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OCT. 4 & 5, 2025

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JULIA TAI, *Music Director*

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Viva Americas!

Oct 4, 7:30 PM & Oct 5, 3:00 PM

71st season, 2025-2026

Gabriela Ortiz ..... *Kauyumari*

Astor Piazzolla ..... *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*

I. Otoño Porteño (Autumn)

II. Invierno Porteño (Winter)

III. Primavera Porteña (Spring)

IV. Verano Porteño (Summer)

Kerson Leong, violin

Intermission

Heitor Villa-Lobos ..... Sinfonietta No. 1, "*A Memoria de Mozart*"

I. Allegro justo

II. Andante non troppo

III. Andantino-Molto allegro

Arturo Márquez ..... *La Conga del Fuego Nuevo*

The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires by Astor Piazzolla presented under license from G. Schirmer Inc. and Associated Music Publishers, copyright owners.

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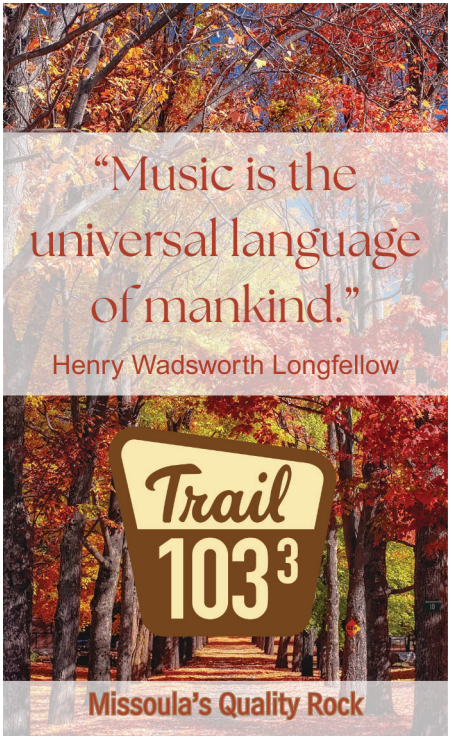

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Julia Tai

Music Director

Praised by the Seattle Times as "poised yet passionate," Julia Tai is one of today's most dynamic and engaging conductors on the international stage. In November 2020, she became the first female music director in the Missoula Symphony Orchestra's history. Her career has led to acclaimed performances and rehearsals with the American Youth Symphony, Bakersfield Symphony, Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic (Czech Republic), Boise Philharmonic, Brandenburger Symphoniker (Germany), Estonian National Youth Symphony (Estonia), Idaho Falls Symphony, Jackson Symphony, Lake Washington Symphony, Lexington Philharmonic, New Symphony Orchestra (Bulgaria), Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM (Mexico), Orquesta Sinfónica Juvenil Charlos Chávez (Mexico), Philharmonia Northwest, and the Seattle Symphony.

As the Music Director of MSO, Ms. Tai has established a reputation for her creative programming and dedication to educational outreach and community partnerships. She has premiered new works by Peter Boyer, Anna Clyne, Tim Fain, Vivian Fung, Donald O. Johnston, and Pascal Le Boeuf. She has also initiated the *Symphony Kids* concert series at the Missoula Public Library, Missoula Youth Symphony side-by-side performances, *Student Night @Dress Rehearsals*, and *Symphony in the Schools*, sending symphony musicians to local high schools to perform and coach music students. She has developed partnerships with organizations such as Five Valley's Land Trust, Missoula Public Library, Montana Natural History Center, and Logjam Presents to further deepen MSO's relationships with its community.

Born in Taipei, Taiwan, Ms. Tai began her violin studies at age four and piano at eight. She received her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music, where she was awarded "Outstanding Graduate" in 2004. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Washington. She lives with her daughter Natalie, who plays the piano, and their dog Humphrey Bear.

Kerson Leong

violin

Kerson Leong has been described as "not just one of Canada's greatest violinists but one of the greatest violinists, period" (*Toronto Star)*. Since winning First Prize at the 2010 International Yehudi Menuhin Violin Competition, he has built a distinctive international career, praised for his unmistakable sound—marked by "spontaneity and mastery, elegance, fantasy, intensity" (*Le Monde*).

