Fall Program

2026/27 Season



80

1946–2026

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History

Celebrating 80 years of history, Houston Youth Symphony (HYS) is the recipient of national acclaim. Most recently, HYS won the 2025 American Prize Special Prize for Sustained Excellence for the Youth Orchestra Division and the 2026 Mark of Excellence Award for the 15th time since 2008. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Dr. Michael Webster, this season 435 musicians between the ages of 7 and 19 come from across the greater Houston area to perform in one of five HYS orchestras. In addition to the core orchestra program, HYS offers musicians an opportunity to participate in a chamber music training program and an annual concerto competition.

In the community, HYS reaches 275 musicians through two programs: the Melody Program and the Coda Music Program. The Melody Program provides free private music lessons for talented youth. In January 2015, HYS launched the Coda Music Program, an after-school program that brings graduated, intensive string instruction to four elementary schools in Houston's Near Northside neighborhood and four elementary schools in Fort Bend. The program uses classical music and group instruction to build community and social transformation.

To learn more about HYS programs, concerts, and opportunities to support the work of Houston Youth Symphony, please visit HoustonYouthSymphony.org.

Mark of Excellence
National Orchestra Honors
2025
National Winner

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Photos courtesy Monica Hindmarsh

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A Note from the Executive Director

It is a great honor to welcome you to our 80th anniversary season! We have so much planned as we celebrate 80 years of providing the best music education in the Greater Houston area.

Highlights include a series of 80th anniversary satellite concerts which will feature HYS musicians performing in your communities this spring. HYS has also commissioned a new work by Jaylin Vinson to honor our 80th. You will hear the world premiere performance at our Spring Concert on May 2nd. Finally, you won't want to miss our 80th Anniversary Concert on January 31st, here in Stude Hall, where you will see the 100+ musicians of the HYS Symphony, 130 singers, and two soloists performing the transcendent Mahler Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection."

We welcome you to one or all of these events to commemorate 80 years and to look forward to the next chapter for Houston Youth Symphony!

With exuberance,



Amy Chung

We wish to thank our generous supporters.

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Oberlin Conservatory of Music

2026/27 Season
Fall Concert I

October 25, 2026, 2:30 p.m.
Stude Concert Hall
Rice University
Shepherd School of Music

Debut String Orchestra

Jackson Guillén, Conductor

Prelude from *Holberg Suite* (1884) — Edvard Grieg (1843–1907), arr. Brendan McBrien

We Rise (By Lifting Others) (2025) — Kevin Sluder

Ghost Carnival (2010) — Erik Morales (b. 1966)

Mariachi Suite (2025) — Jorge Vargas (b. 1971), arr. Stephen Bulla

I. Ranchera
II. Bolero
III. Son Jalisciense

Pause

String Orchestra

Angela Peugnet, Conductor

Bătuta, Stamping Dance (2023) — Snejana Pîslari (b. 1972)

Adagio (2012) — José Serebrier (b. 1938)

"Cossack Dance" from *Mazeppa* (1883) — Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893), arr. Sandra Dackow

Pause

Sinfonia

Matthew Porter, Conductor

Finale from *Sinfonia Piccola* (1935) — Heikki Suolahti (1920–1936)

Three Dances from *The Bartered Bride* (2025) — Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884)

I. Polka
II. Furiant

Karelia Overture (1893) — Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

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Fall Concert I Program Notes

Debut String Orchestra

Prelude from Holberg Suite
Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)
arr. Brendan McBrien

In 1884, Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg wrote the suite *From Holberg's Time* in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Norwegian author and playwright Ludvig Holberg. Originally conceived for piano, the suite features aspects of the Baroque era—the period in which Holberg lived—combined with the harmonies and expressivity of the Romantic period.

The suite consists of five movements. As we open our season, today you will hear the suite's opening movement, *Prelude*, which begins with energetic rhythms and bright harmonies, setting the stage for a celebration. Although the fast-paced rhythmic structure and contrapuntal style resemble those of the Baroque period, Grieg manages to infuse the music with the vitality and lyricism of the Romantic era and Norwegian voices.

We Rise (By Lifting Others)
Kevin Sluder

With a message clearly stated in its title, Kevin Sluder created an inspirational work for young musicians, filled with lyricism and a rising melodic line that beautifully reflects its intended message.

Written in 2025, the piece celebrates the success that organizations, communities, and ensembles can achieve when their members support, motivate, and encourage one another. In an orchestra, each member plays an important role, and the strength of the ensemble comes from working together toward a common goal.

As the music grows in intensity, it reminds us that we can all create something beautiful when we lift up one another.

Ghost Carnival
Erik Morales (b. 1966)

Inspired by the somber atmosphere of an abandoned amusement park in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and with the premise that in the composer's mind, only ghosts are now enjoying the rides, Erik Morales invites the audience to imagine a spooky carnival coming to life.

To accomplish this, the composer incorporates extended bowing techniques and effects such as *sul ponticello*, *tremolos*, *glissandi*, trills, artificial harmonics, and *flautando*, among others. These techniques create unusual sounds and colors while adding a sense of suspense to the work.

The final *glissando* at the end of the piece represents, in the words of the composer, "the final plunge of the roller coaster into the darkness."

Mariachi Suite
Jorge Vargas (b. 1971)
arr. Stephen Bulla

Written as a celebration of Mexican musical traditions and to introduce students to the different styles found in mariachi music, Jorge Vargas's *Mariachi Suite* consists of three original pieces based on some of the most popular styles performed by mariachi ensembles: *Ranchera*, *Bolero*, and *Son Jalisciense*.

Rancheras originated in the rural ranches of Mexico, their lyrics often exploring popular themes such as love, heartbreak, and Mexican identity. They are frequently written in 3/4 meter, giving them a waltz-like character.

The *Bolero* is a romantic song style that emerged in Cuba in the 19th century. Its popularity spread throughout Latin America, becoming one of the region's most beloved musical styles. It is typically performed at a slow tempo and is characterized by expressive melodies and themes of love and longing.

The *Son Jalisciense* is a festive traditional Mexican style with roots in Jalisco. It is characterized by its syncopated rhythms, energetic character, and celebratory spirit. Many songs are accompanied by traditional dancing, with the music's lively rhythms reflected in the dancers' footwork.

