

**Montclair State University**  
JOHN J. CALI SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
PRESENTS

# MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

**Kyle Ritenauer,**  
*Director of Orchestra and Conductor*

WITH SPECIAL GUEST  
**STEFAN JACKIW**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1**  
**3PM**  
ALEXANDER KASSER THEATER

## CALI IMMERSIVE RESIDENCY PROGRAM

**Daniel Gurskis**  
Dean, College of the Arts

**Shea Scruggs**  
Director  
John J. Cali School of Music



**John J. Cali**  
**School of Music**

**MONTCLAIR**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

# SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## PROGRAM

### MSU Symphony Orchestra

Lili Boulanger

*D'un matin de printemps ("Of a Spring Morning")* (1918)

Antonin Dvořák

*Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 53* (1879)

Stefan Jackiw, *violin*

*I. Allegro ma non troppo*

*II. Allegro ma non troppo*

*III. Finale - Allegro giocoso ma non troppo*

## INTERMISSION

### MSU Chamber Orchestra

Samuel Barber

*Knoxville: Summer of 1915* (1948)

Kailey Diggs, *soprano*

### MSU Symphony Orchestra

Maurice Ravel

*Ma mere l'Oye Suite* (1911)

*I. Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant (Pavane of Sleeping Beauty)*

*II. Petit Poucet (Little Tom Thumb)*

*III. Laideronnette: impératrice de pagodas*

*IV. Les entretiens de la belle et de la bête (Conversation of Beauty and the Beast)*

*V. Le jardin féerique (The Fairy Garden)*

***Knoxville: Summer of 1915* by James Agee**

It has become that time of evening  
When people sit on their porches,  
Rocking gently and talking gently  
And watching the street  
And the standing up into their sphere  
Of possession of the trees,  
Of birds' hung havens, hangars.  
People go by; things go by.  
A horse, drawing a buggy,  
Breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt;  
A loud auto: a quiet auto;  
People in pairs, not in a hurry,  
Scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body,  
Talking casually,  
The taste hovering over them of vanilla,  
Strawberry, pasteboard, and starched milk,  
The image upon them of lovers and horsemen,  
Squared with clowns in hueless amber.

A streetcar raising its iron moan;  
Stopping;  
Belling and starting, stertorous;  
Rousing and raising again  
Its iron increasing moan  
And swimming its gold windows and straw seats  
On past and past and past,  
The bleak spark crackling and cursing above it  
Like a small malignant spirit  
Set to dog its tracks;  
The iron whine rises on rising speed;  
Still risen, faints; halts;  
The faint stinging bell;  
Rises again, still fainter;  
Fainting, lifting lifts,  
Faints foregone;  
Forgotten.  
Now is the night one blue dew

My father has drained,  
He has coiled the hose

Low on the length of lawns,  
A frailing of fire who breathes...  
Parents on porches:  
Rock and rock.  
From damp strings morning glories hang  
their ancient faces.

The dry and exalted noise of the locusts  
from all the air  
At once enchants my eardrums.

On the rough wet grass  
Of the backyard  
My father and mother have spread quilts  
We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle,  
my aunt,  
And I too am lying there.  
They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet,  
Of nothing in particular,  
Of nothing at all.  
The stars are wide and alive,  
They seem each like a smile  
Of great sweetness,  
And they seem very near.  
All my people are larger bodies than mine,  
With voices gentle and meaningless  
Like the voices of sleeping birds.  
One is an artist, he is living at home.  
One is a musician, she is living at home.  
One is my mother who is good to me.  
One is my father who is good to me.  
By some chance, here they are,  
All on this earth;  
And who shall ever tell the sorrow  
Of being on this earth, lying, on quilts,  
On the grass,  
In a summer evening,  
Among the sounds of the night.  
May God bless my people,  
My uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father,  
Oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble;  
And in the hour of their taking away.