His recent album featuring the Britten and Bruch violin concertos with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Patrick Hahn on Alpha Classics has earned critical acclaim, receiving *Gramophone's* Editor's Choice, *The Strad* Recommends, *Classica's* Choc, and five-star reviews from *The Sunday Times* and *Diapason*.

Recent engagements include performances with the Royal, Oslo, Brussels, Kansai, and Liège Royal Philharmonic Orchestras; the Seattle, Singapore, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver Symphonies; and tours across Europe, Asia, and North America. He premiered and recorded John Rutter's *Visions* with the composer and Aurora Chamber Orchestra in London.

Selected by Yannick Nézet-Séguin as artist-in-residence with the Orchestre Métropolitain in 2018–19, he has performed in major venues such as Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, the Louvre Auditorium, and Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts.

An avid chamber musician, he has appeared at festivals including Verbier, Gstaad, Rheingau, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Bergen, and Reims. As a dedicated pedagogue, he has given masterclasses at institutions such as the Sibelius Academy, Indiana University, Domaine Forget, and the Gustav Mahler Academy.

Leong also connects with global audiences through his social media presence, offering insight and inspiration to young musicians and listeners worldwide. A strong advocate for music education and outreach, he integrates science and acoustics into his artistry—an interest sparked by early discussions on string resonance with his father. Together, they have lectured on the subject at institutions like the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and the Barratt-Due Institute in Oslo.

He is an associate artist at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Belgium, where he studied with Augustin Dumay, and performs on the 'ex Bohrer, Baumgartner' Guarneri del Gesù, courtesy of Canimex Inc. (Drummondville, Quebec, Canada).

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President's Message

Scott Billadeau

Dear Missoula Symphony Patrons-

It is with great joy and anticipation that we welcome you to a new season of music with the Missoula Symphony! Each year brings with it the opportunity to rediscover the timeless beauty of the classics while embracing the energy and imagination of new works. This season is no exception, and we are thrilled to present a journey that spans centuries and styles.

As splendorous as the autumn leaves, and perhaps with a luring to head South for the winter, comes an opening concert that celebrates the sounds and flavors of Central and South America. One of the many treasured facets of music, is how varied yet distinct musical expression is from all over the world. Each region and country has a 'sound' to it, which is often borrowed from the folk and musical heritage of culture and place, and imbued into the orchestral music from where each composer emerges.

We also continue our desire to introduce works from living composers whose voices carry the torch of orchestral tradition into the present day, ensuring that the symphony remains a living, breathing art form.

As always, our mission is not only to perform great music, but to share experiences that unite and inspire. Whether you are a longtime supporter or joining us for the first time, we invite you to listen with open hearts and discover anew how symphonic music speaks to the soul.

Thank you for being part of our symphony family. We cannot wait to share this extraordinary season with you!

Crescendo-ing,

Scott Billadeau

Board President & CEO
Missoula Symphony Association

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Program Notes

James Randall

Gabriela Ortiz (b.1964) *Kauyumari* (2021)

Born and raised in Mexico City, Gabriela Ortiz enjoyed a particularly rich musical environment. Her parents, both musicians, were members of the popular band Los *Folkloristas*, who created music rooted in many Latin American traditions. When she was young, Ortiz learned to play the guitar, piano, and the charango, a traditional stringed instrument from the Andes. At age 13, she became interested in writing her own music after encountering the piano works of Béla Bartók, whose approach to rhythm and harmony sparked her curiosity. After earning her undergraduate degree in composition from the Escuela Nacional de Música in Mexico City, she traveled for study in Europe, eventually completing her doctorate in composition and electronic music at City University, London.

