

CURTIS  
INSTITUTE OF MUSIC



# CURTIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

MARCH 2024

CURTIS INSTITUTE OF MUSIC



# SPRING GALA

FEATURING CURTIS OPERA THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF

*The Cunning Little Vixen*

FOLLOWED BY COCKTAILS AND DINNER

Join us at the annual spring gala for a festive celebration of Curtis's legacy of voice. Proceeds from the gala play a vital role in underwriting the unparalleled education of our students. Your participation today can help define the legacy of Curtis for generations to come.

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## 2024 GALA CO-CHAIRS

Mignon and Jim Groch  
Robin and Mark Rubenstein

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### WHEN

Saturday, May 4 at 3:00 p.m.

### WHERE

Kimmel Center for Performing Arts

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To secure your place or for more information,  
visit [Curtis.edu/Gala](https://Curtis.edu/Gala)

# 2023-24 SEASON TIME TO DISCOVER

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### **CURTIS INSTITUTE OF MUSIC**

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**CURTIS**  
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# WELCOME

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Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for joining us for today's Curtis Symphony Orchestra performance—the final one of our 2023–24 season.

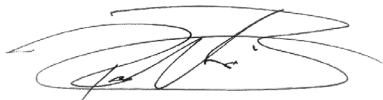
The annual closing concert is always special, representing the culmination of the orchestra's work together over the school year. But this moment is especially poignant for the students who will be graduating later this spring because this marks the last time they will play together in Verizon Hall as a member of the Curtis orchestra. I am so very proud of them, and look forward to seeing all they will accomplish as Curtis alumni.

This afternoon's concert is also extraordinary because it features two world premieres: *Te Deum* by alumnus James Ra and *Aluminum Flowers* by faculty member Steve Mackey, featuring guitar alumna JIJI. The process of learning new works like these is such a valuable experience for our students, and we hope you will enjoy the result of their hard work today.

Although this is our final orchestra concert on this stage this school year, we have many performances for you over the next two months. We have two opera productions, dozens of free recitals—including many graduation recitals—as well as exciting Ensemble 20/21 and Curtis Presents concerts, and our annual gala in May.

Of course, all of these performances are made possible thanks to the generous support of friends like you. We are immensely grateful for the time and resources that you invest in our students and our school. We are so glad you are here today and hope you will join us often in the coming weeks. Thank you for all you do for Curtis.

All my very best,



**Roberto Díaz (Viola '84)**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO

*Nina von Maltzahn President's Chair*  
*James and Betty Matarese Chair in Viola Studies*



*At the Curtis Institute of Music, the world's most talented young musicians develop into exceptional artists, creators, and innovators.*

With a tuition-free foundation, Curtis is a unique environment for teaching and learning. Curtis is a small school by design, where students realize their artistic potential through intensive, individualized study with the most renowned, sought-after faculty.

Animated by a learn-by-doing philosophy, Curtis students share their music with audiences through more than 100 performances each year, including solo and chamber recitals, orchestral concerts, and opera—all free or at an affordable cost—offering audiences unique opportunities to participate in pivotal moments in these young musicians' careers.

In addition to a wealth of performance opportunities, Curtis students experience a close connection to the greatest artists and organizations in classical music, and innovative initiatives that integrate new technologies and encourage entrepreneurship—all within an historic campus in the heart of culturally rich Philadelphia.

In this diverse, collaborative community, Curtis's extraordinary artists challenge, support, and inspire one another—continuing an unparalleled 100-year legacy of musicians who have led, and will lead, classical music into a thriving, equitable, and multidimensional future.

Learn more at [Curtis.edu](https://www.curtis.edu).

### CURTIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Combining outstanding talent with unparalleled enthusiasm for making music together, the Curtis Symphony Orchestra is a cornerstone of the Curtis Institute of Music experience and an essential part of Philadelphia's brilliant cultural landscape. For 100 years, our extraordinary students have honed their skills and expanded their musical horizons as they prepare for professional careers with the world's leading orchestras and chamber ensembles. Under the mentorship of internationally renowned conductors, including Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Osmo Vänskä, Marin Alsop, Simon Rattle, and Robert Spano, Curtis students present audiences with an array of inspiring programming, ranging from the time-honored to dynamic new works.

