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South Florida's Premier Chamber Orchestra

A Celebration!

2024/25
CONCERT SEASON

From the Board President

Dear Friends of The Symphonia,

On behalf of the entire Board of Directors, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to The Symphonia's 20th Anniversary Season. This milestone is a testament to the unwavering support of our audiences, the exceptional talents of our musicians, and the dedication of our artistic leadership. We are incredibly proud to celebrate two decades of bringing outstanding musical performances to this vibrant community.

This 20th season is truly special, as we reflect on our past and look forward to an exciting future. Our programming showcases a rich blend of classical masterpieces and contemporary works, and we are honored to collaborate with some of today's most distinguished conductors and soloists. From the soaring melodies of Vieuxtemps' Violin Concerto No. 5 to Beethoven's exhilarating Symphony No. 7, and the timeless beauty of Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings*, there is something for everyone to enjoy.



In addition to our concert series, The Symphonia is proud to have been selected by the City of Boca Raton to perform twice in 2024. This past July, we partnered with Crazy Fingers for Symphonia JAMS, a unique collaboration that brought classical and jam band fans together at Mizner Amphitheater. We look forward to returning to the Amphitheater on December 7th for our much-anticipated Holiday Pops concert, a festive celebration to kick off the holiday season.

We are also excited to introduce Harmony & Vines, a delightful series of curated evenings of music, wine, and food. Held at Sixty Vines, and sponsored by Drowos Private Wealth, these dinners provide a unique opportunity to enjoy the symphony experience in a more intimate and relaxed setting.

Finally, our educational initiatives continue to grow. Through Strings & Self-Esteem, we are reaching underserved students, ages 5 to 18, at Paul's Place and the Fuller Center, fostering a love for music while building confidence and self-expression.

As we embark on this landmark season, we invite you to join us in celebrating the power of music to inspire, uplift, and unite. Thank you for being a part of The Symphonia family. Your continued support ensures that we can share the beauty and joy of music with future generations. Here's to an unforgettable 20th Anniversary Season!

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sheldon Kwiat". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sheldon Kwiat
President, Board of Directors
The Symphonia



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MOZART AND TIM

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December 6, 2025

DVORAK'S NEW WORLD PREMIERE

January 24, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

January 25, 2026, 3:00 p.m.

The Studio at Mizner Park

BEETHOVEN'S EMPEROR

March 8, 2026, 3:00 p.m.

St. Gregory's Episcopal

VIENNA'S RICHES

A New Directions Concert

April 11, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

April 12, 2026, 3:00 p.m.

The Studio at Mizner Park



2025/26

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CONCERT V

The Studio at Mizner Park
Tuesday, April 29, 2025 – 7 pm

Alastair Willis, Principal Conductor

Principal Conductor's Chair sponsored by The Kimmel Family

St Paul's Suite, Op. 29, No. 2 Gustav Holst

I. Jig: Vivace

II. Ostinato: Presto

III. Intermezzo: Andante con moto

IV. Finale (The Dargason): Allegro

Strum Jessie Montgomery

Ascending Bird Colin Jacobsen/Siamak Aghaei

INTERMISSION

Serenade for Strings, Opus 48 Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

I. Pezzo in forma di sonatina. Andante non troppo—Allegro moderato

II. Valse. Moderato. Tempo di Valse

III. Elegia. Larghetto elegiaco

IV. Finale (Tema russo). Andante — Allegro con spirito

The Symphonia ends the season with conductor Alastair Willis leading a varied all-strings program. Holst's *St. Paul's Suite* is oh-so-English with its expert balance of humor and pageantry. Montgomery's *Strum* is a completely new—but listener-friendly—type of string writing. Based on a Persian folk song, *Ascending Bird* is a dazzling reworking of the myth of the Phoenix. The concert ends with the warmth of Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings*.

Please turn off your cell phones and electronic devices.

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Dina Kostic
Gus Correa
Sheena Gutierrez
Victoria Stepanenko
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Violin II

Erika Venable
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PROGRAM NOTES

St Paul's Suite, Op. 29, No. 2

– Gustav Holst

Born September 21, 1874, in Cheltenham, England

Died May 25, 1934, in London, England

Primarily recognized as a composer of strangely approachable, yet austere works, Gustav Holst was an able composer and talented orchestrator. Having composed since his teens, Holst was accepted by the Royal Conservatory where he was a classmate of Ralph Vaughan Williams, who deeply influenced his musical style by encouraging him to use folk tunes in his music. His first major successes came after this stylistic renaissance, although he was always at odds with the more dissonant (and critically accepted) music that came from Schoenberg and his disciples in Vienna. Holst also possessed an abstract side and developed an interest in Hinduism, studying its literature and the Sanskrit language.

