

The Swarthmore College Department of Music and Dance presents an
ELIZABETH POLLARD FETTER CHAMBER MUSIC PROGRAM NOTES
FALL 2025

[Program I \(Saturday, November 22\)](#)

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Lang Concert Hall
Saturday, November 22, 2025
3:00 PM

Ludwig Van Beethoven, Trio for Three Flutes, Op. 87

Program Notes by Audrey Litman '26
Coached by Becki Simon

Mikhail Glinka, Three Russian Songs

Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857), often named as the father of Russian nationalism in music, was the first to integrate Russian folk songs into Western European musical forms. He influenced a generation of Russian composers, including Modest Mussorgsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, to use Russian musical language in their compositions.

Unlike most musical innovators, Glinka did not come from a musical family. In fact, he wrote in his diary that he heard no music except church bells and his nurse's folk songs during his childhood. In his twenties, he fled an unsuccessful career as a civil servant in Russia for a tour of Western Europe, where he immersed himself in Italian and German opera and orchestral music. This unusual path led him to create unusual music: he was the first major Russian composer to create operas and chamber music using local Eastern European folk melodies.

In the 1880s, German American composer Eduard Herrmann arranged *Three Russian Songs* from vocal works by Glinka. Herrmann translated Glinka's songs, based on Russian poems about love, fear, and betrayal, into a violin, viola, and piano trio with plenty of interesting contrast. The first movement, *Do not tempt me unnecessarily*, comes from the poem *Dissuasion* by Yevgeny Baratynsky which describes the poet's disillusionment with love after a break-up (with his first cousin). The second movement, *Lullaby*, was based on a poem of the same misleading name by Vasilyevich Kukolnik: instead of creating peace and comfort, this lullaby expresses a mother's fear for the fate

of Russian children, saying “Enemies are here, they knock at the door.../ Sufferings, losses, and toil,/ A host of dreadful visions and bitter thoughts.” The third movement, titled *The Doubt*, comes from another Kukolnik poem, this one about a spurned lover trying to resist their delusions of infidelity and murderous rage.

-Program Notes by Maya McDaniel '28

Coached by Keiko Sato

Adolphus Hailstork, Sonata da Chiesa

Sonata da Chiesa (Church Sonata) is a modern masterpiece, drawing from a rich tradition of Renaissance vocal music to form an epic seven-movement work for string orchestra.

Adolphus Hailstork received his early musical education as a member of the boys' chorus at the Cathedral of All Saints in Albany, New York, and would go on to study with the famed Nadia Boulanger in France as well as several prominent American composers at the Manhattan School of Music and University of Michigan. His work “Fanfare on Amazing Grace” was performed at the inauguration of Joe Biden in 2021.

Movements of *Sonata da Chiesa* are generally played without an intervening pause.

The work opens with **Exultate (Rejoice)** evoking the majestic sounds of an organ in a cathedral reminiscent of Hailstork's childhood, before an unsettling mist arrives in **O Magnum Mystrium (O Great Mystery)**. The mist clears, giving way to **Adoro (Adoration)**, in which a solo viola coaxes the orchestra into prayerful consideration, bringing the first large section of the piece to a close.

The following two movements explore feelings associated with the highest highs and lowest lows of life, first with the alternately lyrical and rambunctious **Jubilate (Shout for Joy)**, which is immediately followed by **Agnus Dei (The Lamb of God)**, a mournful lament which serves as the heart of the work.

Hailstork sets the orchestra on a road to recovery through the mystical **Dona Nobis Pacem (Give Us Peace)**, before the orchestra arrives at a triumphal reprise of the **Exultate**.

Program Notes by Kaito Stohr '28

Coached by Andrew Hauze

Friday, December 5, 2025
8:00 PM

Ludwig Van Beethoven, Cello Sonata No. 4 in C Major, Op.102, No. 1

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in 1770 in Bonn, Germany. Much of his music was influenced by Mozart and Haydn (the latter being his teacher for a few years), and in later years, Handel as well. When he was 17, he travelled to Vienna with the intention of studying with Mozart. After a brief return home, he stayed in Vienna for the majority of his life. It was there where he wrote the majority of his works. Beethoven wrote 3 Cello Sonatas prior to this one—published in 1797 and 1809. This piece was written in the same year as his 5th and final cello sonata, in 1815.

