



COLLEGE OF MUSIC

University of North Texas
College of Music

Ensemble Concert | Wednesday, April 15, 2026 | 7:30 p.m.
Margot and Bill Winspear Hall - Murchison Performing Arts Center

Concert Orchestra
Clay Couturiaux, conductor
Nikola Ružević, cello

Prelude to Khovanshchina (1874)..... Modest Mussorgsky
(1839–1881)
Orchestrated by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Schelomo (Solomon):
Hebrew Rhapsody for Violoncello and Orchestra (1916) Ernest Bloch
(1880–1959)
Nikola Ružević, cello

-INTERMISSION-

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat Major, Op. 38 "Spring" (1841)..... Robert Schumann
1. Andante un poco maestoso - Allegro molto vivace (1810–1856)
2. Larghetto
3. Scherzo. Molto vivace
4. Allegro animato e grazioso

Program three hundred eighty of the 2025–2026 season
Photography and videography are prohibited

Program Notes

Khovanshchina: Prelude "Dawn on the Moskva River" (1873–74) | Modest Mussorgsky (1839–1881)

Mussorgsky conceived *Khovanshchina* as a deeply personal response to a turbulent moment in Russian history. The opera dramatizes the political and religious conflicts of the late seventeenth-century Moscow, when rival factions struggled for power during the regency preceding the reign of Peter the Great. Rather than presenting history as heroic spectacle, Mussorgsky sought to portray the forces shaping Russia's identity, tradition, reform, faith, and violence, through the lives of ordinary people caught in moments of national transformation.

Although *Khovanshchina*, is filled with intrigue, unrest, and impending catastrophe, the opera begins in strikingly quiet fashion. Its Prelude, often known as "Dawn on the Moskva River," stands deliberately apart from the drama that follows. Instead of introducing characters or events, Mussorgsky offers a broad atmospheric portrait of Moscow, observed at daybreak before the conflicts of the opera take hold. In this sense, the Prelude functions as a reflective frame; a vision of Russia as landscape and lived environment, existing beyond the ambitions and struggles of its rulers.

The music unfolds slowly and without urgency. A long gently arching melody rises in the violas, soon taken up by solo flute and supported by shimmering strings. Mussorgsky builds the texture gradually, allowing the music to unfold at an unhurried pace, as if the city were waking one sound at a time. As the sound deepens, woodwinds introduce broad, folk-like melodies, and the orchestration becomes richer without ever turning forceful. A clarinet figure, often described as a rooster's crow, signals the arrival of morning, answered by warm horn calls. Throughout the Prelude, instrumental voices seem to converse gently with one another, each new color emerging naturally from the last. The effect is cumulative rather than dramatic, shaped by subtle shifts in timbre and density.

One of the most striking elements of the Prelude is Mussorgsky's use of bell-like sonorities. Soft strokes in the timpani, harp, horns, and pizzicato basses evoke the distant ringing of church bells calling the city to matins. These sounds regulate the musical flow, reinforcing the sense of a community guided by tradition and routine. Even as the orchestral texture thickens, the dynamic level remains restrained, creating a feeling of quiet inevitability rather than urgency.

The Prelude closes as gently as it began. The melodies fragment and dissolve, leaving behind only faint tremolos and isolated instrumental lines that fade into silence. This peaceful conclusion stands in poignant contrast to the opera that follows. For Mussorgsky, the true Russia was found not in the clash of political forces, but in the enduring landscape and the everyday life of its people, a vision captured with extraordinary restraint and sensitivity in this opening music.

Schelomo (Solomon): Rhapsodie Hébraïque for Violoncello and Orchestra (1916) | Ernest Bloch (1880–1959)

Schelomo stands at the center of Ernest Bloch's creative life and is widely regarded as the culmination of his so-called "Jewish Cycle," a group of works through which he sought a personal musical identity rooted in ancient heritage rather than borrowed folklore. Completed in 1916, shortly before Bloch left Europe for the United States, Schelomo is neither a concerto nor a symphonic poem in the traditional sense. Instead, Bloch called it a rhapsody: a work shaped by emotional logic rather than formal symmetry.

