FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

JANUARY 11, 2026

PAUL LEWIS, PIANO

W.A. MOZART
(1756-1791)

Sonata in C Major, K. 330
Allegro
Andante cantabile
Allegretto

FRANCIS POULENC
(1899-1963)

***Improvisations* Nos. 7-12**
No. 7 in C Major
No. 8 in A Minor
No. 9 in D Major
No. 10 in F Major, "Elogé des gammes"
No. 11 in G Minor
No. 12 in E-flat Major, "Hommage à Schubert"

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862-1918)

***L'isle joyeuse*, L. 109**

INTERMISSION

POULENC

***Improvisations* Nos.1-6 and 13-15**
No. 1 in B Minor
No. 2 in A-flat Major
No. 3 in B Minor
No. 4 in A-flat Major
No. 5 in A Minor
No. 6 in B-flat Major
No. 13 in A Minor
No. 14 in D-flat Major
No. 15 in C Minor, "Hommage à Édith Piaf"

MOZART

Sonata in C Minor, K.457
Molto allegro
Adagio
Allegro assai

Photo: Kaupo Kikkas

PAUL LEWIS
Piano

PAUL LEWIS, PIANO

Paul Lewis is one of the foremost interpreters of the Central European piano repertoire, his performances and recordings of Beethoven and Schubert receiving universal critical acclaim. He was awarded Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) for his services to music, and the sincerity and depth of his musical approach have won him fans around the world.

This global popularity is reflected in the world-class orchestras with whom he works, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, London Symphony, London's Philharmonia, Bavarian Radio Symphony, NHK Symphony, New York Philharmonic, LA Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, and Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestras. His close relationship with Boston Symphony Orchestra led to his selection as the 2020 Koussevitzky Artist at Tanglewood.

Lewis often focuses on specific composers in projects that allow him to take audiences deep inside the works. In 2026 and 2027, he will tour his Mozart+ series around the world, juxtaposing Mozart's lesser-known piano repertoire with works by composers such as Poulenc, Chopin, and Weber, illuminating Mozart's influences over subsequent generations as well as shining a light on works that are often overshadowed by his concertos. Previously, between 2022 and 2025, Lewis embarked on a Schubert Piano Sonata Series, presenting four programs of the complete sonatas at over 40 venues around the world.

With a natural affinity for Beethoven, Lewis has performed the composer's complete piano concerto cycle all over the world and was the first pianist to present it in a single BBC Proms season, in 2010. He has subsequently performed it in Tanglewood in 2022, Boston in 2023 with Andris Nelsons and Boston Symphony Orchestra, and in 2025 with Eivind Aadland and Oslo Philharmonic. He took part in the BBC three-part documentary "Being Beethoven."

Beyond many award-winning Beethoven and Schubert recordings, his discography with Harmonia Mundi

demonstrates his characteristic depth of approach in Romantic repertoire such as Schumann, Mussorgsky, Brahms, and Liszt. In March 2025 he gave the world premiere of Thomas Larcher's Piano Sonata in Oviedo, Italy, and he continues to perform it around the world.

In chamber music, Lewis works closely with tenor Mark Padmore in lied recitals around the world—they have recorded three Schubert song cycles together—and he is co-Artistic Director of Midsummer Music, an annual chamber music festival held in Buckinghamshire, UK. In May 2025 he was the first non-American pianist to chair the jury of The Van Cliburn Piano Competition.

Awards include Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist of the Year; two Edison awards; three Gramophone awards; Diapason d'Or de l'Annee; South Bank Show Classical Music Award; and honorary degrees from Liverpool, Edge Hill, and Southampton universities. He was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the 2016 Queen's Birthday Honours.

Paul Lewis is represented by Arts Management Group, Inc.