Ortiz's music is increasingly popular in symphonic halls. The Los Angeles Philharmonic, under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel, recorded an album of Ortiz's music, *Revolución diamantina*, that won three Grammy awards, including Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Among the works on that album was *Kauyumari*. The title means "blue deer," a mystical creature who serves as a traditional spirit guide for the Huichol people in annual pilgrimages to gather the peyote cactus. For the Huichol, peyote is a sacred sacrament ingested to connect them to the spirit world and their ancestors, as well as an important medicine for healing. According to Huichol elders, their people once experienced a devastating famine. In search of food, they sent four young men—Earth, Air, Water, and Fire—on a great hunt. After many days, the young men encountered a solitary blue deer. The chase began, but the deer was far faster than the men. The deer felt pity for the hunters. Stopping periodically to let the men rest, the hunt would resume the next day, the deer always remaining beyond an arrow's reach. After many weeks, the deer eventually led the men close to the home of the Earth Spirit. There a hunter launched an arrow which the men saw pierce the hide of the deer. Running to the kill, however, they found not the deer, but a patch of peyote that had grown in the shape of the mystical animal. The patch glimmered in the sun with fantastic colors and life. The hunters brought home the peyote. Sharing it with their people, they found that they no longer experienced hunger and thirst.

Composed as the Covid-19 pandemic was nearing its end, Gabriela Ortiz wanted *Kauyumari* to represent a joyful return to in-person concerts and music's power to heal. Basing the work's main theme on a melody of the Huichol, she altered it rhythmically and texturally until it was completely transformed. For Ortiz, this transformation symbolized the spiritual and sensorial journey that the sacrament of peyote enables:

> While composing this piece, I noted once again how music has the power to grant us access to the intangible; healing our wounds and binding us to what can only be expressed through sound. Although life is filled with interruptions, *Kauyumari* is a comprehension and celebration of the fact that each of these rifts is also a new beginning.

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* (Four Seasons of Buenos Aires) (1965-1970) arr. for violin and string orchestra by Leonid Desyatnikov.

Astor Piazzolla was born in Argentina, as one might guess from a composer whose name has become synonymous with the tango. But he was also very much a New Yorker. His parents, both Argentinians, emigrated to New York City when the composer was just 4 years old. In addition to the music his parents listened to, he grew up immersed in the sound of early jazz that was shaping the city's soundscape in the 1920s. The family lived first in Greenwich Village, and then in Little Italy. In these diverse neighborhoods, he was exposed to not only the folk and popular musical styles of recent immigrants from Europe, but also to Western classical music. Piazzolla studied classical piano with Hungarian pianist, Béla Wilda, a student of Rachmaninov, but his principal instrument would become the bandoneón, an accordion played with buttons rather than keys. Although the bandoneón is the definitive instrument for the Argentine tango, it wasn't love at first sight. As Piazzolla recalls:

> "My first bandoneón was a gift from my father when I was eight years old. He brought it covered in a box, and I got very happy because I thought it was the roller skates I had asked for so many times. It was a letdown because instead of a pair of skates, I found an artifact I had never seen before in my life. Dad sat down, set it on my legs, and told me, "Astor, this is the instrument of tango. I want you to learn it."

For Piazzolla's parents, the bandoneón was an instrument that their son should learn so that he didn't forget his heritage. While he was initially resistant, the bandoneón became a catalyst for the expression of Piazzolla's own unique musical identity, which was rooted in the Argentine tango, but transformed through the composer's own web of international influences, both popular and classical. He called his music "Nuevo Tango," which he described as tango "for the ear rather than the feet." In his mind, even music rooted in tradition should continue to evolve. He wanted his audiences to hear tango, not as "the language of the dead," but the "language of people who are alive, young, and of the future."

Piazzolla conceived *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas (The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires)* as four independent musical works, which he composed between 1965 and 1970 and performed with his quintet, featuring bandoneón, violin, piano, electric guitar and double bass. Each movement represents the changing seasons of the calendar as experienced in Buenos Aires. As a reminder, the climate associated with these seasons is the opposite of one's experience in the Northern Hemisphere. In the version of the work for solo violin and string orchestra that we hear today, Leonid Desyatnikov freely adapted Piazzolla's original work, keeping Piazzolla's melodies and rhythmic character but altering the structure of the works to be more like Vivaldi's The Four Seasons, with a Baroque concerto structure for each movement. He intertwines some of Vivaldi's best-known themes and musical effects into the arrangement, creating a wonderful mash-up of these two vibrant works.