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# Curtis Symphony Orchestra

PRESENTS

## Ra, Mackey, and Tchaikovsky



Robert Spano ('85), *conductor*

Jiji ('15), *guitar*

**Saturday, March 9, 2024**  
at 3:00 p.m.

Verizon Hall, Kimmel Center

This concert runs approximately 2 hours, including one intermission.

Guest conductor appearances for each Curtis Symphony Orchestra performance are made possible by the Rita E. and Gustave M. Hauser Chair in Conducting Studies.

Orchestral concerts are supported by the Pennsylvania Tourism Office, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the Jack Wolgin Curtis Orchestral Concerts Endowment Fund.

Photographic and recording equipment may not be used in Verizon Hall.

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## PROGRAM

**JAMES RA ('04)**

*Te Deum*

world premiere

**STEVEN MACKKEY**

*Aluminum Flowers,*

for solo electric guitar and orchestra

world premiere

Introduction

Echo

Canción

Fantasia

Loop

*Intermission*

**PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY**

**Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 (“Pathétique”)**

Adagio – Allegro non troppo

Allegro con grazia

Allegro molto vivace

Finale: Adagio lamentoso

## PROGRAM NOTES

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### *Te Deum*

**James Ra** (b. 1974)

*Te Deum* was generously commissioned by the Curtis Institute of Music during the COVID pandemic. As we grappled with uncertainty and loss, both the best and worst in all of us were revealed. Many of us endured the pain of losing loved ones, while others faced unseen struggles, consumed by pressures more insidious than the virus itself. Amidst this adversity, I resolved to give more thanks for the good in my life and to cherish the loved ones who bring beauty and steadfastness to my world. Based on the original Latin hymn, my *Te Deum* is an introspective, personal prayer and hymn of praise, thanksgiving, and awe in solitude. I have used the hymn “Great is Thy Faithfulness” as the vessel through which the conviction “I believe” is expressed, and the nucleus from which all of the music emerges.

*Te Deum* is an ode to the simplicity and sincerity of a time lost. It expresses a longing for a place in which artless beauty and unadorned truth are celebrated without pretension and the cynical sophistication of a bitter age. The essence of our collective connection with art, music, and the divine hinges on our ability to recapture what it was like to know nothing, to be a blank canvas, and to have a child-like fascination with the mysteries of simple miracles such as illumination. I celebrate the boundless wonders of this radiance in *Te Deum*.

—James Ra

9 minutes





## Aluminum Flowers, for solo electric guitar and orchestra

Steven Mackey (b. 1956)

*Aluminum Flowers* is a concerto for solo guitarist playing both electric guitar and nylon-string “classical” guitar. It celebrates the variety of the musical modes that such “polymath” guitarists practice on a regular basis, which range from delicate, intimate tones emanating from flesh on nylon strings to the grand orchestral textures possible with the electric guitar wired to a bank of effects pedals. From the six-hundred-year-old tradition of the Spanish vihuela to contemporary pop, rock, blues, and jazz, guitarists are conversant in a wide range of styles, all of them, ironically, on the fringe of mainstream classical music.

The piece is in five sections:

1. Introduction
2. Echo
3. Canción
4. Fantasia
5. Loop

The movements contrast sharply with each other as each movement is cast for a different instrument: The first movement is a nylon string “classical” or “Spanish” guitar. The second movement runs the electric guitar through a delay pedal, requiring impeccable timing from the soloist to produce a rapid *moto perpetuo* texture. The third movement, somewhat paradoxically, uses overdrive/distortion to create a sustained, lyrical, singing tone. The fourth movement is for prepared guitar—a guitar pick threaded through the strings to create a gong-like sound—a bottleneck that slides up and down the string unencumbered by the frets. The last

movement uses a looper to layer several polyphonic strands, creating an orchestral timbre.

Within each movement, one thing leads to the next naturally, without jagged edges or willfully discursive digressions, one might say “organically.” The organicism combined with the image of metal wires carrying current from the guitar to its pedals like veins to petals conjured the image of metal flowers—Aluminum Flowers because the pitches A–F have an important structural role in the piece beginning with the introduction, which is made up entirely of a bassline which alternates between A and F.

