

42nd Season 2025-26

American Spring

Foellinger Great Hall | Krannert Center for the Performing Arts
Saturday, April 18, 2026 | 7:30 p.m.

Ian Hobson, music director & conductor
Kenneth Tse, alto saxophone

Appalachian Spring

AARON COPLAND
(1900-1990)

Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra, Op. 145

LOWELL LIEBERMANN
(b. 1961)

- I. Moderato*
- II. Lento*
- III. Molto allegro*

Kenneth Tse, alto saxophone

Intermission

Adagio for Strings, Op. 11

SAMUEL BARBER
(1910-1981)

Symphony No. 5½

DON GILLIS
(1912-1978)

- I. Perpetual emotion*
- II. Spiritual?*
- III. Scherzophrenia*
- IV. Conclusion!*

An American in Paris

GEORGE GERSHWIN
(1898-1937)

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Meet the Music Director



Pianist and conductor **Ian Hobson** (Music Director) - called “powerful and persuasive” by The New York Times - is internationally recognized for his command of an extraordinarily comprehensive repertoire, his consummate performances of the Romantic masters, his deft and idiomatic readings of neglected piano music old and new, and his assured conducting from both the piano and the podium.

In addition to being a celebrated performer, Mr. Hobson is a dedicated scholar and educator who has pioneered renewed

interest in music of such lesser-known masters as Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Hummel. He has also been an effective advocate of works written expressly for him by a number of today’s noted composers, including Benjamin Lees, John Gardner, David Liptak, Alan Ridout, and Yehudi Wyner.

In addition to his work with Sinfonia and at the University of Illinois (Swanlund Emeritus Professor), recital and teaching engagements this season take Mr. Hobson throughout the United States and several times to South Korea. Mr. Hobson conducted at Carnegie Mellon University in January 2018.

As guest soloist, Dr. Hobson has appeared with many of the world’s major orchestras; in the United States these include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and The Philadelphia Orchestra, the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Florida, Houston, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and the American Symphony Orchestra, the Orquestra Sinfónica de Puerto Rico. Abroad, he has been heard with Great Britain’s Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, The London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, ORF-Vienna, Orchester de Beethovenhalle, Moscow Chopin Orchestra, Israeli Sinfonietta, and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Since his debut in the double role of Conductor and soloist with the Stuttgart

Chamber Orchestra in 1996, Maestro Hobson has been invited to lead the English Chamber Orchestra, the Sinfonia Varsovia (including an appearance at Carnegie Hall), the Pomeranian Philharmonic (Poland), the Fort Worth Chamber Orchestra (Bass Hall), and the Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra of Israel, among others.

Mr. Hobson is also a much sought-after judge for national and international competitions and has been invited to join numerous juries, among them the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (at the specific request of Mr. Cliburn), the Arthur Rubinstein Competition in Poland, the Chopin Competition in Florida, the Leeds Piano Competition in the U.K., and the Schumann International Competition in Germany. In 2005 Hobson served as Chairman of the Jury for the Cleveland International Competition and the Kosciuzsko Competition in New York; in 2008 he was Chairman of Jury of the New York Piano Competition; and in 2010 he again served in that capacity of the newly renamed New York International Piano Competition.

One of the youngest ever graduates of the Royal Academy of Music, Mr. Hobson began his international career in 1981 when he won First Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, after having earned silver medals at both the Arthur Rubinstein and Vienna-Beethoven competitions. Born in Wolverhampton, England, he studied at Cambridge University (England), and at Yale University, in addition to his earlier studies at the Royal Academy of Music. A professor in the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois, Hobson received the endowed chair of Swanlund Professor of Music in 2000.



Meet the Soloist



Kenneth Tse has long been recognized as one of the world's preeminent figures in the field of classical saxophone, captivating audiences worldwide with his deft technical prowess and enchanting sound. He burst onto the musical scene in 1996 as the winner of the New York Artists International Award and The Alex Award from the National Alliance for Excellence. Both awards led to highly acclaimed performances at New York's prestigious Carnegie Hall. The New York Times hailed him as "a young virtuoso." Since then Tse has amassed a multitude of accolades and has performed as a soloist on five continents. He has graced the stage with renowned orchestras and

concert bands such as the Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, Harbin Symphony, Szczecin Philharmonic Orchestra, Thailand Philharmonic, City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong, Slovenian Army Band, Symphonic Wind Orchestra of Croatian Army forces, the United States Navy Band, et. al. Tse is a sought-after artist and clinician at major events like the World Saxophone Congress, the North American Saxophone Alliance National Conference, the California Band Directors' Association, the Iowa Bandmaster's Association, and the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinics.