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959) Sinfonietta No. 1 in B-flat Major, *"À Memoria de Mozart"* (1916)

Heitor Villa-Lobos is among the best known and frequently performed composers from South America. He was also fiendishly prolific, composing over 2000 works in wildly contrasting styles and genres. Largely self-taught as a composer, his music draws from many disparate influences—from Mozart, who inspired the piece we hear today, to the folk and indigenous music of his native Brazil.

Villa-Lobos based his Sinfonietta No. 1 in B-flat Major on two musical themes by Mozart. Unfortunately, Villa-Lobos didn't name these themes, and musicologists have yet to identify them. He did, however, speak about the mood he ascribed to each melody: the first "delicate and subtle suggest[ing] the European aristocratic elegance of the 18th century," and the other "violent, deep and mysterious present[ing] the characteristics of German genius." For Villa-Lobos, the opposing themes represented a common artistic struggle: "…the conflict between culture, represented by the scholastic prejudices and rules, and the temperament of the free, spontaneous artist, independent of any theory." This was very much how Villa-Lobos saw his own music. Lacking in traditional theoretical training, he often had little regard for conventional musical rules; consequently, his works often faced a harsh reception from conservative music critics.

Villa-Lobos scored his Sinfonietta No. 1 for a chamber ensemble largely consistent with 18th-century practices. He did, however, add in additional brass—two trombones and two trumpets. The organization of the work, in keeping with a sinfonietta, follows the tempo and formal plan of a symphony, but with shorter movements.

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

Arturo Márquez's music draws from the rich popular and folk musical traditions of Mexico and Central America, as well as symphonic music. His father played in a mariachi band, and his grandfather was a folk musician, so Márquez credits them with forming his early musical tastes. As a teenager, he began composing and studied piano and theory at the Conservatorio Nacional de Música in Mexico City. Afterward he was awarded a Fulbright to study composition in the United States, earning an MFA in Composition from the California Institute of Arts. Márquez is the recipient of many awards in Mexico, including the National Prize for Arts and Sciences. His music has been particularly popular in the Latin ballroom scene. His most popular work, *Danzón no. 2*, was programmed by conductor Gustavo Dudamel for an international tour of the Simon Bolívar Youth Orchestra, which brought Márquez's music greater fame outside of Mexico.

Today's work, *La Conga del Fuego Nuevo*, incorporates conga rhythms to musically resurrect a ritual of Aztec origin: the Fuego Nuevo or "New Fire" ceremony. While the conga originated in Cuba, as an Afro-Cuban line dance associated with Carnaval, the dance was also hugely popular in Mexico, especially in eastern state of Veracruz. Centuries earlier, this region of Mexico was also home to portions of the Aztec empire. The *Fuego Nuevo* ceremony was performed only once every 52 years, when the ending of the Aztec ritual calendar aligned with the end of the 365-day Mayan calendar. With the symbolic ending of two important calendar cycles on the same day, the Aztecs feared that the sun may not return, triggering an apocalypse. To ensure that the cycle continued, they practiced a ceremony in which all ritual fires were first extinguished, and then a new ceremonial fire was lit upon the chest of a human sacrifice. As the fire grew, the victim's heart was cut out and cast atop the fire. Torches lit from this fire were carried to other temples and households throughout the empire, thus ensuring the return of the sun and the commencement of another calendar cycle. While the ritual is a shocking source of inspiration, audience members will be relieved to hear that no gore or sacrifice is reflected in the music! It sounds like an epic conga at Carnaval. For an exciting few minutes, Marquez makes us feel like we're all in line.

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Continuing the grand tradition of the Missoula Symphony Guild, the Missoula Symphony Scholarship Fund is dedicated to providing scholarships for outstanding University of Montana music students who play in the Missoula Symphony Orchestra or sing in the Missoula Symphony Chorale.

