

Classical Prodigies

October 17, 2025

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Sunny Xia, Guest Conductor
Amaryn Olmeda, Violin

Maurice RAVEL
(1875-1937)

Le Tombeau de Couperin

Prélude
Forlane
Menuet
Rigaudon

Felix MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64
Allegro molto appassionato
Andante
Allegro non troppo – Allegro molto vivace

INTERMISSION

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART
(1756-1791)

Symphony No. 41 in C major, K.551, "Jupiter"
Allegro vivace
Andante cantabile
Menuetto: Allegretto
Molto allegro



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Guest Conductor

Recognized for her innate musicality, compelling presence, and technical precision, conductor **Sunny Xuecong Xia**'s ability to forge an immediate and captivating connection with orchestras and singers alike has led to engagements around the globe. Xia joined the Seattle Symphony at the beginning of the 2022/2023 season as Douglas F. King Assistant Conductor and was quickly promoted to Associate Conductor. Recent and upcoming engagements include the San Diego Symphony, Phoenix Symphony, Tucson Symphony, Olympia Symphony, and Chandler Opera Theater.



In the 2023/2024 season, Xia led the Seattle Symphony in over a dozen programs featuring soloists such as Conrad Tao, Noah Geller, and Mahani Teave. Highlights include the world premiere of Composer-in-Residence, Angelique Poteat's *Dear Humanity* for Youth Chorus and Orchestra, a work that harnesses the power of 50 voices and full orchestra to confront climate change, the Celebrate Asia program with violinist Kerson Leong, and the Merriman-Ross Family Young Composers Workshop Concert that featured 10 world premieres. She served as Tan Dun's assistant during the composer's acclaimed residency presenting his six-Act oratorio, *Buddha Passion*. Xia has additionally served as Cover Conductor at the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra under Dame Jane Glover and James Gaffigan.

Equally at home in the opera pit, Xia recently led a production of *La bohème* with the Chandler Opera Company to great success. She has previously served as assistant conductor for productions of *Così fan tutte*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *The Juniper Tree*, *Le Rossignol*, and *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges*, among others. A dynamic interpreter of contemporary music, Xia has over a dozen world premieres under her credit. In 2022, Xia was named a Conducting Fellow at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music where she made her festival debut leading the world premiere of Marc Migó Cortés' *Dumka*. Recent performances have featured works by Gabriella Smith, Angelique Poteat, Samuel Adams, Jerod Tate, Juhi Bansal, Gabriela Ortiz, and Tan Dun. She has previously led the Cleveland Institute of Music New Music Ensemble in series such as the Cleveland NEOSonicFest and CIM New Music Series.

Xia holds a dual master's degree in Conducting and Violin Performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music and a doctoral degree from Arizona State University. At the Seattle Symphony, she is mentored by Ludovic Morlot and Xian Zhang. For three summers, she attended the Monteux School and Music Festival as a Kurt & Torj Wray Conducting Scholar. An accomplished violinist, she performed as a soloist with orchestras in China and Australia, including the symphony orchestras of Harbin, Zhejiang, Hunan and Guangxi, and the Concertante Ensemble. While attending Cleveland Institute of Music, she has served as concertmaster of the CIM Orchestra. Her principal mentors include Michael Jinbo, Jeffery Meyer, Tito Muñoz, Jan Mark Sloman, and Carl Topilow.

Originally from Guangzhou, China, Xia relocated to Sydney, Australia at the age of 14 on a scholarship from the Australian String Academy that allowed her to further her violin studies with Peter Shi-xiang Zhang and Charmian Gadd. A talented basketball athlete, she competed in the New South Wales Metro Junior League before focusing primarily on her musical pursuits. When not performing or enjoying a pick-up game, she can be found reading, hiking, or learning languages. She speaks Cantonese, English, Mandarin, and Teochew, and is improving upon her French, German, and Italian.