A prolific recording artist, Tse has curated an extensive discography of twenty-three CDs, showcasing a diverse range of saxophone repertoire. Critics hail his "captivating" sound, "supremely elegant tone...sheer virtuosity," and "incredible technical and interpretive skills.... A master magician," acknowledging his mastery as a saxophonist. His commitment to new music is evident with over forty works dedicated to him by esteemed composers worldwide. Recently, he commissioned a concerto for saxophone and orchestra by renowned composer Lowell Liebermann for premiere in spring of 2025. As a devoted music educator, Tse has shared his expertise through masterclasses at prestigious institutions globally, including the Paris Conservatory, the Tchaikovsky Moscow State

Conservatory, the Fryderyk Chopin Institute in Warsaw, and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in Australia. Moreover, his influence extends to the judging panel of international competitions, representing the USA at events like the Adolphe Sax International Competition in Dinant, Belgium, and the Andorra SaxFest Competition.

His arrangements for the saxophone are published by Reed Music, Australia, and his articles and interviews have been featured in the Saxophone Journal, The Instrumentalist, Fanfare Magazine, Saxophone Symposium, Iowa Bandmaster Association Journal, Japan's Piper and The Sax Magazines, and Yamaha Support Education Magazine. Season 3 of the ADLibitum Class will showcase instructional episodes for saxophone by Tse. Beyond his musical achievements, Tse's commitment to fostering saxophone performance in his native Hong Kong led to the creation of the Hong Kong International Saxophone Symposium. This groundbreaking event, which he initiated in 2009, attracted saxophonists from around the world and has evolved into the Hong Kong International Saxophone Society, a platform to nurture interest in classical saxophone performance in the region.

Kenneth Tse's journey is characterized by artistic excellence, dedication to pedagogy, and a profound impact on the world of classical saxophone. His legacy continues to inspire both aspiring musicians and seasoned professionals alike. In addition to his illustrious performing career, Tse was honored by being named a University of Iowa Distinguished Chair Professor of Saxophone in 2024. His students have earned acclaim in top-tier academic positions, in international competitions, and on recordings, showcasing the impact of his mentorship. In over two decades in Iowa, Tse has fostered a strong musical community across the state. As part of this initiative, he hosted the inaugural Iowa Saxophone United Event, which gathered college-level saxophonists from programs throughout Iowa for masterclasses and performances. His studio has also cultivated an outreach program in recent years that brings live performances on-site to residents at assisted living facilities, retirement communities, and developmentally disabled homes to better serve the needs of the community. Along with this, Tse has created a high school summer saxophone institute for youth across the country on the University of Iowa campus and teaches college students at the American Saxophone Academy in the summers as well. He currently serves as an advisor for the nonprofit organization IOWinds Alliance, with a mission to further promote and elevate the quality of music education for young wind and brass players around the state. Notably, Tse has achieved the

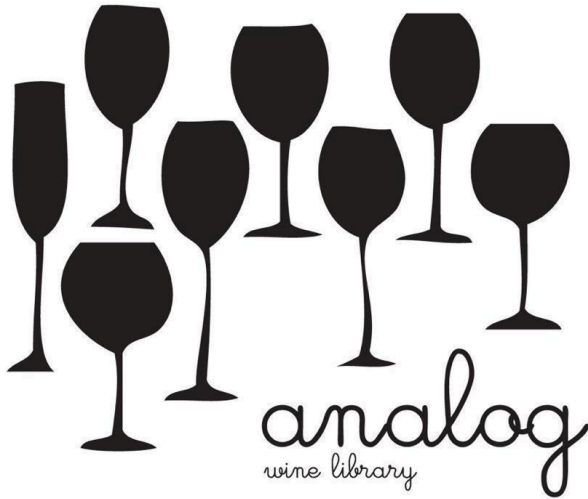
remarkable distinction of being the first saxophonist to hold concurrent, elected presidencies in both the North American Saxophone Alliance and the International Saxophone Committee. For more information and media clips, please visit his website on www.kenneth-tse.com.

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Notes on the Program

Appalachian Spring

Aaron Copland

(Born November 14, 1900, in Brooklyn, New York; died December 2, 1990, in North Tarrytown, New York)

Appalachian Spring has an iconic stature. It is the work most emblematic of Copland's name, having inspired more admiration by critics and listeners than any of his other music. Some of its fame can probably be attributed to its intertwined history with the work of the famous 20th-century modern dancer, Martha Graham. When the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in the Library of Congress commissioned a dance work from Graham in 1942, she turned to Aaron Copland for the music. In 1944, he delivered a score to her entitled *Ballet for Martha*, which subsequently became the work's subtitle. Graham suggested *Appalachian Spring*, a title that was inspired by Hart Crane's poem *The Bridge*. *Appalachian Spring* became one of her most durable works and one of the best-loved of all American compositions. "Appalachian Spring would never have existed without her special personality," Aaron Copland said in 1974. "The music was created for her, and it reflects the unique quality of a human being."