Notes by Jackson Guillén

String Orchestra

Bătuta, Stamping Dance
Snejana Pîslari (b. 1972)

Moldovan composer Snejana Pîslari contributes greatly to the national compositions of Moldova. She writes in the Baltic neo-folkloric style, reviving and integrating Moldova's folk stories and music into the everyday life of its citizens. Pîslari uses minimalism and repetition to recontextualize this Moldovan and Romanian traditional folk dance. This folk dance, characterized by elaborate footwork and stamping, is likely an evolution of the earlier *hopak* style.

Adagio
José Serebrier (b. 1938)

José Serebrier, Uruguayan composer and conductor, won his first composition contest at the age of 15 with a piece he wrote in only 4 days and nights (even finishing the last page in a taxi, rushing to meet the deadline). He only entered the contest because he thought he would be allowed to conduct the work if he won. He did win, but his work was assigned to another conductor. Today, Serebrier has conducted most of the world's major orchestras and holds many of music's most esteemed awards including several Grammy nominations for both his compositions and his recordings. This Adagio is the composer's orchestration of his 1964 choral work *Vocalise, Adagio*. It asks the orchestra to play "Slow, with resigned serenity and as sad as possible."

"Cossack Dance" from *Mazeppa*
Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
arr. Sandra Dackow

Tchaikovsky's opera *Mazeppa* is based on *Poltava*, a narrative poem by Russian author Alexander Pushkin. Ivan Mazepa, the opera's namesake, was a Ukrainian military, political and civic leader who served as the head of the Cossacks. Pushkin based his story on historical events at the Battle of Poltava, where Russian Czar Peter the Great, defeated the invading army of Sweden's King Charles VII. After the Swedes were defeated at Poltava, Mazepa went into exile in Moldavia (now part of modern Romania and Moldova). This *Cossack Dance* takes place during a party in Act 1, Scene 1, No. 4a: Hopak. Hopak takes its name from the Ukrainian word гопати (pronounced as hopaty), meaning to leap and stamp one's feet. The *hopak*, originally a Ukrainian men's folk dance, is highly athletic, featuring jumps,

leaps, spins, and squat sequences. The energy, tempo, folk style, and geographical relationship of this work to the *Bãtuta* played earlier, demonstrates the connections of folk music and dance through time.

Notes by Angela Peugnet

Sinfonia

Finale from *Sinfonia Piccola*
Heikki Suolahti (1920–1936)

Imagine putting the final touches on a musical composition that nobody will ever hear performed. That's the strange reality behind our opening number, the finale from Heikki Suolahti's *Sinfonia Piccola*. In fact, Suolahti was right around the average age of our musicians on stage. Tragically, he died the following year, at only sixteen, and never once heard any of his music played by a live orchestra. The premiere of this work did not happen until 1938, two years after his death. This information might cause you to expect something sad or unfinished, yet it isn't. The finale opens with a slow and serious line in the strings, almost like it's taking a deep breath before attempting something grand. This opening looks backward to the very beginning of the symphony, tying the whole work together – a compositional technique used by composers with decades of experience. Then the music shifts into a faster, more determined section that builds toward a strong, confident ending.

What is remarkable is how sure this music sounds. Suolahti did not write a "student piece" for some project. He scored his work for a full romantic orchestra that includes harp and a larger brass section. Suolahti grew up idolizing and studying the works of Jean Sibelius, Finland's most legendary composer, whose work you will hear a little later in our program. You can certainly hear that influence in the broad melodies and sense of vast, scenic landscapes. However, Suolahti was not imitating Sibelius. He had already found his own voice and was speaking with real confidence.

As you listen to his finale, think about what it represents: not a life cut short in sadness, but a teenager's remarkable imagination, getting a performance it always deserved.

Three Dances from *The Bartered Bride*
Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884)

The Bartered Bride is a comic opera about village life, and the dances we will hear this afternoon are pulled from different points in the story. This sampling of Czech dance styles moves from graceful to fiery.

1. Polka from Act I—The polka is the dance that closes out Act I, where the villagers are celebrating a spring festival outside an inn. Smetana takes a familiar, simple dance and dresses it up in sophisticated clothing—the orchestra. It is cheerful and elegant.
2. Furiant from Act II—The Furiant shows up right after a drinking song, where our villagers break into dance. The *furiant* is a fast Czech dance built on a rhythmic trick where the underlying beat is in three but shifts between groups of two and three.

The Bartered Bride used the Czech language, village life, and dance traditions to help build a distinctly Czech operatic and national identity, much like Sibelius and Suolahti worked to accomplish for Finland a few decades later.

Karelia Overture
Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Jean Sibelius wanted his music to sound distinctly Finnish. In 1892, he traveled to Karelia, a region on the border of Finland and Russia that was full of old folklore, legends, and traditional folk music. This trip inspired the *Karelia Overture*. Sibelius does not quote the folk songs he heard, but rather, he invented music that sounds ancient and Finnish using these compositional techniques:

- alternate, old-sounding scalar material
- bagpipe-like sounds using open fifths and drones
- repeating rhythmic figures
- hefty brass fanfares
- contrast between lyrical and regal-sounding sections

The result of his composition was meant to feel like a journey through an ancient and legendary landscape.

Notes by Matthew Porter

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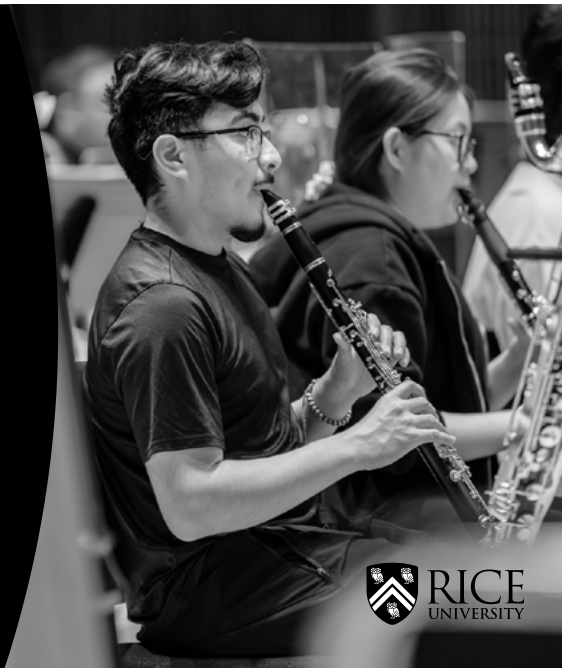
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concertmaster
Robyn Mu
assistant concertmaster
Kenza Wang-Sol
Natalia Martinez
David Deyong Zeng
Amelia Chang
Anagha Vemuru
Aadhavv Parthipan
Mariam Sheikh
Isla J. Tan
Ryan Yu
Allen Lan
Lily Zhao
William Li
Irene Zhang
Eva Valentina Brionez

