Gather (2021) Disc 6.

1–12 ***Jeux d'enfants (Children's Games)***
for Piano, Four Hands, op. 22 (1871)
GEORGES BIZET (1838–1875)

1. Reverie: L'escarpolette (The swing)	2:17
2. Impromptu: La toupie (The spinning top)	1:00
3. Berceuse: La poupée (The doll)	2:06
4. Scherzo: Les chevaux de bois (Wooden horses)	1:13
5. Fantaisie: Le volant (The shuttlecock)	1:11
6. Marche: Trompette et tambour (Trumpet and drum)	2:20
7. Rondino: Les bulles de savon (The soap bubbles)	1:31
8. Esquisse: Les quatre coins (Puss in the corner)	2:11
9. Nocturne: Colin-maillard (Blindman's buff)	1:32
10. Caprice: Saute-mouton (Leapfrog)	1:12
11. Duo: Petit mari, petite femme (Little husband, little wife)	2:13
12. Galop: Le bal (The ball)	1:51

HYEYEON PARK, WU HAN, *piano*

13 ***Rêve d'enfant (A Child's Dream),* op. 14** (ca. 1895–1900) 4:46
EUGÈNE YSAŸE (1858–1931)

JAMES THOMPSON, *violin*; WU HAN, *piano*

14–17 **Violin Sonata no. 1 in A major, op. 13** (1875–1876)
GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845–1924)

Allegro molto	8:45
Andante	6:40
Allegro vivo	3:53
Allegro quasi presto	5:26

KRISTIN LEE, *violin*; WYNONA (YINUO) WANG, *piano*

18–21 **String Quintet no. 2 in B-flat major, op. 87** (1845)
FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)

Allegro vivace	10:06
Andante scherzando	4:20
Adagio e lento	9:07
Allegro molto vivace	5:09

JAMES THOMPSON, TIEN-HSIN CINDY WU, *violins*; |PAUL NEUBAUER, MATTHEW LIPMAN, *violas*; DMITRI ATAPINE, *cello*

The 2021 edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE*, titled *Gather*, celebrates the joy of coming together around a shared love of live music, after an immensely challenging year for the arts when concert halls largely fell silent. Each disc explores pinnacles of the chamber music art form, including both masterworks and tantalizing discoveries. This collection of recordings also celebrates the opening of the Spieker Center for the Arts, Music@Menlo's new home.

Disc 6 begins with some of the finest works of French Romanticism, the first two of the set unified by the imagination and dreams of children. Georges Bizet's best-known contribution to the keyboard literature, *Jeux d'enfants (Children's Games) opens* the disc, followed by an irresistible miniature, titled *Rêve d'enfant (A Child's Dream)* and written by composer-virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe, a transformational figure in the violin tradition. Gabriel Fauré's Violin Sonata no. 1 in A major, a triumph of the composer's youth, demonstrates the emergence of a singular musical voice that would define a generation. The disc concludes with Felix Mendelssohn's String Quintet no. 2, a work that seamlessly blends Classical elegance with Romantic passion.

Liner notes by Patrick Castillo © 2021

GEORGES BIZET (1838–1875)
Jeux d'enfants (Children's Games)
for Piano, Four Hands, op. 22 (1871)

While undoubtedly best known for *Carmen*, which ranks among the most beloved works in the whole of the operatic repertoire, the French composer Georges Bizet moreover produced a substantial oeuvre of piano, choral, and orchestral music—this despite living only to age 36. (*Carmen* was premiered just three months before his death in 1875.)

Alongside *Carmen*, *Jeux d'enfants* represents one of Bizet's most popular creations, not only in its original incarnation as a set of twelve miniatures for piano duet but also in the orchestral suite of five movements. This latter version, with the Symphony in C and *L'arlésienne,* highlights his orchestral catalog, while the four-hand piano cycle stands as Bizet's greatest contribution to the keyboard literature.