Graham chose the title because she liked the sound of it, but the ballet really has no connection to the Appalachians, and "spring" in this case refers to a water source rather than the season. The story of the ballet was originally summarized as: "A pioneer celebration in spring around a newly built farmhouse in the Pennsylvania hills in the early part of the last century. The bride-to-be and the young farmer-husband enact the emotions, joyful and apprehensive, their new domestic partnership invites. An older neighbor suggests now and then the rocky confidence of experience. A revivalist and his followers remind the new householders of the strange and terrible aspects of human fate. At the end, the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house." In an interview published in 1975, Graham added, "It is essentially the coming of a new life. It has to do with growing things. Spring is the loveliest and saddest time of year."

"Appalachian Spring is generally thought to be folk-inspired," Copland said, "but the Shaker tune 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple' is the only folk material actually quoted in the piece. Rhythms and melodies that suggest a certain ambiance, and the use of specific folk themes, are, after all, not

the same thing. It took me about a year to finish, and I remember thinking how crazy it was to spend all that time because I knew how short-lived most ballet scores are, but it took on a life of its own.” The score displays an absorption in the vernacular, as Pollack, Copland’s biographer, says, “suitable to a script so steeped in a wide range of American myth and folklore. It often gives the impression of folk music.”

Copland’s *Appalachian Spring* ballet divides into two parts that “seemingly portray peace and war.” It was first performed at the Library of Congress in Washington on October 30, 1944, by a cast that included Martha Graham (dancing the role of the bride), Merce Cunningham, and Erick Hawkins. The set design was by Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi. The music was originally scored for an ensemble of thirteen instruments: flute, clarinet, bassoon, piano, four violins, two violas, two cellos, and bass, giving it an intimacy that would be more difficult to convey with a larger orchestra. These were all the instruments for which there was room in the tiny pit of the small auditorium at the Library of Congress. Although five different versions exist, the orchestral suite is the best known today.

The opening ascending clarinet notes conjure an awakening—the beginning of a new day and a new life on the frontier. The slow music is serious and has a spare texture. The slow beginning is interrupted by a sudden, quick, and bright string passage, which brings in a different mood. Sudden mood changes throughout the piece continue as the music charts various happenings in the newlyweds’ life: revivalists celebrating with a square dance, and the bride expressing joy and apprehension at her approaching shift to motherhood. The opening music intermittently reappears, affording a sense of reassurance. The melody “Simple Gifts” grows through its variations, expressing joy and humble gratitude. Finally, Copland imbues the pioneer spirit with dignity and the nobility of the everyday. At the end, the clarinet again plays the opening phrase.

Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra, Op. 145 (2024)

Lowell Liebermann

(born February 22, 1961, in New York City)

Among the most performed and recorded American composers of his generation, Lowell Liebermann has built a catalogue of over 150 works that spans symphonies, concertos, chamber music, opera, and song. Trained at the Juilliard School, where he studied with David Diamond and

Vincent Persichetti, Liebermann has forged a distinctive voice that resists easy categorization. *Time* magazine once described his music as “now brazen and glittering, now radiantly visionary...the work of a composer unafraid of grand gestures and openhearted lyricism.” Though critics have sometimes used the label “neo-Romantic,” Liebermann himself pushes back against the term, insisting that what listeners respond to is simply music that communicates directly and honestly—music that prizes melody, color, and emotional immediacy without apology.

The *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra, Op. 145*, composed in 2024, is a recent entry in Liebermann’s long line of concertante works and was written expressly for world-renowned saxophonist Kenneth Tse, Distinguished Chair Professor of Saxophone at the University of Iowa. Tse is one of the foremost classical saxophonists in the world and has been a tireless champion of new music for his instrument; this concerto represents a natural culmination of his artistic vision. The work received its world premiere on March 15, 2025, with Tse as soloist and the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra at the Penderecki Contemporary Music Festival in Yerevan, Armenia. Its creation was made possible through the generous support of the University of Iowa Arts and Humanities Initiative Major Projects Grant and the Linda and Rick Maxson Faculty Development and Outreach Fund.

