



FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
OF SANTA MONICA

MID-WEEK RECITALS

ONLINE SERIES



FEBRUARY
2026

Wednesday, February 11, 2026

12:10 p.m.

GOLD LINE SAXOPHONE QUARTET

Dr. Isaac López, Rachel Wolz, Joseph David Spence, Jacob Hallman

Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904)

American Quartet, op. 96 (arr. Claude Vuirpy)

I Allegro ma non troppo

II Lento

IV Vivace ma non troppo

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Le tombeau de Couperin (arr. Christoph Enzel)

I Prelude

IV Rigaudon

About the Artists

At the core of our music lies a dedication to excellence, authenticity, and virtuosity. We believe in the transformative power of music, its ability to provide solace from the hustle, evoke emotions, and create unforgettable moments. Our performances are not just about notes and rhythms; they are stories, experiences, and a tribute to the musicians who have gone before us.

Described by KUSC as an “awesome” experience, the **Gold Line Quartet** is inspired by the running of the Gold Line crossing from Azusa across the I-210 freeway to Union Station and beyond. We understand that life is a hustle for everyone (us included!), and we want to provide a touch of musical magic in a world that is often a challenging grind.

Dr. Isaac López is a multifaceted saxophonist in the Los Angeles community. He has an active performing career with a variety of ensembles, including: symphony orchestras (San Francisco Symphony, Sacramento Philharmonic, Modesto Symphony, Stockton Symphony, Music in the Mountains, Bear Valley Symphony); saxophone quartets (Gold Line Quartet and TC4); a recently formed piano trio reinterpreting the classical and romantic canon through the lens

of the saxophone; and his duo (López and Jaramillo), commissioning and showcasing works by contemporary classical composers from throughout Latin America. Dr. López is deeply committed to the transformative power of education and actively serves with multiple non-profit organizations to advance this mission: currently instructing as Jazz Ensemble Director (Los Angeles Music and Art School, and Musicians at Play); Saxophone Teaching Artist with Harmony Project of Los Angeles; and Private Instructor. Dr. López also enjoys composing and recording film scores with his colleagues at Show Monkey Studios, who will be producing his upcoming music-documentary series.

Rachel Wolz is a distinguished saxophonist and educator based in Los Angeles, currently completing her Doctor of Musical Arts in Music Performance at UCLA. She has performed with ensembles such as the UCLA Philharmonia and The Colburn Orchestra. She has also toured with the Zoto Saxophone Quartet, conducting various clinics and masterclasses throughout the state of Arizona. Additionally, she is a recipient of numerous awards, including third prize in the 2023 International Artists Competition and the Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship at UCLA.

Saxophonist, composer, educator, **Joseph David Spence** has made a name as an advocate for the saxophone in the concert hall and in his own compositions. A native of Southern California, Spence has performed in throughout the United States and internationally in such prestigious concert venues as Meng Concert Hall (Cal State Fullerton), Hatch Recital Hall (Eastman School of Music), He Lu Ting Concert Hall (Shanghai), and Beijing Concert Hall. Spence's music has been performed throughout the United States including premieres at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, California State University, Fullerton, and The Hartt School.

Founding GLQ member **Jacob Hallman** is a performing artist, composer, and author of *Ready Set Go: Life Hacks for Young Musicians*. Hallman has commissioned new works by Cheryl Bocanegra, Michael E. Anderson, Joshua D. Peterson, and Christian Lauba. Hallman also produced a jazz quartet album titled *In the Hall* featuring pop hits like Super Mario Bros., Virtual Insanity, and original compositions. In 2015, Hallman created an EP release with Bordeaux-based Trio Aqmo with beatbox, saxophone, and piano. He has performed in Argentina, France, Mexico, Poland, Spain, Thailand, and the United States. Today, he regularly performs classical works at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Arcadia, CA.