Beethoven's Cello Sonata No. 4, Op. 102, is dedicated to Countess Marie Erdody. She commissioned it for their mutual friend, a cellist named Joseph Linke who premiered many of Beethoven's cello and chamber works. Beethoven aptly named it the "Free Sonata," describing the improvisatory nature of the first movement Andante.

Both the first and the second movement of the sonata follow a traditional sonata form, with an exposition, development, and recapitulation, although Beethoven subverts particular norms of the form within them. Before that, though, both movements begin with a placid introduction. In the first movement, there is a soulful andante section, with a 'free' and timeless melody. That melody gets passed back and forth between the cello and piano repeatedly. Suddenly, in the Allegro, the two instruments are in unison, with sharp lines compared to the Andante. The cello and piano suddenly shift from the meandering melody of the Andante to a rhythmic dialogue that has the two instruments seemingly arguing with one another.

In the second movement, the cello and piano again begin an improvisatory melodic line. It lacks a recognizable motive, instead focusing on melodic runs and cadenzas. Directly following, there is a reminiscence of the sonata's opening Andante where the soulful melody returns. The piece then tumbles into the Allegro of the second movement. While this one is also in sharper focus compared to the first movement, it is much more agitated. Beethoven leads us through the second movement's Allegro with allusions to the first movement, ending it with a series of arpeggios, leaving us with a feeling of completeness.

Program Notes by Hannah Rowland-Seymour '27
Coached by Marcantonio Barone

Bedřich Smetana, String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor

During his lifetime, the Czech composer Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884) was best known for large-scale works – operas and symphonic poems – with highly nationalistic themes. He laid the groundwork for Czech classical music, a legacy later continued by the likes of Antonín Dvořák and Leoš Janáček. In contrast, Smetana completed only four works of chamber music during his adulthood, each one a deeply intimate reflection on his personal life. The first was the Piano Trio in G Minor, an elegiac piece written after the death of his firstborn child. Today, we will perform the first two movements of Smetana's second chamber work, his autobiographical String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor. Titled 'Z mého života' ('From My Life'), the composer completed the work in 1876, only eight years before his death.

Discussing the quartet in an 1878 letter to his friend Josef Srb-Debrnov, Smetana wrote that he "had no intention of writing any quartet according to the customary formulas, on which I worked sufficiently as a young student of music theory...I wanted namely to represent in sound the course of *my life*." He described the intensely passionate first movement as describing "love of art in my youth, my *romantic mood*, the unspoken longing for something which I could not name or imagine clearly..." The movement opens with a viola solo, introducing an alarm-like theme that foreshadows the many personal tragedies Smetana would experience throughout his life. Even as the theme is passed to other voices and modified throughout the development, its rhythmic motif persists up until through the ominous ending.

By contrast, the second movement of the quartet is an exuberant, carefree polka. Smetana wrote that it was meant to bring "reminders of the happy times of my youth, when as a composer I strewed the young world with *dance pieces*, and was known everywhere as an enthusiastic dancer." After an enthusiastic and joyful opening, the viola plays a rustic solo low in its register, one of Smetana's many uses of polkas to evoke Czech country life in his music. In fact, Smetana calls on the viola to introduce the theme in both the first and second movement, an unusual choice of instrumentation perhaps inspired by his Czech colleague (and violist) Dvořák. The lighthearted movement mostly alternates between bright F major polka sections and more harmonically nuanced waltzes, and any musical tension is quickly dissipated.

Program Notes by Isaac
Cheng '28
Coached by Udi Bar-David

Various, Chinese Art Songs

This set of four Chinese art songs is written by two composers. First two by **Li Yinghai** (1927 - 2007) were composed during the 1980s and the next two by his student Zhao Jiping (b. 1945) were composed in 2011 and 2018, respectively. Li is Zhao's teacher in composition, and both of them were trained at the Central Conservatory of Music in

Beijing. These songs set poetry from the Tang dynasty (618 - 907 AD), with music that draws deeply from the tones, gestures, and rhythmic flow of traditional Chinese instruments, such as the *guqin* and *pipa*.