IN BRIEF

BORN: January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria

DIED: December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE: November 10, 2004, Lang Lang, piano

DURATION: 21 minutes

NOTES

W.A. MOZART: SONATA IN C MAJOR, K. 330

Mozart composed piano sonatas throughout his adult life. His approach to the keyboard in these sonatas differs from that of the concertos. While nearly all the solo concertos for piano and orchestra were composed for his own use, he conceived the sonatas as teaching material. Consequently, they place fewer virtuoso demands on the player. That stated, they are minefields of difficulty from the standpoint of evenness of touch, phrasing, and the musicianship that all Mozart's music requires.

This elegant C major sonata is one of three published early in 1784 by the Viennese house of Artaria. Although all three were long thought to have been composed a half dozen years earlier, the relatively late publication date is one of several factors that have prompted a rethinking of chronology. Ludwig von Köchel, the venerable 19th-century cataloguer of Mozart's music, dated them as 1779; Mozart's early 20th-century biographers revised that date backward to 1778, from the period when he was in Paris. A further theory suggests they date from 1783 and were composed in Salzburg.

No controversy exists as to the quality of the music. The C major sonata is classic style at its best: balanced and pristine. Mozart's first movement theme whispers rather than shouts, with rhythmic variety and a trill adding to its individuality. *Rococo* gentility prevails. The pianistic figuration is gratifying and idiomatic.

The *Andante cantabile* takes its cue from Italian opera, with a three-part aria form and a brief coda derived from the middle section. The closing *Allegretto* preserves the perfect manner and genial spirit of the whole. One can imagine private evening performances in elegant Viennese homes. This music surely pleased then, just as it does now.

FRANCIS POULENC: *IMPROVISATIONS*

IN BRIEF

BORN: January 7, 1899, Paris, France

DIED: January 30, 1963, Paris, France

COMPOSITION: 1932-1959

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE: This afternoon marks the first performance of this work on our series.

DURATION: 25 minutes

Francis Poulenc is celebrated for his contributions to the vocal literature. In the realm of the solo song, he remains the finest French composer since Gabriel Fauré. He is revered for his chamber music, particularly the works with woodwind instruments. With respect to larger works, his sacred choral

compositions have given him a place that rivals that of his contemporary Olivier Messiaen. And perhaps the crowning glory of all his compositions are the operas, ranging from the satirical *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (1947, after Apollinaire) to the tragic and gripping *Dialogues des carmélites* (1957). But his piano music is little known by most pianists and appears infrequently on recital programs. To hear the complete set of Poulenc's *Improvisations* is a rare treat.

The scion of a wealthy pharmaceuticals manufacturing family, Poulenc had a somewhat unorthodox musical education. His mother was a fine pianist; she and Poulenc's uncle encouraged Poulenc's study of piano, and introduced him to other facets of Parisian cultural life, particularly theatre, an acquaintance that was to serve Poulenc richly in his operatic essays. By the end of the First World War, Poulenc had met Georges Auric, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, and Erik Satie, but he had not struck the right rapport with a fine teacher; for example, he never got past a first meeting with Maurice Ravel. But the early 1920s included several years of productive study with Charles Koechlin, and Poulenc also visited Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna and Alfredo Casella in Italy. By the mid-1920s he was writing important music, and his production continued up until his death in 1963 from a heart attack.

He composed his first book of six *Improvisations* in 1932. Six more, usually called Book II, were composed between 1933 and 1941. The last three are quite late, from 1958 and 1959. The title *Improvisations* belies these pieces' organization: nearly all of them are tripartite (A - B - A) or rondo form. It is their atmosphere, their unpredictability and capriciousness, that feels improvisatory. No. 1 contrasts a flickering rhythmic figure that darts lightning fast over the keyboard with a song-like, richly harmonized middle section. No. 2 is tender and intimate, replete with Poulenc's characteristic harmonic quirks.

Collectively, the *Improvisations* share stylistic consistency in their melodic invention and Poulenc's distinctive handling of harmony. They are also brief: only one exceeds three minutes and most are less than two. Although he did not consider them concert music, some are quite virtuosic; No. 4, for example, requires notation on three staves to clarify voice-leading amid a perpetual motion blur of sixteenth notes. No. 6 is at once martial and witty, almost circus-like.