Program Notes

Maurice Ravel - Tombeau de Couperin

World War I encompassed Ravel's psyche almost entirely, and for a while it brought his creativity to a standstill. He had been exempted from military service some years before due to his diminutive stature and feather-light weight (five-foot-three and 108 pounds). When war was declared, in 1914, he nonetheless hoped to train to become a pilot in the French Air Force, but he was rejected due to fragile health—decisively so once military physicians diagnosed a heart condition. He managed to serve as a medical assistant, however, and in March 1916 he headed to the front lines at Verdun as a driver in the Army Motor Transport Corps. His

eagerness to serve may have exceeded his skill behind the wheel, as his correspondence reveals several incidents of one-car fender-benders.

After six months he fell ill with dysentery and was sent back to Paris to convalesce. While he was there his mother passed away, in January 1917, after which he sank into deep depression. He returned to his military assignment only briefly before succumbing to another breakdown, at which point the army discharged him for good. He spent the remaining months of the War in a village in Normandy, gradually recouping his creative energies, returning to some projects that had occupied him prior to the War, and embarking on some new ones.

His suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin* embraced that period of his life. When Ravel sketched it, he reported in a letter to his pupil Roland-Manuel (on October 1, 1914): “I’m beginning ... a French Suite—no, it’s not what you think—the Marseillaise doesn’t come into it at all but there’ll be a forlane and a jig; not a tango, though.” In his *Autobiographical Sketch*, penned in 1929 as a promotional piece for the Aeolian Company, Ravel said of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, “The homage is directed less in fact to Couperin himself than to French music of the eighteenth century.” Nonetheless, he did gear up for the project by making a piano transcription of a forlane from the fourth of the *Concerts royaux* of François Couperin, a forlane being a lively Venetian folk dance that became popular, in a stylized form, in French courts.

Couperin (1668-1733) was indeed an emblem of the distinctive tradition of French music. This past November the musical world marked the 350th anniversary of the birth of this figure, who during the reign of Louis XIV held the title of *Organiste du roi* (King’s Organist) and in 1717, two years after that monarch’s death, was elevated to *Ordinaire de la musique de la chambre du roi pour le clavecin* (Musician-in-Ordinary as Harpsichordist for the King’s Chamber Music), the king at that point being the seven-year old Louis XV, great-grandson of Louis XIV. Although Couperin wrote important sacred works, organ compositions, and chamber music, he is most famous for his harpsichord oeuvre, which comprises some 230 pieces published in four collections and an instructional treatise from 1713 through 1730. These are marked by fanciful imagination, wry wit (or sometimes somber introspection), meticulous craftsmanship, and, above all, clarity—which is how one might also describe Ravel’s keyboard works.

Ravel’s suite initially took the form of six pieces for solo piano. By the time he finished it, what had begun as a celebration of French musical tradition was transformed into another sort of commemoration, as its movements were dedicated to various friends lost in combat during the War. (The cover of the original piano edition included a drawing, by Ravel himself, of a memorial drapery and a funerary urn.) In June 1919, he selected four of the suite’s movements for orchestral arrangements, dropping the original second and sixth movements (a fugue and a toccata, respectively) and re-ordering those that remained. It would be hard to argue that the piano originals come close to making the effect of the crystalline orchestral versions, in which, as Roland-Manuel observed, “strict necessity governs every move” and “with extreme economy and simplicity Ravel obtains translucence and variety of color throughout the whole work.” Ravel’s appreciation for textural clarity is made clear through an anecdote recounted in

a radio interview by the composer and conductor Manuel Rosenthal, who spent time as a pupil of Ravel's:

One day he was speaking to me in glowing terms about Puccini. And being the silly, impertinent young man I was, I started to sneer. At that Ravel flew into a towering rage, locked us both into his little studio at Monfort l'Amaury and sat down at the piano. He then played me the whole of Tosca from memory, stopping about fifty times on the way to ask: "Have you anything to complain of about that passage? Look how good the harmony is, how he respects the form, what a clever, original, and interesting modulation there is in that tune." Finally he took down the score to show me how perfect the orchestration is. He said, "This is exactly what I did with Le Tombeau de Couperin: this economy of means by which two solo instruments in Puccini's orchestra produce such an impact—that is the mark of a great artist."

