COLLEGE OF MUSIC

University of North Texas College of Music

Ensemble Concert | Wednesday, November 19, 2025 | 7:30 p.m.
Margot and Bill Winspear Hall - Murchison Performing Arts Center

Symphony Orchestra and Concert Orchestra

Clay Couturiaux, conductor and student conductors

Symphony Orchestra

Overture "The Hebrides," Op. 26 (1830, rev. 1832) .....Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Nathan Howard, conductor

from Symphony No. 3, Op. 90 (1883) ..... Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

III. Poco allegretto

Jiwoo Seo, conductor

Symphony No. 39 in E-flat Major, K. 543 (1788).....Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1792)

I. Adagio – Allegro

Patricio Gutiérrez, conductor

II. Andante con moto

Alexandra Kovatch, conductor

III. Menuetto – Trio

Mingtong Xie, conductor

IV. Finale: Allegro

Ella Castro, conductor

-INTERMISSION-

Program one hundred sixty-six of the 2025–2026 season
Photography and videography are prohibited

Concert Orchestra

Overture to *Rosamunde*, D. 644 (1820) ..... Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)

Chelsea (Qiuxian) Lu, conductor

Finlandia, Op. 26 (1899, rev. 1900) ..... Jean Sibelius
(1865–1957)

Dax Anthony Stokes, conductor

Tod und Verklärung
(Death and Transfiguration), Op. 24 (1889) ..... Richard Strauss
(1864–1949)

Clay Couturiaux, conductor

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Program Notes

by Sarah Addison, doctoral teaching assistant in music history, supervised by
Brian Anderson, Senior Lecturer of Music History Pedagogy and
Bernardo Illari, Associate Professor of Music History and Musicology Area Coordinator

Overture "The Hebrides," Op. 26 (1830, rev. 1832) | Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Few pieces so perfectly capture the place that inspired them as Felix Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture*. The twenty-year-old composer traveled to Scotland in 1829 with his friend Karl Klingemann, sketching landscapes and soaking in the wild coastal scenery. On August 7, he wrote to his sister Fanny from Tobermory on the Isle of Mull, enclosing the opening bars of a new work with the remark: "In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, I send you the following, which came into my head there."

The next day, Mendelssohn and Klingemann rowed to the island of Staffa to see Fingal's Cave, a vast sea cavern carved from black basalt columns, whose arched roof amplifies the roar of the waves. Although the music had already begun to take shape before he reached the cave itself, the visit confirmed his vision. Klingemann later joked that Mendelssohn "got along better with the sea as an artist than as a human being with a stomach," as the composer was famously seasick during the trip.

The piece underwent several names before settling into its confusing dual identity. Mendelssohn first called it *Die einsame Insel* (*The Lonely Isle*), later changing it to *Die Hebriden* (*The Hebrides*). A publisher then issued the score under the title *Fingal's Cave,* which became equally popular. Today, both *The Hebrides* and *Fingal's Cave* are used interchangeably.

Like much of Mendelssohn's music, the overture was subject to painstaking revision. He completed the first draft in December 1830, but he was dissatisfied with the central section. Writing to his sister Fanny in 1832, he complained: "The middle part, forte in D major, is very stupid, and savors more of counterpoint than of oil, seagulls, and dead fish." The revision premiered in London in May 1832, and Mendelssohn continued to polish the score until its publication in 1833. Despite his misgivings, composers and contemporaries recognized its genius. Brahms later confessed, "I would gladly give all I have written to have composed something like the Hebrides Overture."

Although labelled an overture, *The Hebrides* stands as a self-contained tone poem, one of the earliest examples of orchestral landscape painting. Its opening bars, first sent to Fanny, contain most of the thematic material. Low strings and winds present a dark, undulating figure that suggests the swell of the sea. Above this, waves of sixteenth note figures ebb and flow, establishing a restless marine atmosphere. The brass soon adds surging crescendos, like waves crashing against the rocks, as the strings rise in sweeping arcs that seem to chart the motion of the tide.

The overture loosely follows sonata form, with an exposition, development, and recapitulation, but its effect is one of continuous transformation. The first theme—initially given to violas, cellos, and bassoons—conveys both grandeur and loneliness, as though evoking the immense space of the cavern. A second, more lyrical theme rises in the major mode, often described as the sound of rolling waves. This contrast between turbulent seas and moments of calm gives the piece its drama.

In the development, Mendelssohn intensifies the storm. Fragments of the opening figure are tossed from section to section, overlapping counterpoint until the texture becomes churning and chaotic. Stormy climaxes swell and recede, much like the unpredictable Hebridean weather. At one point, the material condenses into a tempestuous passage before yielding to a serene clarinet solo that restates the second theme, now gentle and introspective. This calm is fleeting. The closing rush drives forward with renewed urgency, until the music suddenly dissipates into silence, vanishing like the horizon itself.