The concerto unfolds across three movements in a broadly classical fast–slow–fast architecture, scored for a rich orchestra of winds, brass, timpani, three percussionists, harp, celesta, piano, and strings—a palette that allows Liebermann to surround the soloist with a wide spectrum of color and texture.

The opening *Moderato* establishes the work’s expressive world: purposeful, searching, and melodically generous. Liebermann writes idiomatically for the alto saxophone, exploiting its unique capacity to move fluidly between lyrical warmth and incisive brilliance, and between the intimacy of a human voice and the projection of a brass instrument.

The central *Lento* is the emotional heart of the concerto. The orchestra draws back to a hushed, luminous stillness, creating space for the saxophone’s most sustained and inward singing. Liebermann’s gift for melody that breathes and unfolds at its own unhurried pace is here at its most eloquent, the solo line soaring with a warmth that only the alto saxophone can fully inhabit. The movement achieves a quiet profundity, neither sentimental nor detached, that places it among the finest slow movements in Liebermann’s catalogue.

The finale, *Molto allegro*, brings the work to an exhilarating close. Rhythmically driven and virtuosically demanding, it showcases the full technical range of the soloist while maintaining the melodic coherence that runs throughout the concerto. The movement builds to a conclusion that is both inevitable and thrilling.

With Op. 145, Liebermann makes a significant contribution to the concerto repertoire for classical saxophone—a work that honors the instrument’s expressive potential while bearing all the hallmarks of a composer at the height of his creative power.

Adagio for Strings, Op. 11

Samuel Barber

(Born March 9, 1910, in West Chester, Pennsylvania; died January 23, 1981, in New York)

Barber showed his musical talent early; at seven, he tried his hand at composing. At fourteen, he entered the Curtis Institute of Music; seven years later, he had joined its faculty. Barber’s compositions are firmly grounded in the traditional vocabulary and technique he learned as a student, but that did not prevent him from composing works of fantasy and expressivity. He defended his neo-Romantic tendencies, which some interpreted as a lack of distinctive style: “I write what I feel. I’m not a self-conscious composer... It is said that I have no style at all, but that doesn’t matter. I just go on doing, as they say, my thing. I believe this takes a certain courage.” His music has rich textures, free rhythms, and is always melodic.

The beautiful *Adagio for Strings*, his most popular and frequently performed work, is now most often heard as a transcription for string orchestra; originally, it was the slow movement of the *String Quartet, Op. 11*, composed in 1936. Barber was inspired by a literary image: a passage from Virgil’s *Georgics* describing how a rivulet gradually becomes a large river. This programmatic idea does not limit the work’s emotional meaning, but rather shapes it so that it begins quietly with a long, spiraling theme, gradually grows to an intense climax, and then returns to calm. For this single-movement work, Barber uses a theme that is both archaic and romantic, which he slowly and richly develops. The music has a romantic spirit but, in Barber’s distinctive way, includes the Phrygian medieval church mode. The combination of 15th-century modality, 19th-century Romanticism, and 20th-century spirit makes the work unique, yet it remains both direct and uncomplicated.

Barber arranged the string orchestra version for Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra, which gave its first performance on November 5, 1938. It soon became one of the most frequently performed works by an American composer.

Symphony No. 5½

Don Gillis

(Born June 17, 1912, in Cameron, MO; died January 10, 1978, in Columbia, SC)

Don Gillis was a prolific composer, arranger, and music educator. *The New York Times* commented: "He described himself as fundamentally a melodist, influenced orchestrally by Strauss, Sibelius, and Debussy. His music sometimes had a jazzy style evolving from Gershwin and Grofé."

He began his career in radio in Dallas, Texas, in the 1930s and rose to become a well-traveled conductor and composer in the 1940s, as well as a radio producer for NBC's *Symphony of the Air* during the Toscanini era. In the 1960s and 1970s, he was vice president of Interlochen Music Camp and joined the faculties of Southern Methodist University, Dallas Baptist College, and the University of South Carolina. He was musical director for NBC radio during a long series of Toscanini broadcasts. In addition to composing for a variety of choral and instrumental ensembles, he also guest-conducted bands and orchestras in the United States and Europe.

Gillis's early education was in Kansas; he studied trombone and conducting at the university level, then received a BA, BM, and honorary DM from Texas Christian University, as well as an MM degree from North Texas State University. At TCU, Gillis also led the 111th Medical Regiment (National Guard) Band.

His music is accessible and engaging, often satirical, with whimsical titles and lively humor. He enjoyed American musical idioms of jazz, bebop, and the blues, and his compositions often reflect a wonderful sense of regional flavor and Americana.

