



School of Music
University of Missouri

2025-2026 Series | Large Ensemble

University Symphony Orchestra

Dr. John McKeever, conductor

October 26, 2025 • 3:00PM
Missouri Theatre

Program

Conga del Fuego Nuevo Arturo Márquez
(b. 1950)

The Dancing Moonlight Dai Wei
(b. 1989)

Ravish and Mayhem Stephanie Berg
(b. 1986)

intermission

Firebird Suite (1919) Igor Stravinsky
(1882-1971)

- I. Introduction
- II. L'oiseau de feu et sa danse
- III. Variation de l'oiseau de feu
- IV. Ronde des princesses
- V. Danse infernale du roi Kastcheï
- VI. Berceuse
- VII. Final

Personnel

Flutes

John Goodson
Nadia Lake
Hanna Noh

Oboes

Sophia Fasone
Sadie Middleton

Clarinets

Samantha Decker
Jane Guillot-Beinke
Matthew Kim

Bassoons

Dominick DeStefano
Michael Kouba

Horns

Hayden Alley
Emily Aponte
Alexis Doebelin
Joseph Rutherford

Trumpets

Zachary Beran
Jackson Kenney
Brandon Sconce

Trombones

Jackson Denney
Dr. Timothy Howe
Brendan Frazier

Tuba

Bryce Herin

Percussion

Carson Allen
Matthew Hinkle
Mon Ioeong Cheok Kai
Daniel Noonan
Tanner Prewitt

Harp

Sadie Rinck

Keyboards

Hanyu Zhang

Violins

Maya Anand
Kip Atteberry
Nathan Bronstein
Angelina Casey
Lydia Davis
Mary Draxler
Breanne Garstang
Thomas Goff
Matthew Kim
Drew Lubiewski
Brandon Merchant
Hadley Miller
Hayden Neally
Abigail Richmond
Thomas Robert
Ethan Sanders
Kyle Stawiarski
Aidan Steinkamp +
Sydney Studer *
Juliana Vieira
Simon Whitty

Violas

Ella Frank *
Elaina Maurer
Ash Merenbloom
Josephine O
Ava O'Bryan
Aiden Spavale
Evan Wilde

Cellos

Clara Anderson
Broderick Beebe
Sophie Hof
Jillian Keeney
Sara Lawson
Mason Murphy
Drake O'Hearn
Henry Rao *
Rebecca Robuck
Preston Smith

Basses

Samuel Caldwell
Sydney Hoynacki
Lucas Reaume
Trey Rolfes *

Assistant Conductor

Ellie Chang

+ - Concertmaster

* - Principal String

Names are listed in
alphabetical order,
seatings for the winds and
percussion rotate on each
piece

Biographies

John McKeever is the Director of Orchestral Activities at the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO. In 2022/23 Dr. McKeever was the Assistant Conductor for the University of North Carolina School of the Arts Symphony Orchestra. Additionally, Dr. McKeever also worked as the Assistant Conductor for Piedmont Opera, where he conducted their 2023 production of Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*. Dr. McKeever earned a Doctor of Musical Arts in Orchestral Conducting at the University of Colorado Boulder, graduating in 2021. As a graduate teaching assistant, he served as the director of the CU Boulder Campus Orchestra. He also served as an Assistant and Cover Conductor for the Boulder Philharmonic.

Born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska, Dr. McKeever began his studies on the piano. While continuing on the piano, he switched his focus to the double bass in elementary school. He earned a Bachelor of Music in Double Bass Performance at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts where he studied with Paul Sharpe. While a student at UNCSA, Dr. McKeever developed an interest in conducting and began to work as an assistant conductor for the A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute, Piedmont Opera, and several UNCSA musicals. Dr. McKeever continued his studies at UNCSA, earning a Master of Music in Orchestral Conducting in 2015.

From 2012-2018, Dr. McKeever served as the Assistant Conductor for Piedmont Opera in Winston-Salem, NC. In 2018 he made his conducting debut with the company in Piedmont Opera's production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. In 2016, Dr. McKeever shadowed the American Ballet Theatre's spring season at the Metropolitan Opera at the invitation of the company's principal conductor, Charles Barker. Dr. McKeever's teachers include James Allbritten, David Amado, Charles Barker, Michael Jinbo, Christopher James Lees, Gary Lewis, Jonathan Schiffman, and Kevin Stites.

For more information, please visit johnmckeeperconductor.com.