In these beguiling depictions of children's games, Bizet demonstrates ample technique and depth of imagination that, had he lived longer, might well have placed him alongside Gabriel Fauré and Camille Saint-Saëns as one of the most highly regarded nineteenth-century French composers (as well as in the company of Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner in the realm of opera). In *Jeux d'enfants*, we encounter, in the words of Bizet biographer Hugh MacDonald, "a fine example of high sophistication in the service of apparent naivety."

Ravishing arpeggiated textures evoke the simple joy of swinging to and fro in the opening number, *L'escarpolette* (*The swing*). *La toupee* (*The spinning top*) whirls with the kinetic energy of Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's famous *Flight*

of the Bumblebee, composed some three decades later. *La poupée* (*The doll*), a gentle lullaby, follows.

Subsequent movements continue to range in form and musical character—from the galloping *Scherzo*, *Les chevaux de bois* (*Wooden horses*), and gallant *Marche, Trompette et tambour* (*Trumpet and drum*), to the leisurely *Nocturne*, *Colin-maillard* (*Blindman's buff*)—presenting an intricate portrait of childhood as immediately beguiling as it is expertly crafted. The suite's penultimate number, *Petit mari, petite femme* (*Little husband, little wife*), captures the child's innocent gaze toward the future. Following this tender duet, *Le bal* brings the suite to a spirited finish.

EUGÈNE YSAŸE (1858–1931)
***Rêve d'enfant (A Child's Dream)*, op. 14** (ca. 1895–1900)

In 1874, the sixteen-year-old Belgian violinist and burgeoning composer Eugène Ysaÿe received a scholarship that enabled him to study with Henryk Wieniawski in Brussels, and subsequently with Henry Vieuxtemps in Paris. In addition to exposing him to a bustling concert life, Ysaÿe's studies in Paris afforded him the opportunity to cultivate important artistic contacts, including the city's most celebrated composers, Camille Saint-Saëns, Cesar Franck, and Gabriel Fauré, as well as the rising generation of Vincent d'Indy, Ernest Chausson, and others. Around this time, Ysaÿe moreover enjoyed the support of the pianist and composer Anton Rubinstein, who arranged for the young virtuoso's first appearances in Russia, Hungary, and Scandinavia, thus helping to kickstart his international career.

His rich pedigree groomed Ysaÿe to inherit the mantle of a French violin lineage that had increased in stature over the previous century; in Ysaÿe's care, this essentially Romantic tradition entered into a new era of instrumental virtuosity. In this respect, his accomplishments in the realm of violin-playing are analogous to the contributions of his generation's leading composers—Franck, Fauré, and others, who bridged Romanticism and modernism. (Indeed, Ysaÿe became a vital figure in contemporary music, premiering numerous major compositions dedicated to him, including Franck's Violin Sonata, Chausson's *Concert* and *Poéme,* and Debussy's String Quartet. When neuritis and diabetes curtailed his abilities as a performer, Ysaÿe turned increasingly to conducting; he served as music director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra from 1918 to 1922, where he continued to champion modern French music.)

The greatest violinist of the generation following Paganini, Ysaÿe in turn had a profound influence on the subsequent class of great virtuosi, including Enescu, Flesch, Szigeti, and Kreisler. "He abandoned the old style of Joachim, Wieniawski, Sarasate, and Auer," writes musicologist Michel Stockhem, "for one that combined rigorous technique and forceful sound with creative freedom on the part of the interpreter. ... He also represented a synthesis of the qualities of Franco-Belgian violin playing before virtuosity became an end in itself."

Meanwhile, Ysaÿe developed into an accomplished composer in his own right, as most famously manifested in his Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, op. 27. These Sonatas illustrate Ysaÿe's approach to the principle of virtuosity: indeed, not an end in itself, but a technique to be deployed in the service of musical expression. His *Réve d'enfant,* op. 14—a bagatelle overshadowed by the Solo Sonatas—is dedicated "A mon p'etit Antoine," Ysaÿe's youngest son. It is a beguiling lullaby in gently rocking 6/8 time, and featuring a simple violin melody, played *piano, dolce*—far short of the technical wizardry of the Solo Sonatas, but revealing, in exquisite distillation, their underlying lyrical soul.

