

PROGRAM

Maurice Ravel
(1875–1937)

String Quartet in F
(1902)

Allegro moderato
Assez vif
Très lent
Vif et agité

Mark Kuss
(b. 1960)

“Elegy” for String Quartet
(2000)

Washington premiere performance

INTERMISSION

Camille Saint-Saëns
(1835–1921)

Piano Quintet in A Minor
Op. 14 (1855)

Allegro moderato
Andante
Presto
Allegro assai

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that all electronic devices are turned off during the performance.

Praised by audiences and critics worldwide, the **Ciampi Quartet** has established itself as one of the nation’s leading chamber ensembles. At Duke University, its home base in Durham, North Carolina, its reputation for performances of the highest standard has earned the group a place of central importance to the region’s cultural life. With many years of collective experience on the concert stage, the Ciampi Quartet brings rare insight to its performances. It dedicates its efforts to projecting the heart and soul of masterpieces ranging from Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven to works by this generation’s most communicative composers.

Pianist **William Ransom** has appeared in recital, as soloist with orchestras, and as a chamber musician in Eastern and Western Europe, Japan, Korea, South America, Mexico, and throughout the United States. In New York City he has performed in Weill Hall, Alice Tully Hall, and Merkin Hall. The orchestras with which he has appeared include the symphonies of Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta, Washington, Philadelphia, Boston, Miami, Dallas, and Los Angeles. He has participated in chamber music festivals throughout the United States, including the Spoleto, Marlboro, and Monadnock Music Festivals. Ransom was a scholarship student of William Masselos at the Juilliard School of Music, receiving both the bachelor and master of music degrees. In further studies with Theodore Lettvin at the University of Michigan he earned the doctor of musical arts degree. William Ransom is the Mary L. Emerson Professor of Music at Emory University in Atlanta and the artistic director of the Highlands-Cashiers Chamber Music Festival in North Carolina.

Eric Pritchard joined the Ciampi Quartet in 1995, after having been first violinist of the Alexander and Oxford Quartets. He was the winner of the National Federation of Music Clubs Award in violin and the first prize winner at the Portsmouth (England) International String Quartet Competition and the Coleman and Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competitions. He has performed with the Boston Pops and orchestras in Europe and South America. He holds degrees from Indiana University and the Juilliard School of Music.

Second violinist **Hsiao-mei Ku** joined the quartet in 1990, prior to which she was the associate concertmaster of the North Carolina

Symphony Orchestra. She came to the United States in 1979 from China to earn the master of music degree and a performer's certificate from the Indiana University School of Music. In China, Ku earned a reputation as one her country's leading violinists and toured as a solo recitalist. She has been a visiting professor at conservatories in China since 1999.

Before joining the Ciompi Quartet, **Jonathan Bagg** was the principal violist of the New Hampshire Symphony, appeared often with the Boston Symphony, and was a member of several of New England's leading musical organizations. An active recitalist, he has introduced many newly composed or neglected works for his instrument, including several works that are dedicated to him. His solo CD recordings are on the Centaur and Gasparo labels. He is a graduate of Yale University and the New England Conservatory of Music.

Cellist **Fred Raimi** became a member of the Ciompi Quartet in 1974. He began his studies in Detroit and later graduated from the Juilliard School of Music. He earned the master of music degree from the State University of New York at Binghamton, where he also performed as a member of the Amici Quartet. In 1971 Raimi won the International Cello Competition in Portugal and participated in Pablo Casals' (1876–1973) final master class. He has participated in chamber music festivals throughout the country, including the Spoleto, Marlboro, and Monadnock Music Festivals.

Ravel wrote his *String Quartet in F Major*, his only work in this genre, when he was twenty-seven years old. The quartet is the work of a composer in complete control of his resources, rich in subtle and original ideas. It displays a breathtaking diversity of textures, tempi, and sonorities, and enjoyed immediate success among listeners who were open to new trends. The second movement is famous for its hard-driving pizzicato opening, which owes much to the *Scherzo* of Claude Debussy's earlier and equally famous quartet. In spite of the fact that Ravel spoke of Debussy's string quartet with some disdain, the latter defended the Ravel quartet against the criticisms of Ravel's teacher, Gabriel Fauré, saying: "In the name of gods of music, and in mine, do not touch a note of what you have written."

Composer Mark Kuss is a graduate of the New England Conservatory and Duke University and teaches at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven. His works appear frequently on the programs of Washington's Twentieth Century Consort and have won awards from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the National Education Association, the Jerome Foundation, Meet the Composer, and the Copland Foundation, among others. About his *Elegy for String Quartet*, Mark Kuss writes: "When the Ciompi Quartet asked me to write a piece for them, I knew that I wanted to write music that in some way engaged the idea of traditional expressive musical 'archetypes'—patterns found throughout the Western art music tradition over its long and tumultuous history. For me, this meant sequence, suspension, motive, development, and repetition—elements that seem to be fundamental regardless of changing historical epochs. I think there is something about the beauty of patterns and ideas that is greater than any of the individual contexts in which they appear. This interests me."

Saint-Saëns wrote his *Piano Quintet in A Minor, Op. 14*, when he was twenty years old and still under the influence of Schumann. Like Ravel, he blossomed early, and his quintet testifies to his youthful skill. The piano part is one of the strengths of the work, demonstrating Saint-Saëns' ability to write virtuosically and imaginatively for that instrument. The music travels easily between simple lyricism, well-timed dramatic moments, and spirited frivolity, with a light touch and the benefit of a sophisticated harmonic palette.

The opening piano chords of the first movement declaim immediately that the piano and the strings will form two primary and often opposing personalities as the work progresses. Saint-Saëns saw the opportunity to place the piano in high relief, almost as in a concerto, but with the flexibility and intimacy of chamber music. The second movement unfolds gracefully with restrained textures, often limited to one or two voices, resulting in a tender, understated beauty. The quietness of the slow movement is interrupted by the *Presto*, which builds immediately to a thrilling climax. Its lightning-quick theme is taken from one of the slow movement's seemingly forgettable ideas, but here it blossoms into a flurry of virtuosity. In the last movement, Saint-Saëns indulges in some