Violin II

Maya Tino
principal
Renay Ayhan
assistant principal
Teh-En Eng
Alan Wu
Ramanathan Palaniappan
Nate Perillo
Evan Xie
Linnea X. Stern
Elynn Hu
Izzie Duerer
Alexis J. Lu
Tyler McLaurin Jiang
Ginny Grayshaw
Diane H. Kang
Anthony Demian
Lucía C. Gaviria

Viola

Hridhaan Maroo
principal
Yukta Beriveera
assistant principal
Lena Sophie Beddar
Fareedah Ope
Autumn Welch
Nidhi Keshav
Rishabh Parchure
Sahasra Reddy Baradi
Lillian G. Diaz
Ellie Josephine Avellaneda

Cello

Bryan Tran
principal
Naomi Berth
assistant principal
Harvey Lerette
Austin Shoemate
Shannyn Lloyd
Daniel Hajoon Vuu
Elias Mollett
Emilia Tan
Leah Chang
Alexander Wei
Sofia Mathew
Zac Wang

Bass

Sihyun (Sunny) Kim
principal
Bruce Manning*

Orchestra Liaison

Michael Duerer

** Substitute musician and HYS Alum*

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Violin I

Angelina Chen
concertmaster
Yuxuan Li
assistant concertmaster
Mina Liu
Tre Hoedel
Angela I. Salazar Gonzalez
Margaret Lin
Hannah Leal
Athena Hehmeyer
Joanna Wu
Ellie Kim
Madeleine Lee
Allison Yang
Lillian Hayden
Emma Koo
Henry Gelhar
Joshua Collin Cheng

Violin II

Luis Valencia
principal
Nana Barning
assistant principal
Ciara Park
Catalina Bonnet
Shreyas Chittoor
Emma Dang
Michael Zhang
Abraham Hangyeol Song
Landon Nguyen
Yaping Wang
Andy Zhang
Myra Yasin
Aadi Dhagat
Henry McLeod
Sarah Liu
Alyssa Li

Viola

Ria Abraham
principal
Shrirang Bhalerao
assistant principal
Andrew Park
Caleb Chen
Hanson Luong
Andrew Kim
Jacqueline Chen
Claire Williams
Ore Akinyemiju
Zoey Liu

Cello

Coraline Zhang
principal
Maria Paulina Arriola Alvarado
assistant principal
Eleanor Zong
Kyle Hechanova
Clara Hong
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Jihwan Kim
Oliver Briggle
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concertmaster
Seyeon Grace Park
assistant concertmaster
John Jiahao Li
Rianna Shezbie
Logan He
Ryan Chung
Olivia Jang
Daniel Hu
Cian-Rong (Jenna) Peng
Arthur Liao
Roy Wang
Gavin Yu
Chloe Liu
Taeyul Kim
Lonny Sui
Julia Hayoon Vuu

Violin II

Gregory Zheng
principal
Daniel Q. Lu
assistant principal
Enya Zhao
Linh Dinh
Antonio Chen
Catherine Chlebus
Andrew Shu
Lily Stojanovic
Jeremy Nguyen
Natalie J. Jian +
Isaac Wang
Carolina Laronga
Sophia Xu
Bennett McLeod
Julia Biral
Isabella Sáenz

Viola

Siao Shih Lin
principal
Grace Chen
assistant principal
Nihaal Garud
Rohan Balan
Eli Brinkley
Neha Garud
Ethan J. Lozada
Isabella Li
Ella Yu
Neil Shaw
María Lopez
Armahn Virani +

Cello

Cedric Wijatno
principal
Mia Li
assistant principal
Joon Choi
Michael Liang
Erika Wang
Brayden Li
Gavin Liu
Miguel De La Cruz
Keziah Kim +
Cole Braley
Andrew Chen
Olivia González

Bass

Evan Zinda
principal
Santiago Ponton
assistant principal
David Hernandez
Zhenyu Yang
Kyle Sanchez
Eduardo Caleb Arriaga
Ibrahim Alomary

Flute

Jenna Kim
Bradley Nguyen ^
Su Yun
Alex Sun ‡ *

Piccolo

Jenna Kim ^
Su Yun *

Oboe

Brayden Lim ‡
Maverick Ma
Marcelo Montoya
Belle Yuwei Tian ^ *

Clarinet

Joseph Cao ^
Clarence Gu
Yichen Wang ‡ *
Ya (Wenya) Wen

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Shyameli Maia Pannala
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Sabrina Judd *
Aiden Self
Kai Steele ^

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Hojun Lee ‡
Nicholas Pham

Bass Trombone
Ryker Dupré

Tuba
David Jimenez ^ *
Lance Sitton ‡

Harp
Wally Snow
Olivia Lowe

Timpani
Landon Pham *
Zach Smith ^
Mason Young ‡

Percussion
Sam Frazier
Landon Pham
Zach Smith
Ayden Ybarra-Trevino
Mason Young

Orchestra Liaison
Tatiana Judd

String musicians are listed in chair order. Wind and Percussion musicians are listed alphabetically.

‡ Principal Suolahti
^ Principal Sibelius
** Principal Smetana*
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2026/27 Season
Fall Concert II

October 25, 2026, 7:00 p.m.
Stude Concert Hall
Rice University
Shepherd School of Music

Philharmonia

Brad Smith, Conductor

Russian Easter Festival Orchestra (1888) — Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

In the Steppes of Central Asia (1880) — Alexander Borodin (1833–1887)

Festive Overture (1954) — Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Pause

Symphony

Michael Webster, Conductor

Symphony No. 2 in C minor (Resurrection) (1894) — Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)

III. *In ruhig fliessender Bewegung* (In quietly flowing motion)
II. Andante moderato. *Sehr gemächlich* (Very leisurely)
I. Allegro maestoso. *Mit durchaus ernstem und feierlichem Ausdruck* (With earnest and solemn expression throughout)

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A ten-minute pause takes place between each orchestra.