Today's audiences are often surprised to learn that Holst composed other significant works in addition to his immensely popular suite, *The Planets*. However, he created works for nearly every musical genre, including many fine choral settings of English folksongs, several notable pieces for wind band, and numerous stage works (including the Sanskrit opera *Savitri*).

Holst's connection to the educational field spanned most of his life. In 1905 he became director of the St. Paul's School for Girls in Hammersmith, a position he would hold until his death twenty-nine years later. At St. Paul's he found a wealth of talented girls and quickly formed several performing groups. If his *St. Paul's Suite* is representative of his orchestra's ability, they were quite capable. Composed in 1913 as a gift to the orchestra, the suite is in four movements, each related to English folksong.

St. Paul's Suite opens with a brisk jig in 6/8 meter. Particularly interesting is the way Holst combines the staccato jig theme with a soaring legato melody to add a feeling of depth. The second movement is built upon a repeated rhythmic pattern onto which a waltz is superimposed. Holst's third-movement intermezzo opens with a solo violin over pizzicato chords. The theme was inspired by the composer's 1908 trip to Algeria and includes some strikingly exotic-sounding music. Perhaps the most memorable movement is the finale, which Holst borrowed from one of his suites for wind band.

The movement opens with a jig, entitled "The Dargason." Before long, the cellos introduce the sixteenth-century melody "Greensleeves," which is combined with "The Dargason," and developed into a stirring climax.

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Strum

– Jessie Montgomery

Born December 8, 1981, in New York, New York

This work was premiered in its present form in 2012. It is scored for string orchestra.

Jessie Montgomery is an acclaimed composer, violinist, and educator. She is the recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Award from the ASCAP Foundation, the Sphinx Medal of Excellence, and her works are performed frequently around the world by leading musicians and ensembles. Her music interweaves classical music with elements of vernacular music, improvisation, poetry, and social consciousness, making her an acute interpreter of 21st century American sound and experience. Her profoundly felt works have been described as "turbulent, wildly colorful and exploding with life" (*The Washington Post*).

Her growing body of work includes solo, chamber, vocal, and orchestral works. Some recent highlights include *Shift, Change, Turn* (2019) commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, *Coincident Dances* (2018) for the Chicago Sinfonietta, and *Banner* (2014)—written to mark the 200th anniversary of "The Star-Spangled Banner"—for The Sphinx Organization and the Joyce Foundation, which was presented in its UK premiere at the BBC Proms on 7 August 2021.

Summer 2021 brought a varied slate of premiere performances, including *Five Freedom Songs*, a song cycle conceived with and written for Soprano Julia Bullock, for Sun Valley and Grand Teton Music Festivals, San Francisco and Kansas City Symphonies, Boston and New Haven Symphony Orchestras, and the Virginia Arts Festival (7 August); a site-specific collaboration with Bard SummerScape Festival and Pam Tanowitz Dance, *I was waiting for the echo of a better day* (8 July); and *Passacaglia*, a flute quartet for The National Flute Association's 49th annual convention (13 August).

Since 1999, Jessie has been affiliated with The Sphinx Organization, which supports young African American and Latinx string players and has served as composer-in-residence for the Sphinx Virtuosi, the Organization's flagship professional touring ensemble.

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A founding member of PUBLIQuartet and a former member of the Catalyst Quartet, Jessie holds degrees from the Juilliard School and New York University and is currently a PhD Candidate in Music Composition at Princeton University. She is Professor of violin and composition at The New School. In May 2021, she began her three-year appointment as the Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

"Strum is the culminating result of several versions of a string quintet I wrote in 2006. It was originally written for the Providence String Quartet and guests of Community MusicWorks Players, then arranged for string quartet in 2008 with several small revisions. In 2012 the piece underwent its final revisions with a rewrite of both the introduction and the ending for the Catalyst Quartet in a performance celebrating the 15th annual Sphinx Competition.

"Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within Strum I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati [repeating patterns] that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece. Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration."