*The piece is dedicated to two extraordinary polymath virtuosos—Jiji Kim and Gretchen Menn.*

—Steven Mackey

25 minutes ♦ 5 movements

## PROGRAM NOTES

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Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 ("Pathétique")

**Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky** (1840-93)

Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony rose from the ashes of a fragmentary symphony in E-flat major, to which the composer had devoted a great deal of time during the latter part of 1892. (It would later be partially reworked into a never-completed piano concerto.) He felt relief at having abandoned the effort—as he wrote to his beloved nephew Vladimir Davydov, it was "an irreversible decision, and it is wonderful that I made it."

During travels early the next year the composer set off in a completely different musical direction. "You know I destroyed a symphony I had been composing and just partly orchestrated in the autumn," he wrote to Davydov in February 1893 of the jettisoned fragment (which he had not actually destroyed). "During my journey I had the idea for another symphony, this time with a program ... but with a program that will be an enigma to all—let them guess! The symphony will be entitled A Program Symphony (No. 6)."

Tchaikovsky might have known that he was setting himself up for speculation about the potentially biographical nature of the "program," but he could barely have imagined the bizarre theories that would arise over the next century—from premonitions of his own death to expressions of desperation about his sexual orientation being made public in the wake of a scandal. In any event, Tchaikovsky would be dead by the end of the year, though not before he had completed and conducted the premiere (in October 1893 in St. Petersburg) of what many believe to be his finest, if perhaps his most

controversial, symphonic composition.

His death at age 53 remains a mystery (some have suggested he died of a stroke, or of an accidental exposure to cholera), but most scholars are fairly sure he did not commit suicide. The symphony's program died with the composer, but the "Pathétique" (the subtitle "Patcheskaia," "pathos-laden" or "passion-filled," was suggested by the composer's brother, Modest) would, by its emotional and at times tragic content, fuel speculations that Tchaikovsky felt his life was about to end. It is true that he reported bursting into tears while composing the symphony. Yet his ebullient excitement about the quality of the work, both during its composition and after its completion, defies a notion of impending doom. "You can't imagine what bliss I feel," he wrote to Davydov, "being convinced that my time is not yet passed, and I can still work."

He composed the symphony on his travels and at his estate in Klin, completing a draft by spring and the orchestration by August. He reported to his brother Anatoly that it was his best composition so far. "It is rare for me to write anything with such love and enthrallment," he wrote to the conductor Ilya Slatin. To his friend and publisher Pyotr Jurgenson he added: "I can honestly say that never in my life have I been so pleased with myself, so proud, or felt so fortunate to have created something as good as this." (Hardly the words of a man about to commit suicide.)

There is indeed much of the tragic vein in the Sixth, as there had been in the Fourth and Fifth symphonies, but there

is mirth as well, and comfort. It's worth remembering that just the year before Tchaikovsky had composed one of his most joyously effervescent pieces, the *Nutcracker*. It's true he considered the Sixth one of the "most sincere" of his works, possibly because of the extensive labors that its completion demanded. "Twenty years ago I tore through everything without thinking, and all went well," he wrote. "Now I have become timorous and unsure of myself." It has been suggested that the intensity of emotion in the symphony inspired in the composer a new and experimental strain; the slow and haunting finale, in fact, continues to baffle and surprise us even today. "Formally there will be much that is new in this symphony," he had written, "and the finale will not be a loud Allegro, but a very slow-moving Adagio."

Some have even suggested that the Sixth looks ahead to the anguish of Mahler (who had in fact already completed his First Symphony by 1893). One could say it looks forward to the 20th century in another respect: An 11-year-old Igor Stravinsky and his father, Fyodor (who had created several roles in Tchaikovsky's operas) were in attendance at Tchaikovsky's funeral. Fyodor was in fact a pallbearer. Stravinsky was deeply moved: Despite the direction his own music would take, he understood implicitly the significance of Tchaikovsky and greatly admired him.

The Sixth's first movement begins with an Adagio introduction of dark foreboding, which gives way to the restless main theme in B minor (Allegro non troppo).

The andante second theme is one of the composer's most achingly passionate (and most beautifully constructed) melodies, and many listeners remember this one more vividly than the "main" subject. Thoughts of death find expression in the trombone incantations following the movement's climax, which quote from a Russian Orthodox hymn for the dead. But morbidity is quickly dispelled in the following movement, the Allegro con grazia, a graceful but irregular dance movement in the curious meter of 5/4—a sort of "three-legged minuet" into which is interspersed a sweet, halting trio section.

