



School of Music
University of Missouri

2026-2027 Series | Large Ensemble

University Symphony Orchestra

Dr. John McKeever, conductor

Ellie Chang, guest conductor

September 27, 2026 • 3:00PM

Missouri Theatre

Program

Dark Mountains (2011) Robert Paterson
(b. 1970)

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

Ellie Chang, conductor

intermission

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, "*Rhenish*" Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

- I. Lebhaft
- II. Scherzo: Sehr mäßig
- III. Nicht schnell
- IV. Feierlich
- V. Lebhaft

University Symphony Orchestra Personnel

Flutes

Jillian Conley
Hanna Noh
Haley Parks

Oboes

Sophia Fasone
Molly Johnson
Dan Willett

Clarinets

Haley Carrier
Thomas Rodriguez
Christina Sanchez

Bassoons

Dominick DeStefano
Matt Fellows

Horns

Hayden Alley
Alexis Doebelin
Gretchen Haselhorst
Emmett Wright
Sam Wyland

Trumpets

Zach Beran
Jackson Kenney

Trombones

Brendan Frazier
Emanuel Guzman
Tyler Martindale

Percussion

Tristan Alderton
Annika Blackburn
Russell Wallace

Harp

Sadie Rinck

Violins

Kip Atteberry
Emma Bangert
Nathan Bronstein *
Angelina Casey
Mary Draxler
Matthew Fang
Thomas Goff
Matthew Kim
Drew Lubiewski
Hadley Miller
Hayden Neally
Abi Richmond
Thomas Robert
Ethan Sanders
Kyle Stawiarski
Aidan Steinkamp
Juliana Vieira +
Simon Whitty
Jocelyn Ybarra

Violas

Ella Frank *
Madison Gong
Ash Merenbloom
Ava O'Bryan
Moses Pavon
Aiden Spavale
Malijha Watts

Cellos

Clara Anderson
Broderick Beebe
Rowan Davis
Michael Fang
Auden Henderson
Sophie Hof
Sara Lawson
Daniel Postlethwait *
Henry Rao
Rebecca Robuck
Torsten Taylor

Basses

Bennett Howe
Sydney Hoynacki
Lucas Reaume *

Assistant Conductor

Ellie Chang

+ - Concertmaster

* - Principal String

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

Biographies

Ellie Chang is a conductor currently pursuing a Master of Music in Orchestral Conducting at the University of Missouri, where she studies with Dr. John McKeever and serves as a graduate teaching assistant.

Ellie earned her Bachelor of Music in Flute Performance and a Certificate in Orchestral Conducting from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, where she studied conducting with Dr. Kevin Sütterlin and flute with Prof. Deb Harris. During her time at Concordia, she was an active member of various ensembles, including the Concordia Orchestra and the Concordia Band, taking on leadership roles as principal flute, violinist, and orchestra librarian.

As assistant conductor of the Concordia Orchestra and Concordia Opera, Ellie has conducted both groups in rehearsals and performances on numerous occasions. Her work with Concordia Opera was recognized with Second Place in the National Opera Association's Collegiate Opera Competition for the college's production of Jonathan Stinson's *The Three Bears*. She also served as conductor for the Concordia Flute Choir, leading the ensemble in rehearsals and performances. During her senior year of college, she won Concordia's Senior Honors Concerto Competition and performed Aram Khachaturian's Flute Concerto as a soloist with the orchestra. She has also received recognition in the Fargo-Moorhead Symphony Orchestra Young Artists Concerto Competition and the Minnesota MTNA Young Artists Competition.

In addition to her work as a conductor and performer, Ellie is deeply committed to teaching and mentoring young musicians. Her teaching experience includes tutoring music theory, providing private lessons, serving as a clinician for solo and ensemble competitions, and presenting masterclasses.

Ellie has continued to develop her conducting experience through a variety of professional and educational opportunities. In 2024 and 2025, she appeared as a guest conductor and conducting fellow with Sinfonietta Memphis. In 2025, she was selected as an orchestral conducting fellow at the Lutheran Summer Music Festival & Academy, where she worked closely with faculty and student musicians in rehearsals and performances. Most recently, she participated as a conducting fellow at the Philippsburg Orchestra Academy in Germany, further expanding her experience working with orchestral musicians in an international setting.