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937) studied piano and composition at the Paris Conservatoire. For a time he was a student of Gabriel Fauré. Primarily interested in composing, he applied five times for a coveted Prix de Rome, which annually provided three years of study in Rome to a young French composer. The conservative jury did not much value Ravel's originality, and his elimination in round one of the 1905 competition (his fifth attempt) caused a national uproar, "L'affaire Ravel." Although some of Ravel's works can be considered "impressionistic," he was more interested in refinement and classical forms than his older countryman Claude Debussy (who was also a rebel at the Conservatoire but who nevertheless won the Prix de Rome in 1884). It is Ravel's neo-classical side that is evident in tonight's program. As a pianist, he wrote music for himself to perform, including many solo pieces and two concertos, but he was also a master orchestrator who arranged some of his keyboard works for instrumental ensembles.

Le Tombeau de Couperin (The Tomb of Couperin), a set of six piano pieces in the style of a Baroque keyboard suite, was composed between 1914–1917 as a tribute to the French Baroque composer, François Couperin. In the early years of the war, Ravel served as a nurse, but he was released from duty in 1917 due to his fragile health. Each movement of *Le Tombeau* is dedicated to a friend of Ravel's who died during World War I. In addition to the triple-meter **Menuet**, Ravel composed a **Forlane**, the French translation of "furlana," a 17th century Italian dance, and a **Rigaudon**, a lively French Baroque dance in duple meter. Listen for the dance rhythms, the clarity of the instrumentation, the ornamentation of the melodic line that was common in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the prominence that Ravel gives to the oboe in this charming offering. When the composer transcribed

the piano solo for orchestra in 1919, he re-ordered the original movements and omitted two of them (Fugue and Toccata). Despite the somber title and the posthumous dedications, it is an airy composition, filled with joyous moments. As Ravel said, "The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence."

DID YOU KNOW?

Legend has it that George Gershwin once asked Maurice Ravel to teach him composition; Ravel responded that he was already a first-rate Gershwin, so why become a second-rate Ravel?

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

had all the advantages of growing up in a wealthy family. He and his sister Fanny had private tutors, the benefits of foreign travel, and access to some of the best-known names in the artistic and cultural scenes in Europe in the early nineteenth century. The siblings were fluent in a number of languages, played several instruments, were both gifted composers, and Felix was an accomplished artist and conductor as well. At seventeen he wrote the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and at age twenty he conducted Bach's St. Matthew Passion in its first performance since the older composer's death 175 years earlier. Mendelssohn's father was an astute banker, and his grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn, was an esteemed rabbi and philosopher. Nevertheless, when Felix was six, he was baptized into the Lutheran faith, because his father recognized increasing anti-Semitism in Europe and felt that the best opportunities were afforded those of the Christian faith. Lutheranism informed much of Felix's music, such as the "Reformation" Symphony, the oratorios *Elijah* and *St. Paul*, and the chorale settings found in his pia-

no and instrumental works. Just over one hundred years after his death, the Nazis banned his music in Germany in 1938 and forced his family's descendants to close the Mendelssohn bank and leave the country.

In the summer of 1838 Mendelssohn first told his friend, violinist Ferdinand David, that he wanted to write a concerto for him; however it was not until 1844 that the two were able to work together to complete the **Violin Concerto**, which premiered in March the following year. In the **Allegro molto appassionato**, the violin enters in the second measure instead of waiting for the customary orchestral exposition to introduce the themes. Mendelssohn also positioned the soloist's cadenza (where the orchestra is silent) at the transition from the development section to the recapitulation, rather than its usual place near the end of the movement. In addition, he conceived of the concerto as a single unit, with each movement flowing into the next. The bridge to the **Andante** is one sustained note in the bassoon. Likewise that second movement segues right into the scherzo-like last movement with a reminiscent glimpse of the opening theme. This **Allegro molto** exhibits Mendelssohn's whimsical "elfin writing" that was first evident in the Scherzo from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* written in his youth. The violin concerto was so popular after its premiere that it was performed everywhere, to the point that one critic put words to the opening theme, "Yet again, yet again, that Mendelssohn concerto!" When the composition was first germinating in Mendelssohn's brain in 1838, he said, "One [theme] in E minor sticks in my head, the beginning of which will not leave me in peace." Almost 200 years later, the work continues to "stick" in people's heads, and today it is one of the most popular concertos for any instrument.

