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Chamber Orchestra

Music that Moves: a Ballet, a Tango and a Folk Dance

Renee Gilliland, Jacob Kaminski and Nelio Zamorano, conductors

Thursday, March 5, 2026, 7:30 p.m.

Grusin Music Hall

PROGRAM

Appalachian Spring for 13 instruments

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Jacob Kaminski, conductor

Intermission

Tangazo (Variations on Buenos Aires)

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

Nelio Zamorano, conductor

Dances of Galánta

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)

- I. Lento
- II. Allegretto moderato
- III. Allegro con moto, grazioso
- IV. Allegro
- V. Allegro vivace

Renee Gilliland, conductor

PROGRAM NOTES

Appalachian Spring for 13 instruments

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Some of Copland's most populist "American" music was produced during the Depression and war years, including the overtly patriotic morale boosters *Lincoln Portrait* and *Fanfare for the Common Man*. *Appalachian Spring* capped a trilogy of dance interpretations of the American frontier spirit, beginning with *Billy the Kid* (1938) and continuing with *Rodeo* (1942). This was music that created the concert and theater equivalent of the poignant "high lonesome" bluegrass sound emerging at the same time, music of open chords and spare textures that often drew on traditional sources.

Appalachian Spring was commissioned by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge for Martha Graham. Copland began work on Graham's then-untitled scenario in Hollywood in June 1943, completing the ballet a year later in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "After Martha gave me this bare outline, I knew certain crucial things—that it had to do with the pioneer American spirit, with youth and spring, with optimism and hope," Copland later wrote.

Graham took the eventual title from a poem by Hart Crane, though not the narrative of an Appalachian housewarming for a pioneer and his bride. Copland originally scored the ballet for an ensemble of 13 instruments, since the premiere was in the small Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress (with Graham herself as the Bride, Erick Hawkins as the Husbandman, and Merce Cunningham as the Revivalist). In the spring of 1945 he arranged a suite from the ballet for full orchestra, which won the Pulitzer Prize for music that year.

The Suite is cast in eight uninterrupted sections. It opens with a slowly blooming introduction, which unison strings burst into in an elated Allegro. The scenes that follow move from a warm, gentle duet for the pioneering couple, through fleetly fiddling dances for a revivalist preacher and his followers, to an animated dance of anticipation for the bride. A transitional interlude recalls the opening before the Suite's climax, a set of variations on the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts," which supported scenes of rustic domesticity in the choreography. In the coda, the married couple are left alone in their new home, with tender music that bookends and fulfills the opening expectations.

Graham told Copland that she wanted the dance to be "a legend of American living, like a bone structure, the inner frame that holds together a people," and the ballet and its music were immediately understood as reflections of a national identity, of hope and fulfillment in a difficult time. "... the Spring that is being celebrated is not just any Spring but the Spring of America; and the celebrants are not just half a dozen individuals but ourselves in different phases," John Martin wrote in his New York Times review.
—Note by John Henken

Tangazo (Variations on Buenos Aires)

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

Originating in the working class neighborhoods of Buenos Aires during the mid-19th century, the tango grew out of a fusion of European, African and native Argentine influences.

When the composer, Astor Piazzolla, moved this sultry street music into the concert hall, at first, traditionalists objected vehemently. By the time the heckling and boos faded, Piazzolla had revolutionized the tango with a fusion of new elements, which included jazz and twentieth century classical influences. The reinvigorated music fell under the label, nuevo tango.

Piazzolla was born in Mar del Plata, Argentina, to Italian immigrant parents. In 1925, the family moved to the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. At the age of eight, Piazzolla's father gave him a bandoneon, an accordion-like instrument which originated in the Black Forest region of Germany, and later became popular in Argentina and Uruguay. Soon, Piazzolla was hailed as the "boy wonder of the bandoneon." Around the same time, he fell in love with the music of Bach. Studies with Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera began in 1941. In 1954, Piazzolla composed a symphony for the Buenos Aires Philharmonic which earned him a scholarship to study in Paris with the legendary Nadia Boulanger. Setting aside the symphony, Boulanger asked the young composer to play a few bars of a tango he had composed. Piazzolla later recalled,

"She suddenly opened her eyes, took my hand and told me: 'You idiot, that's Piazzolla!' And I took all the music I composed, ten

years of my life, and sent it to hell in two seconds...”