The vigorous Allegro molto vivace in G major, a marchlike piece cast in sonata form, stands in the place where most listeners might expect a lyrical slow movement. (Some have suggested that the inclusion of a waltz, a minuet, and a march in a symphony with such a tragic profile seems ironic, even forced, but the sincerity of each affect cannot be doubted). The ever-astonishing Adagio lamentoso reminds the listener of the composer's original descriptive outline for the symphony in its earlier guise: "Fourth movement ends dying away. ... Finale death—result of collapse."

—Paul Horsley

46 minutes ♦ 4 movements

## BIOGRAPHIES

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### Robert Spano CONDUCTOR

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Robert Spano—conductor, pianist, composer, and teacher—is known for the intensity of his artistry and distinctive communicative abilities, creating a sense of inclusion and warmth among musicians and audiences that is unique among American orchestras.

After twenty seasons as music director, he continues his association with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra as music director laureate. As music director of the Aspen Music Festival and School since 2011, he oversees the programming of more than 300 events and educational programs for 630 students and young performers.

Principal guest conductor of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra since 2019, Mr. Spano began his tenure as music director in August 2022. In February 2024, Mr. Spano was appointed music director of the Washington National Opera, beginning in the 2025–26 season, for a three-year term; he is currently the WNO's music director designate.

Mr. Spano made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 2019, leading the U.S. premiere of *Marnie*, by American composer Nico Muhly. Recent concert highlights have included several world premiere performances, including *Voy a Dormir* by Bryce Dessner at Carnegie Hall with the Orchestra of St. Luke's and mezzo-soprano Kelley O'Connor; George Tsontakis's Violin Concerto No. 3 with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra; and the Tuba Concerto by Jennifer Higdon, performed by Craig Knox and the Pittsburgh Symphony.

Mr. Spano has garnered four GRAMMY Awards and eight nominations with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. He is on faculty at Oberlin Conservatory and has received honorary doctorates from Curtis, Bowling Green State University, Emory University, and Oberlin. Mr. Spano is a recipient of the Georgia Governor's Award for the Arts

and Humanities and is one of two classical musicians inducted into the Georgia Music Hall of Fame. Mr. Spano is a 1985 graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music.

### James Ra COMPOSER

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James Ra's music has been described as "coursing with adrenaline-pumping energy" and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* has called him "a composer to watch."

His music has been performed by members of the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, and Seoul Philharmonic in such venues as Carnegie Hall, Verizon Hall, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Philadelphia Convention Center, Jordan Hall, Weill Hall, the Kaufmann Center, Herbst Theatre (San Francisco), Seoul Arts Hall, IBK Hall (Seoul), Arts Hall (Busan), Daejeon Arts Hall, Tong Yeong International Music Festival, and in France, India, and Turkey. Upcoming commissions include a double concerto for the New York Classical Players, an orchestral work for the New Jersey Youth Orchestra, a work for the New York Flutists, a saxophone work for Wonki Lee, and a cello work for Jiwon Suh.

He was the young composer-in-residence at Music From Angel Fire under the direction of Ida Kavafian and composer-in-residence for groups such as the Korean Concert Society in Washington, D.C.; Ensemble 212 in New York; and Ensemble V9 in Korea. He was a fellow at Princeton University as part of their Atelier under the direction of Toni Morrison.

Born in Upper Darby, Pa., his teachers include Richard Danielpour, Ned Rorem, George Tsontakis and John Carbon, Simon Andrews, and Seung Jae Chung. He holds degrees from Curtis ('04), Franklin and Marshall College, and the Manhattan School of Music.

**Steven Mackey**  
COMPOSER

Bright in coloring, ecstatic in inventiveness, lively and profound, Steven Mackey’s music spins the tendrils of his improvisatory riffs into large-scale works of grooving, dramatic coherence. As a teenager growing up in Northern California obsessed with blues-rock guitar, Dr. Mackey was in search of the “right wrong notes,” those heart-wrenching moments that imbue the music with new, unexpected momentum. Today, his pieces play with that tension of being inside or outside of the harmony and flow forward, shimmering with prismatic detail.