Program Notes, *cont'd.*

Most concertgoers are familiar with the story of **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)**, the child prodigy whose father promoted (and benefited from) his children's talents by taking them on concert tours that began when Mozart was only six. Wolfgang astounded the public with his performance skills, his memory, and his ability to improvise new compositions at the keyboard. He was a gifted composer in all genres and wrote over 600 works in his brief lifespan of thirty-five years. The summer of 1788 was a prolific one in which he composed three symphonies in less than three months. The **"Jupiter" Symphony** (nicknamed after Mozart's death, perhaps by the impresario Salomon) was composed in a mere six weeks. Because form was so important for 18th century musicians, we will delve into each movement in more-than-usual detail. The declamatory nature of the first part of the main theme group of the **Allegro vivace** captures attention immediately. Pauses create a sense of breathless anticipation. The second part of the theme group involves an octave leap followed by a descending scale and a series of slurs [sighs]. Several times Mozart teases us into thinking we have settled in the dominant key of G major; when he finally establishes the key, we hear an elegant secondary theme with delicate little trills. A sudden storm bursts forth before the closing theme with its repeated notes. After many changes of key during the development, Mozart sets us up to believe that we have reached the recapitulation, but it is a false recap as there is more development of the first theme. Eventually all three themes from the exposition are heard in order to conclude the first movement. The slower and more reflective **Andante cantabile** (moderately slow, singingly) starts with a rising motive in the first violins, punctuated by the whole orchestra. Winds play the ascending,

stepwise secondary theme. The development includes a wonderful sequence of suddenly accented notes that progresses through various keys before the restatement of the themes. A lilting, descending note pattern in the violins introduces the **Minuet**. Each section of the minuet is repeated before the Trio is played by a smaller number of instruments without the timpani. The nature of this central section is quite different from the dancing Minuet, which is subsequently repeated to close the third movement. A motto, C D F E, appears in the violins at the very beginning of the **Molto allegro** movement and is heard throughout. Unlike earlier symphonies, the Jupiter's length and weight are not in the first movement but in this last, which includes a coda with an impressive fugue involving five different themes. [A fugue, particularly popular in the Baroque era, involves the exact repetition of a theme by successive "voices" according to a particular key scheme.] Fugal development and unexpected key changes contribute to this exuberant finale.

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Dr. Akers has a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in Historical Musicology from Florida State University



Winner of first prize and the audience choice award at the 24th Annual Sphinx Competition, violinist **Amaryn Olmeda** is a rising star sought after for her bold and expressive performances as a soloist and collaborator. Violinist.com says of Olmeda, "...her commanding stage presence, infallible technique, and interpretive ability already rival that of international concert stage veterans."

Highlights of 2025–2026 include debut performances with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Calgary Philharmonic, Tallahassee Symphony, Modesto Symphony, Williamsburg Symphony, and Shreveport Symphony, as well as return appearances with the Buffalo Philharmonic, Des Moines Symphony, Stockton Symphony, and Auburn Symphony. Olmeda will also debut in recital at the Celebrity Series of Boston.

Olmeda made her Lincoln Center solo debut on the 2024 Summer for the City Series. Later that season, she returned for her solo debut at David Geffen Hall on the New York Philharmonic's Kravis Nightcap Series. She made her Carnegie Hall solo debut on the Sphinx Virtuosi tour at the age of 14, garnering rave reviews.

Recent highlights include debuts with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Houston

Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Charlotte Symphony, Omaha Symphony, and the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra at their New Year's Concert Series, earning her a nomination for the San Francisco Classical Voice Audience Choice Awards.

In 2023, she recorded Carlos Simon's *Between Worlds* on Deutsche Grammophon, praised by *The Strad* as "an impressive reading by the young musician." In 2022, Olmeda performed for the San Francisco Conservatory Gala with Yuja Wang. At 13, Olmeda became the first member of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Opus 3 Artist's Artist Apprentice Program.

Born in Melbourne, Australia in 2008, Olmeda currently studies at the New England Conservatory of Music with Miriam Fried. She previ-

ously studied with Ian Swensen at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Amaryn Olmeda performs on a violin made by J.B. Vuillaume in 1864.



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