Program Notes

Arturo Márquez (b. 1950): *Conga del Fuego Nuevo* (2005)

Best known for his *Danzón* series, which includes the widely popular *Danzón No.2*, Mexican composer Arturo Márquez (b.1950) is no stranger to incorporating Latin American influences and culture into his music. Born in Sonora to a family of musicians, Márquez spent his early career studying across the country, practicing piano, violin and music theory in both the United States and at the Conservatorio Nacional in Mexico. Later, as a Fulbright Scholar, he studied composition in both France and later the California Institute of Arts. He has since enjoyed a prolific career composing both orchestral and chamber works. His most recent entry in the *Danzón* series, *Danzón No.9*, was commissioned and premiered in 2017 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel.

Conga del Fuego Nuevo (Conga of New Fire) was written by Márquez following a commission for the Mexican festival “Festival del Tajín” held in north Veracruz. In a 2021 interview with the Chicago Sinfonietta, Marquez detailed his experience learning Veracruzano traditions, stating how the Veracruzano pioneers have very special tradition, some based on a “conga” that is danced every new year, called “The Conga of The Old Man.” He continued, “I loved a ritual that they do in Veracruz called “The New Fire,” when a new period arrives.” Márquez is known for his use of different cultural traditions and rhythms in his music, including the danzón, which originates from the nearby Cuba. In the same interview, he described his love for the conga dance and its rhythms, stating that it has wonderful stories despite not being performed frequently, which led to the composition.

In *Conga del Fuego Nuevo*, the pace is very fast and energetic, with only one slower, lyric, section. The piece focuses on sounds traditionally found in the modern Mexican music setting, as well as those found in the Veracruzano tradition and the “conga”. While several different areas of influence are present, including a strong and expressive trumpet presence and passages highlighting the repeated harmonic patterns in the strings and winds, the primary sound featured is that of the percussion. The percussion is led by several different Latin instruments, including congas, guiro, and claves, and they follow a specific rhythmic pattern during the piece, which is that of the “conga” dance. The conga dance features three steps on the beat and an additional strike that comes slightly before the fourth beat. This pattern is very present throughout the entirety of the piece, and it

leads to several impactful moments by the percussion, including those provided by the tambourine and timpani. When asked about what to listen for during the piece, Márquez remarked that special attention must be paid to the percussion, noting that players must pay close attention to how they are blending the Latin instruments with the orchestral instruments as well as how they are playing their accents.

Using the unique blend of his own cultural traditions and influences as well as his knowledge working as an orchestral composer, Márquez's skill for infusing different cultures into his music allows for this piece to stand out amongst the orchestral world as a high paced, musically rich composition that will delight the audience with its upbeat groove.

Program notes by Russell Wallace

Dai Wei (b.1989): *The Dancing Moonlight* (2017, rev. 2021)

Chinese-born composer and vocalist Dai Wei (b.1989) creates music that builds bridges between worlds. Her compositions blend Eastern and Western musical traditions, weaving together classical techniques with the energy of jazz and rock. As a performer, she's also known for her mastery of Khoomei, a remarkable throat singing technique from Central Asia where a single voice produces multiple tones simultaneously.

Wei studied composition at Xinghai Conservatory (China) as well as at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and the Curtis Institute of Music (U.S.). Currently, she is completing her doctorate at Princeton University. Critics have praised her work as "impassioned" (*The New York Times*) and filled with "striking humanity" (*The Washington Post*). Her music has reached audiences worldwide through performances by major orchestras, including the Detroit Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, and London's Philharmonia Orchestra, as well as innovative ensembles like the Alarm Will Sound, Bang on a Can, and the Kronos Quartet. This season, she serves as the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra's Sound Investment Composer, working toward a premiere under conductor Jaime Martín in Spring 2025.

The *Dancing Moonlight* draws its inspiration from the vibrant traditions of the Yi people, one of China's largest ethnic minorities who live primarily in the mountainous regions of Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou provinces. In Yi culture, music and dance are not just entertainment, they are the heartbeat of community life, performed outdoors during festivals and celebrations under the open sky. The piece takes its name from "Axi Tiaoyue"

(Dancing under the Moon), a beloved Yi tradition where dancers create intricate, twisting patterns with stamping steps and spontaneous groupings, all bathed in moonlight. Wei captures this communal spirit in her orchestration, using shifting rhythms, percussive accents, and interlocking musical conversations between instruments to mirror the dancers' interactions.