The music also emphasizes text painting, and therefore is rich in imagery. While listening, we invite you to look for the recurring musical patterns in each piece, and imagine the actions they evoke, such as a petal falling, a crow cawing, the moon setting, a bird cheeping, or a paddle sliding through the water.

***Mooring by Maple Bridge* (枫桥夜泊)** paints a lonely night scene from the poem by poet Zhang Ji. The poet himself is the figure in the poem, moored by the still waters of Suzhou, hearing the distant toll of a temple bell on an autumn night. At each long sustained note, we employ a distinctive vibrato – not an even oscillation, but one that begins with a series of slightly emphasized, upward-moving pulses. This expressive shaping, inspired by *Jingju* and *Kunqu* (Chinese operatic) singing, resembles a human sigh or wail, and captures the poem’s quiet sorrow.

***Spring Dawn* (春晓)** paints the delicate moment of waking at dawn after a night of spring rain. Interestingly, the last line of the poem (“How many petals are now on the ground sleeping?”) can be interpreted in many ways: as a question for the audience, as a question to the heavens, or as the poet’s soft sigh. Li Yinghai opens various ways of expressions through subtle shifts in phrasing and color, first beginning the question in the higher register, then to an echo in the lower register, and finally to a focal point sustained in the high.

In both of Li’s songs, sparse textures of piano evoke the *guqin* and *pipa* re-create vivid scenes that draw listeners directly into the poets’ inner worlds.

The next two songs by **Zhao Jiping**, however, move away from depicting a delicate, transient moment and towards expressing broader emotions and ideas. While Zhao still emphasizes text painting, his harmonic language is richer and his pacing is more dramatic.

***Longing for Family on a Festive Day* (佳节思亲)** describes the mingled joy and homesickness of a single traveler living in a foreign land during festivals of reunion. The music dramatizes the poet’s changes of emotions through harmonic progressions and dynamic contrasts. The piano and voice echo one another, as if in dialogue.

***In Song of the Hidden Orchid* (幽兰操)**, the poet Han Yu eulogizes the integrity and virtue of *junzi* (君子), an ideal person who preserves integrity and virtue in Confucian ideology, through the metaphor of the orchid, so as to encourage and exhort himself to become a *junzi*. With arrangers Zhao Lin and Dai Xiaofei, Zhao Jiping sets the text with grand harmonies and resonant chords, transcribing the spirit of *junzi* through the image of an orchid, which blooms unknown but full of beauty.

【唐】张继

月落乌啼霜满天，
江枫渔火对愁眠。
姑苏城外寒山寺，
夜半钟声到客船。

Mooring by Maple Bridge

(Written by Zhang Ji; Translated by Perxi Pu with reference to Xu Yuanchong)

Moon sets, crows caw, frost fills the sky,
River maples, fishermen's flares confront my uneasy eyes.
Beyond the city wall, from Temple of Cold Hill,
Bells toll across midnight till it reaches my roamer's boat.

春晓

【唐】孟浩然

春眠不觉晓，
处处闻啼鸟，
夜来风雨声，
花落知多少。

Spring Dawn

(Written by Meng Haoran; Translated by Perxi Pu with reference to Xu Yuanchong)

Slumbering, I know not the spring dawn is peeping.
Now everywhere the singing birds are cheeping.
Last night I heard the rainy wind weeping.
How many petals are now on the ground sleeping?

佳节思亲

【唐】王维

独在异乡为异客，
每逢佳节倍思亲。
遥知兄弟登高处，
遍插茱萸少一人。

Longing for Family on a Festive Day

(Written by Wang Wei; Translated by Perxi Pu with reference to Ke Yuying)

Alone, in foreign lands, I, a stranger be,
Missing more dearly of my family, at each festival time,
I know, from afar, my brothers climb the hill high on this day.
All inserting cornus sprigs. All without me.