After a little  
I am taken in  
And put to bed.  
Sleep, soft smiling,  
Draws me unto her:  
And those receive me,  
Who quietly treat me,  
As one familiar and well-beloved in that home:  
But will not, oh, will not,  
Not now, not ever;  
But will not ever tell me who I am

## MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Montclair State University Symphony Orchestra is a core component of the John J. Cali School of Music, where students develop essential professional skills in preparation, etiquette, and collaboration, all while striving for the highest standard of performance. The Symphony provides a safe and inclusive environment, bringing together students from across the university—particularly those studying music performance, music education, and music therapy—at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Together, they perform a diverse repertoire, ranging from classical masterpieces to contemporary symphonic and operatic works.

Under the direction of Kyle Ritenauer since 2022, the Symphony Orchestra maintains a rigorous schedule, presenting four symphonic concerts, a mainstage opera, and a variety of projects, guest artists, and collaborations. Central to our mission is providing meaningful performance opportunities for Montclair's students. To that end, we host an annual Concerto Competition, a Vocal Competition (with winners performing as soloists with the orchestra), and workshops for student composers to develop their latest works through the experience of a live orchestra.

Recent highlights include the first-ever performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on the MSU campus, in collaboration with the MSU Chorale. The Symphony has also partnered with the Jazz Department, most notably performing Duke Ellington's *Three Black Kings*. In 2025, the orchestra performed Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* with live synesthesia artist Helena Chywski as a central event for the University's donors, hosted by President Koppell's office. The orchestra continues to collaborate with world-class artists including Seth Parker Woods, Vijay Gupta, Bela Fleck, and Eric Whitacre among others. High-level opera productions have featured Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, and Cavalli's *La Calisto*.

Upcoming season highlights include visits from renowned artists such as violinist Stefan Jackiw, mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard, and the Kronos Quartet. The orchestra will perform Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 1 and present a full production of Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte*.

The Symphony Orchestra deepens its connection to the regional musical and educational community through growing outreach and collaborations. This year, the orchestra hosts its first *StringFest*, welcoming 250 high school students to campus for concerts and workshops. The orchestra created the Montclair Violin Prize to support young violinists pursuing music careers and will hold the 2nd Annual Orchestra Conductors Workshop with ASTA-NJ and the Pierre Monteux School, offering tracks for educators and performers. Partnerships with the New Jersey Symphony Youth Orchestra and The Pathways Project provide side-by-side performance opportunities for high school and college musicians, and this season, the Chatham High School Chamber Orchestra joins the December concert. Through these initiatives, the MSU Symphony Orchestra serves as a vital hub for musical education and community engagement in the region.

### FROM THE PODIUM

The opening concert of the 2025–26 season marks a very exciting moment for the Montclair State University Symphony Orchestra as we welcome one of the world's most sought-after violinists, Stefan Jackiw. The program is bookended by two phenomenal impressionistic composers, Lili Boulanger and Maurice Ravel. The concert begins with Boulanger's vivid, splashy, and colorful depiction of a lively spring morning and concludes with Ravel's nostalgic reflections on childhood stories.

Though not impressionistic in style, Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* shares thematic connections with the rest of the program—both seasonal and deeply personal—as Barber reflects on a summer from his own childhood. This program features soprano Kailey Diggs, who earned this performance opportunity through a school-wide audition. The MSU Chamber Orchestra will perform this work again with Isabel Leonard on November 9 at 3 p.m. in Leshowitz Recital Hall.

## MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

<b>First Violin</b> Oliver Costello Carlos Santamaria Kiley Foxhall** Anthony Holc Jade Hattori-Hamilton Briana Almonte Sophie Jiang Rachel O'Connor	<b>Second Violin</b> Marisol Zapata Rafael Linares Annamaria Alcaro Abigail Meighoo Giselle Gomez Park Choy E'nyla Latta Haydn Ng	<b>Viola</b> Sam Omalyev Emma Musial Armando Atanda Denton Moreland Noah Stevens* Geanelly Vallecillo Josie Dambeck Hector Otero	<b>Cello</b> John Sample Annamaria Witek Yubin Choi Justeen Valere Nailah Harris Yitian Huang Kelvin Guillen Paige Stewart	Shayna Barkan Max Caulkins Eda Yildiz  <b>Bass</b> Niles Scott Ilana Ziedman JP Bernabe*	
<b>Flute</b> Julianna Taveras-Garcia Anaya Torrence Luiza Ribiero Arianna Ngyuen-Habeneski Sofia Scamurra Ashley Mendeke	<b>Oboe</b> Bailey Coon Iva Verba David Reinstein	<b>Clairnet</b> Nicole Dibari Erin Smith Emily O'Brien Emmet Miller	<b>Basoon</b> Jonathan Hart Darren Butler Taylor Lee	<b>Horn</b> Jeison Campoverde Faith Santana Sheldon Senek Jose Zapata	<b>Trumpet</b> Clifton Little Kevin Jacobsen Gianna Ciaburri
<b>Trombone</b> Aidan Andreoli David Laird Dan Harkin <b>Tuba</b> Isaac Galang	<b>Percussion</b> Hannah D'Elia Alex Pothos Isabella Cruz Linda Zhang Domingo Hernandez	<b>Harp</b> Diane Michaels  <b>Celesta</b> Gary Blackman	<b>Assistant Conductors</b> Gary Blackman Alec Hamilton Tristan Hughes		

## MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

<b>First Violin</b>	<b>Second Violin</b>	<b>Viola</b>	<b>Cello</b>	<b>Bass</b>	<b>Flute</b>	
Oliver Costello	Marisol Zapata	Sam Omalyev	John Sample	Niles Scott	Ashley Mendeke	
Carlos Santamaria	Brianna Almonte	Emma Musial	Annamaria Witek			
Kiley Foxhall**	Rafael Linares	Armando Atanda	Yubin Choi			
Anthony Holc	Sophie Jiang	Noah Stevens*				
Jade Hattori-Hamilton	Hector Otero					
<b>Oboe</b>	<b>Clairnet</b>	<b>Basoon</b>	<b>Horn</b>	<b>Trumpet</b>	<b>Harp</b>	<b>Percussion</b>
Bailey Coon	Emily O'Brien	Darren Butler	Jeison Campoverde	Kevin Jacobse	Diane Michaels	Alex Pothos
			Faith Santana			

\*Alumni String Fellows

\*\*Orchestra Graduate Assistan



**Kyle Ritenauer** is an emerging presence in the classical music world, known for his versatility across the symphonic stage, opera, and ballet. Kyle made his Kennedy Center debut in 2024 conducting the National Symphony Orchestra in performance. Following his debut with the New York City Ballet, leading six performances of George Balanchine's *Episodes* (music of Anton Webern), Kyle will return later this season for six performances of *The Nutcracker*.

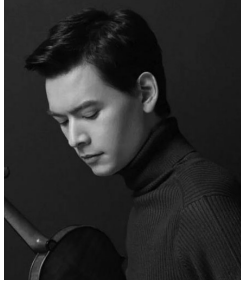
In the world of opera, Kyle has worked with companies including Opéra de Montréal and Des Moines Metro Opera, the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Singers, and most recently prepared Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* with The Juilliard School Orchestra and Vocal Department. As principal conductor of the Cali Opera Program, Kyle has led productions of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, Cavalli's *La Calisto*, and is excited for this year's production of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*.

A teacher at heart, Kyle works to make classical music meaningful and relevant for his students, guiding them to approach their craft with both excellence and imagination. His primary appointment is as Interim Director of Orchestral Studies at Montclair State University, where he leads the John J. Cali School of Music Symphony Orchestra, collaborates with the Cali Opera Program, and teaches a full studio of graduate orchestral conducting students. Kyle considers the John J. Cali School his musical home.

Nationally sought after as a teacher, Kyle has served on the artistic staff of the Manhattan School of Music since 2021, is a member of the conducting faculty at the internationally recognized Pierre Monteux School, and regularly guest conducts at The Juilliard School. He maintains deep connections with youth orchestras and high school musicians across the country and was recognized as *Collegiate Teacher of the Year* by the American String Teachers Association.

