

ONEPPO CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES

David Shifrin, *artistic director*

Pacifica Quartet

with

Karen Slack, *soprano*

and

JJ Penna, *piano*

Tuesday, October 7, 2025 | 7:30 pm
Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Yale SCHOOL OF MUSIC

José García-León, Dean

Program

Florence Price
1887–1953

String Quartet No. 1 in G major (1929)

- I. Allegro
II. Andante moderato – Allegretto

Pacifica Quartet

Price

Beyond the Years

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Bright Be The Place

Lord Byron

There Be None

Lord Byron

Pittance

Don Vincent Gray

Winter Idyl

David Morton

Karen Slack, *soprano*
Pacifica Quartet

James Lee III
b. 1975

A Double Standard (2022)

Frances Ellen Watkins
Harper

Karen Slack, *soprano*
JJ Penna, *piano*

INTERMISSION

Shawn Okpebholo
b. 1981

Oh! Freedom! (2013)

Spiritual

Moses Hogan
1957–2003

Crucifixion (2000)

Spiritual

Hall Johnson
1888–1970

Le's Have A Union (1964)

Spiritual

Margaret Bonds
1913–1972

You Can Tell The World (1946)
from Five Creek-Freedman Spirituals

Spiritual

Karen Slack, *soprano*
JJ Penna, *piano*

Antonin Dvořák
1841–1904

Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96, “American”

- I. Allegro ma non troppo
- II. Lento
- III. Molto vivace
- IV. Finale. Vivace ma non troppo

Pacifica Quartet

As a courtesy to others, please silence all devices. Photography and recording of any kind is strictly prohibited. Please do not leave the hall during musical selections. Thank you.

Artist Profiles

Pacifica Quartet

Simin Ganatra, *violin*

Austin Hartman, *violin*

Mark Hollaway, *viola*

Brandon Vamos, *cello*

With a career spanning three decades, the multiple Grammy Award-winning Pacifica Quartet has achieved international recognition as one of the finest chamber ensembles performing today. The Quartet is known for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style, and often-daring repertory choices. Having served as quartet-in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music for over a decade, the Quartet was also previously the quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 2021, the Pacifica Quartet received a second Grammy Award for *Contemporary Voices*, an exploration of music by three Pulitzer Prize-winning composers: Shulamit Ran, Jennifer Higdon, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly won chamber music's top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002 the ensemble was honored with Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award and the appointment to Lincoln Center's The Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two), and in 2006 was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. With its powerful energy and captivating, cohesive sound, the Pacifica has established itself as the embodiment of the senior American quartet sound.

Upcoming season highlights include performances for Chamber Music Monterey Bay, 92nd Street Y, San Francisco Performances, Library of Congress, Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival, DePaul University, and Friends of Chamber Music-Vancouver.

In 2008 the Quartet released its Grammy Award-winning recording of Carter's Quartets Nos. 1 and 5 on the Naxos label; the 2009 release of Quartets Nos. 2, 3, and 4 completed the two-CD set. Cedille Records released the group's four-CD recording of the entire Shostakovich cycle, paired with other contemporary Soviet works, to rave reviews: "The playing is nothing short of phenomenal." (*Daily Telegraph*, London) Other recent recording projects include Leo Ornstein's rarely heard piano quintet with Marc-André Hamelin with an accompanying tour, the Brahms piano quintet with the legendary pianist Menahem Pressler, the Brahms and Mozart clarinet quintets with clarinetist Anthony McGill, and their Grammy Award-winning *Contemporary Voices* album.

The members of the Pacifica Quartet live in Bloomington, IN, where they serve as quartet-in-residence and full-time faculty members at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. Prior to their appointment, the Quartet was on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Champaign Urbana from 2003 to 2012, and also served as resident performing artist at the University of Chicago for seventeen years.

Karen Slack, *soprano*

Praised for her “sizeable voice that captured all of the vacillating emotions” (*The New York Times*), Karen Slack is “not only one of the nation’s most celebrated sopranos, but a leading voice in changing and making spaces in classical music” (*Trilloquy*).

A recipient of the 2022 Sphinx Medal of Excellence and a 2025 MPower Artist Grant, Slack is a sought-after collaborator, curator and artistic advisor known for her fiery charisma and groundbreaking approach to engagement. Her debut album, *Beyond the Years: Unpublished Songs of Florence Price* on Azica Records, won the 2025 GRAMMY® Award for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album.

A major highlight of Slack’s 2024-2025 season is the nationwide tour of her new commissioning project, *African Queens*, an evening-length vocal recital of new art songs celebrating the history and legacy of seven African queens, revered as rulers but not widely heralded in the Western world. The program weaves this historical narrative through new works by acclaimed composers Jasmine Barnes, Damien Geter, Jessie Montgomery, Shawn Okpebholo, Dave Ragland, Carlos Simon, and Joel Thompson along with carefully selected traditional repertoire – further illuminated through passages of spoken text and thematic artwork. Slack will perform the world premiere of *African Queens* at the Ravinia Festival, followed by performances at co-commissioners Aspen Music Festival, Tanglewood Music

Festival, 92NY, Washington Performing Arts, Denver Friends of Chamber Music, University of Toronto, and Newport Classical Festival.