III. Poco allegretto, from Symphony No. 3, Op. 90 (1883) | Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Johannes Brahms completed his Third Symphony in 1883 at the age of fifty. From the moment of its premiere, the symphony was admired not only for its craft but also for its unusual design. Clara Schumann wrote to him: "What a work! What a poem! What a harmonious mood pervades the whole! All the movements seem to be of one piece, one beat of the heart, each one a jewel." Her praise points to one of the symphony's most striking qualities: its cohesion. Throughout, Brahms anchors the music with the motto F–A♭–F, a cryptic signature thought to represent his personal maxim, *frei aber froh* ("free but happy"). These three pitches, with their built-in tension between A and A♭, permeate the symphony and serve as the seed of its musical language.

The third movement is the most famous portion of the symphony, and many listeners may already know its theme without realizing it. The haunting melody has appeared in films, television, and popular music. Serge Gainsbourg adapted it for *Baby Alone in Babylone* (1983), Carlos Santana wove it into *Love of My Life* with Dave Matthews (1999), and it has surfaced in everything from Robert Palmer's album *Pride* to the soundtrack of *Civilization IV*. Yet however widely it has traveled, its expressive power remains most striking in Brahms's original version.

Instead of the scherzo one might expect in the third movement of a Romantic symphony, Brahms offers something altogether different: a poised intermezzo marked *Poco allegretto*. The melody itself grows out of the symphony's unifying three-note motto, F–A♭–F, now softened into a more lyrical guise. This moderate tempo is deliberately ambiguous, neither fast nor slow, and the music inhabits a lyrical, autumnal world. The melody can be heard as a lyrical transformation of the F–A♭–F motto, now C-D-E♭, as the heart of a minor, long-breathed song.

The movement begins with the cellos, supported by a hushed accompaniment that rustles gently like leaves in the wind. This understated opening, gives the melody an in-between quality that is tender yet tinged with sadness. The theme unfolds in long phrases that breathe with a natural, songlike cadence. Brahms then repeats it in a succession of different orchestrations, as though holding the same thought up to the light from multiple angles. The violins take up the melody from the cellos, soaring above the strings with greater urgency. Next, the woodwinds enter, with oboe, clarinet, and horn sharing the tune in delicate interplay. Later, the French horn sings it as a solo voice, followed by the oboe, and finally the violins and cellos together. Remarkably, Brahms presents the theme six times in total, always the same in outline but transformed by changing instrumental color.

Between these statements, Brahms introduces contrasting material, including a yearning three-note figure that again recalls the motto. Here the pitches contract and expand, tugging between lyricism and passion, just as the motto itself hovers between major and minor. The push and pull gives the music a sense of suppressed intensity, of deep feeling under a controlled surface. The orchestration is as crucial as the melody itself. With the trumpets and timpani silent, the sound world is intimate, favoring the warmth of strings and winds. Brahms's choice of instruments for each return of the theme gives the movement a rich variety of tone colors while maintaining its reflective atmosphere. The horn solo has become iconic with its mellow voice perfectly suited to the movement's bittersweet lyricism.

After so many varied colors and subtle shifts, the music withdraws rather than concludes, fading with the same understated grace that has carried it throughout. The effect is one of quiet resignation, as though the melody simply exhales and let's go. It is this gentle, unforced ending, at once haunting and serene.

Symphony No. 39 in E-flat Major, K. 543 (1788) | Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1792)

The summer of 1788 was one of the most difficult periods of Mozart's life; however, Mozart was still able to compose his final three symphonies—Nos. 39, 40, and 41—in the span of just six weeks. His letters from that time reveal financial strain and personal grief, including the death of his infant daughter, and yet the music he produced radiates invention and vitality. *Symphony No. 39* was the first of the trilogy. Although scholars cannot be certain when, or even if, the symphony was performed during his lifetime, its character reveals a composer working at the height of his symphonic imagination

Scored for flute, pairs of clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets, timpani, and strings, the symphony is unusual in Mozart's mature output for its omission of oboes, which gives the clarinets a special prominence. The work begins with a solemn slow introduction, a rarity in his symphonies. These choices immediately signal a bold, distinctive voice, one that blends grandeur with intimacy.

The symphony opens with a majestic *Adagio*, full of dotted rhythms and brass fanfares that evoke the ceremonial weight of a French overture. Mozart quickly unsettles the grandeur with hushed, chromatic passages that hint at mystery, even foreboding. The *Allegro* that follows bursts forth in lively contrast. The main theme unfolds in buoyant singing phrases carried by the violins and echoed by winds. Mozart's second theme group contains multiple lyrical ideas, including a lilting walking theme. The interplay between strings and winds creates a texture of chamber-like transparency within orchestra. Though cast in sonata form, the development is remarkably concise. This construction heightens the impact of the recapitulation when the radiant opening theme returns.