Fall Concert II Program Notes

Philharmonia

Russian Easter Festival Overture
Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov composed this overture in 1888 (the same year that Mahler wrote the first movement of his Symphony No. 2, also about Resurrection), drawing from liturgical chants of the *Obikhod* (Russian Orthodox church music). The work is designed to bridge the sorrow of Holy Saturday with the joyful celebration of Easter Sunday. In his autobiography, *My Musical Life*, Rimsky-Korsakov provided his own comprehensive program note for this work.

"... The rather lengthy slow introduction... on the liturgical theme "Let God Arise" (heard in woodwinds), alternating with the ecclesiastical melody "An Angel cried out" (solo cello), appeared to me, in the beginning as it were, the ancient prophecy of Isaiah of the Resurrection of Christ. The gloomy colors of the *Andante lugubre* seemed to depict the Holy Sepulchre that had shone with ineffable light at the moment of the Resurrection–in the transition to the Allegro of the overture. The beginning of the *Allegro* – the theme "Let them also that hate Him flee before Him", led to the holiday mood of the Greek Orthodox service on Christ's matins; the solemn trumpet voice of the Archangel was replaced by a tonal reproduction of the joyous, almost dance-like tolling of bells, alternating now with the sexton's rapid reading and now with the conventional chant of the priest's reading the glad tidings of the Evangel. The *Obikhod* theme, "Christ is Arisen," which forms a sort of subsidiary part of the overture, appears amid the trumpet blasts and the bell-tolling, constituting a triumphant coda."

The huge range of orchestral color which the composer uses to depict celebration and solemnity are a perfect example of Rimsky-Korsakov's ability to transform the basics of music into something incredibly artistic. Since the Greek Orthodoxy had banned musical instruments for about a thousand years, the very act of setting these chants and hymn tunes into an orchestral setting was incredibly bold. However, he was able to prove

that instruments were capable implements of faith and could celebrate church occasions just as well as could the voice. Three specific representations include a trombone solo, which acts as a *recitative* (chanting) passage representing the voice of the priest reading from the Gospel. Vibrant percussion colors in triangle, bells, and tam-tam are clearly the sounds of church bells, and when nearing the end, an overlapping massive brass sound lets us hear the chant again, slowly and in full splendor, surrounded by exciting woodwind and string figuration. Each section of the orchestra, including harp and extended violin solos, is given a chance to shine.

In the Steppes of Central Asia
Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)

Alexander Borodin's 1880 symphonic poem is a masterclass in musical efficiency, built almost entirely on the interaction of two contrasting thematic ideas against a sustained background. Borodin paints the vast expanse of the Asian plain using an extremely high, static pedal point in the first violins.

Out of this silence emerges the "Russian" theme, introduced by a single clarinet in a quiet, peaceful register. Shortly after, the English horn introduces the winding Eastern (Central Asian) theme, characterized by its minor mode and modal melodic inflections. Borodin's craftsmanship shines in the central section, where he overlays the two themes instead of what we might expect to be a development of each. The piece builds to a triumphant full orchestra restatement of the Russian theme, supported by a heavy pizzicato bass, and then fading into the distance. We are left with only the violin pedal point and a single flute to bring the work to a close.

Festive Overture
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

In 1954, the Bolshoi Theater planned a concert to celebrate the Russian Revolution of 1917, but only days before, they realized with panic that they had no piece suitable to open a concert of that importance. At the time, their musical consultant was Shostakovich, and he was called upon to produce something appropriate. His *Festive Overture* was the result of a three-day timeline, a work recognized today as one of his most effective "official" pieces. Lev Lebedinsky, a close friend of Shostakovich, recalled the astounding speed at which he wrote. "Moreover," said Lebedinsky, "when he wrote light

music, he was able to talk, make jokes, and compose simultaneously, like the legendary Mozart." The pages were sent while still wet with ink to the copyists at the theater. Despite its brief duration, it demands virtuosic agility from every section of the orchestra.

The work opens with a fanfare scored for brass in octaves, establishing a bold A-major tonality. The main body of the overture, a very quick *Presto*, launches with a lightning-fast, scalar running line in the clarinets that quickly spreads across the woodwinds. Shostakovich uses a classic *Sonata-allegro* form, but in a very short timeline. The second section brings a lyrical melody from the cellos and horns, all while keeping up the relentless driving momentum. A brass ensemble re-enters near the *coda*, layering the opening fanfare over the frantic tempo of the main theme for an intense and triumphant high-energy finish.

Notes by Brad Smith

Symphony

Symphony No. 2 in C minor (Resurrection)
Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

HYS is celebrating its 80th anniversary by performing Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 2 in C minor, (Resurrection). We are following historical precedent by offering the first three movements first, as did Mahler, when he conducted the Berlin Philharmonic in March, 1895. HYS will start with the third movement and end with the first, because it has a mood of finality at the end. Nine months later Mahler directed the first complete performance with the same orchestra. HYS won't wait that long! Come back on January 31 to hear the complete symphony with the Kingwood and Rice Chorales, soprano Sophia Orrico, and mezzo-soprano Jessica Lubyinsky.

Considering the immense popularity of Mahler's Second Symphony in the 21st century, it is eye-opening to realize how much trouble it had getting off the ground. The first movement was written simultaneously with the first symphony in 1888 as a stand-alone symphonic poem entitled *Todtenfeier*, a funeral rite for the hero of the first symphony. (Another 1888 work is the Russian Easter

Overture that you just heard.) Mahler played it on the piano for his mentor, the renowned conductor Hans von Bülow, whose negative reaction included, "If that is still music then I do not understand a single thing about music." Mahler was crushed, so he withheld *Todtenfeier* from performance or publication until deciding, five years later, to convert it into the first movement of his second symphony.

