

# Winds in the chamber, plus a returning pianist voice

CAMERATA PACIFICA'S PROGRAM FOCUSES ON WIND PLAYERS BUT ALSO FEATURES ACCOMPLISHED PIANIST MOLLY MORKOSKI, REMEMBERED FOR HER SMASHING LOCAL PERFORMANCE WITH DAWN UPSHAW SEVERAL YEARS AGO

By Josef Woodard,  
News-Press Correspondent



## Camerata Pacifica

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday

**Where:** Hahn Hall, Music Academy of the West,  
1070 Fairway Rd.

**Cost:** \$30-\$56

**Information:** 884-8410, cameratapacifica.org

**A**s the 2015-16 Camerata Pacifica concert season marches forward, tonight at Hahn Hall, the acclaimed group's impressive international roster of guest musicians returns to the scene of the chamber music. With tonight's program, the focus is largely about winds — and visits by English oboe virtuoso Nicholas Daniel and Spanish clarinetist Jose Franch-Ballester, along with regular violist Richard O'Neill.

But the newcomer to the ranks is the New York-based pianist Molly Morkoski, who will perform Bach's G Minor Sonata for Oboe and Piano, and a work by obscure French composer Edouard Destenay, from an evening's menu also including Mozart and Henri Vieuxtemps.

Ms. Morkoski will be debuting with this group, but is fondly remembered for her first Santa Barbara visit, appearing as pianist for soprano Dawn Upshaw, at the Lobero Theatre in 2007 (the same year Ms. Morkoski made her Carnegie Hall debut). On that fateful night at the Lobero, because the soprano was under the weather (and just having been through treatments for breast cancer), the pianist was given an extra solo spotlight, beautifully filled with her memorable reading of "The Alcotts," from Charles Ives' challenging "The Concord Sonata." We connected with Ms. Morkoski while in Santa Barbara, rehearsing her role in a group she may add to her long list of musical allies.

**News-Press:** This will be your debut with Camerata Pacifica, which has become quite a bold contender in the chamber music scene on the West coast. How was that link established?

**Molly Morkoski:** I am supremely fortunate to have a friendship with the

composer John Harbison, who is a favorite of Adrian Spence, the artistic director and flutist of the group. On a trip last season, I think John mentioned and recommended me to Adrian. (Violist) Richard O'Neill, (harpist) Bridget Kibbey and I have been long time colleagues in New York and so they also both encouraged an invitation.

So, happily, Adrian came to New York last winter and we met and he extended an invitation to come out this November and again in March this season. I am having an absolutely fabulous time putting these works together with the superstar roster of chamber musicians he has assembled.

**NP:** You will be playing Bach's sonata for oboe and piano with the Camerata Pacifica. I know you have done some serious work with the "Goldberg Variations." Are you among the ranks of musicians who hold Bach in a worshipful way?

**MM:** I most definitely am. I don't know many, if any, musicians who feel differently. Bach is genius. There is certainly something spiritual about his music, regardless of personal beliefs. It is universal. From the most complex multi-voiced works, to the elegance and simplicity of two voices slowly moving in counterpoint, the beauty and profundity of his music is unparalleled in my mind.

When I play Bach, I feel there is balance in the world. And you can return to works of his you know year after year, and you can still find a new treasure. Its depths are infinite.

**NP:** When you performed with a slightly under-the-weather Dawn Upshaw at the Lobero, in 2007, you were granted a silver lining sort of spotlight, going solo on Ives' "Concord Sonata." Do you remember that night, and is Dawn one of those artists who you feel a particular simpatico with?

**MM:** I certainly do remember that night, and that tour with Dawn. Dawn is a remarkable artist and person. That she invited me to perform on these first concerts, after being away from performing for a time due to her illness, was very special for me. As musicians, we are privileged to bring an art that offers so much life and healing to all who listen, whether as performer or audience member. And those concerts were evidence of that healing, for sure.