The slow movement in A-flat major offers one of Mozart's most tender inspirations. The strings introduce a gentle, cantabile theme that unfolds with calm restraint. Moments of agitation soon intrude, particularly in the passionate episodes in F minor, where dotted rhythms disturb the otherwise tranquil flow. Even more startling is a digression into B minor, a rare key for Mozart that is associated with his most somber music. These sudden shadows lend the movement a depth of feeling that belies its graceful surface. Mozart colors the texture throughout by passing material between strings and winds, especially the clarinets whose mellow voices enrich the sonority. The result is music that shimmers between serenity and unease, balancing Classical elegance with Romantic expressiveness.

The *Menuetto* restores the symphony's vigor with a dance in E-flat. Its sturdy rhythm and assertive orchestration make it one of Mozart's most imposing minuets, more symphonic in weight than courtly in style. The contrasting trio section turns rustic and playful, evoking the Austrian ländler, a folk dance related to the waltz. The clarinets come to the foreground, one spinning out a simple tune while the other decorates it with bubbling arpeggios in the chalumeau (low, deep, and mellow) register, with the flute providing gentle echoes. The effect is a charming reminder of Mozart's gift for transforming popular idioms.

The finale is a whirlwind of energy that is propelled by a single idea: a rapid, scale-like figure that scurries upward and downward almost without pause. Mozart builds a movement of remarkable ingenuity from this seemingly modest material. The theme fragments, overlaps, and reappears in unexpected keys, producing a game of tension and release that sustains the movement's sense of drama. Though essentially monothematic, the movement never feels repetitive thanks to its rhythmic drive and harmonic variety. Like Haydn, Mozart toys with silence, sudden shifts, and witty surprises. The rushing sixteenth notes rarely let up, creating a perpetual-motion effect that carries the symphony to its exuberant close.

Overture to *Rosamunde*, D. 644 (1820) | Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

In December 1823, the Viennese poet Helmina von Chézy presented her play *Rosamunde, Princess of Cyprus* at the Theater an der Wien. Chézy was already notorious in the city for her disastrous libretto to Carl Maria von Weber's *Euryanthe*, and *Rosamunde* fared little better. Its improbable story that was full of disguises, shipwrecks, poisonings, and sudden revelations was widely ridiculed. After just two performances, the drama was dropped from the stage.

The one aspect of the production that met with acclaim was Schubert's incidental music. Written in haste, with parts copied only days before the premiere, it included choruses, entr'actes, and ballet numbers that were praised for their freshness and imagination. For Schubert, however, there was no time to prepare a new overture in addition to the other music for the piece: pressed by deadlines, he borrowed an Overture for *Rosamunde* he had already written for his grand but unperformed opera *Alfonso und Estrella*. The recycled material was particularly well received; an eyewitness reported that the audience demanded encores of both the Overture (D. 732) and the Shepherds' Chorus.

The history of this overture grew more complicated after Schubert's death. When the incidental music was first published in 1891, it was paired not with the *Alfonso und Estrella* (D. 732) overture, which had actually opened the play in 1823, but with another overture Schubert had composed for a different melodrama, *The Magic Harp* (D. 644). For more than a century, this "Magic Harp" overture has circulated under the title *Rosamunde*, adding a layer of confusion to what listeners think they are hearing. Both overtures share Schubert's unmistakable melodic gift and orchestral charm, and in practice, either may introduce the suite of incidental music.

The overture heard today (adapted from *The Magic Harp*) unfolds in a broad sonata design. Its slow introduction immediately establishes a sense of grandeur, with stern chords and dark sonorities suggesting the kind of Gothic drama Viennese audiences expected. The strings speak in hushed tones, interrupted by bold brass and timpani, creating an atmosphere of suspense. When the tempo suddenly quickens, the effect is like a curtain rising: the music bursts into light with restless strings scurrying in perpetual motion, punctuated by bright fanfares in the winds.

The first theme is energetic and rhythmically insistent, propelled forward by rapid violin figures. Schubert contrasts this with a second theme of lyrical beauty, sung by the woodwinds over a gentle accompaniment. This balance between drive and songfulness is a hallmark of his orchestral style: the forward surge of Italianate opera overtures tempered by the melodic warmth of his lieder.

Schubert's orchestration also plays a vital role in shaping the contrast between the overture's driving first theme and the more lyrical secondary theme. He often assigns melodies to the clarinet or oboe, giving them a human, almost vocal quality, and he uses the strings provide both brilliance and urgency underneath. Sudden shifts in dynamics, from hushed pianissimo to blazing tutti, keep the listener off balance, while carefully timed silences heighten the drama.

As the development unfolds, fragments of the opening theme tumble through different keys, building tension before the triumphant recapitulation. Here the themes return in full force, now energized by Schubert's harmonic restlessness. The overture closes with a jubilant coda, where vigorous rhythms and bright orchestral colors carry the music forward in an unstoppable rush of theatrical energy.