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845–1924)
Violin Sonata no. 1 in A major, op. 13 (1875–1876)

"In the years 1877 to 1879," wrote the pianist Marguerite Long, a friend and regular collaborator of Gabriel Fauré, the composer "still had not escaped from the Wagnerian influences he had come under on his visits to Bayreuth with Saint-Saëns. But however overwhelmed he may have been, his music still retained its individuality. His inspiration, devoid of grandiose gestures, showed itself through charm, modesty, restraint, and freshness of expression."

The emergence of Fauré's singular voice, as if from its youthful cocoon of Wagnerian influence, is in evidence in his First Violin Sonata. "This Sonata has everything that will seduce the gourmet," surmised Camille Saint-Saëns: "novel forms, exquisite modulations, uncommon tone colors, the use of the most unexpected rhythms. And hovering above all this is a magic which envelops the work and brings the masses of ordinary listeners to accept the wildest audacities as something perfectly natural." Alongside the Piano Quartet no. 1, op. 15 (1876–1879), and Ballade for Piano, op. 19 (1877–1879), the Violin Sonata ranks as one of the great triumphs of Fauré's youth. (Despite acknowledging its artistic merit, the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel drove a hard bargain, agreeing to publish the sonata only if the composer declined his fee. A representative from the publisher remarked, "M. Fauré is not known in Germany and the market is overflowing with works of this sort, even though they're often inferior to the one we're discussing.")

The work begins with a robust sonata-form movement, striking from the piano's opening strains for its textural

richness. Yet within the movement's sonic musculature are elegant and debonair melodic ideas. Even throughout the development section, whose turbulence at times places it in league with the chamber music of Johannes Brahms, the "charm, modesty, restraint, and freshness of expression" characteristic of Fauré ultimately win the day.

A hypnotic *Andante* in D minor follows. Above a halting rhythmic pattern in the piano, the violin spins a lachrymose melody. Here is music of understated, dignified sadness—a prefiguration, perhaps, of the slow movement of the Opus 15 Piano Quartet, composed in the wake of Fauré's broken engagement to Marianne Viardot. (This sonata bears a dedication to Viardot's brother, the violinist Paul Viardot, who played the work with Fauré at a private gathering before its public premiere.)

The effervescent *Allegro molto* sees staccato sixteenth-note runs, marked *piano e leggierissimo*, hocketing back and forth between the piano and violin, as if playing a children's game. Fauré scholar Jean-Michel Nectoux described this movement—"not the fantastic nocturnal dance of the German Romantics but a sunny, skipping movement with bursts of pizzicato"—as the "prototype...of the 'French scherzo' that Debussy and Ravel used in their quartets."

The sonata's finale begins on a deceptively serene note. Yet as in the first movement, Fauré's expressive intentions here are subtly complex. Subsequent thematic ideas suggest some measure of discontent, while retaining a suave, unruffled demeanor throughout. After traversing richly varied emotional terrain, the sonata ends in graceful good humor.

Following Paul Viardot's private reading, the sonata received its official premiere at the Salle Pleyel on January 27, 1877, in a performance by violinist Marie Tayau with Fauré at the piano. The composer was pleased: "The success of my sonata surpassed by far all my expectations!...As to my performer, I will never be able to express adequately how she made my sonata her own, how she put her heart and spirit into playing it...Mademoiselle Tayau's interpretation was perfect."

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)
String Quintet no. 2 in B-flat major, op. 87 (1845)

By the 1840s, Felix Mendelssohn, the greatest child prodigy that Western music had ever seen, had fulfilled the promise of his youth and reigned as one of Europe's supreme musical figures. In addition to being recognized as its leading composer, he was a celebrated pianist, organist, and conductor. In 1835, he fielded competing offers to become music director of the Munich Opera, editor of the music journal *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, and music director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. He accepted the position in Leipzig, in which he contributed mightily to that city's musical life. Under his stewardship, the Gewandhaus Orchestra became one of the world's elite cultural institutions. Eight years into his tenure, Mendelssohn founded the Leipzig Conservatory, which would quickly attain similar distinction.