The title Schelomo is the Hebrew form of Solomon, the biblical king traditionally associated with wisdom. Bloch drew inspiration from the book of Ecclesiastes, a text attributed to Solomon that reflects on the futility of earthly ambition and the burden of understanding. Rather than portraying Solomon as a ruler or lawgiver, Bloch presents him as a voice of experience and disillusionment, a figure who has seen the world's splendor and found it wanting. Initially, Bloch intended to set passages of Ecclesiastes as a vocal work but abandoned the idea in favor of a purely instrumental voice. The cello, with its wide expressive range and human warmth, became Solomon's surrogate. In Bloch's own words, the solo cello represents Solomon's voice, while the orchestra embodies the surrounding world. At times ensemble echoes his thoughts, at others it's tempting, overwhelming, or contradicting him.

The work unfolds in three broad sections, played without pause. It opens with a solitary cello lament, rhythmically free and searching, descending through wide intervals as if weighed down by experience. This opening gesture establishes the central conflict of the piece: the inward voice of reflection set against an external world that refuses to remain silent. The orchestra gradually enters with shimmering textures and exotic harmonies, introducing a contrasting dance-like idea that will recur throughout the work. This seductive music does not comfort Solomon; instead, it distracts him, pulling him away from his inward questioning.

As the rhapsody progresses, the relationship between soloist and orchestra becomes increasingly charged. The cello repeatedly breaks away into cadenzas that are moments of interruption that function almost like philosophical protests. Bloch described these passages as Solomon's rejection of the world's vanities. Each cadenza rises with effort, often climbing through the cello's extreme registers, only to fall back again, suggesting that resistance is ultimately futile.

The middle section accelerates sharply. A forceful, rhythmically driven theme emerges in the orchestra, announced with stark, almost ritual intensity. Against this, the cello resists, weaving its lamenting material over pounding rhythms and bare harmonic intervals. The orchestra presses forward relentlessly, and the soloist is eventually drawn into the struggle. This confrontation leads to the work's largest climax, a moment of violent collision in which all the musical forces converge.

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In the final section, the energy subsides, but no new ideas appear. Instead, earlier themes return transformed. The cello's voice becomes heavier and more resigned, and the orchestra, though richly colored, no longer challenges it with the same aggression. Bloch subtly alters the harmonic language here, easing earlier tensions while draining the music of hope. The rhapsody closes with a final, subdued statement of the cello's opening lament, now stripped of resistance. Solomon's voice fades into silence, leaving behind not redemption, but acceptance.

Unlike many of Bloch's works, *Schelomo* offers no optimistic conclusion. Bloch himself remarked that it was the only piece in his output that ends in "absolute negation." Yet its power lies precisely in that refusal to console. Through its raw expressivity, elemental rhythms, and deeply human voice, *Schelomo* remains one of the most uncompromising and moving statements of the early twentieth century, a meditation on wisdom, weariness, and the cost of understanding.

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38 "Spring" (1841) | Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Robert Schumann's First Symphony marked a decisive turning point in his career. Until 1841 he was known primarily as a composer of piano music and song, as well as a perceptive and influential music critic. Though he had long dreamed of writing a symphony, the weight of Beethoven's legacy made the genre feel daunting. What finally unlocked Schumann's symphonic voice was a period of personal happiness: his marriage to Clara Wieck in 1840 and the creative surge that followed. In early 1841, Schumann completed his First Symphony with astonishing speed, sketching the entire work in just four days. From the outset, the symphony announces itself as music of awakening. A bold trumpet fanfare opens the first movement, sounding like a call from above. Schumann described this gesture as a summons to spring, and it sets the tone for everything that follows. The slow introduction carries a sense of anticipation rather than full release, as if winter has not quite loosened its grip. When the *Allegro* begins, the energy breaks free. A buoyant main theme surges forward, propelled by rhythmic vitality and bright orchestral color. Schumann develops this material with urgency and drive, returning to the opening fanfare at key structural moments to anchor the movement's exuberant sweep.

The second movement offers a striking contrast. Cast as a broad and songful, it unfolds with the intimacy of a lyrical meditation. Schumann's gift for melody, honed through years of song composition, comes fully into focus here. Long, flowing lines pass gently between strings and winds, creating a sense of warmth and repose. Subtle details add depth: delicate trills shimmer across the texture, and near the end, a hushed chorale in the trombones introduces a shadowed color that quietly unsettles the calm. This moment hints at deeper emotional complexity beneath the surface serenity.

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The Scherzo returns to motion and contrast. Its opening is energetic and slightly rough-edged, driven by syncopated rhythms and a restless pulse. Schumann expands the traditional form by including two trio sections instead of one, each offering a different kind of release. The first trio is light and playful, built from the simplest of musical ideas, while the second presses forward with greater insistence and rhythmic displacement. These shifting characters keep the listener alert, and the movement closes with a brief, whimsical coda that recalls earlier material before slipping away.