Finlandia, Op. 26 (1899, rev. 1900) | Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

At the turn of the twentieth century, Finland was still under the rule of Tsarist Russia. For most of the nineteenth century, the territory had enjoyed a measure of autonomy as a Grand Duchy, but this balance was upended when Tsar Nicholas II initiated harsh "Russification" policies in 1899. The Russian authorities censored the Finnish government, newspapers shut down, and public institutions brought under tighter Russian control. In response, Finnish intellectuals organized a series of events to raise funds for unemployed journalists and to reaffirm cultural identity. Ostensibly staged as "Press Celebrations," these evenings were in reality patriotic demonstrations of Finnish pride.

Jean Sibelius, already regarded as the leading composer of Finland's nationalist movement, was commissioned to provide music for a set of *tableaux vivants,* or staged historical scenes tracing Finnish history. His finale, originally titled *Finland Awakens*, accompanied a tableau that celebrated the nation's cultural rebirth in the nineteenth century. Audiences understood the subtext immediately: this was not just a theatrical pageant but a thinly veiled call for resistance and unity. To circumvent Russian censorship, the score appeared under deliberately bland names such as *Impromptu* or *Happy Feelings at the Awakening of Finnish Spring*. When Sibelius revised and published the piece as *Finlandia* in 1900, it quickly transcended its local protest origins and became an international symbol of Finnish national spirit.

Sibelius himself described the work in stirring terms: "We fought 600 years for our freedom, and I am part of the generation which achieved it. *Finlandia* is the story of this fight. It is the song of our battle, our hymn of victory." While he later admitted to being puzzled by the piece's popularity, dismissing it as "insignificant compared with my other works," audiences embraced it from the beginning.

Finlandia unfolds in a single continuous span of about eight minutes. The work is guided by the national story it aims to tell and unfolds in an organic progression. The music does not follow a strict sonata form, though it feints at it with contrasting themes and a development-like section. Instead, Sibelius shapes it according to the needs of its narrative: from darkness into light, from oppression into freedom.

The work opens with foreboding brass and timpani snarling in dark chords that evoke both menace and resistance. These growling gestures give way to somber chorales in the low winds and strings, suggesting a nation bowed but unbroken. Already in the first measures Sibelius establishes a mood of tension and despair, the first step in a journey that will later give voice to resilience and quiet defiance.

The Allegro moderato that follows surges forward with martial energy. Clipped brass, insistent string figures, and propulsive rhythms create a sense of unrest, as if sounding a call of "Finland, Awake!" Here the music becomes openly combative, filled with resolve and drive. A particularly vivid feature is a five-note ostinato in the bassoons, tuba, and low strings. In the original "Press Celebration" performance of 1899, this would have evoked the churning of a locomotive, the engine of Finnish historical progress, pushing the nation inexorably toward its future.

At the height of this turbulence, the music suddenly falls away. Out of the quiet that follows, the famous *Finlandia Hymn* enters. At first tentative in the woodwinds, then taken up by the strings, it expands into broad, noble phrases that contrast strikingly with the struggle that precedes it. Though often mistaken for a folk melody, the tune is entirely Sibelius' own, yet it has the character of something timeless. Its serenity and warmth suggest hope, solidarity, and faith in a brighter future.

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Sibelius does not leave the hymn as a solitary interlude. After the hymns first appearance, the martial figures return, but they are no longer quite the same. The music continues to convey a sense of struggle but now the figures are transformed, as if energized by the hymn's presence. The piece drives toward a triumphant close: the ostinato engine propels the music forward once again, and the hymn resounds in its fullest, most emphatic statement, concluding with a cadence that feels almost like a collective "Amen."

Tod und Verklärung (Death and Transfiguration), Op. 24 (1889) | Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

In the late 1880s, a 25-year-old Richard Strauss was on the cusp of international fame. Already celebrated for his fiery tone poem *Don Juan*, he was hailed as one of the boldest new voices in German music and the heir apparent to Wagner and Liszt. Strauss had grown up in Munich under the watchful eye of his father, Franz, the city's leading horn player, who resisted exposing his son to Wagner's operas until adolescence. But once young Strauss discovered *Tristan und Isolde* for himself, he embraced the expressive possibilities of music as drama, writing tone poems that blurred the lines between symphony and opera.

It was in this spirit that he composed *Tod und Verklärung* (*Death and Transfiguration*) from 1888–89. The piece is cast as a tone poem, a single movement orchestral work that tells a story without words. Strauss explained in a letter that he wished to portray "the dying hours of a man who had striven toward the highest idealistic aims, perhaps indeed those of an artist." The work became one of his most ambitious early essays in musical storytelling. The subject death, not as an end but as a radiant transformation remained close to Strauss's imagination for the rest of his life. Indeed, on his own deathbed in 1949, Strauss remarked to his daughter-in-law: "It's a funny thing, Alice, dying is just the way I composed it in *Tod und Verklärung*."