Signature early works merged his academic training with the free-spirited physicality of his mother-tongue rock guitar music: *Troubadour Songs* (1991) and *Physical Property* (1992) for string quartet and electric guitar; and *Banana Dump Truck* (1995), an electrified-cello concerto. Later works explored his deepening fascination with transformation and movement of sound through time: *Dreamhouse* (2003), a rich work for voices and ensemble, was nominated for four GRAMMY Awards; *A Beautiful Passing* (2008) for violin and orchestra on the passing of his mother; and *Slide* (2011), a GRAMMY Award-winning music theater piece.

Today, Steven Mackey writes for chamber ensemble, orchestra, dance, and opera—commissioned by the greatest orchestras around the world. He has served as professor of music at Princeton University for the past 35 years and has won several awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award. He continues to explore an ever-widening world of timbres befitting a complex, 21st-century culture while always striving to make music that unites the head and heart, that is visceral, that gets us moving. Dr. Mackey joined the Curtis faculty in 2022.

**JJI**  
GUITAR

Praised by the *Washington Post* for her “mesmerizing” and “stirring” performances, JJI is an adventurous guitarist known for her virtuosity and command of diverse repertoire. Equally at home with acoustic and electric guitar, her concerts range from traditional and contemporary classical to free improvisation.

Through her impeccable musicianship, compelling stage presence, and commitment to commissioning and performing new musical works, JJI has solidified her reputation as a top 21st century guitarist. In 2021, the *Washington Post* selected JJI as “one of the 21 composers/performers who sound like tomorrow.” In recent seasons, JJI has presented solo recitals at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall; Lincoln Center; 92nd Street Y; Caramoor; Green Music Center; and the National Art Gallery, among other distinguished venues.

This season, JJI appears with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the Asheville and Utah Symphonies; is presented in recital by the Austin Classical Guitar Society, Tippet Rise Arts Center, Placitas Artists Series, Celebrity Series of Boston, and La Jolla Music Society; and tours with violinist Danbi Um in Delaware, Houston, Halifax, New Hampshire, Ohio, Wisconsin.

She has premiered solo and chamber works by a diverse range of musical artists, including Michael Gilbertson, Hilary Purrington, Shelley Washington, Kate Moore, Chris Rountree, Gulli Bjornsson, Molly Joyce, and Paul Lansky. A sought-after and versatile collaborator, JJI’s recent chamber and ensemble performances include appearances with the New York Philharmonic’s Nightcap Series; Cuarteto Latinoamericano; the Verona Quartet; Wildup; Duo Linu; and soprano Molly Netter.

JJI is a 2015 graduate of Curtis, and is sponsored by D’Addario Strings and GuitarLift by Felix Justen.

# CURTIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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## VIOLIN

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Noah Urquidi,  
*bass trombone*  
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#### TUBA

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#### HARP

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\* concertmaster  
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Joosep Reimaa, violin

Marija Räsänen, viola

Stergios Theodoridis,  
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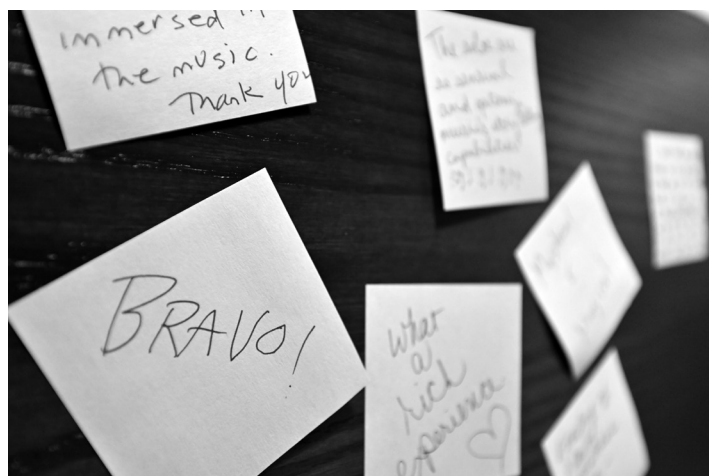
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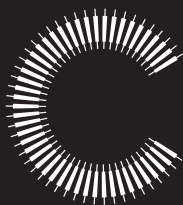
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