And Dawn has a deep love, admiration and friendship with my former teacher and mentor, Gilbert Kalish, and I share



Courtesy photo

**Molly Morkoski, making her Camerata Pacifica debut, will perform Bach's G Minor Sonata for Oboe and Piano and other works.**

the same feelings. In fact, I first met Dawn in Paris when I was living there and she and Gil came to perform. So I have known her for quite some time, and have the highest regard for her personally and professionally.

I remember that concert and always her superb musicianship with great fondness, and I also remember well my introduction to Santa Barbara during that trip. It is gorgeous here.

**NP:** You have maintained a strong connection to contemporary and modernist music — and were Ensemble Intercontemporain, among many other adventuresome groups and composers. Was that always a priority for you, to dive into the music of our time, and the last century, to the point where it's something of a mission?

**MM:** During my masters degree at Indiana University I caught "new music fever" and I have never lost it. It is important that we continue commissioning

new works as has been done for centuries. There have always been performers collaborating with composers and commissioners for new music — some of it just happens to be old now. And, a century from now, everything now new will be old.

Yes, I guess it's a mission, but it is also a privilege and a joy. I have held manuscripts in my hands and played through them at the piano, scores that no one else has heard or seen before until the time of performance. That is incredibly exciting to me. I have several such manuscripts on my piano desk now and it makes me very happy to think that these composers trusted me to give me something so personal.

I feel a great and proud responsibility to their music. I hope I bring life in just the ways that they might have imagined and,

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David Bazemore photos

Clarinetist Jose-Franch Ballester. Above, violist Richard O'Neill

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best case scenario, maybe something even more than.

NP: On that subject, your latest album is "Compadrazgo," with music of Gabriela Lena Frank. Is she one of the composers whose work resonates with you, and that you feel a desire to get out into the world?

MM: Gabriela Lena Frank is a dear, dear friend and a wonderful composer. We first met when we were paired together for a Carnegie Hall Composer/Performer Workshop. She is a fine pianist, and so her writing quickly resonated with me.

Her music, among many things, is typically evocative of Peruvian instruments and folk song, so she writes always aiming to recreate that sound world and colorful atmosphere using western instruments. She recently had a premiere at Carnegie Hall of her new piano concerto with string orchestra and it is a great work. I sat proudly and watched my friend premiere her own concerto. Her music is already out into the world, but I am honored to be among those artists championing her compositions.

NP: Chamber music has been a world you are deeply involved in. What attributes in that medium appeal to you?

MM: My main answer is so clear in my mind: People. I love working on music with people. The camaraderie that we enjoy while we work on chamber music is, in my mind, enviable. Of course, the repertoire is vast, beautiful, and exciting for piano, so that is also extremely appealing as there is always another work to encounter, especially when you factor in newly written works.

The process of rehearsals is usually fun and there can be lots of laughter and there can also be moments of extreme sharing, sincerity and depth. The more time you spend together, playing or otherwise, the more trust you develop and that only makes the music-making that much richer. Adrian ensures ample time for rehearsals prior to the concerts Camerata gives and I have enjoyed the time spent with him, Nick, Jose, and Richard this week immensely.



SUNDAY!

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC LIVE!

The High Frontier: Exploring the Forest Canopy

Mark Moffett, Ecologist and Photographer

SUN, NOV 22 / 3 PM / UCSB CAMPBELL HALL \$25 / \$15 UCSB students and youth (18 & under)

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National Geographic Live series sponsored by Lynda Weinman & Bruce Heavin Sheila & Michael Bonsignore

photo: Mark Moffett (Mantidus)

SUNDAY!

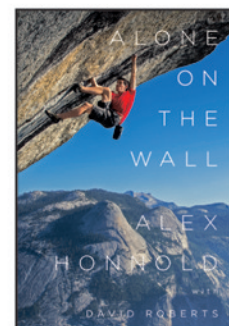


An Evening with Alex Honnold Alone on the Wall

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