Strauss believed the piece could only be fully understood if the audience knew the scenario. At the premiere in 1890, printed programs included a poetic summary by his friend Alexander Ritter, which outlined four connected sections. The piece depicts a universal journey into a single arc: the frailty of the body, the struggle against mortality, the memories of a life lived, and the hope of something beyond. The music is vivid and at times overwhelming, but its clarity of narrative offers listeners a way in. Even if one does not follow every theme, the contrasts are unmistakable: whispers against storms, memories against battles, pain giving way to radiance.

The opening *Largo* (The sick man, near death) sets the scene with extraordinary vividness. The orchestra seems to breathe irregularly: soft string figures and the muffled pulse of timpani suggest a faltering heartbeat or the ticking of a clock in a dim sickroom. Flute and oboe solos float above these halting rhythms like friendly dreams, briefly easing the man's suffering.

This fragile calm is soon shattered by the *Allegro molto agitato* (The battle between life and death offers no respite to the man), in which the music convulses in spasms of pain. Brass and strings clash violently, feverish and restless, depicting the agonies of the deathbed and the body fighting against its own decline. Within this storm, however, a bold theme emerges in the brass, a glimpse of the transfiguration to come.

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As the struggle recedes, Strauss moves into the *Meno mosso* (The dying man's life passes before him), a section that turns inward as the man drifts into reverie. His past life passes before him in sound. Childhood is evoked with gentle woodwind phrases, simple and innocent. Youth bursts forth in fanfare-like themes for horns and winds, brimming with vigor and aspiration. The violins usher in a sweeping, passionate love scene, one of those unmistakably Straussian passages where melody surges with both ardor and nostalgia. Yet even here, suffering intrudes. The music of love is interrupted by dissonance and shadow, reminding us that pain is never far away. Strauss layers these contrasting emotions until they become almost unbearable, the beauty of memory bound together with the inevitability of loss.

At last, the *Moderato* (The sought-after transfiguration) section brings release. The transfiguration theme, heard only in fragments before, now comes into focus. It grows from a tentative brass chorale into a radiant hymn, enriched by the shimmer of harps and luminous orchestral color. Strauss described this as the moment when the man perceives "the fruit of his life's path, the ideal which he has sought to realize, but which he has not been able to complete." But to reach this vision, he must relinquish life itself. The heartbeat motive falters, the timpani strike like a final blow, and the music seems to slip away with the stroke of the gong as the soul departs the body.

What follows is not despair but transfiguration. The theme blossoms one last time, climbing higher and higher as though borne upward into light. After terrors and struggles, after memories both tender and searing, the music opens into a realm of serenity and radiant peace. The work closes in a vision of transcendence that feels deeply personal and universally human.

Biographies

Ella Castro is a Filipino soprano, conductor, and composer. A jack of many trades, Ella has a stellar career in singing and teaching, leading choirs and orchestras, and composing and arranging musicals and choral works. Under the guidance of her voice professor Dr. Terrie Sanders, she won numerous accolades in her singing career. She also taught her own voice studio in Northwestern State University (NSU) School of Creative and Performing Arts. She was also the interim director of NSU Men's Chorus for almost two years. As a chorister, Ella had traveled to different parts of the world (Asia, Europe, and USA) joining local and international choral competitions and concert tours, including being a member of the World Youth Choir in 2025, touring Catalunya and France. She made her orchestral debut conducting the Natchitoches Northwestern Symphony Orchestra in 2022. She was the chorusmaster and assistant conductor of Spotlight on Opera 2023's productions of Puccini's "Suor Angelica", and "Madama Butterfly" held in Shreveport, Louisiana under the guidance of Dr. William Reber and Ms. Kristin Roach. Back in the Philippines, she was the resident musical director and composer of Teatro Kalsayeño, Caloocan City Science High School's theatre group from 2014 to 2020, composing various musicals for and with them. Currently, she is the personnel manager of University of North Texas - Orchestral Studies where she is working on her doctorate degree in orchestral conducting under Maestro David Itkin. As a graduate student conductor, she conducts and assists the UNT Symphony Orchestra and Concert Orchestra. She was also appointed as the assistant conductor of Lewisville Lake Symphony for the 2025-2026 season.

Described by the Chilean Newspaper, El Centro, as "a bright young talent," Chilean cellist and conductor **Patricio Gutiérrez** has performed in Canada, United States, Peru, Argentina, and Chile. A dedicated cello instructor, Gutiérrez has taught in several youth orchestras in Maule and Bio-bio regions in Chile between 2009-15, as well as in the DFW area from 2018. Patricio is also an active arranger, organizing pieces for cello duets, trios, quartets, and string ensembles. Born into a non-musical family in Santiago, Chile, Gutiérrez began studying classical guitar at the age of eight and switched to cello at the age of ten. Patricio graduated from Universidad de Talca in 2012 under the guidance of Alejandro Tagle. In 2013 Patricio was the recipient of the Universia Scholarship of Santander Bank in Chile, which allowed him to spend one semester as an exchange student at University of Connecticut, taking cello lessons with the cellist of the Penderecki Quartet, Katie Schlaikjer. In 2018, Patricio graduated from The Glenn Gould School of the Royal Conservatory in Toronto where he finished his Artist Diploma, working with both cello teachers Desmond Hoebig and Andrés Díaz. In 2020, Patricio graduated from his MM in cello performance under the guidance of Andrés Díaz at SMU. In 2022, Patricio graduated from his MM in orchestral conducting under the guidance of Dr. Paul Phillips at SMU. In 2024, Patricio was appointed assistant conductor of Lewisville Lake Symphony. Currently, Patricio is pursuing his Doctoral studies at the University of North Texas under David Itkin.

