up a palette of eight essentially equal instruments and paints in myriad instrumental colors, ranging from the hushed monochrome unison at the end of the Scherzo to the burst of multi-colored hues in the eight-part fugal exuberance that follows. Mendelssohn also pinpoints the sort of chamber-scale *orchestral* sound he wants: "This Octet must be played by all instruments in symphonic orchestral style," he writes in the preface to the score. "*Pianos* and *fortes* must be strictly observed and more sharply emphasized than is usual in pieces of this character." Throughout, the young Mendelssohn eagerly explores a sparkling variety of textures, often in strikingly original ways. The first two movements alternate between polished ensemble playing and, as in the soaring opening, the style of a violin concerto. The scherzo, a meeting point for both absolute and program music, has always been the favorite movement of the Octet, inspired by the *Walpurgis* night dream section of Goethe's *Faust*, with its vivid insect and small animal imagery. The mood of the Octet's finale is hard to put into words. The opening, which is played low down on scrubbing cellos, seems humorous and the counter-melody which soon evolves is less than reverentially lifted from the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's *Messiah* at the words: "And He shall reign for ever and ever". In fact, the entire movement seems to evolve as a light-hearted treatment of the academic form of the fugue. It is youthful in its exuberance, tongue-in-cheek at times, effortlessly modulating from one key to another, joyous and assured. It represents a perfect rapport between form and content, the likes of which Mendelssohn was to achieve only infrequently again.

ABOUT THE CARPENTER CENTER

Founded in 1994, the \$27 million Carpenter Performing Arts Center on the Cal State Long Beach campus seats over 1,000 patrons. The Center is named after pop music duo Richard and Karen Carpenter, who both attended CSULB.

Long Beach architect Donald Gibbs modeled the stage after the David H. Koch Theater in New York. The theater's large proscenium allows for a full and proper view of dance performances. The Center's world-class acoustics make musical performances crisp and clear from any seat in the house.

ENSEMBLE CREDITS

Tomo Keller, Violin and Guest Leader

Fiona Bonds, Viola

Martin Burgess, Violin

Jennifer Godson, Violin

Stephen Orton, Cello

Will Schofield, Cello

Robert Smissen, Viola

Harvey de Souza, Violin