Mendelssohn continued to have his pick of plum professional opportunities. In 1845, he received an invitation to conduct a festival in New York and was offered a commission from the King of Prussia to compose incidental music to Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. Yet he declined both of these, opting to spend the first half of the year quietly with his family in Frankfurt, Germany. During this time, he composed two major chamber works, the Piano Trio in C minor, op. 66, and the String Quintet in B-flat major, op. 67. He also drafted a symphony, ultimately left unfinished, and worked on an edition of Bach's organ music.

Thus dating from the apex of Mendelssohn's professional renown, the B-flat Quintet equally reveals a composer at the height of his creative powers. It is the composer's second and final string quintet, marking his return to a medium that he had last visited in 1826, with the Quintet in A major, op. 18. That work is a product of Mendelssohn's remarkable adolescence. The previous year, at sixteen, he penned the magnificent Octet, op. 20, still regarded as one of the finest works in the canon. Four months after the A Major Quintet, Mendelssohn completed his Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a work that likewise endures as a hallmark of its era.

The Quintet in B-flat major provides a mature foil to the earlier quintet. It is, strictly speaking, a late work, though Mendelssohn certainly had no sense in 1845 that he would die at age 38 two years later. Yet in character, too, the B-flat Quintet marks a significant departure from his Opus 18. The earlier work, Mendelssohn's first essay in a form chiefly innovated by Mozart, reveals the seventeen-year-old composer—self-assured, certainly—yet nevertheless audibly following a Mozartian model. Its melodies carry the refined elegance of the Classical era; its ensemble textures are redolent of Mozart's string quintets.

By contrast, the Opus 87 Quintet demonstrates the voice of a Romantic master in full bloom immediately from its opening gesture: *forte* tremolandi in the lower four voices buoying the heroic ascending theme in the first violin. With the *Allegro vivace*'s second theme, a legato descending melody, Mendelssohn establishes a quintessentially Romantic dynamic, evocative of the dialogue between Robert Schumann's alteregos, the extroverted Florestan and introspective Eusebius. Here, illustrating Mendelssohn's superlative craft, the robust first theme and

the tender, legato melody are unified by a rhythmic motif, the rollicking triplets that persist throughout the exposition. This proceeds, sans repeat, into the thrilling development section and a triumphant recapitulation, sustained throughout by melodic clarity, rhythmic vitality, and textural dynamism.

The second movement serves as the quintet's scherzo but eschews the hypercaffeinated buzz of prototypical Romantic scherzi (a yen surely satisfied in any case by the *Allegro vivace*). Instead, this movement, marked *Andante scherzando*, projects a measured temperament. While also forgoing the lightning quickness of Mendelssohn's own signature *Midsummer Night's Dream* scherzo style, something of that rarefied music characterizes this movement as well, with its soft staccato and pizzicato gestures. Fanny Mendelssohn's description of the octet's scherzo, for which she claimed her brother drew inspiration from the *Walpurgisnachtstraum* in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust,* applies equally well here: "everything new and strange, and at the same time most insinuating and pleasing, one feels so near the world of spirits, carried away in the air, half inclined to snatch up a broomstick and follow the aerial procession."

The deeply felt *Adagio e lento* counters the esprit of the first two movements with a sober melancholy. All five voices issue the lachrymose, dirgelike theme. From this solemn opening, the movement's pathos steadily intensifies to full-throated despair. A brief episode in A major offers fleeting comfort, but a doleful air ultimately carries the day.

The quintet's *Allegro molto vivace* finale revisits the opening movement's vigor. Its opening pronouncement—a strong, dotted-rhythm chord played in double and triple stops across the full ensemble and launching an animated flight of sixteenth notes in the first violin—heralds the tuneful theme. Though carefree in character, the melody is muscular in texture; no sooner has the theme been stated than the tremolandi of the quintet's opening return. As one irresistible musical idea after another comes to the fore, Mendelssohn's expert deployment of the ensemble's five voices continues to thrill the ear. A central episode marked by intricate counterpoint reflects the composer's fascination with Johann Sebastian Bach—yet in its melodic sensibility and expressive zeal, this soaring finale is unmistakably the work of this singular Romantic master.

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