In 1888, there was an ongoing conflict between writing symphonic poems and symphonies. Richard Strauss's *Don Juan* and Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony were both written that year, exemplifying the diametrically opposed forms. Mahler was caught in the middle. He wanted to write symphonies, but *Todtenfeier* was far away from the symphonic ideal of a first movement in sonata-allegro form in which two themes appear in the exposition, are tossed around in a development section, and reappear in the recapitulation. In addition to its dramatic, dynamic, thematic, and rhythmic contrasts and occasionally extreme dissonances, *Todtenfeier* perplexed von Bülow because the sequence of themes is so unpredictable. Mahler's First Symphony had a standard exact repeat of the exposition, but the Second Symphony has multiple variations of the exposition the second time through. When the second theme appears the second time, it ushers in a long section of music that combines elements of exposition and development that make it hard (or impossible!) for the listener to follow the form.

I have devised a "cast of characters" to act as a guide.

1. Wake-up call (W): five notes in the low strings, fast and furious
2. Procession (P): the rhythmic underpinning of the funeral march, juxtaposing dotted rhythms (long, short) with triplets. It appears throughout the movement, often not coordinated with the main melody. This is the first theme of the exposition.
3. Hero (H): the melody above the procession, using a similar blend of dotted rhythms and triplets, heard first in the oboes. Later, it is heard either in its entirety, or in smaller extracted motifs, but never exactly the same twice. First theme continued.
4. Afterlife (A): a total contrast, starting with a slow, soft, inwardly expressive upward rising scale in the violins. This is the second theme of the exposition.
5. Victory (V): a quiet brass chorale, first appearing in the

repeat of the exposition, that gains strength as the movement progresses
6. Fate (F): A strong upward chromatic dotted rhythm, usually in the brass (derived from H but distinct)
7. Resignation (Res): A plodding, downward bass line featuring a chromatic triplet
8. Requiem (Req): A solemn theme, first heard in English horn and bass clarinet above P rhythms
9. Cymbals (C): Two of the many cymbal crashes are particularly significant.

Here is a sequence of how the themes appear. Sections 3 through 6 combine elements of the second theme with development.

Section 1 (exposition 1):	W, P, H, A
Section 2 (exposition repeat):	W, P, H, V (soft), F, Res
Section 3 (second theme? devel?):	A (extended, with clarinet duo), P, Req (English horn, bass clarinet), H, V (loud), F
Section 4 (second theme? devel?):	C, A (flute—fast tempo), H
Section 5 (clearly development):	W, P (cellos and basses), Req (trumpet, trombone), H, V (soft)
Section 6 (devel. leading to climax):	C, H, F
Section 7 (Recapitulation):	W, P, H, A
Section 8 (Coda):	Res, F, H, P (a remembrance — soft and slow)

In the entire 22-minute movement, there are only two measures that come anywhere near exact repetition. P, H, and A are continually varied. It is particularly rewarding to follow the evolution of A, which can be interpreted as the hero's desire for "transfiguration" after death. A is interrupted by earthly passion during its first appearance, highly simplified in its first iteration (Section 3), appearing way too fast in the flute (Section 4), then achieving resolution in its last appearance (Section 7).

Mahler was famous as a conductor and so busy during the winter season that he had to relegate composing to summertime. After deciding that *Todtenfeier* should become the first movement of a symphony he completed the second and third movements in short order between June and August of 1893.

After the tumultuous *Todtenfeier*, Mahler chose the Viennese dance called *Ländler* for a contrasting second movement that he called "the raisin in the cake." The *Ländler* originated as a heavy peasant dance (as in Mahler's First Symphony) but gained grace and lightness among wealthier city folk. The Ländler is like a slow waltz, but with occasional accents on the third beat in addition to the stressed downbeat. Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms were fond of writing *Ländler*, but by far the most famous *Ländler* was written by Richard Rodgers for the scene in *Sound of Music* in which Baron von Trapp and Maria realize that they are falling in love. In Mahler's hands, the ingratiating first theme is interrupted by a gossamer stream of triplets somewhat reminiscent of Mendelssohn. The first theme returns with a romantic countermelody in the cellos. But there are storm clouds on the horizon. The triplets return, loud and energetic this time. The storm gradually dissipates to a third appearance of the first theme, pizzicato. The woodwinds take over the original melody with a violin countermelody that deepens the expression of the cellos before the dancers disappear in the distance.

For the third movement, Mahler turned to the collection of folk poetry called *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* to write the satirical song, *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt* (Antonius of Padua's Fish Sermon). He completed a version with piano in July and with orchestra in August 1893. The text is a study of futility. Antonius finds the church empty, so goes to the riverside to preach to the fish. The carp, pike, codfish, eels, sturgeon, crabs, and turtles take turns being enthralled by his sermon, but swim away unchanged. The related symphonic movement is three times as long as the song, the futility interrupted three times by an optimistic fanfare and once by a poignant trumpet quartet that Mahler likened to the agave plant that blooms only once.

The third fanfare catapults forward in tempo and dynamic until layers of brass and percussion culminate in what Mahler called, "the appalling shriek of this tortured soul." The movement ends with a whimper, answering none of the questions raised by the first movement: "Why have you lived? Why have you suffered? Is it all one great, horrible joke?" We'll have to wait until January 31 to have those questions answered by the fourth and fifth movements.

Notes by Michael Webster

Philharmonia Musicians

Violin I

ChenXi Ling
concertmaster
David McGrew
assistant concertmaster
Kelly Kim
Edison Barton
Madeleine Marie Melancon
Hephzibah Hernandez
Christine Kim
Isabella Chen
Charlie Rogan
Christina Zhou
Ailin Feng
Andrew Huang
Yu-Shan Sun
Sophia Franco
Alice Zhang
S. Emily Liu

Violin II

Phoebe Caffey
principal
Amy Xu
assistant principal
Theia Doescher
Yujin Kim
Ethan Liu
Enora Trahan
Eden Chung
Ava Jean Achivida
Emma Lee
Nathan Min
Aaron Vinoth
Rosabella Chu
Claire Shim
Lotus MacGloin
Kelly Su

Viola

Jade Nicole Phan
principal
Evan Lee
assistant principal
Henry Zhao
Lijia Zhen
Alex Starnes
Ian Cooper
Ethan Helms
Sasha-Nicole Ogbebor
Jamie Lan
Neil Debnath
Madeleine Ulanday
Luke Avery Rodriguez
Isaac Lu

