

Program notes  
Naperville Chamber Players  
January 10 and 17, 2010

**Franz Ignaz Danzi** was a German cellist, composer and conductor, the son of the noted Italian cellist Innocenz Danzi. Born in Schwetzingen, Germany, Danzi lived at a significant time in the history of European concert music. His career spanned the transition from the late Classical to the early Romantic styles, and coincided with the origin of much of the music that lives in our concert halls and is familiar to contemporary classical music audiences. As a young man he knew Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, whom he revered; he was a contemporary of Ludwig van Beethoven, and he was a mentor for the young Carl Maria von Weber, whose music he respected and promoted. Danzi composed in most major genres of the time, including opera, church music, orchestral works, and many varieties of chamber music.

**Benjamin Britten's** *Ceremony of Carols* is a choral piece for Christmas, scored for three-part treble chorus, solo voices, and harp. In 1942, when the piece was composed, Britten spent a month aboard a Swedish cargo ship traveling back to England after a very successful three years in America. During the voyage they berthed at Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Britten came across a book of medieval poems, *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*, by Gerald Bullett. Some of these he set during the voyage as the *Ceremony of Carols*, which consists of eleven movements; the *Interlude for solo harp* is the seventh movement of the work.

**Alan Hovhaness** was born as Alan Vaness Chakmakjian in Somerville, Massachusetts to Haroutioun Hovanes Chakmakjian, an Armenian chemistry professor at Tufts College who had been born in Adana, Turkey; and Madeleine Scott, an American woman of Scottish descent who had graduated from Wellesley College. Upon his mother's death on October 3, 1930, he began to use the surname "Hovanness" in honor of his paternal grandfather, and changed it to "Hovhaness" around 1944. Hovhaness began composing at a very early age and studied at the New England Conservatory of Music and with Bohuslav Martinů at Tanglewood in the 1930s, but his intensive study of Oriental music, philosophy, and religion in the 1940s, and his increasingly mystical attitude toward his art left him dissatisfied with his previous work, and he destroyed much of his early work.

The influence of Armenian and Oriental music on Hovhaness' work thereafter became pervasive. The sound and image that inspired *Upon Enchanted Ground*, composed in 1951 on commission from dancer Jean Erdman, may be traced to the *Jhala*, which Hovhaness explained "is a term borrowed from Hindustani classical music. Porcelain cups are struck with a stick. The figuration derived from this repetitive, bell-tone phrases with which the harp imitates a *Jhala*." The harp's glinting line is enclosed within a lyrical song floated high in the flute's register with a broad, chant-like foundation melody in the cello.

The quartet instrumentation runs to the unusual: flute, cello, harp, and tam-tam (a large gong). There are only about a dozen strokes for the instrument in the entire score, all of them never rising beyond a soft dynamic. But they give the piece an incredible depth, like the iceberg's bulk beneath the ocean surface or a seismic rumble.

**Lori Laitman** is one of America's most prolific and widely performed composers of vocal music. She has composed nearly 200 songs, setting the poetry of classical and contemporary poets from Emily Dickinson to Richard Wilbur, and has also created a unique body of music commemorating the Holocaust. Since launching her career in 1991, Laitman's music has been performed frequently in the US and abroad. Some recent U.S. venues include The Frye Art Music and Benaroya Hall in Seattle, WA; The Kennedy Center and The Phillips Collection in Washington, DC; Weill Recital Hall and Merkin Hall in New York, NY; The Granada in Santa Barbara, CA and The USC Fisher Museum in Los Angeles, CA. Her discography also continues to grow, with releases on Albany Records, Naxos, Channel Classics and other labels, showcasing the talents of some of today's top musicians. Laitman frequently travels to universities and festivals to give master classes on her music, and her music continues to be the subject of articles in leading industry publications. Laitman graduated *magna cum laude* from Yale College and received her Master of Music degree in flute performance from The Yale School of Music. Her recordings are available on her website, [www.artsongs.com](http://www.artsongs.com), as well as Amazon and iTunes. Images for flute, cello and harp is one of Laitman's early works.

**Felix Mendelssohn**, along with being a violinist, pianist and organist, was one of the greatest composers the world has ever known. Even if the general public does not recognize his name, they have certainly heard his famous work with the "Wedding March" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream." He was a child prodigy, having had his first composition for choir and full orchestra performed when he was 12. It had a full overture and 11 numbers.

Mendelssohn's musical style was predominately influenced by Bach's colorful counterpoint, the grace and tuneful qualities of Mozart, the oratorios of Handel and the dramatic power of Beethoven and Weber. His music reflects the tension in time periods between classical and romantic styles. Much of his writing has a vocal timbre; it embraces vocal lines to generate strong themes or tunes in the music. Between 1832 and 1845 he published the famous "Lieder Ohne Worte" or "Songs without Words", 36 pieces for piano that he called songs. There is a story that says that Felix played a childhood game with his pianist/composer sister, Fanny, where they added words to the piano pieces they were learning.

The whimsical, light and very fast scherzo was technically Beethoven's romantic invention, but it is evident in this d-minor Trio that you will be listening to today. Mendelssohn composed this trio when he was thirty. This was reported to be a very happy time in his life with a satisfying marriage, thriving career and family life with five children. One can also notice the exciting scherzo in Mendelssohn's most famous piece inspired by Shakespeare, "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The scherzo from the overture is a timeless masterpiece of virtuosic speed and grace.

It is said that Mendelssohn might have been as great as Beethoven or Mozart if he had lived longer. His last years of life were reported to be very stressful due to his unreasonably demanding employer in Berlin, the King of Prussia. Shortly after his famous composer sister, Fanny, passed away by stroke, he died of a stroke at the age of 38.