Program notes by James M. Keller

Antonin Dvorak - American Quartet, op. 96

When Dvorak arrived in New York from Prague on September 17, 1892, he immediately took up his duties as director of the National Conservatory but also continued to compose and fulfill his many obligations as a visiting celebrity. By the end of the taxing season, he was delighted to accept an invitation to spend the summer visiting the tiny (population: 300) farming community of Spillville, Iowa, made up of Czech immigrants who preserved the language, culture, and customs of their native land. Dvorak arrived in Spillville on June 5 with his wife, six children, sister, maid, and secretary. Three days later he was already at work on a new string quartet. Although he usually composed quite slowly, he finished the sketches by June 11, writing at the end, "Thanks be to the Lord God. I am satisfied. It went quickly." As soon as the final score was ready, on June 23, Dvorak, playing violin, along with three students, read it through. The "official" premiere was given in Boston by the Kneisel Quartet on January 1, 1894.

Written just after the "New World" Symphony, his most famous symphony, this quartet became Dvorak's best-known chamber music composition and acquired a similar nickname, the "American" Quartet. Many hear in the quartet strains of black spirituals and plantation songs, as well as elements of American Indian music. Others doubt that the quartet grew from the sounds Dvorak heard in America and hold rather that it is based on certain melodic and rhythmic similarities shared by both American ethnic music and the Bohemian-Slavic folk tradition. This difference of opinion really matters little in light of the "American" Quartet's enormous popularity and universal appeal.

This particular arrangement for saxophone quartet was completed by Claude Voirpy in 1993. Saxophonists have not settled on a standard arrangement for the work. While the Voirpy version you will hear today is widely published and played by university musicians due to its quality and inclusion in the Henri Lemoine catalog in Paris, other arrangements exist. Contributors such as Frederick Hemke (of Northwestern emeritus status) and more recently Colin Eng in 2022 offer acceptable alternatives. Some saxophone quartets create their own in-house arrangements to satisfy their needs.

Why the arrangement variance? The main reason concerns the tonality of F, which lies awkwardly on the saxophone for this particular work as the high notes push the soprano and baritone parts into the altissimo register of the instrument. While not impossible, the string lines in that register strain the performer to play figures that would otherwise lie smoothly on the saxophone. Sensitive to this, Voirpy created an arrangement moving the entire work down a whole step from F to Eb. While perhaps unsatisfying to purists (especially those with perfect pitch), the result allows the saxophonist to recreate Dvorak's work using the lighter approach endemic to string quartet performance.

Program notes by Melvin Berger and Jacob Hallman

MID-WEEK RECITALS

2025-26 Schedule

- Sept 10 **Philip Vaiman**, violin
- Oct 8 **Classical Gass**, cello, guitar, and bass
- Nov 12 **Laurent Jochum**, organ
- Dec 10 **Meagan Martin**, mezzo soprano
- Jan 14 **Noah Sonderling**, piano
- Feb 11 **Gold Line Saxophone Quartet**
- Mar 11 **Sangam: Paul Livingstone**, sitar; **Peter Jacobson**, cello
- Apr 8 **Trio Pacifico**, flute, guitar and cello
- May 13 **Esther Yune, Susan Kim-Pedroza**, 4-hand piano



Presented by Dr. James E. Smith, First UMC Music Director, the Mid-Week Recital series is held online on the second Wednesdays of the month in the Fall and Spring. Recitals begin promptly at **12:10 p.m. online** then are available to view anytime afterwards.

HOW TO WATCH:

- Website: www.santamonicaumc.org/livestream
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