Cello

Xavier Olvera
principal
Elise Ng
assistant principal
Hai Nguyen
Katherine Xu
Marcus Lee +
Jonah Holliday
Avery Payne
Danna Sun
Auriam Rahimi
Andhra Krishna Yalamanchili
Tanush Vatnani
Jillian Chiang
Benjamin Le

Bass

Noah Leal
principal
Emmeleine Roach
assistant principal
Kristine Yi
Joel Mathew
Ivan Ramos
Priya Chandrasekhar
Cayden White

Flute

Luna Choe ‡ ^
Abesira Daniel
Nandan Oruganti
Bradyn Saenz *

Piccolo

Nandan Oruganti *
Bradyn Saenz ‡

Oboe

Kyle Conner ‡ *
Samuel Frederick
Vivian Gibson ^
Eda Gürmen

English Horn

Kyle Conner ^

Clarinet

Joshua Fong *
Hariharan Jayant
London Johnson ‡ *
Yichen Zheng

Bassoon
Nina Frey-Brinker
Trent Henschel ‡ *
Liam MacDonald
Holly Swart ^

Horn
Kali Fuson
Ryan Hamm
Sahithi Kommuri ‡ *
Kishan A. Patel
Liam Powers
Rubina Rahman ^

Trumpet
Enzo Barron
Alejandro Perez Alvarez *
Wyatt Richey ^
Alan Sanchez ‡

Trombone
Owen Isaacson ‡ *
Jinoo Kim ^
Owen Marshall
Trevor Zambrana

Bass Trombone
Justin Hirsh ‡ ^ *
Carter Winter

Tuba
Joshua Ayala
Patrick Carmona ‡ ^ *

Harp
Wally Snow
Olivia Lowe

Timpani
George Hamilton ^
Brekken Ler ‡
Edwin Wang *

Percussion
Samuel Frazier
George Hamilton
Brekken Ler
Edwin Wang
Kieran Welsh
Ayden Ybarra-Trevino

Orchestra Liaison
Carissa Helms

String musicians are listed in chair order.

Wind and Percussion musicians are listed alphabetically.

‡ *Principal Rimsky-Korsakov*
^ *Principal Borodin*
* *Principal Shostakovich*
\+ *Not playing this concert*

Symphony Musicians

Violin I

Lawrence Feng
concertmaster
Kevin Hu
assistant concertmaster
Ava Zhang
Kalea Schunk
Ethan Suh
Benjamin Zhou
McKenna Petersen
Evelyn Kao
Michelle Li
Claire Loggenberg
Khanh Le
Sheryl Sun
Nelly Gonzalez Marin
Vanae Schunk
Huanran Yu
Renee Qiu

Violin II

Eric Liu
principal
Chase Lu
assistant principal
Joseph Mani
Robin Gao
Margaret Searfoorce
Penny Gu
Piet Hein Athmer
Dylan Chan
Maya Ikegami
Sasha Tan
Yejin Lee
Mayu Fujiwara
Claira Yang
Devon Chan
Vivian Stone
Emily Choi

Viola

Carson I. Kirkley
principal
Juan Esteban Ramos Alzate
assistant principal
Julian Lee
Abin George
Mason Wilmore
Arya Prasad
Joana Kong
Kevin Sanchez
Kevin Chen
Carmen Luna Ferrer Perez
Aaron Daniel Bradberry
Ayrah Kamdar

Cello

Joshua Segraves
principal
Seungheon Sunny Seok
assistant principal
Joshua Smith
Shaopan Gao
Claire Ahn
Evangeline Yang
Moses Christensen
Brayden Buffalo
Varsha R. Chandupatla
Brianna Orloske
Jinlin Li
Joshua Wang
Evan Ung

Bass

César Garibay II
principal
Ryder J. McBride
assistant principal
Rudra Singh
Aiden Wang
Bria Soleil Linehan
Lincoln Kennedy
Jonathan Cho
Rayan Rahimi

Flute

Jun Han *
Elise Hui
Matthew Riggan
Isaac Serrano
Tret Townsend

Piccolo

Elise Hui
Isaac Serrano *

Oboe

Daniel Bell
Allison Y. Kim
Mason Hsingyu Kuo *
William Spencer
Athena Zhou

English Horn

Daniel Bell

Clarinet

Daniel Duan
Allen Minami *
Rexford Pan
Haobo Shi

E-flat Clarinet
Nathaniel Calili *
Yicheng He *

Bass Clarinet
Haobo Shi

Bassoon
Ramon A Bagadion II
Lucas D. Colca
Shyam Jayant
Maggie Lardizabal *
Ella Stevens

Contrabassoon
Ramon A Bagadion II

Horn
Jonathan Castillo
Martin Cetto
Lily Edwards
Joshua Grush *
Athri Karunamurthy
Conley Lynch
Aaron Mendoza
Eton Rosales

Trumpet
Jacob Cook
Danny Ly
Madden Mueller
Diego Palacios
Evan Salas *
Nolan Vaughn

Trombone
Iliyas Aikhan
Nate Grissom *
Sean Rotich
James Santos

Bass Trombone
Manuel Colón Reyes *
Joshua Meng

Tuba
Corbin O'Bannion *
Preston Sukhumalchandra

Harp
Titus Lu
Shannon Yang *

Timpani
Annie Newton *
Josh Manuel Lagaac Anino

Percussion
Josh Manuel Lagaac Anino
Brendan Floco
Annie Newton
Michael Sanders
Eric Wang

Orchestra Liaison
Chi Nguyen

String musicians are listed in chair order. Wind and Percussion musicians are listed alphabetically.

* *Principal Mahler*



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Conductor Biographies

Michael Webster
Artistic Director and Symphony Conductor



As the 2026-27 season begins, Michael Webster and the Houston Youth Symphony have a lot to be thankful for, most recently having been announced as the national winner of the Mark of Excellence from the Foundation for Music Education for the 15th time! Our performance of Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring received glowing comments from the prestigious adjudicator, Larry Livingston. The other competition for youth orchestras, The American Prize, awarded HYS special recognition for an unprecedented two years consecutively in 2024 and 2025 as Honored Artists of The American Prize, "a category of recognition limited to a very few who have proved to be individuals (or organizations) of 'sustained excellence' in their chosen area of artistic endeavor."