The piece bursts to life with the lower strings establishing a driving irregular rhythm, joined by the piano and percussion to build the foundation. Over this foundation, the upper strings and winds create dance-like melodies that seem to converse with each other like dancers responding to one another's steps. The music alternates between these festive exchanges and quieter, lyrical moments before concluding with a playful and light melody on the piano, flutes, and xylophone, bringing the choreography under the moon to its end.

Program notes by Juliana Vieira

DAI WEI is a composer and vocalist whose musical journey navigates in the spaces between east and west, classical and pop, electronic and acoustic, innovation and tradition. She often draws from eastern philosophy and aesthetics to create works with contemporary resonance, and reflect an introspection on how these multidimensional conflict and tension can create and inhabit worlds of their own. Being an experimental vocalist, she performs herself as a Khoomei throat singer in her recent compositions, through which are filtered by different experiences and backgrounds as a calling that transcends genres, races, and labels. She was recently featured in **The Washington Post's** "22 for 22": Composers and Performers to Watch this year."

Described as "impassioned" by *The New York Times* and "with a striking humanity" by *The Washington Post*, her music has received commissions and performances by the **Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Utah Symphony Orchestra, New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Albany Symphony, West Virginia Symphony Orchestra, Reno Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Opéra Orchestre National Montpellier, Philharmonia Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, Alarm Will Sound, Bang on a Can, and Aizuri String Quartet**. Recent highlights include two multimedia works commissioned by **the Kronos Quartet** and pipa virtuoso **Wu Man** for their 50th Anniversary Celebration, as well as two chamber orchestra pieces for the **Albany Symphony**. Dai Wei is currently serving as Composer-in-Residence for the **Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra's** 2024-2025 Sound Investment.

THE DANCING MOONLIGHT is largely a piece about my infatuation with a type of traditional dance music that originated from an ethnic group called Yi in Yunnan, China. With the capture and blending of the style and timbre in Jazz and Rock music, I want to express that we are always looking at the same moon regardless of where we are, who we are, and where we come from.

Biography and Program Notes by Dai Wei

Stephanie Berg (b. 1986): *Ravish and Mayhem* (2012)

Stephanie Berg grew up in Parkville, Missouri, and now makes her home in St. Louis. A clarinetist and composer, she's known for music that bursts with color, rhythm, and a touch of cinematic flair. Years of playing in bands and orchestras gave her a practical understanding of instrumental color, technical challenges, and notation—insights that continue to shape her writing. *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* once praised her as a “promising new compositional voice,” and she's since delivered on that promise with a wide range of orchestral, chamber, and solo works performed around the country. Her pieces have been commissioned by major ensembles, recorded professionally, and in 2015 she was named “Composer of the Year” by the Arkansas Symphony. Alongside composing, Berg performs regularly on clarinet with regional orchestras and teaches a thriving private studio. She holds degrees in clarinet performance and composition from the University of Missouri, where she studied with Stefan Freund and Edward Dolbashian.

Ravish and Mayhem is one of Berg's breakout works. It first appeared at the Mizzou International Composers Festival in 2012, where it was performed by Alarm Will Sound. Soon after, Berg expanded it for full orchestra, and the piece quickly took off, finding a home on programs with the St. Louis Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, and Arkansas Symphony. It's now one of her most celebrated works, showing off her distinctive voice and infectious energy.

The spark for the piece came in an everyday moment: a long car ride. To pass the time, Berg imagined a massive street festival—wild dancers, street musicians, couples swept up in the moment, and, at the grand finale, a parade of elephants. From that vision grew a piece that she says reflects the “vivacity and virtuosity” of Alarm Will Sound, the ensemble that first premiered it. While the imagery might call to mind a Middle Eastern celebration, the music itself doesn't borrow directly from any one tradition. Instead, Berg creates her own sense of festivity with bold fanfares, folk-like melodies, and dazzling orchestral colors.

When expanding *Ravish and Mayhem* from chamber ensemble to orchestra, Berg kept the character of the original intact, leaving most of the solo passages unchanged. The main shift came in filling out the large tutti sections and expanding solo strings into full sections. Some of the piece's most distinctive colors come from unusual instrumental pairings, such as the E-flat clarinet with solo violin. Instead of blending smoothly, the two instruments highlight each other's sharper edges, creating a deliberately raw, almost "exotic" quality that perfectly suits the festival atmosphere. Stylistically, *Ravish and Mayhem* reflects Berg's eclectic, cinematic voice. The piece brims with rhythmic drive, sudden shifts of texture, and bold melodic gestures that evoke a sense of spectacle and celebration. While rooted in the traditions of orchestral showpieces, its imaginative flair and exuberant pacing place it firmly in the landscape of 21st-century American music.

