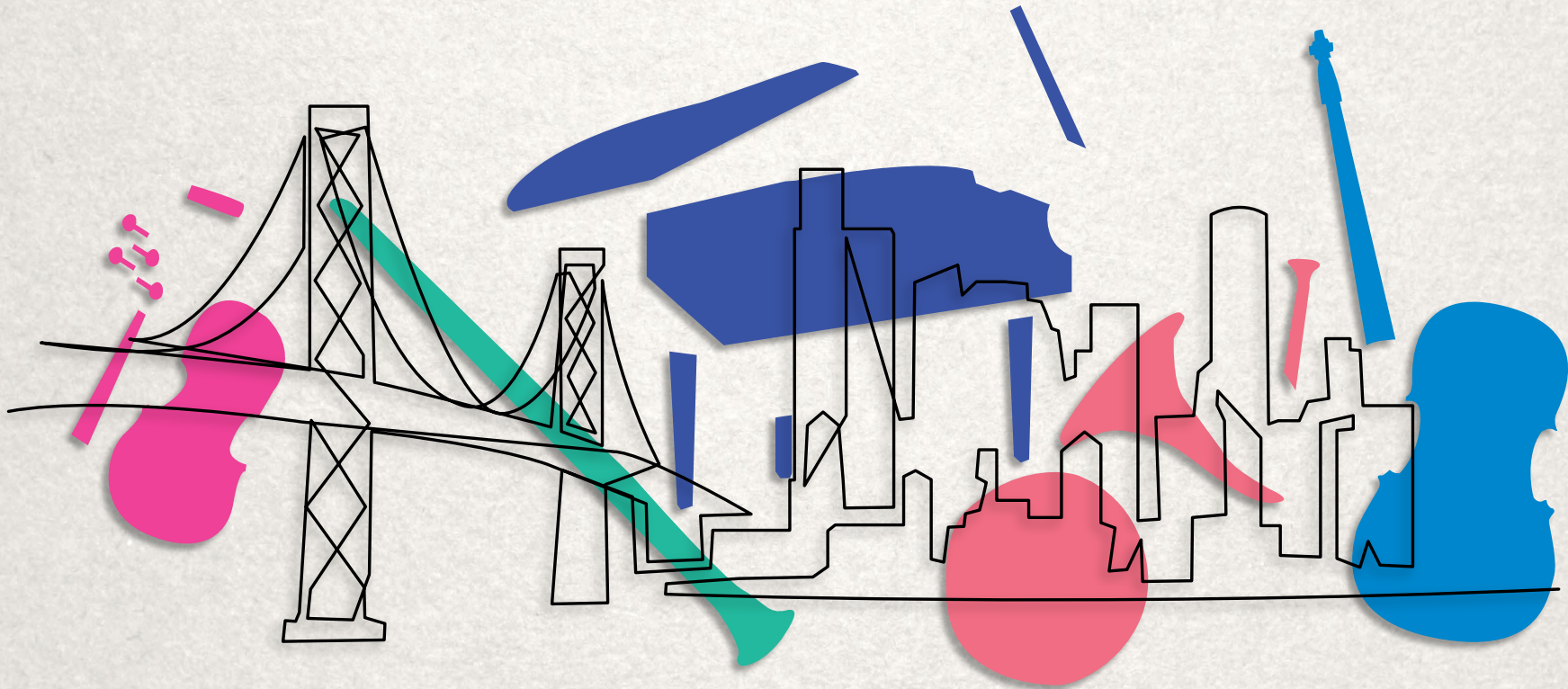


Intimate Voices Chamber Music of David Conte

SAMUEL VARGAS • KEVIN KORTH • EMIL MILAND
MILES GRABER • KEVIN RIVARD • JEROME SIMAS
ERIC ZIVIAN • MATTHEW LINAMAN



Over the past three centuries, composers have turned to chamber ensembles such as those featured on this recording to express their most profound thoughts and emotions. From my years of study as one of the last students of the great French pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, I learned as a young man the value of imitating mastery over seeking singularity. As Mlle. Boulanger wisely remarked: "One is not original by choice. The root of originality lies in one's origins, as true personality in music is only revealed through the deep knowledge of the personalities of others." As Ravel once noted, "A composer who doesn't show his influences should find another profession." Thus, for example, in my Piano Trio No. 2, I very consciously was inspired in the four successive movements by four disparate musical personalities: Erich Korngold, Stephen Sondheim, Frank Martin, and Beethoven.

For me, the joy of creating music is in affirming the continuity of musical culture as expressed through my own deep assimilation of those composers I most love and admire. I believe that any serious living composer has a vital relationship with one's fellow composers past and present. In composing it is my intention to focus my full thought, feeling, and will in creating musical narratives that hold the performer's and listener's attention in such a way that they experience my compositions not just in chronological time, which is temporal, but in ontological time, which is eternal.