Nos. 13-15 are significantly later—from the 1950s—and reflect the evolution of Poulenc's style. Subtle echoes of his 19th-century predecessors inform this music, with special reference to Chopin, Debussy, and Ravel in textures and voice-leading. No. 13 is introverted, melancholy, and understated, with motivic echoes that underscore the continuity of his melodic lines. No. 14 opens lilting and tender, with a folkloric quality that dissipates as Poulenc adds his spicy wit. The last *Improvisation* is subtitled *Hommage à Édith Piaf*, a salute to France's national *chanteuse* in the 1950s. Poulenc's tribute captures the atmosphere of the sad love songs and ballads that made Piaf a star.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY: *L'ISLE JOYEUSE*

IN BRIEF

BORN: August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

DIED: March 25, 1918, Paris, France

FIRST PERFORMANCE: February 10, 1905, Paris, France

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE: February 20, 2024, Beatrice Rana, piano

DURATION: 6 minutes

Early in 1904, Claude Debussy became involved in a passionate affair with Emma Bardac, an amateur singer and wife of a Paris banker. Debussy had met her the previous autumn. He had been married to Rosalie (Lilly) Texier since 1899, but the union was shallow, and he found Bardac intoxicating. In June 1904 Debussy left Lilly to move in with Emma, whose husband traveled extensively. The lovers slipped out of Paris in mid-July to spend three glorious weeks on the British Isle of Jersey. *L'isle joyeuse* ("The joyous island") mirrors the delirious passion of Debussy's first extended holiday with Emma, who eventually became his second wife.

Debussy had drafted the score to *L'isle joyeuse* during the summer of 1903 while still in Paris. He initially thought to include it in the *Suite bergamasque*. While on Jersey, he revised the piece extensively, adding final touches in Dieppe in August, on his way back to Paris. In that version it is one

of his lengthiest solo piano compositions (only *Masques* rivals *L'isle joyeuse* in duration) and differs markedly from the delicate understatement of many of his other piano works. As Marcel Dietschy has noted:

> Voluble, passionate joy runs through *L'isle joyeuse*, like a flock of birds dazzled by the dawn and drunk on the freshness of the morning. The past was buried when Debussy finished this piece with its strong and flexible muscle…[it testifies] to Debussy's uncontrollable feeling for Emma Bardac.

The piece is intensely virtuosic, placing technical demands on the pianist similar to those in the dazzling showpieces of Franz Liszt. The composer wrote to his publisher Jacques Durand: "But God! How difficult it is to perform. … seems to assemble all the ways to attack a piano since it unites force and grace." Debussy uses the piano as if it were a full orchestra, drawing forth a variety of colors as infinite as the play of light on the sea. (Evidently recognizing its symphonic potential, the composer planned to orchestrate it in 1915 but did not complete the project before his death.)

Harmonically, *L'Isle joyeuse* dances between folk-like tunes and vivid whole-tone passages. There are also sections in which Debussy writes in two keys simultaneously. Rhythmically, the piece alternates between impetuosity and unpredictability to measured delicacy. Throughout, the composer's spirit emerges exultant, even ecstatic.

MOZART: SONATA IN C MINOR, K. 457

IN BRIEF

COMPOSED: 1784

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE: November 14, 1973, Lili Kraus, piano

DURATION: 22 minutes

This Sonata is one of only two solo piano works, the other a Fantasia, that Mozart wrote in the key of C minor. He apparently considered them companion pieces despite the fact that he composed them in different years. Both were written for Frau Therese von Trattner, a piano student of Mozart's who was married to a prominent Viennese bookseller and

music publisher. (Her husband was godfather to Mozart and his wife Constanze's two surviving sons, and Therese was godmother to one of their two daughters.) The Sonata dates from 1783 or 1784; the Fantasia from 1785. Vienna's Artaria & Co. engraved them for publication together in 1785, reinforcing the concept of companion pieces. Mozart appears to have endorsed the idea that the Fantasia served as a large-scale prelude to the Sonata. Surely he knew their quality; they are among his finest piano works. Though occasionally performed together, each functions superbly as an independent composition.