幽兰操

【唐】韩愈

兰之猗猗，扬扬其香。
众香供之，幽幽其芳。
不采而佩，与兰何伤？
以日以年，我行四方。
文王梦熊，渭水泱泱。
采而佩之，奕奕清芳。
雪霜茂茂，蕾蕾于冬。
君子之守，子孙之昌。

Song of the Hidden Orchid

(Written by Han Yu; Translated by Perxi Pu)

The orchid stands, lush in hue.

Its fragrance rises, serene and true.
While all other scents revolve around,
Quietly its scent remains its own.
Even if being unpicked all this time,
What harm could it do to the orchid?
Through days and through years,
I will keep traveling, traveling all around.

Ah, King Wen once dreamed of the flying bear,
and River Wei flowed grand and proud.
When an orchid is picked and worn closely,
Still beautiful and pure it remains.
In snow and frosts it grows lush.
In winter it sprouts and is covered in buds.
A Junzi keeps their virtue.
Thus their legacy flourishes and thrives.

Program Notes by Perxi Pu '27 and Che Lu '26
Coached by Debra Scruto-Davis and Liangjun Shi

Johannes Brahms, Piano Trio No.1 in B Major, Op. 8

Brahms composed the original version of his first Piano Trio in 1854 at age twenty, during a turbulent period in which he was deeply involved with the Schumann family after Robert Schumann's collapse that year. The Trio was one of Brahms's first large-scale chamber works. More than three decades later, in 1889, he returned to the work after having written his major symphonies, concertos, and chamber masterpieces. The revised version retains much of the earlier material but reshapes the overall architecture with greater balance and clarity. The close connection between the themes and the equal distribution of musical roles among the instruments reflect Brahms's mature compositional approach, sharing a mix of his early Romantic voice and his late, introspective style.

The first movement, *Allegro con brio*, begins with a lyrical theme in the cello and piano that establishes a calm but expressive character. The movement follows sonata form, featuring two contrasting themes: the first smooth and reflective, and the second, shifting to G# minor. This second theme introduces a darker, more unsettled atmosphere. Its chromatic inflections and veiled texture create a sense of tension rather than assertion. In the recapitulation, Brahms brings this material back in the tonic minor, deepening the emotional contrast before concluding with a *Tranquillo* section that reframes the opening lyricism in a serene, conclusive way.

The second movement, *Scherzo*, is set in B minor and marked by fast, rhythmic energy. The piano introduces a recurring rising-third motif that drives the motion throughout the *Scherzo*. The movement alternates between quick, light passages and more forceful moments, creating a sense of contrast and momentum. In the Trio section, the tempo relaxes, and the tonality shifts to B major, bringing a brief lyrical interlude before the return of the opening material. The movement concludes with a Picardy third, a final cadence in B major that provides a clear and unexpected resolution.

Program Notes by Calder Balfour '28, Grace Chen '28, and Alice Lee '28
Coached by Marcantonio Barone

Lang Concert Hall
Saturday, December 6, 2025
3:00 PM

George Frederic Handel, The Lord is my Strength

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, O Quam Tristis

Antonio Vivaldi, Laudamus Te

Program Notes by Menah Alkhabaz '28, Hannah He '28, and Matthew Tomlinson '26
Coached by Robin Bier and Debra Scurto-Davis

Astor Pantaleón Piazzolla, The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires

Felix Mendelssohn, Piano Trio No.2 in C Minor, Op. 66

Composed in 1845, Mendelssohn's Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor, Op. 66 stands among his final chamber works, written just two years before his death. The Trio reflects both his mastery of classical form and his deepening engagement with spiritual and emotional

expression. Dedicated to the violinist Louis Spohr, it pairs structural clarity with the intensity and chromatic color characteristic of Mendelssohn's late style. In these last years, Mendelssohn had been notably preoccupied with questions of faith, legacy, and artistic identity, which seem to permeate in Trio's darker harmonic palette and its dramatic contrasts between agitation and inward reflection. This piece reflects Mendelssohn's pushing of the expressive possibilities of chamber music further than in his earlier, more classically restrained trios.