Kyle has conducted the Elgin Symphony Orchestra, Symphony New Hampshire, Capital Philharmonic of New Jersey, Norwalk Symphony Orchestra, the Hudson Valley Philharmonic, and Carnegie Hall's Ensemble Connect. As a cover conductor Kyle has worked with the New York Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Utah Symphony, New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, and the American Composers Orchestra.

An advocate for the music of today, Ritenauer has premiered more than seventy works and collaborated with leading composers including John Adams, Caroline Shaw, Carlos Simon, Quinn Mason, Nina Young, Andy Akiho, Jon Batiste, and Anna Clyne. He is a student of David Robertson and has received mentorship from conductors Gianandrea Noseda, Gustavo Dudamel, and others.



**Stefan Jackiw** is one of America's foremost violinists, captivating audiences with playing that combines poetry and purity with impeccable technique. Hailed for playing of "uncommon musical substance" that is "striking for its intelligence and sensitivity" (*Boston Globe*), Jackiw has appeared as a soloist with the Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco symphony orchestras, among others.

In the 2025–26 season, Stefan Jackiw returns to the Pittsburgh Symphony for Korngold's *Concerto*, the Baltimore Symphony for Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* alongside Inon Barnatan and Hayoung Choi, conducted by Jonathan Heyward, and the Indianapolis Symphony for Berg's *Violin Concerto*. He launches the Austin Symphony's season with Prokofiev's *Violin Concerto No. 2*, which he also performs later with the Vancouver Symphony. Jackiw joins the Seoul Philharmonic and Mei-Ann Chen for Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy*. In winter 2026, he opens the Laguna Beach Music Festival with three consecutive concerts featuring a varied repertoire, including Janáček's *Kreutzer Sonata*. He also performs Dvořák's *Concerto* with the Kansas City Symphony.

Jackiw is set to make his debut at London's iconic Southbank Centre in a highly anticipated special trio project with cellist Alisa Weilerstein and pianist Inon Barnatan. He continues touring with Junction Trio with engagements at Chamber Music Sedona, Sanford-Hill Piano Series, Noe Music, Caramoor, Jacksonville Symphony, and additional dates to be announced. As a recitalist, he returns to Montclair State University, Denver Friends of Chamber Music, Harvard University, Friends of Music Sleepy Hollow, and The Rockefeller University, with additional performances to be announced.

Jackiw's 2024-25 season highlights include performances with the Cleveland Orchestra under Santtu-Matias Rouvali, National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, Suwon Philharmonic, Pasadena Symphony, The Florida Orchestra, Erie Philharmonic and the Jacksonville Symphony. He continued touring with Junction Trio, returning to the 92NY stage with a program including the world premiere of a new work by John Zorn and performing at Rockefeller University.

Jackiw opened his 2023-24 season returning to the New York Philharmonic to perform the *Barber Concerto* with Jaap van Zweden. His season also included a quadruple World Premiere of new works at Roulette, performances with the Taiwan Philharmonic, China National Symphony, and the Junction Trio's highly praised debut at Carnegie Hall.

Jackiw tours frequently with his musical partners, pianist Conrad Tao and cellist Jay Campbell, as part of the Junction Trio. In 2021, Jackiw performed a new Violin concerto, written for him by Conrad Tao and premiered by the Atlanta Symphony and Baltimore Symphony. He also enjoys collaborating with pianist Jeremy Denk with whom he recorded the complete *Ives Violin Sonatas* on Nonesuch Records. The album was universally lauded by critics, with *The New Yorker's* Alex Ross naming Jackiw's performance "a new standard." In 2019, he recorded Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* with Inon Barnatan, Alisa Weilerstein, Alan Gilbert and Academy St. Martin in the Fields.

He has also premiered David Fulmer's concerto *Jauchzende Bögen* with Matthias Pintscher and the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen at the Heidelberger Frühling.

Jackiw has performed in numerous major festivals and concert halls around the world, including the Aspen Music Festival, Ravinia Festival, Caramoor International Music Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, Lincoln Center's *Summer for the City* Festival, the Philharmonie de Paris, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, the Celebrity Series of Boston, and the Washington Performing Arts Society.

