



School of Music  
University of Missouri

2025-2026 Series | Large Ensemble

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# University Symphony Orchestra

**Dr. John McKeever, conductor**

**April 25, 2026 • 7:00PM**  
**Missouri Theatre**

## Program

**Overture to *Nabucco* ..... Giuseppe Verdi**  
(1813-1901)

**Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, op. 37 ..... Ludwig van Beethoven**  
(1770-1827)

I. Allegro con brio

Hanyu Zhang, piano

*intermission*

**Symphony No. 5 in E minor, op. 64 ..... Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky**  
(1840-1893)

I. Andante – Allegro con anima

II. Andante cantabile con alcuna licenza

III. Valse: Allegro moderato

IV. Finale: Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace

## University Symphony Orchestra Personnel

### Flutes

Mattie Neidholdt  
Hanna Noh  
Haley Parks

### Oboes

Sophia Fasone  
Sadie Middleton

### Clarinets

Haley Carrier  
Maddie Gibbs  
Jane Guillot-Beinke  
Christina Sanchez

### Bassoons

Dominick DeStefano  
Grayson Helsel

### Horns

Hayden Alley  
Emily Aponte  
Alexis Doebelin  
Lauren Griffith  
Joseph Rutherford

### Trumpets

Jackson Kenney  
Douglas Schaedler  
Brandon Sconce

### Trombones

Brendan Frazier  
Andrew Jaggi  
Chloe Wilson

### Tuba

Bryce Herin

### Percussion

Matthew Hinkle  
Daniel Noonan  
Tanner Prewitt

### Violins

Maya Anand  
Kip Atteberry  
Emma Bangert  
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 +  
Juliana Vieira \*  
Simon Whitty

### Violas

Ella Frank \*  
Elaina Maurer  
Ash Merenbloom  
Jojo O  
Ava O'Bryan  
Aiden Spavale  
Evan Wilde  
Becca Winters

### Cellos

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

### Basses

Kelsey Atteberry  
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

**Hanyu Zhang** is a pianist whose performances have taken him to concert stages across China, Europe, and the United States, with appearances in Wuhan, Dalian, Salzburg, Kansas City, and Columbia.

Zhang's accomplishments have been recognized through numerous competitions. He received First Prize in the China Youth Music Competition, Second Prize in the Conero International Piano Competition, and was selected as the sole pianist for the "Best of the Best" Training Program and scholarship at the Wuhan Conservatory of Music. Most recently, he was named as prizewinner in both the University of Missouri Emerging Artist Competition and the University of Missouri Soloist Competition.

Zhang holds a Bachelor of Music from the Wuhan Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Dr. Hanqing Zhou, and previously studied with Alon Goldstein at the University of Missouri – Kansas City. He is currently pursuing a Master of Music in Piano Performance at the University of Missouri – Columbia under the guidance of Dr. Peter Miyamoto, where he also serves as a Graduate Assistant in Collaborative Piano.

**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 [johnmckeeverconductor.com](http://johnmckeeverconductor.com).

## Program Notes

### **Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901): Overture to *Nabucco* (1841)**

Giuseppe Verdi was one of the most important figures in 19th-century Italian opera, known for his ability to write music that feels both dramatically powerful and emotionally direct. His career, though, did not start smoothly. After the failure of one of his early operas, along with the deaths of his wife and two young children, Verdi was ready to stop composing entirely. *Nabucco* became the turning point that changed everything.

Written during this difficult period, *Nabucco* tells the story of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and the exile of the Hebrew people. Verdi was initially uninterested in the libretto, but when he eventually read it, its themes of loss, displacement, and longing resonated deeply with him. The opera premiered in 1842 at La Scala and was an immediate success, marking the true beginning of his career. Its impact extended beyond music—Italian audiences connected strongly with the story during a time of growing national identity, and the famous chorus “Va, pensiero,” expressing the longing of an exiled people for their homeland, became closely associated with the movement for Italian unification.

