

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®

School of Music

presents

JMU SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Kira Omelchenko, *conductor*

Lina Cao, *guzheng*

Sunday, March 9, 2025

2 pm

Concert Hall

(Pre-concert talk 1:00-1:30pm in the Grand Lobby
with Guest Artist, Lina Cao, guzheng soloist)



There will be one 15-minute intermission.

Program

Finlandia, Op. 26

Jean Sibelius
(1865-1957)

Summer Evening from “3 Small Tone-Poems”

Frederick Delius
(1862-1934)

Waves of the Sea (2018)
U.S. Premiere

Rui Wang
(b. 1990)

Lina Cao, *guzheng*

15-Minute Intermission

Tango: Dance of Strings (2023)
North American Premiere

Pui Ian Chan
(b. 2000)

Lina Cao, *guzheng*

Symphony no. 2 “Romantic”

Howard Hanson
(1896-1981)

Adagio - Allegro moderato
Andante con tenerezza
Allegro con brio

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personal computers, and any other electronic devices.

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of this production is strictly prohibited
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Program Notes

Finlandia, Op. 26 | Jean Sibelius

Completed by Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) in early November of 1899, Finlandia is a tone poem covertly protesting the increasing censorship Finland was experiencing from the Russian Empire. Originally part of a larger work, it quickly formed into its own piece. To avoid censorship, it was performed under different titles and in unique locations. Its heroic themes have cemented the piece as an unofficial song of Finnish pride. Its melody has also been adopted for other songs of peace and unity sung around the world.

— Program note by John Foley

Summer Evening from “3 Small Tone-Poems” | Frederick Delius

English composer, Frederick Delius (1862-1934), was born in Bradford, England and played both violin and piano as a young child. He later moved to Florida in the U.S. to oversee an orange plantation but would later return to Europe where he lived in Germany, Norway, and France.

During his short time in Florida, he was influenced by African American music, which inspired him to compose. It was not until 1907 that his music started appearing in concerts, thanks to the support of Thomas Beecham, who programmed, conducted, and recorded Delius's works, including the cantata, *A Mass of Life*, and the opera, *A Village Romeo and Juliet*. In 1918, the composer suffered from syphilis, which led to him becoming paralyzed and blind. He was, however, able to still complete his later compositions with the aid of an assistant. In 1962, the Delius Society was formed and continues to promote the composer's works.

Delius's “3 Small Tone-Poems” for orchestra and was composed between 1888-1890. The tone poems are sonic quaint vignettes and include three pieces, “Summer Evening”, “Spring Morning” and “Winter Night”. Delius's music is influenced by American landscapes and European composers such as Wagner and Grieg. He was also inspired by the nature around small French town of Grez-sur-Loing, where he lived for the second half of his life. His orchestration includes soft and lush tuneful melodies, suspended chords, and chromatic harmonies. Delius later used segments of “Summer Evening” as a basis for his “Summer Night on a River.” After Delius's death, Thomas Beecham edited and arranged the original works for a premiere in 1949.

— Program note by Kira Omelchenko

Waves of the Sea (2018) | Rui Wang

Waves of the Sea originates from the poetic phrase “*Waves of the Sea, Ruggedness of the Mountains*” in *Poetry in Twenty-Four Styles* and was composed in 2018 by young composer Rui Wang. As a composer born in a coastal hometown, Wang expresses deep sentiment and admiration for the sea in this piece. The imagery of seagulls soaring and waves crashing against the shore serves as a vivid and unforgettable memory, embodying the composer's deep attachment to their hometown. This composition was awarded the Gold Prize for Original Guzhen Works at the 2018 “Splendid Guzhen” Competition.

—Rui Wang

Program Notes - *continued*

Tango: Dance of Strings (2023) | Pui Ian Chan

This piece was composed in 2023, drawing inspiration from Argentine tango dance, showcasing the author's unique approach to combining the guzheng and tango music. The composition incorporates rhythmic and musical elements of tango dance steps, infusing the music with a sense of allure. In the middle section, a lyrical melody vividly depicts the composer's yearning for exotic charm and a beautiful life, with smooth and dynamic musical lines. The following section features a rhythmic and lively fast-paced segment, concluding in the intense rhythm of the tango, creating a tension-filled entirety for the composition.

—*Pui Ian Chan*

Symphony no. 2 “Romantic” | Howard Hanson

Born in Nebraska, Howard Hanson (1896-1981) was an influential American composer, conductor, and music educator known for his contributions to classical music during the 20th century. He is particularly noted for his symphonic works, which blend traditional Romanticism with elements of American musical style.

Hanson studied at the University of Nebraska and later at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, where he became a leading figure and the director of the Eastman School of Music from 1924 to 1964. In addition to his work as an educator, Hanson composed a significant body of music, including orchestral works, choral music, and chamber music. He was an advocate for American music, and his work reflects both a strong national identity and a command of European classical traditions.

Hanson's Symphony no. 2 “Romantic” was commissioned for the 50th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra by Serge Koussevitzky, who conducted the premiere on November 28, 1930. The term “Romantic” reflects the emotionally charged and expansive style that Hanson employed in the work, evoking the spirit of 19th-century European symphonists. Hanson's symphonic music is often characterized by its sweeping melodies, harmonic richness, and a strong sense of lyricism. His works are generally described as neo-Romantic, though his style evolved over the years. He combined elements of traditional Western classical music with an American sound, often incorporating folk-like melodies and rhythms. Some of his works exhibit influences of impressionism, especially in their orchestration, but his overall approach is more firmly rooted in the Romantic tradition.

