



Gerald Carpenter: Santa Barbara Music Club Opens New Season on Saturday

The first of its free concerts will feature works by Gershwin, Poulenc and Brahms

By Gerald Carpenter, Noozhawk Contributing Writer | Published on 10.21.2011

That exemplary music provider, the [Santa Barbara Music Club](#), opens its 2011-12 season of free concerts at 3 p.m. Saturday in its venerable venue, the Faulkner Gallery of the downtown branch of the [Santa Barbara Public Library](#), 40 E. Anapamu St.

The program contains three selections: *Three Preludes for Piano* by [George Gershwin](#), played by Robert Else; [François Poulenc's](#) *Sonata for Oboe and Piano, Opus 185*, performed by “Dolci” (Ted Rust on oboe and Viva Knight on piano); and [Johannes Brahms' Piano Sonata No. 3 in F-Minor, Opus 5](#), performed by Christopher Davis.

When Gershwin died, the great American novelist [John O'Hara](#) said, “George Gershwin died on July 11, 1937, but I don't have to believe it if I don't want to.” At the [Hollywood Bowl](#) memorial concert for the composer (Sept. 8, 1937), no less a musician than [Otto Klemperer](#) conducted his own orchestration of the second of Gershwin's *Three Piano Preludes*.

It is, I think, impossible to overestimate the importance of Gershwin to American music. What we sometimes erroneously identify as “jazz” — but which actually stands for a broad range of African-American music forms — was brought by Gershwin into the mainstream of our music and it has been there, a source of vitality and renewal, ever since. The *Three Preludes* are way too short. They are like haikus, each a perfect and precise statement of a single idea.

Gershwin went to Paris in the 1920s. He tried to study with [Nadia Boulanger](#) or [Maurice Ravel](#), but they rejected his application on the (stated) grounds that it would spoil his gifts to impose classical theories upon them. In the event, he had more influence on the French musicians of that era than they had on him.

Gershwin probably met Poulenc when he was in Paris, but Poulenc's more significant Parisian encounter was with **Sergei Prokofiev**, who was then living there as an exile from the Soviet Union. Poulenc and Prokofiev began a friendship then, which lasted until the latter's death — indeed, after, since the *Oboe Sonata*, written in 1962, was dedicated to Prokofiev, and the last movement, which is claimed by oboists to be the last thing Poulenc completed before his own death, is an exquisite lament for his dead friend. (Prokofiev's own *Flute Sonata*, of 1943, sounds like it was written by Poulenc.)

Brahms wrote his *F-Minor Sonata* in 1853 and dedicated it to Countess Ida von Hohenenthal of Leipzig. He was 20, and of his first five opus numbers, three are piano sonatas. Yet, this was his last essay in the form, also, his last work to be submitted to **Robert Schumann** for review before publication. His apprenticeship was over.

The piano was Brahms' instrument — his first job as a professional musician, age 15, was playing piano in a whorehouse — and he poured into this last sonata what amounts to a pianist's last will and testament. In five movements, and lasting about 40 minutes, it is in every way a gigantic work. Davis shows a lot of moxie taking it on.