John McKeever is the Director of Orchestral Activities at the University of Missouri in Columbia, MO. In addition to his role at the University, Dr. McKeever is the co-founder and musical director for the Light Opera Lab in New York City. Light Opera Lab (LOL) is

committed to the creation and performance of new comedic operas. 2026 marked Light Opera Lab's first season. The company performed contemporary comedic operas and workshopped scenes from two newly written comedic operas that are now being fully fleshed out for complete productions in 2027. Here in Columbia, Dr. McKeever is also the Artistic Director of the Columbia Civic Orchestra. The CCO is a volunteer ensemble dedicated to providing a continued enjoyment of orchestral music to its members and audiences.

Highly sought after as an educator, Dr. McKeever has led clinics, honors ensembles, and masterclasses across the United States. In October of 2025, he was a guest teacher at the Universidad Nacional de Música in Lima, Peru, where he taught conducting master classes and led rehearsals with the Symphony Orchestra. 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

Robert Paterson (b. 1970): *Dark Mountains* (2011)

This piece is commissioned by and dedicated to the Vermont Symphony Orchestra and Jaime Laredo, and was originally written for the Made in Vermont Music Festival.

Vermont is famous for its green mountains, but I often find myself taking long drives through the mountains on overcast days or even at night, when the mountains lose color and become gray silhouettes. Many roads in Vermont are so dark, particularly in the Northeast Kingdom, that you need to use headlights, even during the day. *Dark Mountains* is meant to portray the beauty and grandeur of the mountains and the peacefulness of the open roads, but also the darkness and occasional treacherous passes one may encounter during the evening hours. The piece is in three connected sections. The first section portrays the calmness and austerity of a quiet evening. The second is inspired by a fast drive down winding country roads, with twists and turns, frequent tempo changes and shifting gears. The final section evokes the feeling of looking at the nighttime sky with moonlight shining through the trees and the sounds of nature in the distance.

Program note by Robert Paterson

Claude Debussy (1862–1918): *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894)

A sleepy afternoon, a flute, and a faun dreaming about nymphs might seem like an unusual recipe for a masterpiece. Yet this is exactly the world Claude Debussy creates in *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. Inspired by the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, the piece does not tell a story in the traditional sense. Instead, Debussy captures the hazy, sensual feeling of a dream, where memories, desires, and imagination all blend together.

Mallarmé's poem follows a faun (a mythical creature that is half-human and half-goat) as he wakes from an afternoon nap and reflects on his encounters with a pair of nymphs. As he tries to remember what happened, it becomes difficult to tell whether these encounters were real or simply part of his imagination. This uncertainty is at the heart of the poem, and Debussy brings the same ambiguity into his music. Rather than giving us a clear beginning, middle, and end, the music moves from one mood and image to another, much like the wandering thoughts of someone caught between sleep and waking.

Debussy was deeply connected to the artistic and literary world of late nineteenth-century Paris. He regularly attended the Tuesday evening gatherings hosted by Mallarmé, where

poets, painters, writers, and other artists came together to share ideas. These circles had a lasting influence on Debussy. Although he is often associated with musical “Impressionism,” the Symbolist poets were especially important to his musical imagination. Symbolism favored suggestion over explanation, leaving room for mystery and interpretation. Debussy found a musical equivalent in sounds that seem to hover, shift, and disappear before they can be fully understood.

Much of the magic comes from Debussy’s use of orchestral color. The famous opening flute solo sounds almost as if it is coming from somewhere far away, completely on its own before the rest of the orchestra begins to emerge around it. When the melody returns, it is never quite the same. Sometimes it belongs to the flute, sometimes it blends into the woodwinds, and sometimes it is surrounded by strings, harp, or distant horn calls. Debussy uses the orchestra almost like a painter uses a palette, constantly changing the combination of colors. Even the harmony feels a little slippery, rarely giving us the strong sense of “this is where we are going” that we might expect.

Debussy began working on the *Prélude* in 1892 and completed it in 1894. He originally imagined a larger project of music inspired by Mallarmé’s poem, but only the *Prélude* was completed. Mallarmé was initially hesitant about having his poetry translated into music, but after hearing Debussy play the work, he was pleased with the result. Debussy later described the piece as a “general impression” of the poem, explaining that he wanted to evoke the succession of scenes in which the faun’s desires and dreams pass through his mind.

When the *Prélude* premiered in Paris on December 22, 1894, the audience responded enthusiastically and demanded an encore. The piece would become one of Debussy’s best-known works, but its importance goes far beyond its popularity. Its fluid form, unusual harmonies, and imaginative orchestration helped point music in a new direction as the nineteenth century came to a close. What sounds familiar to us now was remarkably fresh at the time: Debussy showed that an orchestra did not always have to drive forward or build toward a grand conclusion. Sometimes, it could simply breathe, drift, and let us listen to the colors along the way.