Born to physicist parents of Korean and Ukrainian descent, Stefan Jackiw began playing the violin at the age of four. His teachers have included Zinaida Gilels, Michèle Auclair, and Donald Weilerstein. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from Harvard University, as well as an Artist Diploma from the New England Conservatory, and is the recipient of a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. Jackiw plays a violin made by Domenico Montagnana "ex. Rossi" c. 1730, generously loaned by a private foundation. He lives in New York City.



**Kailey Diggs**, soprano, is an American artist based in New York City. This season, she performs Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* and will appear as Erste Dame in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. She will also compete at the district level of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition. Next summer, she returns to her hometown, Sacramento, CA, to give a recital with the Sacramento Community Concert Association.

In 2024, Kailey debuted the title role of Handel's *Alcina*. On the concert stage, she has appeared as a soloist in Poulenc's *Gloria* and Rutter's *Magnificat*.

Her artistry has been recognized with numerous awards, including first place in the California Capital Chapter NATS Competition and the Fresno State Art Song Festival, as well as second place in the Opera Modesto Competition.

Passionate about new music, Kailey has become a frequent interpreter of contemporary opera. She appeared as Estelle Rigault in Zachary Watkins's *No Exit* (2024) and participated in *Four Corners: Operation Opera*, where she originated two new roles. With a curiosity for bold repertoire and a willingness to adapt, she has established herself as a dedicated collaborator in the creation of new works. She is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma in Opera Performance at Montclair State University and earned her Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of the Pacific in 2024.



**Lili Boulanger - *D'un Matin de printemps* ("From a Spring Morning")** *D'un Matin de printemps* ("From a Spring Morning") and its sister piece, *D'un Soir triste* ("Of a Sad Evening") were two of the final pieces written in Marie-Juliette "Lili" Boulanger's tragically short life. However, at just 24 years old, she had already begun to make a name for herself across Europe. Born in 1893 in Paris, into a family of musicians, composer Ernest Boulanger and Russian princess and singer Raissa Myshetskaya, Boulanger showed incredible musical aptitude from an early age. She could carry a tune at two and could read music before she could read letters. Boulanger's compositional training likely began while accompanying her older sister, the legendary composer and teacher Nadia Boulanger, to her classes at the Paris Conservatoire. Through her studies, she sang and played the piano, violin, cello and harp.

Her big breakthrough came in 1913, at the age of just 19, when she became the first woman to win the Prix de Rome. In winning the prize, she joined musical giants Hector Berlioz, Gabriel Fauré, Claude Debussy, and even her own father Ernest Boulanger. Her own sister, Nadia, finished in second in the 1908 edition. The prize awarded her the opportunity to work for 3 to 5 years in Rome, all expenses paid. Unfortunately, this was cut short by the advent of the First World War in 1914. A second stint in Rome to finish her studies in 1916 also ended early, as Boulanger's health began to seriously deteriorate. Her final return to Paris would result in a frantic two years of desperately finishing and orchestrating her remaining works. Very sickly from an early age, she battled the continuing effects of bronchial pneumonia, contracted when she was 2 years old. Her weakened state eventually led to intestinal tuberculosis, the disease that would eventually kill her. Rushing to finish her last orchestrations, the frail markings in the original manuscripts of *D'un Matin de printemps* and *D'un Soir triste* tell the story of a young, bright intellect running out of time. These two pieces were some of the very last written in Boulanger's own hand, with her final works being dictated by Nadia.

*D'un Matin de printemps* and *D'un Soir triste* are perfect examples of French Impressionism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though young, Boulanger shows a maturity in constructing a sonic tapestry in two completely bipolar effects. While *D'un Soir triste* conveys a dark, morbid, and almost funerary mood, *D'un Matin de printemps* overflows with shimmering colors and delicate orchestrations. The harmony is nuanced and at times sumptuous, while the melodies are evocative and dynamic. In the beginning, listen to the way each phrase dances and skates without care. The sparkly nature of the opening establishes an energetic buzz that continues throughout the piece. The light, driving eighth notes in the strings provide a dazzling stage for the woodwinds to pirouette on. The middle section of the piece takes a more contemplative tone. Long, stretched phrases are filled with a rainbow of woodwind color. The yearning pull of the strings calls for us to return to the jubilant spirit of the beginning. That fire returns, and *D'un Matin de printemps* escalates into one, final climactic section. The annoyance of dissonant flutes gives way to a celebratory flourish. The piece ends with an explosion of ecstasy, as Boulanger shares her interpretation of what it means to capture a scintillating new beginning.