The Sonata opens with a "Mannheim rocket," a rapidly rising arpeggio that delineates the home key. Fierce and unrelenting, it dominates the movement, particularly in the stormy development section. Even the comparative sweetness of the secondary theme does not eclipse the dark drama of Mozart's principal idea.

The slow movement is one of Mozart's finest and provides necessary contrast after the turbulence of the opening Allegro. The structure is complex: a synthesis of three-part form and rondo. Each time the opening melody recurs, Mozart decorates it more intricately. Those florid ornaments enhance the movement's expressive power.

The finale, a rondo in C minor, is a close cousin to the turbulent first movement. Mozart opens quietly, with a quasi-syncopated theme that establishes restlessness and uncertainty. He intensifies the tension with frequent rests, allowing unresolved harmonies to hang in the air. The rondo includes episodes initially in major mode. Dramatic silences herald the return to C minor and the opening music. The succeeding episodes introduce more of those unexpected pregnant pauses, which become almost as important as the angry musical gestures that dominate this remarkable sonata.

Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2025

UPCOMING CONCERTS

ZLATA CHOCHIEVA, PIANO
THU, FEB 5, 2026 | 7:30 PM | GATES CONCERT HALL

In her highly anticipated FCM debut, Russian pianist Zlata Chochieva brings her deep passion for chamber music to a captivating program. Alongside Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 13, Op. 27 and selections from Schumann's Fantasiestücke, she explores the vivid soundscapes of Bartók, Bach, Sibelius, and Scriabin.

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FCM is excited to present world-class artists in two new venues, helping spread the joy of chamber music in the community. Tickets now on sale at friendsofchambermusic.com

NOTE: These two concerts are not included in 2025-26 season ticket packages.

OWLS
SUN, MAR 1, 2026 | 4:00 PM | LAKEWOOD CULTURAL CENTER
470 S. ALLISON PARKWAY, LAKEWOOD

Photo: Ashley Gellman

Owls is a fresh and original new string quartet collective featuring some of chamber music's most creative voices, including violinist Alexi Kenney, violist Ayane Kozasa, and cellists Gabriel Cabezas and Paul Wiancko.

LE CONSORT
THU, MAR 19, 2026 | 7:30 PM | AUGUSTANA LUTHERAN CHURCH
5000 E. ALAMEDA AVE., DENVER

Co-presented with Augustana Arts

Formed in Paris in 2015, Le Consort is a dynamic chamber music ensemble that breathes new life into Baroque music with a special devotion to the trio sonata. These four exceptional musicians bring their energy and artistry to "A Trio Sonata Soiree," featuring works by Albinoni, Telemann, and Bach.

Tickets for all performances are available at friendsofchambermusic.com

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CHAMBER SERIES

Zlata Chochieva, piano
Thu, Feb 5, 2026 | 7:30 pm

Owls
Sun, Mar 1, 2026 | 4:00 pm
Lakewood Cultural Center

Le Consort
Thu, Mar 19, 2026 | 7:30 pm
Augustana Lutheran Church
Co-presented with Augustana Arts

Brentano Quartet
Mon, Apr 6, 2026 | 7:30 pm

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano
Thu, May 7, 2026 | 7:30 pm

COMMUNITY EVENTS

MUSIC IN THE GALLERIES

Masakazu Ito, classical guitar
Sun, Mar 8, 2026 | 12:00 & 1:00 pm

Timberline Quartet
Sun, May 10, 2026 | 12:00 & 1:00 pm
Clyfford Still Museum
1250 Bannock Street, Denver

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