The first movement, *Allegro energico e con fuoco*, opens in C minor with rapid, cascading arpeggios passed between the three instruments, creating a restless and stormy texture reminiscent of his orchestral tone poems. The main theme, adapted from his *Songs Without Words*, Op. 102, No. 1, ties the Trio to Mendelssohn's lyrical piano idiom. The movement follows a clear sonata form plan, moving from the turbulent C minor opening to a more lyrical secondary theme in E-flat major. Throughout, Mendelssohn uses intricate rhythmic layering: the piano's continuous motion drives the texture while the strings echo, anticipate, or transform the piano's gestures, creating a seamless interplay rather than mere accompaniment. The result is a dialogue of equals, each instrument contributing to the movement's relentless energy and structural coherence.

The final movement, *Allegro appassionato*, also begins in C minor with an impassioned cello theme that sets an urgent tone. Mendelssohn later introduces two chorale melodies: *Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ* ("Praise be to You, Jesus Christ") and the psalm tune *Old Hundredth* ("All People That on Earth Do Dwell"). These chorales serve as moments of spiritual reflection, contrasting with the restless energy of the opening material. The relationship between the fiery beginning and the luminous chorale passages suggests a kind of spiritual ascent into unity. The transformation from C minor to triumphant C major at the end reinforces this sense of redemption, concluding the Trio with radiant affirmation.

Program Notes by Alice Lee '28
Coached by Yu Xi Wang

Claude Bolling, Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), one of the most significant composers of the Classical era, played a crucial role in shaping the symphonic form as we know it today. Over his lifetime, he composed more than 100 symphonies, many of which were written before 1790 as commissions for the court orchestra he served—as Kapellmeister, Haydn was responsible not only for leading the orchestra but also for composing new music for them to perform. The Symphony No. 45, famously known as the "*Farewell*" Symphony, was one of these commissioned works.

Haydn earned the nickname “Papa Haydn” for his fatherly care of the musicians under his charge, a fact beautifully illustrated by the story behind this symphony. In 1772, Haydn and the court orchestra had been staying far longer than expected at Prince Nikolaus Esterházy’s remote summer palace, while the musicians’ families remained at home. Concerned that his players had been away too long, Haydn devised a witty way to suggest to the Prince that it was time to return. Rather than addressing the matter directly, he embedded the request into the music itself. After a seemingly ordinary Presto in the symphony’s final movement, the music unexpectedly slows into an Adagio, and one by one, the musicians stop playing, extinguish their candles, and leave the stage, until only two muted violins remain. The message was clear—after the dramatic farewell, the Prince took the hint and allowed the musicians to go home the next day.

Before the last movement, there are several unusual moments in the symphony that almost foreshadow its humorous ending. The first movement, marked *Allegro assai*, is stormy and intense, set in the unusual and brooding key of F-sharp minor, typical of Haydn’s *Sturm und Drang* [storm and stress] style. But in the middle of the movement, a sudden shift to D major brings an unexpectedly graceful and elegant bridge that concludes on an eerily hollow arpeggio. The Adagio second movement moves to A major and at first seems more restrained, yet its surface tranquility is deceptive. Beneath its poised phrasing and muted strings, moments of strangeness emerge in its elusive harmony. The third movement, a Minuet and Trio, gloriously shifts to F-sharp major, bringing a refined elegance, with a stately horn melody in the Trio section. This was a very difficult key to play. Haydn had to order special half-step crook extensions from the horn-maker so that the G-horns at the time could be transposed down to F-sharp. And then we turn to the last movement—starting with a brisk, energetic Presto, and everything seems to be normal...

Program Notes by Louis Luo '27
Coached by Mark Loria

Various, R&B

Our R&B ensemble will be performing a variety of tunes that also pull from genres outside of R&B. Our songs consist of Stevie Wonder’s “Sir Duke”, “Them Changes” by Thundercat, “Rain” by SWV, and “If I Ever Fall in Love” by Shai. While some of these songs venture into genres of jazz and pop, we felt that performing songs that we enjoyed listening to was more of a priority than sticking purely to R&B.