The overture brings together the central emotional and dramatic elements of the opera into a cohesive, self-contained work. It opens with a noble brass chorale that immediately establishes a serious, weighty tone, before shifting into a more lyrical woodwind melody drawn from “Va, pensiero.” This theme has a calm, reflective quality, suggesting the longing of an exiled people. These more introspective moments are contrasted with faster, more forceful sections, driven by energetic rhythms and strong orchestral gestures that suggest tension and struggle.

Throughout the overture, Verdi plays with these contrasts, moving between intimate and powerful sounds while gradually building momentum. The piece closes with a strong, energetic finish that leaves a sense of excitement, which offers a glimpse into the larger drama of the opera. Even in this early work, Verdi’s ability to combine memorable melodies with clear, compelling drama is already evident.

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, op. 37 (1800)**

#### **I. Allegro con brio**

Ludwig van Beethoven stands at the center of the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras, expanding inherited forms into something more personal and dramatic. His Piano Concerto No. 3 marks an important turning point in that shift. While his earlier concertos show a clear influence from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, this work moves into a darker, more individual sound world, especially through its use of the key of C minor—a key Beethoven often used for his most intense music.

The concerto was premiered in 1803 at the Theater an der Wien as part of an all-Beethoven concert. The performance itself has become well known—Beethoven had not fully written out the solo part and played much of it from memory, leaving his page-turner to navigate nearly blank pages.

The first movement opens with a long orchestral introduction that builds tension from a quiet beginning. Its main theme is direct and rhythmic, contrasted by a more lyrical second theme in E-flat major. This sets up the “double exposition,” where the orchestra presents the material first, followed by the soloist’s more elaborate version.

When the piano enters, the soloist expands on this material with intensity and motion, bringing out the contrast between the two themes through virtuosic passage and shifting character. The relationship between soloist and orchestra becomes more active from this point on, alternating between moments of dialogue and tension. Near the end of the movement, a cadenza gives the soloist space to shape the music more freely before the orchestra returns, leading to a strong and dramatic close in C minor.

### **Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893): Symphony No. 5 in E minor, op. 64 (1888)**

“I am passionately fond of the national element in all its varied expressions... I am Russian in the fullest sense of the word.” — Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky occupies a unique place in 19th-century music. While many Russian composers of his time focused on creating a distinctly national style, Tchaikovsky balanced that influence with a strong foundation in Western European training. The result is music that feels both deeply expressive yet structurally grounded, combining emotional intensity with clarity of form.

Composed in 1888, his fifth symphony comes from a period of renewed creative energy after several years of uncertainty. Although Tchaikovsky did not assign the work a formal program, he hinted at an underlying idea in his sketches: “complete resignation before

fate.” This idea has led many to hear the symphony as a kind of psychological journey, shaped by a recurring “fate” motif that appears in all four movements and gradually transforms over the course of the work.

The symphony opens with a motif in the clarinets that is dark and restrained in character. As the first movement develops, it alternates with more lyrical material, creating a sense of tension between opposing ideas. The second movement offers one of Tchaikovsky’s most recognizable melodies, introduced by a horn solo and supported by rich orchestral color, though its warmth is interrupted by the return of the fate theme. In the third movement, a graceful waltz provides contrast, with lighter textures and a sense of elegance that recalls Tchaikovsky’s ballet writing.

The finale brings all the elements together, beginning with a transformed version of the fate motif, now in a brighter, more assertive character. As the movement progresses, the music builds in intensity, moving through moments of struggle before arriving at a broad, triumphant conclusion. Across the work, Tchaikovsky’s use of recurring material, rich orchestration, and strong contrasts creates a sense of continuity and emotional direction. This gives the work both its dramatic shape and lasting impact.

While Tchaikovsky himself was uncertain about the symphony’s success, it has since become one of his most frequently performed works. Its balance of structure and expression, along with the transformation of a single idea across the entire piece, gives the symphony a strong sense of unity. At the same time, its shifting moods leave space for a range of interpretations, making it a work that continues to resonate with performers and audiences alike.

*Program notes by Ellie Chang*