The finale launches without hesitation. A rising scale figure announces a movement full of momentum and grace, combining athletic brilliance with lyrical charm. Schumann focuses his development on this opening idea, allowing it to evolve and gather strength as the music drives forward. Just before the end, he introduces a new theme that feels like a breakthrough moment, opening the texture and lifting the music into a broader, more radiant space. The symphony concludes in a burst of joy, affirming the optimism suggested from the very beginning.

Though Schumann ultimately withdrew the movement titles he originally assigned, the spirit of spring remains unmistakable throughout the work. More than a seasonal portrait, the "Spring" Symphony captures a moment of personal and artistic renewal, music animated by hope, energy, and the exhilaration of new beginnings.

Biographies

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.

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.

A native of Croatia, **Nikola Nino Ružević** has performed in many countries around the world where he has received critical acclaim for his artistry. The Los Angeles Times writes about his playing: "... thrilling intensity and apprehensible projection", " ... compelling narrative skills and imaginative coloring. Each piece told a story the listener could immerse in."

An active soloist and chamber musician, Mr. Ružević has performed in world-renowned halls such as The Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Musikverein Vienna, and Suntory Hall Tokyo. He has, among others, collaborated with Zubin Mehta, Valery Gergiev, Milan Horvat and performed with Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden Philharmonic, Zagreb Philharmonic, Solisti di Zagreb, Bartók String Quartet, Emerson String Quartet, Zagreb String Quartet, Viotti String Quartet, Apple Hill Chamber Players.

As a juror, Mr. Ružević has judged numerous international competitions including the Alice and Eleonore Schoenfeld International Violin and Cello Competition, Salzburg = Mozart International Chamber Music Competition, Antonio Janigro International Cello Competition, Rudolf Matz International String Competition, Alpe-Adria International String Competition and Republic of Croatia String Competition.

Nikola Ružević has held teaching positions at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, University of Texas at Arlington and University of Zagreb, Croatia. He has given master classes at some of the most prestigious music programs: Moscow State Conservatory "P. I. Tchaikovsky", Toho Gakuen School of Music, Yamaha Ginza Concert Association, University of Southern California, Grandmaster Orchestral Music Society Hong Kong. Moreover, Mr. Ružević has been invited to teach at Apple Hill Chamber Music Festival, Uzmah Hvar International Summer School, Texas Cello Academy and Festival, Accent Music Festival, TCU CelloFest and Upbeat International Music Festival.

Presently, Mr. Ružević is associate professor of cello and chamber music at the University of North Texas.

Concert Orchestra Personnel

Violin 1

Ray Hsu †
Esther Huang
Rowan Ingraham
Joanna Haeun Lee
Alfiia Mansurova
Braeden Boyles
Ava Cosse'
Bella Lorenzini
Kevin Reid
Alexis de Leon
Luis Bonilla

Violin 2

Sophie Thiessen †
Jose Forero Daza
Janicesta Browne
Julia Oh
Jiada Ortiz
Juliana Jones
Makayla Coleman
Lancelot Clark
Yeji Joun
Nicholas Lieu
Valeria Tuesta
Dylan Leung
Michelle Ye

Viola

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

Cello

Aminah (Zhimai) Ma †
Ellen Miner
Matthew Arias
Griffin Jones
Dawn Mansfield
Dylan Branam
Esther Kang
Bo Yeoun Kim
Gilbert Dewitte
Vanessa Rivens
Dylhan Orellana-Garcia
Angelica Rodriguez-Lanza
RJ Lux
Ethen (Akira) Lim
Olivia Jenkins

Bass

Jacob O'Toole †
Andrew Lakly
Eduardo Flores
Ethan Miranda
Lillian Holder
Sara Nell Chase
Aiyana Armstrong

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

Caleb Harold
Nathan Laurel #+
Trampus Marek
Yung Chi Yang *

Trumpet

Elaina Garza
Noah Newsome #
Justin Petry +
Connor Williams

Trombone

Julius Patsch #+
Ashlee Thompson
Jaden Bullock

Bass Trombone

Loghan Runnakko

Timpani

Moses Ortiz

Percussion

Tristan Brown
Harris Garner
Ben Hinkle
Caden Thompson

Harp

Sophie Chien
Kathryn Horton

Celesta

Tao Jiang

‡ Concertmaster | † Principal

* Principal on Mussorgsky | # Principal on Bloch

+ Principal on Schumann