Welcome to *Musica Nova*. We are the Advanced Orchestra/Chamber Music Ensemble. Our students are all scientists. They are not here for any requirement; they are here because they *love* music and because they *want* to be here.

We start with Vivaldi. Vivaldi was actually better known than Bach in his time, mainly as an opera composer. Today, we remember Vivaldi more for the pieces he wrote for his day job. He was director of music at a school for orphaned girls at the *Chiesa de Santa Maria della Pietà* right on the Grand Canal in Venice. He built his orchestra to a professional level, and people came from all over Europe to hear the students play. The church fathers thought it would be too scandalous for the public to *see* the girls in the physical act of playing their instruments, so they put up a big screen between the audience and the orchestra. People could *hear* the music, but they could only *imagine* what was going on onstage -- which, of course, added to the appeal.

We have Vivaldi’s Concerto for Two Flutes, Oboe, Strings and Keyboard. As many of you may know, Vivaldi never wrote a concerto for that instrumentation. In fact, *no one* has ever written *anything* for that combination. Until now. We Zoomed with Vivaldi up in “Composer Heaven,” and we asked him to take his Concerto for Two Flutes and to compose a special oboe part just for us. We wanted him to put three instruments in the musical space of two instruments. Vivaldi said that it would take more complicated counterpoint than he had ever written when he was alive, but he said that, if we paid him enough, he would try. So now, we have the world premiere of Vivaldi’s new concerto -- not only *published* posthumously, but *composed* posthumously.

To quote a music-loving scientist named Einstein, "Mozart's music is of such purity and beauty that one feels he simply found it -- that it always existed as part of the inner beauty of the universe waiting to be revealed." Mozart's music does sound as if it came floating down straight from Heaven, but it is that very innocence and that “Amadeus-gift from God” aura that masks the fact that, under all that sweetness and light, there are demons and passions and lascivious stirrings of our human senses and emotions. Stravinsky even called Mozart’s masses, “sweets of sin.” They say that, “When the angels in Heaven play for God, they play Bach, but, when they play just for their own pleasure, they play Mozart.”

Tonight, we have a piano concerto which floated down in a different instrumentation from the players in our ensemble. So, our pianist is playing some of the orchestra parts in addition to his own part, and Mozart rewrote the wind parts for us. The piece dates from Mozart's early maturity. He was 26, and he had only nine more years to live. He had just moved from the country town of Salzburg to Vienna to make it in the “big time.” He wanted to promote the 400 or so pieces that he had already written, and, of
course, he wanted commissions to write new ones -- particularly operas. If Mozart had put a bumper sticker on his piano, it would have said, "I'd rather be writing an opera." His finest works are his three great sex comedies, and, with our concerto, we have a miniature comic opera for instruments without singers. Mozart introduces all the characters, one by one, and we learn who wants what and who is ganging up with and against whom. They sneak up on each other and scheme to set up a big trick on someone, followed by a joyous finale. In the middle act, they stop for a torrid, “Casanova-by-candlelight” love scene. I can imagine the angels in Heaven playing it for their own guilty pleasure and blushing.

We close with Fauré. Fauré was one of the greatest French composers, and he lived through the most enormous stylistic shift in all of musical history. When Fauré was born, Chopin was writing salon music in Paris. He lived through Brahms, Wagner, Mahler and Strauss. He knew Debussy, he taught Ravel, and he went on to experience the two different modernist revolutions of Schoenberg and Stravinsky.

His First Piano Quintet dates from 1905, when he was 60. He wrote it for four solo strings and piano, but we are doing it for string ensemble and piano. It starts in the sweet, Romantic style, but, from time to time, you can hear him looking ahead to the future. Fauré follows Mozart’s example by writing music that seems quite refined and innocent on the surface, but there is fire underneath. He had that special French quality of being both passionate and elegantly serene, all at the same time. The French can make everything look charming and easy. Think of sinking that complicated perfect pool shot and then just walking away and letting everyone else watch the balls all over the table, just tumbling perfectly into place, one after the other. The Italians call it "sprezzatura." In English, we say “cool.” In French, they might say that it has that “je ne sais quoi” or “élégance,” "nonchalance," "débonnaire" or "savoir-faire." Whatever you want to call it, this is it.

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