David Conte



David Conte
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Elegy for Violin and Piano is a transcription of the second movement of my “Sinfonietta”, which was commissioned in 2011 by the Atlantic Classical Orchestra. I arranged this movement especially for Susan Paik and Edward Niedermaier, who premiered the piece at the Schola Cantorum in Paris July 18th, 2014. The work is characterized by a quiet intensity, with a “sighing” motive first stated in the piano, and answered by more florid passages in the violin. These two ideas are gradually and subtly developed and transformed while moving through many tonalities and arriving at several climaxes. The movement ends with a rising violin solo line over a rich pedal harmony in the piano, bringing the work to a quiet conclusion.

The six versions of my **Aria and Fugue** were composed and adapted especially for various musical friends

and colleagues between 2005 and 2015. The first version was for Viola and Piano. The *Aria* was composed for violist Hank Dutt of the Kronos Quartet, and pianist Mark Beau Beckham-Shirey, and was premiered by them in June, 2005. The *Fugue* is dedicated to my San Francisco Conservatory colleague violist Jodi Levitz. The version for Cello and Piano was adapted for cellist Julie Bevan, former faculty member at Brigham Young University, and pianist Douglas Reed. The version for Violin and Piano was adapted in 2012 for San Francisco-based violinist Gregory Wrenn and pianist Miles Graber. Versions for various instruments and organ were first inspired by my long-time friend and frequently collaborator Swedish Soprano Saxophonist Anders Paulsson, who premiered the work in Sweden with organist Andrew Canning in 2009. The adaptation for Cello and Organ was prompted in 2015 by San Francisco-based organist Jonathan

Dimmock cellist Angela Lee, and the adaptation for Violin and Organ soon followed.

The *Aria* features a lyrical, somewhat melancholy melody in the solo instrument which is continually supported by rich regularly pulsating chords in the accompaniment. Contrasting sections are faster and mysterious in character, with a return to the opening idea. The *Fugue* is based on a subject both lively and melancholy, in compound meter. This subject is treated with the standard devices of development, including inversion and augmentation.

Sonata for French Horn and Piano is cast in three contrasting movements. The first movement, marked *Allegretto*, features a broadly sung, energetic first theme, followed by a more lyrical, cantabile second theme. The work unfolds according to the traditional

sonata-allegro design, and ends with a witty recollection of the first theme. The second movement, marked *Adagio*, opens with an expressive and melancholy theme in the piano. The theme is then taken up by the French Horn, and is subtly developed and expanded, reaching several climaxes, before ending with a mournful passage alternating the two instruments over a pulsating pedal. The third movement is marked *Allegro giocoso* and features two rhythmic and cheerful themes, followed by a third more lyrical theme. In the recapitulation all three themes are restated with some modest development, leading to a brisk coda.

The Sonata is a transcription of my *Sonata for Double Bass and Piano*, which was commissioned by Stephen Tramontozzi, my colleague at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Assistant Principal Bassist of the San



Francisco Symphony. Sonata for French Horn and Piano was transcribed for Kevin Rivard, my colleague at the San Francisco Conservatory and Principal French Horn in the San Francisco Opera Orchestra.

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

was composed especially for Franklin Cohen, former Principal Clarinetist of the Cleveland Orchestra. Having grown up in Cleveland, I have long admired Mr. Cohen's playing. The Sonata was commissioned in 2015 for the 25th anniversary of the Arts Renaissance Tremont Chamber Music Concert Series, Chris Haff-Paluck, Founder and Artistic Director. Mr. Cohen premiered the first movement of the work on October 25th, 2015. The complete work was premiered at Trinity Cathedral on April 5th, 2017, with Mr. Cohen and Todd Wilson, pianist. The final revised version the piece was performed by Jerome

Simas, clarinetist, and Eric Zivian, pianist, presented by the Left Coast Ensemble, on March 4th, 2019.

The Sonata's first movement, marked *Allegro moderato, appassionato*, begins with a brief introduction in the manner of a solo recitative for the piano, featuring a motive built on successive perfect fifths which is the basis for much of the musical ideas in this movement. The piece is in a quite straight-forward Sonata-allegro form. The first theme is a broadly sung lyrical melody, unabashedly romantic in character, supported by an undulating accompaniment in the piano. This gives way suddenly to an agitated variation of this first theme, which transitions into a second theme, marked *Moderato cantabile*, accompanied by stately quarter-note chords in the piano. As the theme progresses, the clarinet and piano trade the melody back and forth,

finally culminating in a canon between the two instruments. This gives way to a more relaxed closing theme in the Clarinet, marked *Slower, mysterious, spacious*, supported in the piano by many ringing perfect fifths, sounding somewhat like chiming bells. A brief development follows, leading to a climax, and followed by an affirmative return to the first theme.

The movement unfolds with a restatement of all three themes, ending with a quietly solemn coda.