Biography and program notes graciously provided by the composer

Ascending Bird

– Siamak Aghaei and Colin Jacobsen

Aghaei: Born 1973 in Ahwaz, Iran

Jacobsen: Born 1978 in Greater NYC, New York

The impetus for this work came in 2004 and the arrangement followed soon after. It was originally scored for the international instruments of the Silk Road Ensemble. This version is scored for string orchestra.

Sometimes concert music comes from the unlikeliest of situations. Siamak Aghaei is a santur player, composer, and folk song collector from Iran who is trying to preserve traditional music before it is wiped out by political intervention from the post-revolutionary government. More information on him appears later in this note.

Colin Jacobsen is a violinist and composer who has an extensive background in multi-cultural music. He founded the string quartet Brooklyn Rider and the orchestra The Knights. Jacobsen is also a member of the Silk Road Ensemble. As the Artistic Director of Santa Fe Pro Musica, he has been able to explore his approach even further.



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Jacobsen's website has extensive information on his background and critical reviews of his works and performances. One of the things that makes his music unique is his collaborations with a wide variety of artists, ranging from "Philip Glass and Osvaldo Golijov to John Zorn, and from Swedish mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter to banjo legend Béla Fleck, Mexican jazz singer Magos Herrera and Irish fiddler Martin Hayes."

Discussing Siamak Aghaei and *Ascending Bird*, Jacobsen wrote:

"In the summer of 2004, violist Nick Cords and I had the opportunity to visit Iran, the home of Siamak Aghaei and Kayhan Kalhor, musicians and friends who I met through The Silk Road Ensemble. The visit was a cultural exchange made possible by Silkroad and would prove to be a life-changing experience. Besides learning more about traditional Persian architecture, calligraphy, arts and crafts and their close link to Persian music, we spent many hours in the homes of both Kayhan and Siamak listening to them play and talk about the philosophy behind their music.

Siamak is a bit of a modern-day Bartok in that he travels around Iran making field recordings of folk musicians from the many and varied traditions represented by the different regions of Iran. He dusted off one such recording and the sound that emerged from the speakers gave us a form of vertigo. Our ears were held to attention by the sound of an incredibly potent and piercing instrument, which Siamak told us was made out of the fused bones of a bird and measured little more than two inches in length. The music also encoded a popular mythical story of a bird attempting to fly to the sun. Failing on the first two attempts, on the third try the bird loses its physical body in the radiant embrace of the sun, a metaphor for spiritual transcendence.

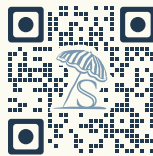
"What emerged from this experience was *Ascending Bird* – comprised of Siamak's reinterpretation of the traditional tune to which I added further textural layers and combined with an original introduction and coda."

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Serenade for Strings, Opus 48

– Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born May 7, 1840, in Votkinsk, Russia

Died November 6, 1893, in St. Petersburg, Russia

This work was first performed on October 30, 1881, in St. Petersburg. It is scored for string orchestra.

By the time Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed his *Serenade for Strings*, he was a well-known composer. Although his music is characterized by overt displays of searing emotional intensity, few people realize that Tchaikovsky's personal life of the previous few years had been much like the plot of a very juicy soap opera. First, in 1877 Tchaikovsky married a former student from one of his large lecture courses. Antonina Ivanovna Milyukova became obsessed with the composer while in his class and proceeded to write several letters professing her love. Tchaikovsky proposed to Antonina, although he was secretly homosexual and feared professional rejection if he was found out. It seems that he hoped to use the young woman's infatuation as a ruse to forestall controversy. The disastrous marriage lasted all of nine weeks. Also in 1877, the wealthy widow of a railroad baron, Nadezhda von Meck, decided to subsidize Tchaikovsky's career, allowing him to leave his teaching duties and devote himself entirely to composition. These two events alone illustrate the emotional extremes the composer experienced in a short span of time.

Tchaikovsky's depression, which had dogged him for most of his adult life (he was likely bipolar), drove him to a drastic decision. He resigned from his professorship at the Moscow Conservatory in October of 1878 and embarked on a remarkable six-year odyssey of extensive travel punctuated with periods of creative intensity. During this period, he composed his operas *The Maid of Orleans* and *Mazeppa*, his first three suites for orchestra, the *1812 Overture*, the *Serenade for Strings*, and the *Second Piano Concerto*.