Composed in 1969, Piazzolla’s *Tangazo* is subtitled, “Variations on Buenos Aires.” The piece inhabits a dreamy world which is simultaneously sensuous and melancholy. It begins with a single mysteriously wandering line in the low strings. Soon, this ominous repeating bass line is joined, successively, by new contrapuntal lines in violas and violins. Out of the shadows of this somber introduction, the tango springs to life with glistening woodwinds and triangle, followed by a boisterous ascending piano glissando. As the vivacious tango unfolds, the violins become percussion instruments, with behind the bridge “scrubbing” and rhythmic tapping of the wood. A soulful musical conversation unfolds, with wistful statements in the solo horn, flute, oboe, and clarinet. It is something akin to the passionate, unspoken dialogue between partners in the dance.

—Note by Timothy Judd

Dances of Galánta

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)

Like his friend and compatriot Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály devoted much of his energy to the study of Hungarian folk song, and this revealed itself throughout his creative endeavors. Few composers of the last century were so vocally oriented, and even his purely instrumental works are imbued with the character of song, the song of the people. Late in his life, Kodály wrote, “Our age of mechanization leads along a road ending with man himself as a machine; only the spirit of singing can save him from this fate.” To project this spirit, Kodály wrote songs and choral works in greater numbers than perhaps any other 20th-century composer, and

many of these were intended for school use. Indeed, this aspect of his work made Kodály one of the great music educators of all time. But the same spirit found its way into his purely orchestral music, most of which was written in the decade and a half between 1925 and 1940.

Kodály inserted the following statement in the score of *Dances of Galanta*, by way of explanation:

Galánta is a small Hungarian market-town known to the travelers from Vienna to Budapest, where the composer passed seven years of his childhood. There existed at that time a famous Gypsy band which has since disappeared. Their music was the first “orchestral sonority” which came to the ear of the child. The forebears of these Gypsies were already known more than a hundred years ago. Around the year 1800 some books of Hungarian dances were published in Vienna, one of which contained music “after several Gypsies from Galántha.” They have preserved the old Hungarian traditions. In order to continue it the composer has taken his principal subjects from these old editions.

These old 18th-century dances that Kodály has chosen are known as verbunkos music, the “recruiting dances” (from the German word “Werbung,” “recruiting”) from the method of enlisting recruits during that century’s Imperial wars. The dance was performed by a group of hussars led by their sergeant, and consisted of slow figures alternating with lively ones. The impressive display was apparently designed to arouse enthusiasm among the spectators and encourage some of them to join up to share in the fun. The music that accompanied these events was played by Gypsy bands, who often performed breathtakingly elaborate improvisations over the basically simple tunes.

Kodály's piece is an evocation of that old Hungarian tradition. Having selected his tunes, he arranged them in a rondo-like pattern, with a central Andante maestoso recurring twice in the course of the piece. The brilliant orchestration provides a modern orchestral treatment of the colorful old Gypsy bands, and has in no small way contributed to the work's great popularity. Indeed, of Kodály's purely orchestral works, the Galánta dances remain by far the most popular.

—Note by Steven Ledbetter

PERSONNEL

Renee Gilliland, conductor

Jacob Kaminski, student conductor

Jacob Kaminski is a conductor and double bass player from Cleveland, Ohio pursuing a doctoral degree in orchestral conducting and literature from the University of Colorado Boulder. Kaminski is the director of CU Boulder's Campus Orchestra, a group of non music majors and music minors who perform an eclectic repertoire of classical and non classical music by diverse composers from all time periods. As an avid educator, he is the ensemble lead of intermediate and advanced ensembles at El Sistema Colorado (ESC), where he also instructs double bass and teaches music theory. In addition to his work with ESC, Kaminski also serves as string coach and assistant conductor for Denver Young Artists Orchestra, where he works with the intermediate Conservatory ensemble. He also has worked as a guest clinician in the Boulder Valley School District and served as the music director for the 2026 Pikes Peak Honors Orchestra in Colorado Springs. As an active bass teacher, Kaminski teaches a wide range of students in the classical and jazz mediums. Passionate about conducting pedagogy, he has also attended conferences such as the Robert Reynolds Conducting Institute at the Midwest Clinic, and the University of Kansas City Conducting Symposium. Kaminski holds a bachelor's degree from Baldwin Wallace Conservatory in double bass performance, and a master's degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Colorado Boulder.

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*The Drowsy Chaperone (2023).
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