Nathan Howard is a multi-instrumentalist and conductor pursuing a Doctorate at the University of North Texas under Maestro David Itkin. Following graduate studies at Southern Methodist University, he served as resident conductor of the Meadows Symphony Orchestra. Nathan also studied at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, where he recorded with the New Music Ensemble. As an ensemble leader, he was Music Director for The Camp-of-the-Woods jazz band and conducted the Lviv National Philharmonic, Meadows Symphony Orchestra and Samford University Orchestra. His previous conducting teachers include Paul C. Phillips, Jack Delaney, and Michelle Merrill.

Alexandra Kovatch is a dedicated teacher, harpist, and orchestral conductor. She began her musical journey as a harpist, earning a Bachelor of Music degree in harp performance from Washburn University (2017). Alexandra has performed with orchestras across Kansas, Missouri, and Colorado. Notably, she participated in a performance at the American Harp Society National Conference in Atlanta (2016) and is a faculty member at the Elyrica Summer Harp Program in Connecticut (2021, 2023, and 2024). Alexandra began conducting during her undergraduate studies and continued to pursue this passion at Missouri State University under the guidance of Dr. Christopher Kelts. She earned her Master of Music degree in Orchestral Conducting from Missouri State University in 2020. During the pandemic, she began teaching at Drury University (Springfield, Missouri), where she taught from 2020 to 2023, directing the orchestra and teaching various music courses. She also served as the Orchestra Director for the Ozark Festival Orchestra (Monett, Missouri). As a guest conductor, Alexandra has conducted the Kansas City Civic Orchestra (2023) and the Allen Philharmonic Orchestra (2024) in two performances of The Nutcracker alongside the Allen Civic Ballet. Currently, Alexandra is pursuing a Doctorate of Musical Arts in Orchestral Conducting at the University of North Texas. She is studying with Professor David Itkin in the graduate orchestral conducting studio, studying harp with Dr. Jaymee Haefner, and serving as the Assistant Conductor to the Opera Program while studying under Dr. Stephanie Rhodes Russell.

Jiwoo Seo is currently pursuing a master's degree in Orchestral Conducting at the University of North Texas under Professor David Itkin, where she also studies harpsichord with Professor Malcolm Matthews and performs with the Baroque Orchestra. She earned her bachelor's degree in Choral Conducting from the Korea National University of Arts. During her undergraduate years, she conducted premieres of new works by students at several universities. She also founded Reason Choir, bringing together young musicians. She previously studied violin and composition during her secondary education.

Mingtong Xie is a conductor. He enrolled in the conducting program at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music and held the position of Assistant Conductor for the Xinghai Symphony Orchestra in 2015. In 2019, he conducted the premiere of The Years of Splendor, a large-scale musical theatre production, at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music's Lang Lang Concert Hall. Later that year, he was admitted to the Master of Conducting program at the Central Conservatory of Music, studying under Professor Sha Liu, Principal Conductor of the China National Traditional Orchestra, and Professor Lin Chen, Director of the Conducting Department at the Central Conservatory of Music and Music Director of the Chengdu Symphony Orchestra. From 2021 to 2023, he was the Assistant Conductor of the Central Conservatory of Music Chamber Orchestra. Additionally, he fulfilled Assistant Conductor responsibilities at significant events such as the Music and Dance Collection Project and the "Harmony of East and West, Creating the Future" concert. In the same period, he took on the role of Teaching Assistant for conducting courses at the Central Conservatory of Music Middle School. He was awarded the National Scholarship for Graduate Students and received the title of "Excellent Student" from the Central Conservatory of Music in December 2021. He was also distinguished as an Outstanding Graduate of the Central Conservatory of Music. From June 2022 to 2025, he was the resident conductor of the Symphony Orchestra at the Music School attached to the Xinghai Conservatory of Music. In November 2023, he served as Assistant Conductor for the Chou Wen-chung Centennial Concert at the Xinghai Conservatory of Music, conducting works such as Twilight Colors, In the Mode of Shang (premiere), and YU KO. He has been a guest conductor with numerous symphony orchestras, chamber orchestras, and the National Traditional Orchestra of China, including the Central Conservatory of Music Symphony Orchestra, Central Conservatory of Music Chamber Orchestra, Xiamen Theater Symphony Orchestra, Beijing National Orchestra, Henan Symphony Orchestra, Xinghai Conservatory of Music Symphony Orchestra, Xinghai Conservatory of Music Chamber Music Ensemble, and the Symphony Orchestra of the Music School attached to the Xinghai Conservatory of Music. He is currently working on his doctoral degree in orchestral conducting under Maestro David Itkin as a graduate student conductor.