As you listen to these songs, you’ll notice that all of them exhibit core features of R&B. R&B, otherwise known as the rhythm and blues, is a style of music that draws influences from jazz and the blues, and its songs tend to have a very strong and driving backbeat. Vocals are typically the main focus of R&B, and its instrumentation typically has a full rhythm section of drums, piano, guitar, and bass.

You can hear all these aspects of R&B in our song “Sir Duke”, with the driving groove established by the rhythm section and the jazzy hornlines. “Them Changes” also features R&B elements, though in a much more modern context, sampling its drumbeat from the hit R&B song “Footsteps in the Dark” by the Isley Brothers. While the bass line and horns give the song a more psychedelic jazz and funk feel, the core R&B groove is still evident in the way the drums drive the song forward. You can hear this driving feel in the drumbeat of “Rain” as well. Our last song, “If I Ever Fall in Love”, was originally an acapella song, but we’ve added in horn parts and a full rhythm section accompaniment to give it that R&B feel.

Stevie Wonder, “Sir Duke”

Two years after his passing in 1974, the tribute to the legendary jazz icon Duke Ellington “Sir Duke” was released on *Songs in the Key of Life* by American singer/songwriter Stevie Wonder. Through the 70s and 80s, Wonder established himself as one of the most influential musicians of his time by pioneering the fusion of R&B, soul, funk, pop, and jazz. *Songs in the Key of Life* represented a culmination of what music journalists refer to as his “classic period” of recording. Achieving substantial commercial and critical acclaim, the album took home Album of the Year at the Grammys. It was later inducted by the Library of Congress into the National Recording Registry, demonstrating the cultural significance of the homage to the jazz world.

While “Sir Duke” features a set of complex chord changes, it remains accessible through its memorable melodies and a groove that bridges its jazz elements with a more mainstream pop sensibility. The potent horn section interspersed throughout provides ample backgrounds while bookending the form with fast unison lines, contributing a level of energy that helps convey the song’s celebratory message. The lyrics reference the title’s inspiration Duke Ellington alongside a suite of comparable jazz icons such as Count Basie, Louie Armstrong (Satchmo), Glen Miller, and Ella Fitzgerald.

Our interpretation of “Sir Duke” attempts to remain faithful to the original while simultaneously adapting it to showcase the characteristics of our ensemble. Our four vocalists expanded Stevie Wonder’s vocal part into a four part harmony with the help of our coach. Our saxophonist and trombonist transcribed the horn section parts and modified them to suit our more compressed instrumentation. By keeping the unison horn lines untouched and simplifying the background figures, we ensured that our vocalists would be able to showcase their expanded harmonies.

Stephen Lee Bruner, “Them Changes”

Released in 2015 on *The Beyond / Where the Giants Roam*, “Them Changes” is one of the most recognizable works by bassist, composer, and producer Stephen “Thundercat” Bruner. A cornerstone of the Los Angeles music scene, Thundercat has taken the R&B

world by storm. His career spans collaborations with artists such as Kendrick Lamar, Mac Miller, Flying Lotus, and Erykah Badu, as he is known for blending jazz fusion, funk rhythm, and contemporary soul into a sound that is distinctly his own. Named by *Rolling Stone* as one of the greatest bassists of all time, Thundercat approaches composition with an incredible balance of precision and spontaneity, creating music that feels both technically intricate and emotionally direct.

Anchored by a looping, syncopated bass groove, this arrangement of “Them Changes” layers piano, drums, trombone, saxophone and vocal harmonies into a rich and cohesive soundscape. The song’s sense of motion contrasts with the reflective mood in its lyrics, balancing groove and melancholy in a way that feels organic rather than forced.

The piece, although released within the last decade, draws heavily from 1970s funk and soul, combining the harmonics of jazz fusion and the laid-back pulse of R&B. Yet, Thundercat reimagines these traditions through modern production and an improvisational sensibility that keeps the music fluid and unpredictable. Our arrangement captures the original song’s layered style while allowing space for more instrumental color and dialogue.