The result is a work full of contrasts and surprises. Fiery rhythms suddenly give way to quieter, more playful textures; virtuosic solos emerge and then dissolve back into the bustle; and the music always seems to be in motion, as if carrying the listener through the twists and turns of a crowded festival. By the end, the energy builds to an over-the-top, jubilant finale—the musical arrival of those elephants Berg imagined from the start. Berg encourages audiences to approach the work in their own way. Some may imagine the vibrant street festival she pictured, while others may simply enjoy the energy and color of the music without attaching imagery to it.

Lively, unpredictable, and infectiously fun, *Ravish and Mayhem* invites the audience to join the celebration. It's a piece that revels in sound, spectacle, and sheer joy—a reminder of how music can transport us to an imagined world and sweep us up in its energy.

Program notes by Ellie Chang

Stravinsky (1882-1971): *The Firebird Suite* (1919)

If it wasn't for Paris's Ballets Russes manager, Serge Diaghilev, Igor Stravinsky may have been lost to history. The previous year, Diaghilev was criticized by the Parisian press for his ballet's "lack of any comparable musical novelty." In response, Diaghilev took a risk and commissioned a new production of a Russian fairy tale from the relatively unknown Stravinsky, who then began to write the music that would change his life.

Stravinsky was very excited by the project, and *The Firebird* was completed in May of 1910. However, difficulties soon arose. At the first rehearsal, the orchestra was absolutely

bewildered by the unexpected harmonies and rhythms, causing dancers to miss their entrances and chaos to ensue. An additional dress rehearsal was required to practice the parts. The debut of the piece took place on June 25, 1910. The impact of *The Firebird* was sensational, and Stravinsky immediately became a household name. The Parisian critics who had haunted Diaghilev's previous season were more than placated, one calling *The Firebird*, "the most exquisite marvel of equilibrium we have ever imagined between sounds, movements and forms." Throughout his life, Stravinsky would continue to return to *The Firebird*, creating four different versions of the piece. The most popular of these is the one we are playing today: the 1919 version.

I. *Introduction*

The first movement opens ominously in the Enchanted Garden of the immortal and evil King Kashchei. Suddenly, the Firebird appears (depicted by shimmering trills), pursued by a young prince named Ivan Tsarevich (depicted by strings and oboe).

II. *The Firebird and its dance (L'oiseau de feu et sa danse)*

The Firebird performs a lively dance around a tree of golden apples, accompanied by fluttering strings and driving rhythms.

III. *The Firebird's variation (Variation de l'oiseau de feu)*

Unlike a musical variation, a dance variation refers to a solo dance showcasing the expertise and artistry of the dancer. In this movement, the Firebird's dance becomes even more wild, before finally Ivan catches the Firebird, but he cannot contain her and she eventually escapes, leaving behind one of her magical feathers.

IV. *The Princesses' Khorovod (Ronde des Princesses)*

Thirteen enchanted princesses appear in the garden (depicted by two themes, one in triplets and one in duplets), shaking the apple tree to retrieve the golden fruit. Ivan immediately falls in love with Princess Elena while the princesses perform a stately dance. However, when he goes to greet them, they flee to the palace.

V. *Infernal dance of King Kashchei (Danse infernale de roi Kachtcheï)*

In pursuit of the princesses, Ivan enters the palace and is captured by monsters who guard the immortal King Kashchei. The evil king begins to turn Ivan to stone (depicted by "magic thirds" in the bass), but before he successfully completes the magic spell, Ivan remembers the Firebird's feather! He waves it in the air,

summoning the bird to his aid. The Firebird enchants Kashchei and his monsters causing them to dance a wild ballet full of syncopation.

VI. *Lullaby (Berceuse)*

After the king and his monsters fall asleep from exhaustion, the Firebird reveals the secret of the king's immortality: his soul is shielded in a magic egg. Ivan destroys the egg, freeing the princesses and other creatures held captive by Kashchei's spells.

VII. *Finale*

In a final joyful celebration (featuring an unusual 7/4 time signature), Ivan and Princess Elena are happily married.

Program notes by Aidan Steinkamp