Clay Couturiaux is the assistant director of Orchestral Studies at the University of North Texas where he currently teaches orchestral conducting and is conductor of the UNT Concert Orchestra. The 2025–26 season marks Couturiaux's fourteenth season as music director and conductor of the Richardson Symphony Orchestra. Following a distinguished 16-year tenure, he was named conductor laureate of the Monroe Symphony Orchestra in May 2020. He has also served on the faculty of the UNT Summer Strings Institute since 2015.

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Maestro Couturiaux has accumulated over two decades of experience conducting professional symphony orchestras and teaching at the university level. His career has taken him across the United States, Europe, and Asia including concerts with the Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra, Ho Chi Minh City Symphony Orchestra, Milano Classica Orchestra da Camera, and National Taiwan Normal University Symphony Orchestra. Other professional conducting engagements include performances with the Abilene Philharmonic, Arkansas Symphony, Austin Symphony, Metropolitan Classical Ballet, East Texas Symphony Orchestra, Texas Chamber Orchestra, and Wichita Falls Symphony Orchestra.

Further highlights include conducting the University of North Texas Symphony Orchestra in concert for an audience of 37,000 at Cowboys Stadium in a major collaboration with the North Texas XLV Super Bowl Host Committee, NFL Films, and Tim McGraw. He has also recorded with the UNT Chamber Orchestra on the Crystal Records label. In addition to his professional schedule, Maestro Couturiaux regularly serves as a guest conductor/clinician, including concerts with several Texas All-Region Honors Orchestras.

In March 2013 the Northeast Louisiana Arts Council named Maestro Couturiaux the recipient of the Edmund Williamson Artist of the Year Award. The award is presented to an artist who the selection committee feels has made the most significant contribution to the improvement of the quality of life for Northeast Louisiana.

Dr. Couturiaux began his musical studies at the age of eight in violoncello and piano. He holds degrees in both conducting and violoncello performance from the University of North Texas. In addition, he developed his conducting skills at the world-renowned Pierre Monteux School for Conductors and Orchestra Musicians in Maine and at the National Arts Centre Conductors Programme in Ottawa, Canada. The long list of distinguished conductors with whom Couturiaux studied includes Anshel Brusilow, Jorma Panula, Michael Jinbo, Hugh Wolff, Neal Gittleman, Carl Topilow, and Harold Farberman.

Chelsea (Qiuxian) Lu is a conductor, composer, and performer. A native of Zhejiang, China, she began musical training on the piano at the age of five and traveled to the United States to pursue musical studies at the age of eighteen. She studied piano, flute, and conducting at Western Michigan University and was awarded Summa Cum Laude at graduation. She earned the Master of Music degree in Orchestral Conducting from the University of Oklahoma, where she served as assistant conductor of OU Symphony Orchestra and OU Opera. She is currently pursuing her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Orchestral Conducting at the University of North Texas College of Music under the tutelage of Dr. Clay Couturiaux and serves as teaching assistant in Advanced Instrumental Conducting and Symphonic Literature courses. Lu has conducted major orchestral and operatic works in various large ensembles throughout her studies. She also conducted world premieres in large ensembles and chamber ensembles. Lu is a proponent of contemporary music and is devoted to bringing a diverse array of late 20th-century and 21st-century compositions to the stage. She is currently the conductor of UNT Nova contemporary ensemble. Lu has established contemporary musical ensembles in Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, where she organized concert series, coached chamber ensembles, and conducted large ensembles.

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Praised by Hangzhou Daily and Qianjiang Evening News, "Qiuxian Lu has unique and in-depth insights into contemporary music and is very experienced with a variety of contemporary repertoire." She has composed multiple works for solo instruments, chamber ensembles, and large ensembles. Her solo and chamber works have been frequently commissioned and performed by instrumentalists and ensembles in China. Lu has actively performed as a pianist and flutist in multiple orchestras and top wind bands as well as a chamber musician across China and the United States. Besides standard repertoire and contemporary music, she has developed an interest in early music and is currently a harpsichordist in the UNT Baroque Orchestra. Lu has taught music theory and aural skills for over 7 years in both China and the United States and has established a scientific training system. She has served as music theory and aural skills instructor in music festivals and summer camps. Outside the world of music, Lu enjoys figure skating and swimming.