-Tristan Hughes (MM - Orchestral Conducting '27)

### **Antonín Dvořák - *Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 53***

Antonín Dvořák is a composer whose success was only gained by virtue of his determination. By the age of 33, Dvořák did not even own a piano and lived with five roommates until he married. He had composed a significant body of works, yet his music had yet to be heard outside of the city of Prague. Upon applying for the Austrian State Music Prize, his music caught the eye of senior composer Johannes Brahms, who secured Dvořák's first contract with a publishing company and became an ardent supporter of his work. Finally, after years of struggle, his music would reach a larger audience. It is unsurprising then that Dvořák's *Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 53* was composed only months after the premiere of Brahms' own in 1879. Dvořák even dedicated the work to Joseph Joachim, the same violinist who had premiered Brahms's concerto. But once again, he couldn't catch a break. Joachim rejected the work, and it wasn't until 1883 that it was premiered—not by Joachim, but by the Czech violinist František Ondříček.

Dvořák openly wears his influences on his sleeve in this concerto. Much of the music found here has its roots in Czech or Bohemian folk music. One can hear many of the same techniques utilized in Brahms' concerto put to use, as well as similarities in Dvořák's last movement with that of Beethoven's own violin concerto.

The piece opens with a heavy, punctuated introduction by the orchestra before the solo violin enters with a dark, *pesante* melody. After a long dialogue of intense, bravura statements between the violin and the orchestra, a lyrical theme is introduced by the winds. The solo maintains its intensity but eventually evaporates into a more peaceful sound world. After revisiting the opening material, the music performs a smoky escape and modulates seamlessly into the second movement, which consists of simple, cantabile melodies and florid variations.

The third movement, marked "Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo," is a spritely rondo, with a tear-jerking contrasting section. Here, Dvořák's violin writing truly shines—the soloist laments, cheers, and dances with glee before the concerto comes to a breathless close. From quiet determination to celebratory dance rhythms, this piece has it all. Sit back, and enjoy Antonín Dvořák's *Violin Concerto*.

— Noah Stevens (alumnus string fellow and conducting student)

### **Samuel Barber - *Knoxville: Summer of 1915***

The creation of a great artistic masterpiece, much like the discovery of a groundbreaking medical breakthrough, is often the result of fortuitous and unexpected moments its creators could never have predicted.

In 1947, Eleanor Steber, the renowned lyric soprano, commissioned the American composer Samuel Barber to compose a piece for her to perform. Soon after, Barber stumbled across James Agee's prose poem, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, in *The Partisan Review* magazine. Barber was deeply moved by its sentiment and surprised by how closely Agee's recollections of childhood mirrored his own early years.

Born three months apart and raised by loving, middle-class families—Agee in Tennessee and Barber in Pennsylvania—both men were inward-looking and created art that expressed emotions with clarity and lyricism, leaving a profound and lasting impact on their audiences. Barber was a musical prodigy as a child, while Agee’s talent for writing emerged during his undergraduate years at Harvard.

They considered themselves outsiders. Agee’s feelings of isolation and abandonment following the tragic death of his father when he was only five haunted him for the rest of his life. Barber, a gay man, faced cruel discrimination from an unaccepting society and is widely believed to have struggled with depression and alcoholism as a result.

Both Pulitzer Prize recipients, Barber and Agee were key figures in the American Modernist movement, which began in the early 20th century as a reckoning by performing and visual artists, writers, and other cultural arbiters on how to create music, art, and literature in an increasingly urban and industrialized society.

