



University of North Texas  
College of Music

Lecture Recital | Sunday, April 5, 2026 | 5:00 p.m. | Recital Hall

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**Blake Lile, tuba**

**SangSoo Kim, piano**

*Blake Lile: DMA Lecture Recital*

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Spirit Sketches (2025)..... Chris McLaughlin  
I. Salamander (b. 1998)  
II. Undine  
III. Gnome  
IV. Sylph

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Program four hundred seventy-seven of the 2025–2026 season  
Photography and videography are prohibited

## Program Notes

When my friend Blake Lile approached me about composing a piece for his dissertation, I was immediately excited at the premise and simply had to agree. He mentioned wanting to tackle the crosstraining aspect of tuba pedagogy, so we brainstormed to see what a piece that calls for both contrabass tuba and bass tuba could look like. Thus, "Spirit Sketches" was born!

The title and the movements take inspiration from Paracelsus's early 16th century alchemical writings. Scientists have been and always will be tasked with the endless pursuit of theorizing how the world we inhabit works. While much of alchemy is easily dismissed in a modern time, I find it helpful to imagine things from a 16th century perspective. Perhaps this was the best theory supported by the evidence at the time. As we collect more evidence and acquire more knowledge, then we can revise our theories.

Paracelsus posited that each of the four elements had a particular spirit associated with them: **Salamander** with fire, **Undine** with water, **Gnome** with earth, and **Sylph** with air. As I pondered those four elements and their representative spirits, it seemed logical that the warmth and breadth of fire and earth could be mapped to contrabass tuba while the fluidity and suppleness of water and air could be mapped to bass tuba. Thus, the movement structure fell into place.

**Salamander** presents a bombastic opening to the piece. This movement presents the convention of sonata form in a modern light. Each section features its own Afro-Caribbean dance style and/or its own rhythm from the *son clave* timeline. The FTA utilizes an upbeat *guajeo* groove in combination with a *tumbao* bassline. The STA presents a contrasting *saudade* with a composite *maxixe* rhythm. The development largely uses the 3-2 *son clave* rhythm and notably contains improv sections for both the tubist and the pianist. The recap reprises the rhythms and reconciles the tonality in accordance with the sonata principle. Finally, the movement ends with a raucous and exciting coda featuring plenty of extended techniques for the tubist.

**Undine** is through-composed, yet still relies on harmony and rhythm as means of narrative expression. A maritime wanderer quickly becomes lost during a tragic shipwreck on a solo exploration. The previous aftermath is depicted by a driving piano ostinato at the beginning of the movement. After the initial shock subsides, he spends time contemplating his existence. This is represented by harmonic traveling between b minor and e minor. Flashbacks to the accident occur, represented by the return of the driving piano ostinato. Time's arrow marches forward and eventually the Trauma subsides. One fateful day, the traveler notices a shimmering bright light in the water. It beckons to him, and his soul is charged with electric curiosity. Unable to resist the urge anymore, he dives into the water. Could this light be his long-awaited savior?

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I believe that **Gnome** requires a bit of a cultural mindwipe and reset. Here, I do not mean it to refer to the characterized garden gnomes that have grown in popularity over the years. Rather, I mean an interpretation closer to that of Paracelsus's original interpretation: a being made from and of the earth. I have long been drawn to the idiom of "returning to the earth" as a metaphor for death. These thoughts had been crystallizing in my head as I was preparing to compose. On the very first day I sat down to write this movement, I checked my phone on a quick brain break and received the saddening news that Jamshied Sharifi had passed. Tragically, this cemented the metaphor of "returning to earth" in my head and I immediately knew that I had to dedicate this movement as a tribute to his memory. Jamshied was the keyboardist, orchestrator, and conductor who worked closely with the progressive metal band Dream Theater to blend their iconic metal sound with a symphonic orchestration. Jamshied conducted the Octavarium Orchestra for Dream Theater's 20th Anniversary finale at Radio City Music Hall on April 1, 2006. Simply put, I grew up listening to this music. I wasn't taught to listen to symphonic orchestral music until my undergrad, so listening to this orchestra play symphonic prog metal in my teenage years was my first exposure to the orchestra. Jamshied's masterful orchestrations perfectly captured the spirit of the music, and they really inspired me to experiment with blending genres. It felt only right to accent this tribute with a reference to the famous 5/4 waltz from Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, as this was one of the first symphonic orchestral pieces I performed in college and what cemented my love for the orchestra. May Jamshied's memory be Eternal.

**Sylph** is perhaps the most straightforward of the movements. The movement takes a Theme and Variations and nests it within the confines of Sonata Rondo form. This movement is certainly the most technical of the four, and is designed to highlight both the tubist and the pianist. The barn burner ending of this movement is exhilarating and reprises material from the ending of the first movement.