Dax Anthony Stokes has been an active conductor in the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex area for over 25 years, conducting orchestral concerts, musical theater and opera productions, and sacred choral music. He is also active as a teacher at the college and amateur levels, leading courses in music appreciation, sacred music, and conducting to students all over the world. He served as the only Music Director for the Chamber Orchestra of Denton, and is currently Music Director of the St. Kassiani Chorale. As a conductor of Russian sacred choral music, he has led choirs throughout the United States and in Russia, and has taught masterclasses in choral conducting. As a student of Russian conductor Vladimir Gorbik, Dax has conducted professional choirs in church services in Moscow, as well as participating in Maestro Gorbik's conducting course at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He holds a Bachelor of Music from the University of Tennessee, where he studied euphonium and conducting with W. Sande MacMorran, and a Master of Music from the University of North Texas, studying euphonium with Dr. Brian Bowman, and opera conducting with Dr. Stephen Dubberly. Currently, he is completing the Doctor of Musical Arts in Orchestral Conducting with a related field in Wind Studies at the University of North Texas, which he began in 2002 with the late Maestro Anshel Brusilow and is now completing coursework with Dr. Clay Couturiaux. Dax also holds a Master of Science in Library Science, and works as a librarian and music instructor at North Central Texas College, while staying active as a trombone and euphonium performer.

Ensemble Personnel

Symphony Orchestra

Violin 1
Ethan Dunn
Ming-Wei Hsieh
Hyunjung Kim ‡
Eleanor (Szu Yun) Wang
Hongrui Wang
Yu Xie
Peng Yi

Violin 2
Mitchelle Cabrera
Olivia Corporon †
Ziyang Lyu
Michelle Martey
Travis Pota-Birkhoff
Phoebe Tang

Viola
Yupeng Cai
Shanya Chynwat
Margot Elder
Cameron Halsell
Madi Price
John Sharp
Ziyan Zeng †

Cello
Julia (Jiho) Choi
Maddy Dykhouse †
Iris (Chao) Fang
Maya Huber
Minching Lin
Ethan Nelsen

Bass
Wyatt Gaugler
Zoe Harris
Chelsea Strayer †
Catherine Willis

Flute
Kaitlyn Maresca
Shane Salinas †

Oboe
Madeline Lee
Taylor Darnell *^

Clarinet
Megan Dewalt †
Amber Lo

Bassoon
Landon Murr #
Donovan Neal *^

Horn
Becca Geitzenauer †
Eva Gomez

Trumpet
Joseph Runkle
Jacaleb Shepard *#

Timpani
Jack Spelman

‡ Concertmaster
† Principal
* Principal on Mendelssohn
^ Principal on Brahms
# Principal on Mozart

Concert Orchestra

Violin 1
Ray Hsu ‡
Ava Cosse'
Jeonghoo Yim
Rowan Ingraham
Bella Lorenzini
Joanna Haeun Lee
Jiwon Lee
Alexis de Leon
Kevin Reid
Luis Bonilla
Braeden Boyles
Julia Oh

Violin 2
Sophie Thiessen †
Esther Huang
Janicesta Browne
Juliana Jones
Jiada Ortiz
Lancelot Clark
Makayla Coleman
Nicholas Lieu
Yeji Joun
Dylan Leung
Valeria Tuesta
Michelle Ye

Viola
Jacob Rodriguez †
Jordan Palmer
Kseniya Klyukina
Gabby Paladino
Ariel Ross
Aidan Shannon
Angel de Hoyos
Anthony Brooks
Audrey Lewis
Isabella Eastwood
Breanna Norton
Melanie Cantu

Cello
Aminah (Zhimai) Ma †
Ellen Miner
Esther Kang
Jonathan Scoggins
Matthew Arias
Griffin Jones
Dylan Branam
Dawn Mansfield
Dylhan Orellano-Garcia
Angelica Rodriguez-Lanza
Olivia Jenkins
Vanessa Rivens

Bass
Jacob O'Toole †
Andrew Lakly
Eduardo Flores
Camryn Lafargue
Lillian Holder
Sara Nell Chase
Aiyana Armstrong
An Nguyen

Flute
Joshua Diaz *
Katie Ikesaki
Hui Lam (Tiffany) Mak ^
Steven Rios #
Meige Yang

Oboe
Logan Pierce #
Ava Raymond *
Ben Yoder ^

Clarinet
Jakob Lumadue ^
Riley Mazziotta *
Nyla Ortiz #
Rey Rostro

Bassoon
Anthony Coito ^
Artur Kuchurivskiy *
Kyle Palmer #

Horn
Jackson Dillard #
Caleb Harold
Nathan Laurel
Jake Osmond ^
Yung Chi Yang *

Trumpet
Elaina Garza #
Noah Newsome ^
Justin Petry *
Connor Williams

Trombone
Julius Patsch *^&
Ashlee Thompson
Jaden Bullock

Tuba
Loghan Runnakko

Timpani
Moses Ortiz

Percussion
Anastasia Clayton
Harris Garner
Ben Hinkle
Caden Thompson

Harp
Sophie Chien
Kathryn Horton

‡ Concertmaster
† Principal
* Principal on Schubert
# Principal on Sibelius
^ Principal on Strauss