The second movement begins in a *Largamente* tempo, with an expressive, declamatory recitative motive in the clarinet, leading to a *Lento molto* tempo, which introduces a syncopated ostinato in the bass register of the piano. The entire movement is built on these two ideas. There is a contrasting middle section which is more playful, and slightly jazzy in character, with



From left to right: Matthew Linaman, David Conte, Kevin Korth & Samuel Vargas



humorous interplay between the clarinet and piano. The opening ideas return, leading to a climax, and the work ends with a final statement of the recitative motive, accompanied by mysterious rising chords in the piano.

The third movement is a spirited *Allegro* in compound meter. After an introductory fanfare-like section, alternating statements from the clarinet and the piano, the clarinet announces a perky and cheerful theme with steady 8th notes in the piano. This leads to a transition featuring block chords in the piano, transitioning to a very lyrical second theme, traded back and forth between the two instruments. The first theme returns, and the second theme is briefly restated, leading to a brisk, virtuosic coda. I wish to thank several clarinetists and pianists who have contributed richly to the evolution of this work since its completion in 2017: pianists Javier Gonzalez, John Churchwell, Todd Wilson,

and clarinetist José Gonzalez Granero. A superb studio recording was made in 2019 with clarinetist Jerome Simas of the San Francisco Symphony, a former student of Franklin Cohen, and pianist Eric Zivian.

My **Piano Trio No. 2**, composed between March 2021 and January 2022, was commissioned in 2020 by the Lee Trio: Lisa Lee, violin, Angela Lee, cello; and Melinda Lee Masur, piano, for the 250th Anniversary of Beethoven's birth, and also in honor of Beethoven's Opus One, a set of three piano trios. Experienced composers know that the medium of piano trio is the most difficult of the various combinations of piano and strings, all of which have inspired some of the greatest composers' greatest works. I composed my first Piano Trio in 2011, commissioned by the Shanghai Conservatory, and I was delighted to have another opportunity to meet this challenge. Cellist Angela Lee and I have

collaborated on a number of projects, including a recording of my "Aria and Fugue" for cello and organ, with organist Jonathan Dimmock.

As the composition of each of the four movements was underway, I became conscious very quickly that each movement was an homage to an admired composer. The first movement is cast in a traditional sonata allegro form, featuring a nervous, rhythmically varied first theme, contrasted with a very lyrical second theme. It was especially the character of this second theme that made me aware of the muse of Erich Korngold as a source of inspiration. I have long admired his unabashedly romantic musical language, which is subtly informed by some 20th century idioms. The second movement, which was the last composed, is a lively scherzo, and from my composition of the first bars, I was completely aware

of the influence of Stephen Sondheim, who had just died, and who I consider to be the most important American composer of the last third of the 20th century.

My scherzo follows quite closely the formal design of the traditional scherzo, with the trio section featuring some extended canonic treatment of the themes. One of my favorite pieces of 20th century music is Frank Martin's "Petite Symphonie Concertante."

I was a student in Paris in 1976 when an important memorial concert of his music was given.

My teacher Nadia Boulanger gave me tickets to attend, and I have been devoted to his music ever since.

Like Martin's piece, my third movement, a *Chaconne* marked "Largo serio," is based on a 12-tone row which becomes the basis for both a harmonic progression and a melody. The work unfolds based completely on this theme, and rises to several climaxes



before the final more serene music, built on a pedal tone. The fourth movement is an Elegy which very consciously evokes the stately and expressive character that one finds in a number of Beethoven's slow movements. It was originally composed for the Cavani String Quartet in memory of Chris Haff-Paluck, a beloved Cleveland musician and producer. At eight minutes, this is the longest movement, and it is based on a series of variations on the opening theme, treated as a *Chaconne*. The work ends with serene confidence on a sonority that places the work firmly within a certain American 20th century musical tradition, thus unifying the vision of the great master Beethoven, the original impulse behind this commission, with our own time.



David Conte with Nadia Boulanger
in 1975

David Conte
March 2025

Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

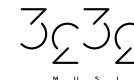
Executive producers **David Conte**, **Sean Hickey** (PENTATONE) & **Peter Bransten** (Piano Trio No. 2) | Creative producer **Kevin Rogers** (Piano Trio No.2)
Recording producer & engineers **Cory Todd** (track 1, 4, 5, 6), **Jason O'Connell** (tracks 2, 3), **Zach Miley** (track 7-9), **Dann Thompson** (tracks 10-13)

ARTWORK

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Track 1 recorded at Sol Joseph Recital Hall, SFCM on April 2, 2024
Tracks 2-3 recorded at Hume Concert Hall, SFCM on June 1, 2014
Tracks 4-6 recorded at Hume Concert Hall, SFCM on June 1, 2021
Tracks 7-9 recorded at Hume Concert Hall, SFCM on June 10, 2019

Piano Trio No. 2 recorded at Skywalker Ranch on February 4, 2024.
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