

A Little Mischief

Monday, October 19, 2026 - Parlor Series, Concert 1.

Jeremy Beck (b. 1960)

“Nightsong & Sunrise” Duet for Flute & Cello (2026 premiere)

Dr. Jeremy Beck was kind enough to supply his own information about himself and his new piece:

Louisville composer Jeremy Beck composed *Nightsong and Sunrise* in July for the NouLou Chamber Players, specifically for this opening concert. This brief composition unfolds in two moods, as represented by the title. The beginning of the music presents a type of lyrical conversation between the flute and cello. This pensive section then transitions to a bright and lively type of dance music, which closes the piece.

Dr. Beck is a graduate of the Yale School of Music; his most recent recording of Chamber Music on the Ulysses Arts label features performances by Louisville musicians Emily Albrink, Jessica Litwiniec Dorman, and Jennifer Potochnic, among others. www.BeckMusic.org

Charles Gounod (1818-1893)

***Petite Symphonie* in B flat for 9 wind instruments (1885)**

- *Adagio, Allegro*
- *Andante antabile (quasi adagio) - attacca*
- *Scherzo: Allegro moderato*
- *Finale: Allegretto*

Before the catastrophic interruption, to French society and to his career, of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71), Charles Gounod had been one of the premier Parisian composers.

From the Paris Conservatoire he had won the prestigious Prix de Rome; he absorbed the influences of Berlioz, and both Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, who instilled in him a love of J. S. Bach; he became a protégé of the musician and salonnière, Pauline Viardot; and under her patronage had begun to compose a sequence of increasingly popular operas. By the time he returned from an extended exile in England, years after the war had ended, Gounod had been replaced by a younger generation of composers and his music was considered old-fashioned. He is now remembered primarily for a handful of works which remain in the repertoire: his opera/oratorio *Faust*, his grotesquely humorous *Funeral March of a Marionette*, and arguably his most serious orchestral/ensemble work, the *Petite Symphonie*.

Paul Taffanel, professor of flute at the Conservatoire and a friend of Gounod, commissioned a chamber piece for winds. The instrumentation, for wind octet (two each of oboes, bassoons, clarinets, and horns) with an added flute part in honor of Taffanel, resembles that of Mozart's wind serenades. The work follows the form of a Classical symphony. Themes are regular in structure, follow traditional harmonic expectations, and contrast in character. The first movement begins with a slow introduction, a nod to Haydn, and develops into an *Allegretto* in sonata form. The slow movement highlights the role of the flute. The scherzo sets a hunting theme, once again channeling Haydn. The finale provides a rousing conclusion to this elegant piece.

A work of Gounod's senior years, the simplicity and conservative idiom are an implicit rejection of the cult of Wagner then vogueish in Paris. Furthermore, this charming celebration of the wind ensemble may be a nostalgic tribute to the private teacher of his youth: Antonín Reicha, the Czech composer, friend of Beethoven, renowned for his twenty-five pioneering wind quintets, all composed and performed during his years in Paris when Gounod was a (very young) child.

The *Petite Symphonie* was first performed at the Salle Pleyel in Paris on 30 April 1885.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Octet for Winds (1922-3, rev. 1952)

- *Sinfonia*

- *Tema con Variazioni*

- *Finale*

The final piece in this evening's concert, while startlingly different in its sound world and scoring, nonetheless resembles the preceding Gounod in two distinct ways. Most obviously, it is also for wind ensemble, albeit weighted more to the brass section, with two trumpets and two trombones against flute, clarinet and two bassoons. More subtly, this is a formative work of Stravinsky's pioneering "Neo-Classical" period.

Although the composer vehemently rejected the term, it remains convenient as a description for music which embraces a modern approach to harmony and rhythm, while following basic Classical forms and ideals. Stravinsky had recently made his name with a string of high-profile and noteworthy ballet scores, famous for their violent folkloric rhythms and harmonies, and colourful instrumentation betraying the influence of his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov. The barbaric wedding celebration, *Les Noces*, had been premiered just months before. It is very hard to respect Stravinsky's objections to the term when this new piece owed so much to eighteenth-century forms and sensibilities.

The unusual scoring of the Octet was supposedly inspired by a dream experienced by the composer who, on waking, immediately began to compose. Like the Gounod, it owes a debt to classical Mozartian divertimenti, and the sound world conjured by the ensemble reinforces this. Further firm evidence of its classical origins is provided by the three-movement structure: sonata, variations, and fugue.

Once again offering comparison with the *Petite Symphonie*, the slow opening is reminiscent of Haydn before developing into a series of episodes introduced by a march-like theme. Sketches for the second movement date back to 1919, the variations (the theme being the *Andante* of Mozart's Piano Concerto in E-flat Major, K. 482) include a march, a waltz, a can-

can, and a closing fugue, each separated by wild interludes referred to by the composer as “ribbons of scales”. It represents Stravinsky’s first mature attempt at a set of variations. The finale, essentially a rondo, is jazzy in feel while owing its rhythms to a traditional Russian dance.

The Octet was first performed on 18 October 1923 at the Paris Opera House, scene of many of Stravinsky’s earlier triumphs (and scandals), conducted by the composer. It was given as part of a series of concerts organised by the conductor/impresario Serge Koussevitsky, but allegedly Stravinsky was unhappy with the Maestro’s recent handling of his Symphony of Wind Instruments and opted, therefore, to do the job himself; his major conducting debut. He was also reportedly concerned that a different conductor might seek to impose an “interpretation” on music for which he intended none. The result, with which Stravinsky declared himself satisfied in spite of the challenging acoustic, resulted in another scandal, albeit contrasting significantly with the near-riot that greeted the Rite of Spring: silence.

The violent change of stylistic direction exhibited in the Octet “mystified” many of Stravinsky’s enthusiastic followers, including Aaron Copland who was present. Writing about it later, with the benefit of hindsight, Copland acknowledged the irony of this reaction given the subsequent widespread adoption of this new Neo-Classical style by composers of the coming generation, the sensibilities of which appealed to their post-war Dadaist/Surrealist ideologies. It is as hard now to imagine a musical world without Neo-Classicism as it is to attempt to understand the original impact of Beethoven.

Notes for NouLou Chamber Players by Matthew Wallis (2026)