2024 also brought national recognition as HYS performed for an enthusiastic audience of 1,000 at the League of American Orchestras Conference at Jones Hall in Houston. As a clarinetist, Michael Webster received an Honorary Membership for "Lifetime Achievement in Performing, Teaching, and Professional Service" from the International Clarinet Association at ClarinetFest 2024 in Dublin, Ireland.

A multifaceted musician, Dr. Webster is known as clarinetist, conductor, composer, arranger, and educator. As Artistic Director of HYS since 1997, he led the Symphony at the inauguration of Houston Mayor Lee Brown, at Carnegie Hall, and at the 2002 National Youth Orchestra Festival in Sarasota, Florida, as one of six orchestras selected from applicants nationwide. Rarely featuring an orchestra, NPR's national radio show "From the Top" invited HYS to perform live on the radio in 2012.

HYS is also the only youth orchestra to be in the top two of The American Prize for eleven years in a row, having garnered eight first and three second prizes, including first place in 2023. Dr. Webster has won first or

Michael Webster photo courtesy of Allison Asthana

second place in The American Prize for conducting eight times.

Formerly principal clarinetist with the Rochester Philharmonic and acting principal of the San Francisco Symphony, Dr. Webster has appeared as soloist with many orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra with Aaron Copland and the Boston Pops with John Williams. Since winning Young Concert Artists international auditions in 1968, his performances have included: the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center; the 92nd Street Y; the Tokyo, Cleveland, Muir, Ying, Enso, Dover, Leontóvych, Artaria and Chester String Quartets; Da Camera, Context, and Musiqa in Houston; and the festivals of Marlboro, Santa Fe, Chamber Music West and Northwest, Norfolk, Victoria, Domaine Forget, Sitka, Maui, Steamboat Springs, Park City, Angel Fire, Orcas Island, Bowdoin, and La Musica di Asolo. He has performed and taught all over the United States and in Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, Europe, Japan, China, New Zealand, and Australia. He has collaborated with musicians including Yo-Yo Ma, Lynn Harrell, Joshua Bell, Rudolf Serkin, and many others.

Dr. Webster served as Assistant Conductor of the Asian Youth Orchestra under Yehudi Menuhin, Music Director of the Wellesley Symphony Orchestra, and director of the Michigan Youth Symphony Orchestra. Recently retired from his professorship at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, he previously held faculty positions in clarinet and conducting at the University of Michigan, the New England Conservatory, Boston University, and the Eastman School of Music, where he had earned three degrees as a student of Stanley Hasty.

For many summers he has been clarinet and woodwind coach for the Texas Music Festival at the University of Houston and Orchestra of the Americas, which met in a different country every year until the 2020 pandemic. Countries represented included Mexico, Panama, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Belgium, Estonia, Poland, China, Canada and the U.S. Since 2020, the Orchestra of the Americas has established a strong online presence with OAcademy, where Dr. Webster is the lead clarinet teacher. He has also been a faculty member at the Atlantic Music Festival in Waterville, ME since 2021.

Brad Smith
Philharmonia Conductor



Conductor and music educator Brad Smith is recognized for his engaging leadership and commitment to developing the next generation of musicians. Since 2015 he has served on the Houston Youth Symphony artistic staff, leading the Sinfonia for many years, and is now in his second year conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra.

In addition to his work with HYS, Dr. Smith directs Orchestral Activities at Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, where he coaches chamber music, and teaches conducting. His students have earned recognition in concerto and chamber music competitions, the National YoungArts program, and in the TMEA All-State Orchestras. Graduates of the HSPVA orchestra program study at leading conservatories and music schools across the country, majoring in music performance, education, conducting and composition, among others. Other past appointments include conducting and teaching at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, while also serving as Artistic Director and Conductor of the Delaware County Youth Orchestra in suburban Philadelphia.

Passionate about sharing music with students of all ages, Dr. Smith has built a career centered on artistic collaboration, education, and mentorship. He holds degrees from Stephen F. Austin State University and The University of Texas at Austin.

Conductor photos courtesy Monica Hindmarsh Photography

Matthew Porter
Sinfonia Conductor



Matthew Porter is a highly accomplished and passionate music educator, currently serving as Director of Orchestras at Tompkins High School in Katy, Texas. With a deep commitment to nurturing talent and fostering a love for orchestral music, Mr. Porter has made a lasting impact on his students and the broader music education community.

A native of Abilene, Texas, Mr. Porter studied bass and cello under the mentorship of Madelyn Mitchell, Carolyn Rhoads, and Wanda Cooper. He earned his cum laude degree in Music Education from Texas Tech University, with a focus on orchestral conducting. Mr. Porter began his career in Katy ISD, first at Beck Junior High and Memorial Parkway Junior High, before moving to Beckendorff Junior High in 2007. Under his leadership, the orchestra program was transformed from 58 to over 250 students, earning finalist positions in the Texas Honor Orchestra competition for eight consecutive years, and garnering invitations to perform at the Midwest Clinic (2011) and the TMEA Convention (2012).

In 2013, Mr. Porter was appointed to open Tompkins High School, where he has built one of the district's most successful orchestra programs. The Tompkins orchestras have earned multiple TMEA Honor Orchestra titles, a testament to Mr. Porter's dedication to excellence, collaborative teamwork and artistic growth.

Mr. Porter is a founding director of the Katy Youth Orchestra and the Katy ISD Junior High Summer Orchestra Camp, which he co-founded with his wife, Bryanna. As a respected clinician, adjudicator, and guest conductor, he also regularly shares his expertise at music festivals and events.

Among numerous accolades, Mr. Porter received the Houston Symphony's 2014 Spec's Award for Excellence in Music Education. Through his unwavering commitment to musical excellence, Matthew Porter continues to inspire, mentor, and empower young musicians, shaping their artistic

journeys and fostering a lifelong appreciation for the beauty and power of orchestral music.

Angela Peugnet
String Orchestra Conductor



Mrs. Angela Peugnet has served as the head orchestra director at Fort Settlement MS since the fall of 2006. Under her direction, the Fort Settlement Orchestras have been an invited Midwest Clinic Ensemble, honored many times as Commended and National Winners with the Foundation for Music Education, and have been multi-year finalists in the Texas Honor Orchestra Competition.