Our group learned “Them Changes” largely by rote, internalizing rhythms, harmonies, and phrasing through listening and repetition rather than notation. That process demanded close attention and trust, turning rehearsal into a form of conversation. The result is a performance shaped by collective feel rather than fixed interpretation, reflecting the same spontaneity and human connection that defines the piece itself.

Brian Alexander Morgan “Rain”

Starting off as a sample from bassist Jaco Patrious's "Portrait of Tracy", SWV's version of “Rain” was born from a unique adaptation of the sample by producer Brain Alexander Morgans. While originally intended for Brandy, another well known R&B artist, performer, and actress, the song was passed on to SWV after Brandy's label rejected the song. However, this song performed by SWV, being their last track as a group, would become an R&B hit, reaching number 25 on the Billboard Hot 100 and number 7 on the Hot R&B singles chart in 1998. SWV released the song on their 1997 original album *Release Some Tension* and the song has remained relevant in R&B literature as it has continued to be sampled by other artists such as Kanye West in his album *Sunday Service Choir* and Coco Jones in her single “Double Back”.

SWV, or Sisters With Voices, was a Black female R&B group consisting of performers Cheryl “Coko” Gamble, Tamaa “Taj” Johnson, and Leanne “Lelee” Lyons. Starting as a trio of singers in New York performing gospel and church music, Coko, Taj, Lelee would perform together for many years before deciding to release music together. SWV was born in 1990 when they released their debut album, *It's About Time*, launching them into

success with hit singles including “Weak” and “I’m So Into You.” Their hit song “Rain” unfortunately became the group's last song before disbanding in 1998.

The song itself involves a stripped down three part harmony containing little instrumentation and more layering of the unique and melodic vocal tracks. For our band specifically, this song allows us to shine a spotlight on our vocalists and their unique blend of voices. Our vocalists spent countless hours working on perfecting the layering of the lyrical elements of the song to produce their unique harmonies and replicating the effortless blend of the SWV trio.

Carl “Groove” Martin, “If I Ever Fall In Love”

The debut single from their 1992 album bearing the same name, “If I Ever Fall In Love” is an emotionally captivating a cappella ballad by the Washington D.C. based R&B group Shai. The name comes from a Swahili word for the personification of one’s destiny, which is appropriate when considering the monumental success and influence that they went on to cultivate through their music. Originally consisting of members Marc Gay, Carl Martin, Darnell Van Rensalier, and Garfield A. Bright, Shai is often noted as one of the most culturally distinctive R&B groups of the 1990s and beyond. Not only did “If I Ever Fall In Love” reach number two on the US Billboard Hot 100 in 1992, but also number one on the Billboard Hot R&B Singles in 1993. This catapulted Shai into the mainstream, and influenced other famous groups to emulate their signature emotive and soulful a cappella arrangements.

Shai’s first Billboard hit features a four-part a cappella arrangement, a departure from typical instrumental arrangements common in R&B. However, this attribute is exactly what set the quartet apart from their contemporaries, allowing them to develop into a commercially viable musical entity. Musically, the rich harmonic texture coupled with poignant yet hopeful lyrics about love and longing, create a truly gripping listening experience. A cappella arrangements, such as those of “If I Ever Fall In Love,” push musical and stylistic boundaries of what can be expressed with human voices without instrumental accompaniment. This style continued throughout the 90s to be an inspiration for other groups, such as Boyz II Men and All-4-One. For our band especially, this song serves as a beautiful way to highlight our vocalists, as they follow the parts from Shai’s original recording. Where we differ from the original, however, is with our addition of instrumental accompaniment to include our other band members. These instrumental parts offer rhythmic support, as well as outlining the harmonic progression of the vocal harmonies.

Program notes by Olivia Eaton ’28, Luca Ferrandino ’29,
Calvin He ’27, Oliver Kim ’27, and Aleah Nale ’27

Coached by Sean Tripline