Gillis's music is melodic and descriptive of various American scenes. Some of his better-known scores include *The Man Who Invented Music*, *The January February March*, *Alice in Orchestrabilia*, *The Coming of the Kings*, *Symphony for Band*, *Ballet for Band*, *Saga of a Pioneer*, *Tulsa*, *Symphony No. 5*, and *Symphony X (Big "D")*. His more than 200 works have been performed in 35 countries. Before his death, Gillis was director

of the Center for Media Arts Studies and composer-in-residence at the University of South Carolina.

Symphony No. 5½, written in 1967, is characterized by its whimsy. The fraction in the title indicates it was composed between his fifth and sixth symphonies. Its subtitle is *A Symphony for Fun*, and its four movements have comical titles that display a lighthearted approach to classical tradition: *Perpetual Emotion*, *Spiritual?*, *Scherzofrenia*, and *Conclusion!* Tone color and expressive performance are highlighted in the opening movement, while the other three emphasize rhythmic variety and tempo. All movements are approximately the same length. The orchestral version was made famous by Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Orchestra. The work contains square dances, blues, swing, and even ragtime, all treated in typical Don Gillis fashion.

An American in Paris

George Gershwin

(Born September 26, 1898, in Brooklyn, New York; died July 11, 1937, in Beverly Hills, California)

The extraordinary vitality of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* led to the commission for his first symphonic work, the *Concerto in F*, written for Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Orchestra. Gershwin had little previous experience with large forms and full symphony orchestra, but the *Concerto in F* was so successful that he promised Damrosch another work. In January 1928, he began sketching what would become *An American in Paris*.

After his success, Gershwin sought to refine his technique. He studied manuals and traveled to Europe, then the center of concert music, to learn from leading composers. From London to Paris to Vienna, he found his work widely known and admired by figures such as William Walton, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, Alban Berg, and Franz Lehár. None offered formal instruction. Ravel famously declined with the remark, "Why do you want to become a second-rate Ravel when you are already a first-rate Gershwin?" Stravinsky quipped that perhaps he should take lessons from Gershwin. Nevertheless, the trip proved fruitful and inspired *An American in Paris*.

Returning to New York, Gershwin completed the work on November 18, 1928. He variously described it as a tone poem, ballet, or rhapsody, noting that its style was modern and French, its subject Franco-American, and its character more impressionistic than literal.

“My purpose,” he said, “is to portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the noises, and absorbs the atmosphere. The individual listener can imagine episodes as they wish. A blues section suggests homesickness, followed by a return to exuberance. At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant.”

Walter Damrosch conducted the premiere on December 13, 1928, with the New York Philharmonic.

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Sinfonia da Camera

In residence at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, this professional chamber orchestra is led by world-renowned pianist, conductor, and educator, Maestro Ian Hobson. Sinfonia da Camera is comprised of University of Illinois faculty, staff, and students, as well as distinguished regional and national freelance musicians. Founded in 1984, Sinfonia has welcomed world-class soloists, commissioned new works, and presented beloved orchestra favorites and hidden gems to local audiences for over 40 years.

In its debut season, Sinfonia released an acclaimed recording of French Piano Concerti with music director Ian Hobson conducting from the keyboard; it was the subject of a 90-minute Public Television special. Since that time, Sinfonia has performed over 1,000 musical works featuring more than 150 local and guest artists. Through Maestro Hobson's commitment to excellence in all of the orchestra's endeavors - special projects, recordings, tours, and concerts for the hometown crowd at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts - Sinfonia has achieved national and international recognition.

Sinfonia has been featured on over a dozen recordings and has several projects in the works. In 2011, the Albany label released a Sinfonia recording on another American composer, William Schuman, during his centenary year. A live recording of Sinfonia da Camera's October 6, 2012 concert featuring music by Pulitzer Prize-Winning composer George Walker was recently released on Albany Records. The fourth and final volume of the Ignaz Moscheles cycle was released in 2012. The previous volumes were reviewed by American Record Guide: "Hobson, whose elegant phrasing, remarkable ear for color, and miraculous ability to evenly sustain the most difficult runs - each like a string of pearls - are simply a joy to hear" and "[The concerti] seem tailor-made for Hobson's great panache and free-wheeling style." Ten recordings by Sinfonia da Camera for the Zephyr label have been released to rave reviews at home and abroad.

To learn more about the orchestra, Maestro Hobson, the musicians, administration, and Advisory board visit our website at www.sinfonia.illinois.edu.



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*Contributors from August 1, 2024 through March 6, 2026.
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