JJ Penna, *piano*

JJ Penna has performed extensively with singers such as Kathleen Battle, Harolyn Blackwell, Measha Brueggergosman, David Daniels, Denyce Graves, Ying Huang, Susan Narucki, Roberta Peters, Florence Quivar, and Andreas Scholl. He has held fellowships at the Tanglewood Music Center, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival/Yale Summer School of Music, Music Academy of the West, and the San Francisco Opera’s Merola Opera Program. Penna is a recital and art-song coach in the Yale Opera program at the Yale School of Music. He also teaches at the New England Conservatory, the Ravinia Festival’s Steans Music Institute, and Carnegie Hall’s SongStudio. Devoted to the teaching of classical song literature, Penna has been on the faculties of the Juilliard School, Bowdoin International Music Festival, Westminster Choir College at Rider University, and the Vancouver International Song Institute.

He received his training under Martin Katz, Margo Garrett, and Diane Richardson.

Program Notes

String Quartet No. 1 in G major

PRICE

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Florence Price's String Quartet No. 1 in G Major (1929) represents a threshold in her career: shortly thereafter, her First Symphony would achieve historical significance in Chicago as the first by a Black woman to be performed by a major American orchestra. The quartet, as with much of her music, demonstrates an affinity with Antonin Dvořák's method of integrating vernacular idioms within Classical formal structures: warm, lyrical themes, buoyant rhythms, and clear architectural design. Like Dvořák's "American" works, folk musical elements infuse a framework that otherwise follows a European Romantic tradition. The first movement employs nostalgic themes within a sonata form enhanced by chromatic wandering, unexpected modulations, and light syncopations woven into its lyrical material. The Andante moderato resembles a hymn through its extended phrases, dignified pacing, and harmonic expansions at cadential points. This theme undergoes several imaginative variations, nearly improvisational in their spontaneity and alternation between lyricism and playfulness. The quartet's two movements invite speculation about what might have followed in a third movement while celebrating the beautiful and inventive music that Price bequeathed. Unperformed during her lifetime, the quartet resurfaced following the 2009 discovery of a manuscript collection in her former Illinois summer residence,

contributing to the long-overdue renaissance of her music.

Songs

PRICE

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Song composition constituted a fundamental aspect of Price's output; she created well over one hundred works for voice and piano, balancing concert art songs with spiritual arrangements. This evening's selection— *Beyond the Years* (Paul Laurence Dunbar), *Bright Be the Place* and *There Be None* (Lord Byron), *Pittance* (Don Vincent Gray), and *Winter Idyl* (David Morton)— demonstrates her range of poetic sources and expressive character. Her settings favor clear textual declamation and expansive melodic lines; accompaniments alternate between hymn-like support and gently propulsive figures, with chromatic inflections intensifying cadences. Emotional intensity develops through the poetry's contour and harmonic coloring rather than dynamic volume alone. Heard together, these songs present her artistic sensibility in miniature: late-Romantic lyricism inflected by American speech patterns and church-derived harmony.

A Double Standard

LEE III

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall, Chamber Music Detroit, and Chamber Music Cincinnati and premiered in Baltimore in 2022, *A Double Standard* brings musical realization to a powerful

Program Notes *cont.*

poem by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911). A pioneering voice in American literature, Harper broke barriers as one of the first African American women published in the United States in 1845, while simultaneously advocating for abolition, women’s suffrage, and social justice through her writing and public speaking.

Regarding the new work, composer James Lee III states: “*A Double Standard* is a musical journey that displays her pain and frustration regarding the biases against women and the nineteenth-century mindset concerning sex, gender, and societal roles. The work begins with an extended introduction in the strings that is highly agitated. Once the introduction concludes, the soprano presents a four-note motive on the words ‘Do you blame me...’ which recurs frequently when the word ‘blame’ appears. One can truly sense the righteous indignation in Ms. Harper’s voice as she composed these words. Throughout *A Double Standard*, various emotions emerge at contrasting dynamic levels before reaching the dramatic climax.”

Oh! Freedom!

OKPEBHOLO

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Shawn E. Okpebholo’s setting for soprano and piano places a historic freedom song within a contemporary framework. “O Freedom” likely developed following Emancipation, adapted from earlier spiritual tradition, and subsequently became a Civil Rights anthem performed

and recorded by artists including Odetta and, memorably, Joan Baez at the 1963 March on Washington.

In Okpebholo’s setting, the song functions as living testimony, serving as the foundation for more expansive compositional projects. His 2023 cycle *Songs in Flight*, performed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, begins with this song as prologue before traversing additional terrain across multiple voices, instrumentations, and subjects.

Crucifixion

HOGAN

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Born in New Orleans, Moses Hogan—pianist, conductor, and definitive arranger of the concert spiritual—brought a composer’s sensitivity to color and pacing to traditional songs. Trained at Oberlin and Juilliard, he led the Moses Hogan Chorale and the Moses Hogan Singers, and his choral settings helped establish the concert spiritual in choirs worldwide.