Written by Agee at age 28, the poem expresses nostalgia for a loving family alongside feelings of alienation following his father’s untimely death. Barber felt a kinship with Agee that inspired him to set the poem to music. Perhaps it was no coincidence that when Barber began this work, his own beloved father and aunt were both terminally ill. Three weeks after *Knoxville* was premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Barber’s aunt died, followed by the passing of his father three months later.

As you listen to *Knoxville*, notice how different sections of the orchestra, and individual instruments, evoke moods, suggest colors, and give context and texture to the lyrics. For example, the opening introduces a gentle and clearly Americana setting through open intervals within a chorale-like orchestration played by a woodwind trio of English horn, clarinet, and bassoon. The easy, swaying motion ushering in the vocalist reflects “that time of evening when people sit on their porches.” When a streetcar passes by, musical inflections and accents conjure a busy street scene reminiscent of George Gershwin’s *An American in Paris*.

As dusk descends on his Knoxville home, Agee recalls the soothing simplicity and deep feeling of security he felt as a child lying outdoors on quilts with his family; his father has drained and “coiled the hose,” “parents on porches rock and rock,” and the “noise of the locusts from all the air at once, enchants my ear drums.” All this contentment is expressed lovingly by an enveloping warmth, like a quilt, conveyed by the strings. The harp adds lightly plucked chords and arpeggios, infusing the scene with otherworldly mystery.

*Knoxville: Summer of 1915* embodies a full range of emotional experience, from the wide-eyed wonder of childhood through world-weary adulthood. Simple melodies and harmonies portray Agee’s childhood memories. Barber’s sharply angular melodies and dissonant harmonies represent Agee looking back as an adult, foreshadowing the tragedy about to befall his family. In several cases, the lyric “father

portends a darker musical mood with a muted trumpet and French horn piercing the serenity of a lazy summer evening.

*Knoxville: Summer of 1915* remains a brilliant crown jewel within the canon of American classical music. Barber's transformation of Agee's text into an enduring, evocative, and moving musical experience is a true artistic alchemy.

-Gary Blackman (MM Orchestral Conducting '26)

### **Maurice Ravel - *Ma mere l'Oye Suite* (1910)**

Originally a piano duet for his friends' children, Maurice Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite (Ma Mère l'Oye)* has been enchanting audiences since 1910. Ravel wrote the five-movement piece for piano four-hands for Mimi and Jean Godebski, the children of two of his closest friends. Mimi, when much older, often recounted the stories Ravel used to tell her and her brother—many of which were the Mother Goose fairy tales, based on the collection by French author Charles Perrault. Many of these stories have become popular mainstream fairy tales, most notably through Disney: *Beauty and the Beast*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Cinderella*, to name just a few.

Later orchestrated into a ballet, Ravel selected five movements from it to become the orchestral suite—much like Tchaikovsky did with *The Nutcracker*. The first movement of the suite, *Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty*, evokes the story of a princess who has been asleep for 100 years. Ravel's use of sparse instrumentation and the Aeolian mode (a commonly used “key signature” in old Church music) creates a distant, almost haunting atmosphere.

The second movement, *Petit Poucet*, colloquially *Tom Thumb*, uses rolling and moving string lines to depict the titular character retracing his breadcrumb-strewn steps. Occasionally, the strings play notes “out of the ordinary,” representing Tom's confusion when he notices his breadcrumbs are gone. High, chirping wind notes create the effect of birds swooping in to eat the crumbs.

*Laideronnette, The Empress of the Pagodas* conjures the exotic and “oriental” sounds of the Far East using the pentatonic scale, which on the piano is played almost exclusively on the black keys, evoking the sound of Eastern music.

*Conversations of Beauty and the Beast* uses a slow and unhurried waltz that accompanies the familiar final scene from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, where Beauty accepts the Beast's kind heart and, for the first time, looks past his haggard appearance. From this, the Beast returns to his original, handsome, princely self.

*The Fairy Garden* culminates our journey through these mystical and enchanting fairy tales, with *Sleeping Beauty* being awoken by Prince Charming.

-Alec Hamilton (MM Orchestra Conducting '26)