One of Tchaikovsky's travels was a sojourn to Rome during the winter of 1879-1880. The warm climate and festive atmosphere, especially the revelry of the pre-Lenten Carnival, did much to brighten the composer's mood. He enjoyed the colorful folk songs he heard throughout the region, as well as the raucous dance tunes. It was just the thing he needed to help him recover from such a harrowing experience in Moscow, and it is reflected in the music he composed during that time.



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Composed in 1880, Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings* was originally intended to be a symphony. He adored the piece, contrasting greatly from his unbridled hatred of the *1812 Overture*, written the same year. Set in four movements, the serenade is one of Tchaikovsky's sunniest works, only betraying his penchant for melancholy in the third movement *Larghetto elegiaco*. Simply put, the *Serenade for Strings* was composed in one of the happiness periods in the composer's life – and it shows.

Beginning with a dramatic and serious introduction, the first movement eventually gives way to an *allegro moderato* main body. Subtitled "Piece in the Form of a Sonatina," this movement is true to its designation (a *sonatina* is a movement in traditional sonata form, but shortened by its lack of a development section). Tchaikovsky hearkens back to the Classical period in this movement's melodic beauty and structural clarity.

The second movement is a Viennese waltz. One of the composer's most popular movements, it is infectious in its captivating rhythmic propulsion. Melancholy and heartfelt, the *larghetto elegiaco* is a brief glimpse into Tchaikovsky's troubled heart – a dark side that would tragically overtake his psyche in the last decade of his all too brief life. A short middle section explores a brighter tempo, only to return to the music from the beginning of the movement, this time with even darker shading as the strings are now muted.

Tchaikovsky's finale uses actual folk material to give it brusque and festive flavors, after a sterner introduction. Growing ever more festive until it reaches fever pitch, Tchaikovsky abruptly interrupts the festivities with a restatement of the theme from the dramatic introduction to the first movement. This imposing, almost threatening, interpolation ends quickly as it began when the brisk coda speeds the movement to a brilliant close.

Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor

Grammy-nominated conductor **Alastair Willis** is currently the Music Director of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra.

In past seasons, Willis has guest conducted orchestras around the world including the Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Mexico City Philharmonic, Orquestra Sinfonica de Rio de Janeiro, Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, China National Orchestra (Beijing), and Silk Road Ensemble (with Yo-Yo Ma) among others. His recording of Ravel's "L'Enfant et les Sortilèges" with Nashville Symphony and Opera for Naxos was Grammy-nominated for Best Classical Album in 2009.



Alastair Willis

Last season Willis was re-engaged by the Seattle Symphony, Gyor Philharmonic, The Symphonia Boca Raton, Pacific Northwest Ballet and Orchestra Seattle/Seattle Chamber Singers, and made his debut with the Philharmonie Südwestfalen. This season he returns to the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra, Victoria Symphony B.C., Pacific Northwest Ballet, The Symphonia Boca Raton, and makes his debuts with Peninsula Music Festival, Fox Valley Symphony, La Porte Symphony, Salute to Vienna, and Seattle's Music of Remembrance.

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The Wick Theatre & Costume Museum

561-995-2333
boxoffice@theWick.org

Youth Orchestra of Palm Beach County

561-281-8600
yomail@yopbc.org

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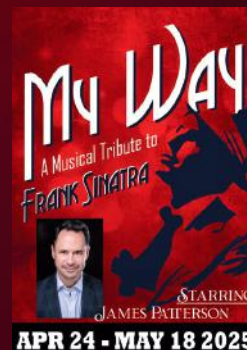
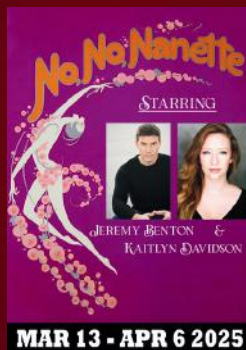
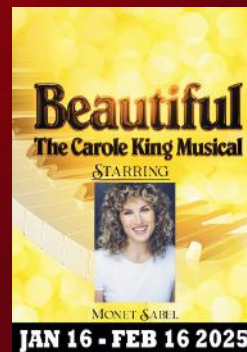
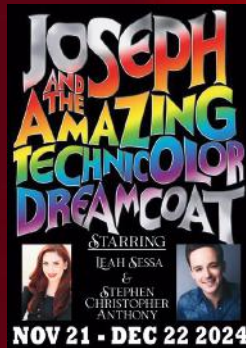
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