This year, the Missoula Symphony Association will award more than $30,000 in scholarships to ten talented young musicians. This commitment is possible thanks to the generosity of the individuals listed below. Every penny of their donation goes directly to scholarships. Our 2025-2026 scholarship recipients are noted on the Orchestra Roster with a "+" sign.

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New in 2020-2021, this scholarship is named for Will and Kay Cook. "We are happy to partner with the University of Montana and The Missoula Symphony Association to support the growth of music education in Montana and the cultural enrichment of our city." 2025-2026 Recipients: AJ Frisque, string bass Zoe McLain, violin, Lindsay Abelin, viola, Kamara Wilbur, violin.

The Florence Reynolds Scholarship

Named for a woman who shared her musical talent, enthusiasm and endless energy with the MSA for many years. Recipient: Kylie Heit, cello, Maren Elliott, violin.

The Symphony Guild Presidents' Scholarship

Named in honor of those women who have given their time and energy as Presidents of the Missoula Symphony Guild. Recipient: Garon Jones, string bass.

The Joseph Henry Scholarship

Named in honor of our Music Director Emeritus, who retired in 2007 after 21 years as Music Director of the Missoula Symphony Orchestra. Recipient: Hayley Bouchard, cello.

The Donald Carey Scholarship

Named in honor of our former Chorale Director who retired in 2006, after 18 years at his post. Recipient: Seth Griffith, cello.

The Virginia Vinal Scholarship

Named in honor of the longest-serving member of the orchestra, and her dedication to music and community. Recipient: Moe Kobold, violin.

The Lorraine Andrie Prize

Not a scholarship but a cash award, this prize is presented at the final concert of each season to a U.M. graduating senior who is deemed a truly outstanding and dedicated orchestra member. Named in honor of the founding leader of the Guild. Recipient: Jayla Mitchell, cello.

The Women's Guild Tuition Scholarship

Funded by Betty Thisted and Sophie Lambros, two presidents of the former Missoula Symphony Guild, this scholarship provides full tuition, for four years, to an incoming University of Montana music major focusing on piano or percussion. Recipient: William (Danger) Gersh, percussion.

The Steve and Jane Bahls Scholarship

Established by Steve and Jane Bahls in 2023. The Steve and Jane Bahls scholarship recognizes an outstanding music student who performs in the Missoula Symphony Orchestra or in the Missoula Symphony Chorale. Recipient: Pamela Harrington, violin.

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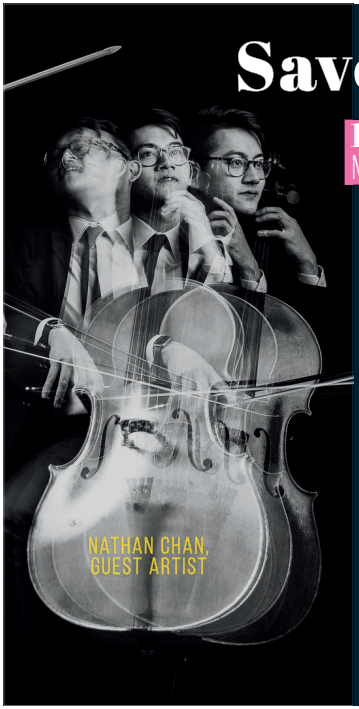

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Julia Tai presents a series of four mini-concerts that help children explore the elements of music and the instruments of the orchestra. These engaging and hands-on programs feature Symphony musicians and guest artists from our 2025-2026 season.

4:30-5:30 PM AT THE MISSOULA PUBLIC LIBRARY IMAGINARIUM

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AT THE DENNISON THEATRE

Friday, October 3, 2025, 7-10pm • Saturday, November 1, 2025, 10am-1pm
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Arturo Márquez
La Conga del Fuego Nuevo

Nov. 1 & 2, 2025
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Nathan Chan, Cello
Arvo Pärt
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Symphony No. 6 in B minor,
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