As the music flows, notice how the opening flute melody keeps returning and how differently it sounds each time. Listen for the way it passes between instruments and the little changes that happen around it. Near the end, the music becomes even more delicate, with the harp and antique cymbals adding a final touch of color. Instead of ending with a grand statement, Debussy lets the music quietly fade away, almost as if the faun has fallen back asleep and we have simply wandered out of his dream.

Robert Schumann (1810–1856): Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 97 “*Rhenish*” (1850)

A new city, a new position, and a new sense of excitement all found their way into Robert Schumann’s Symphony No. 3. Written shortly after Schumann and his family moved to Düsseldorf in 1850, the symphony reflects his enthusiasm for his new home along the Rhine. It is energetic, warm, playful, and full of surprises.

Schumann had recently accepted a position as Düsseldorf’s Music Director, marking the first time he had lived outside his native Saxony. The move seemed to bring a fresh energy into his life. He and his wife Clara were welcomed with dinners, dances, speeches, and even serenades from the city orchestra. Not long after arriving, the family traveled to nearby Cologne, where Schumann was deeply impressed by the magnificent Cologne Cathedral. These experiences became part of the musical world of the new symphony.

The nickname “Rhenish” was not given by Schumann himself, but it stuck. However, he did acknowledge the connection to his new surroundings, writing that the symphony “perhaps reflects something of Rhenish life here and there.” He wanted the music to have a sense of the region’s “joyous simplicity and fresh naturalness,” and that spirit can be heard throughout the work. Instead of giving us a detailed musical picture of the Rhine, Schumann reflects the feeling of being there.

The symphony is unusual in a number of ways, beginning with its five-movement structure. Most symphonies of the time followed a four-movement format, making Schumann’s decision to add a fifth movement somewhat unexpected. The opening movement immediately grabs our attention with a bold, energetic theme in E-flat major. Although it is written in 3/4 meter, the rhythm often makes the music feel as if it is moving in two or three different directions at once. Schumann plays with this feeling throughout the movement, which creates a sense of momentum that never quite lets us settle. The main theme also becomes an important thread throughout the symphony, helping to connect the movements together.

The second movement offers a completely different character. Schumann originally called it “Morning on the Rhine,” and its flowing, folk-like melody has an easygoing quality that makes it feel like a dance. The third movement is more intimate, with lyrical melodies and a lighter orchestral texture. It feels almost like a little musical conversation tucked between the larger, more dramatic movements.

Then comes the fourth movement, marked *Feierlich* (“Solemnly”). Schumann originally described it as being “in the character of an accompaniment to a solemn ceremony,” and it is one of the most fascinating moments in the entire symphony. The trombones, which

have been silent up to this point, finally enter and immediately change the character of the orchestra. Their sound gives the music a sense of weight and grandeur, while the contrapuntal writing (different musical lines woven together) creates a sacred atmosphere. The movement is often connected with Schumann's visit to the Cologne Cathedral, and whether or not we take that connection literally, it is easy to hear the sense of awe in the music.

After all of the seriousness, Schumann does not leave us there. The fifth movement brings back the energy and brightness of the opening, with lively rhythms, playful melodies, and a feeling of forward motion. The solemnity of the fourth movement is transformed into something joyful, leading the symphony toward a bright and triumphant conclusion.

Schumann wrote the entire symphony in just over a month, from November 2 to December 9, 1850. He conducted its premiere in Düsseldorf on February 6, 1851, and the performance was successful enough that he repeated the work a few weeks later. Although the symphony is now one of his most beloved orchestral works, Schumann's symphonies were not always treated with the same respect as his piano and vocal music. Their unusual structures and sometimes unconventional orchestration led later composers to "improve" them through reorchestration. Today, the qualities that once made Schumann's symphonies controversial are part of what makes them so interesting to hear.

One of the joys of this symphony is how quickly Schumann can change the mood without losing the thread of the music. A lively opening gives way to a carefree dance, then to something more intimate, before the solemn fourth movement takes us somewhere completely different. By the time the finale arrives, the earlier seriousness has disappeared, and the music feels ready to celebrate. All of those different characters come together in a joyful finish, celebrating the place, the people, and the excitement of Schumann's new life along the Rhine.

Program notes by Ellie Chang