Crucifixion (He Never Said a Mumbalin’ Word) narrates the Passion— the trial, scourging, and crucifixion— each stanza answered by the refrain “he never said a mumbalin’ word.” Following a dramatic piano introduction, the voice enters solemnly with an accompaniment that alternates between lightness and intensity. Silences function as effectively as sound; the refrain arrives with measured restraint. The result presents a concentrated arc of witness: austere, dignified, and quietly devastating.

Le's Have A Union

JOHNSON

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Born in Athens, Georgia, Francis Hall Johnson was a violinist, violist, composer, and one of the spiritual's most dedicated advocates. Following studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Juilliard, and USC, he established himself in Harlem as a working musician— often collaborating with his colleague William Grant Still, a prominent American composer. Johnson performed in the pit orchestra for *Shuffle Along* (1921), a landmark production that expanded Black presence and musical influence on Broadway. His central mission became the preservation and concert presentation of spirituals in their authentic language and style. He founded the Hall Johnson Choir, which debuted at the Pythian Temple in 1928, appeared at Town Hall shortly thereafter, and quickly achieved New York success through frequent broadcasts and an RCA Victor recording contract.

Le's Have a Union, in this setting for voice and piano, belongs to that larger mission. It emphasizes clear textual delivery, speech-inflected melody, and direct expression while preserving the spiritual's essential character. Johnson's spirituals entered distinguished recital programs; acclaimed vocalists including Marian Anderson and Leontyne Price were among the artists who brought them to prominence.

You Can Tell The World

BONDS

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Margaret Bonds was an influential composer, pianist, arranger, and vital contributor to the concert spiritual who combined craftsmanship with advocacy throughout her career, often collaborating with her friend Langston Hughes. During the mid-1940s, she assembled *Five Creek-Freedmen Spirituals*, a collection associated with soprano Hortense Love and her Muscogee (Creek) Freedmen heritage. The project exemplifies classic Bonds methodology: preserve the spiritual's language and character while providing a clear, performable framework.

You Can Tell the World for soprano and piano is declarative by design. The soprano line is exultant, supported by a parlor-like piano accompaniment featuring robust chords, subtle ragtime influences, and occasional imitative figures. The phrases maintain declamatory character yet build toward moments of triumphant joy. A brief quiet section at the center allows the text to speak plainly before energy returns and the refrain resonates. Cadences arrive through affirmation rather than grandiosity, with forward momentum derived from buoyant rhythm rather than sheer volume. Bonds achieves balance between textual clarity and musical motion, preserving the spiritual's character while adapting it for the concert stage.

Program Notes *cont.*

Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96, “American”

DVOŘÁK

Katherine Balch

Historians have often classified Dvořák as a “nationalist composer,” drawing inspiration from and espousing the folk tradition of his native Bohemia (the modern-day Czech Republic). But the so-called “American” Quartet shows a composer whose interest in national music is unbound by personal affiliation. Dvořák wrote the String Quartet in F major in the summer of 1883 while vacationing in Iowa, just months after completing and hearing the New York Philharmonic premier his Ninth Symphony, “From the New World.” From 1882 to 1885, Dvořák had taken residence in New York as director of the new National Conservatory, a short-lived project by philanthropist Jeannette Meyer Thurber to create an institutional home for a “national musical spirit.” Dvořák immersed himself in this project, publishing a series of articles on the state of American music, and advocating for an American musical identity built on the traditions of Native and African American song. His promotion of these distinctly American styles found a diluted but significant place in his music, with pentatonic tunes and ostinati resembling Native American rhythmic structures.

In the F major quartet, Dvořák (thankfully) does not attempt an ethnomusicological catalogue of “American” themes, but rather, takes liberal inspiration from the melodic and

rhythmic qualities of this music to craft a refreshing textural and melodic sound world. Throughout the three movements of this approximately 25-minute composition, harmonic beds of trills, tremolos, and pulsations support an ever-present sense of melodic flow. This music is rooted in the polyphonic tradition of classic music, to be sure, but is equally imbued with the gentle tunefulness of a monophonic folk song.

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List as of October 7, 2025

More Music Awaits!

Thank you for joining us – we'd love to have you back! If you liked today's concert, here are a few more performances we think you'll enjoy:

OCT 19 **Frank Morelli, *bassoon***

Faculty Artist Series

3:00 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall

Free admission

NOV 7 **New Jazz Underground**

Ellington Jazz Series

7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall

Tickets start at \$26, Faculty/Staff start at \$19, Students start at \$11

NOV 15 **Christopher Theofanidis - *Siddhartha, She***

Jeffrey Douma, *guest conductor*

Yale Philharmonia

7:30 p.m. | Woolsey Hall

Tickets start at \$13, Faculty/Staff start at \$9, Students free

NOV 18 **Andy Akiho, *percussion & Imani Winds***

Onepo Chamber Music Series

7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall

Tickets start at \$31, Faculty/Staff start at \$23, Students start at \$14

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