Mrs. Peugnet holds a Bachelor of Music with Teacher's Certification from the University of Houston with Membership in the Honors College and holds a Master of Music with a conducting specialization from Colorado State University. Previously, she taught in the Spring Branch Independent School District and was on staff with the University of Houston Moores School of Music's Preparatory and Continuing Studies Department as the Suzuki Strings Program Coordinator. Mrs. Peugnet has worked with some of the profession's most notable teachers including Dr. Laurie Scott, Mr. William Dick, Mr. Andrzej Grabiec, and Maestros Franz Krager, and Wes Kenney.

She is a member of the Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Orchestra Directors Association, American String Teachers Association, Texas Music Adjudicators Association, Suzuki Association of the Americas, Sigma Alpha Iota, and has served as an orchestra committee member for the state UIL String Orchestra Texas Prescribed Music List. She is honored to be a member of Mu Omicron, a peer-nominated honors society of orchestra directors. She has been an invited conductor and clinician with several Houston Area Region Orchestras. In 2019 she was honored with the Music Educator Award by the Houston Symphony and the Spec's Charitable Foundation.

She and her husband, Forrest Peugnet, are proud parents to three girls. When she is not teaching, she performs with the Houston Civic Orchestra, enjoys playing music

with her children, backpacking, hiking, camping, reading, archery, and playing board/video games with family and friends.

Jackson Guillén
Debut String Orchestra Conductor



Dr. Jackson Guillén is a Honduran-born violinist and violist known for his dynamic performance career, commitment to education, and advocacy for Latin American music. He has performed across the U.S., Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, and Chile, and toured Latin America with the Youth Orchestra of the Americas. Orchestrally, he has held leadership roles as Principal Second Violin with the Gulf Coast Symphony, Lubbock Symphony, and Symphony of Southeast Texas, and has served as Guest Concertmaster of the Shreveport Symphony.

Dr. Guillén co-founded the Terra Nostra Ensemble, a chamber group dedicated to showcasing Latin American and Iberian composers. He has performed with several local music organizations such as the Mercury Chamber Orchestra, Musiqa Houston, and The Houston Ballet (among others), and was a Da Camera of Houston Young Artist Fellow for two seasons.

As an educator, Guillén is a key figure in Houston's music community. He directs and develops curriculum for the CODA Music Program, an El Sistema-inspired initiative under the Houston Youth Symphony, where he also conducts the Debut String Orchestra. He served in the faculty at Lone Star College Tomball and Montgomery, teaching violin and viola, and conducting the Creekside Civic Chamber Orchestra.

Dr. Guillén earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Houston, studying under Dr. Kirsten Yon. He also holds a Master's degree from Texas Tech University and a Bachelor's from the University of Southern Mississippi. He was selected as a Future of Music Faculty Fellow by the Cleveland Institute of Music and was among the first cohort of the Global Leaders Program through the Orchestra of the Americas, participating in community-based music initiatives in Honduras, El Salvador, and Chicago.

Passionate about cultural exchange, for more than 10 years he contributed to the organization and coordination of the Encuentro de Cuerdas, an annual string festival in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He remains dedicated to bridging communities through music performance and education.



Teaching Artists

Fall Concert Sectional Coaches

Marcos Altamirano
bass

Nicholas Leh Baker
strings

Meera Bhatia
oboe

Carmen Borregales
clarinet
woodwinds

Laura Callon
violin

Clint Capshaw
strings

Matthew Daily*
bass

Andrés Gonzalez
violin

Luis Gutiérrez Fonseca
violin

Zelda Gray
violin

Benjamin Grube
violin

Russell Haehl*
trumpet

Deborah Harvey
horn

Craig Hauschildt
percussion

Naomi Hoffmeyer
harp

Mack Jones
viola

David Irish
brass

Kana Kimura
violin

Nicholas Lindell
viola

Sarah Mason
viola

Jalayne Mitchell
cello

Pablo Moreno
oboe

Gabriel Musella
brass

Danny Nguyen*
bassoon

Hunter O'Brien
flute

Benjamin Rodriguez
cello

Ryan Rongone
low brass

Adam Sadberry*
flute
woodwinds

Elizabeth Spencer
cello

Tom Tillotson
trumpet

Karissa Williams
violin

Ogechi Ukazu
low brass

Joy Yanai
cello

Sergein Yap
viola

Chamber Music Program Coaches

Whitney Bullock
Sheldon Person
Dana Rath

Melody Program Teachers

Matthew Daily*
Douglas DeVries
Luis Gutiérrez Fonseca
Emma Reynolds
Ryan Rongone

Coda Music Program Director
Jackson Guillén

Coda Program Assistant Directors
Omar Escobedo
Nora Henschen

Lead Teachers
Luis Gutiérrez Fonseca
Christian Ibañez
Angelica Velasquez

Assistant Teachers
Jonathan Andino
Alejandro Castillo*
Larysa Horichenko
Tony Luong*
Ana Papashvili
Tyson Salinas
Natalie Zaldivar
Mario Zelaya

Interns
Victor Rodriguez*

2026/27 Coda Mentorship Cohort
Varsha Chandupatla
Sophia Franco
Emma Lee
Siao-Shih Lin
Siao-Wu Lin
Renee Qiu
Ava Zhang

*Houston Youth Symphony alum

Parent Volunteers

Laura Alvarado
Kari Ayala
Ulka Bhalerao
Dawn Briggle
Charles Doescher
Michael Duerer
Yaoping Han
Carissa Helms
Tatiana Judd
Karyn Lloyd
Sandy Lo
Pei-chun Lu
Ketan Maroo
Skye McLaurin-Jiang
Chi Nguyen
Aimee Petersen
Danette Quaicoe
Mindy Snow
Ke Su
Lydia Tam
Joan Wijatno
Amanda Yuan
Laura Zhang
Zhimin Zhang
Yuan Zhong

Houston Youth Symphony

80th Anniversary Concert

January 31, 2027
7:00 PM

Featuring the HYS Symphony
and
Dr. Michael Webster with
Sophia Orrico, *soprano*
Jessica Lyublinski, *mezzo-soprano*
Kingwood Chorale, directed by
Todd Miller
Rice Chorale, directed by Tom Jaber

Performing Mahler Symphony No. 2
"Resurrection"

For updates on concert details,
check houstonyouthsymphony.org

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Texas Commission on the Arts

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Houston Youth Symphony

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