— *Program note by Kira Omelchenko*

Biographies

Lina Cao (guzheng)



Lina Cao is a world-renowned guzheng virtuoso celebrated for her profound contributions to Chinese traditional music and her visionary approach to blending Eastern and Western musical traditions. Spanning continents, Lina has redefined guzheng artistry, breaking cultural boundaries and establishing herself as one of the most influential figures in contemporary Chinese music.

Beginning her guzheng studies at the age of five, Lina demonstrated exceptional talent from a young age. Lina trained under China's top masters, including Wang Wei, Ren Jie, Yanai Hua, and Li Meng, and earned degrees from the Nanjing University of the Arts and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Combining tradition with modern expression, Lina's performances have graced prestigious stages worldwide, including Carnegie Hall in New York, Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto and the National

Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing, captivating global audiences.

Throughout her career, Lina has collaborated with premier ensembles such as the China Broadcasting Film Symphony Orchestra, the Atalanta Youth Wind Symphony, the Canadian Children's Opera Company, the Toronto Chinese Orchestra, the Canada London Symphonia, and the Canadian Arabic Orchestra. Lina has also worked with renowned composers like He Zhanhao, Alice Ho, Sandeep Bhagwati, and Andrew Stainland, premiering critically acclaimed works that push the boundaries of guzheng performance.

Lina's accolades include double gold prizes for solo and ensemble guzheng at the Singapore International Chinese Arts Festival (2008) and China's highest honors, the "Golden Bell Award" (2012) and the "Wenhua Award" (2008). Lina also received the "World Peace International Appreciation Award" at the Sino-Japanese Friendship Concert and was nominated for "Outstanding Chamber Performance" at the 40th Dora Mavor Moore Awards in Canada (2017). Lina's performances have been broadcast by CBC Music (2020) and Chicago's WFMT Radio Network (2014), and in 2024, she received funding from the Canada Council for the Arts.

As the founder and music director of the Toronto Guzheng Ensemble, Lina has led the group to premiere numerous innovative works at prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and the Isabel Bader Theatre at the University of Toronto. Through performances and recordings, she has elevated guzheng chamber music to new heights.

Lina is also a dedicated educator, serving as the first guzheng instructor at Wilfrid Laurier University and frequently lecturing at institutions such as the music faculties of University of Toronto and York University. Using music as a cultural bridge, Lina continues to infuse new vitality into guzheng artistry, solidifying its place on the global stage.

Biographies - *continued*

Rui Wang (composer)



Rui Wang, Ph.D. in Composition from the Central Conservatory of Music (China) and Lecturer at the Tianjin Conservatory of Music (China), is a recipient of the 2019 National Arts Fund "Young Talents in Artistic Creation" Grant. Born in 1990 in Qingdao, Wang began his musical journey with piano studies at an early age. In 2009, he was admitted to the Composition Department of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, China, where he studied under esteemed professors Hao Weiya and Li Binyang. Demonstrating exceptional academic performance, he was admitted to the master's program under the guidance of Professor Liu Kanghua and continued his studies as a Ph.D. candidate in 2017. After earning his doctorate in 2020, he joined the Composition and Conducting Department at the Tianjin Conservatory of Music.

As a composer, Rui Wang's works span a wide array of styles and genres. He has collaborated with numerous renowned conductors, performers, and leading orchestras in China, producing commissioned works that have garnered critical acclaim. His compositions, such as *Waves of the Sea*, *Chants of the Mountains and Rivers*, *Flourishing Blossoms*, and *Impressions of the Mountain Lilies*, have been performed at prominent venues and integrated into the curriculum for traditional Chinese instrumental music education at conservatories.

As a scholar, Rui Wang is deeply engaged in research on compositional techniques and related disciplines. His academic contributions include multiple papers published in prestigious journals such as *Chinese Music* and *Tian Lai*, where he explores the development of Chinese music and offers insights aimed at advancing the field of music theory. As an educator, Rui Wang is committed to innovation in teaching methods, focusing on bridging creative theory with performance practice. He actively fosters platforms for artistic practice, nurturing a new generation of students with comprehensive professional skills and a strong sense of cultural confidence.

Pui Ian Chan (composer)



Composer, Pui Ian Chan is currently pursuing a master's degree in guzheng performance at the Central Conservatory of Music in China, studying under Associate Professor Su Chang, a renowned guzheng performer. Since 2019, she has also studied composition with Ye Xiaogang, the President of the Chinese Musicians Association and the Founding Dean of the School of Music at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen).

In 2017, Chan composed the guzheng concerto *Flower Whisper*, which premiered at Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge. The performance received high praise from the College's Master, Stuart Laing, as well as from the local audience. In 2019,

Biographies - *continued*

she participated in the scoring of *Theme and Variations on Passacaglia*, which premiered at the China Millennium Monument in Beijing.

As an arranger, Chan has adapted numerous works, including *Theme and Variations on Passacaglia*, *The Girl with the Flaxen Hair*, *Hanging Curtain*, and *Promenade in Paris*. These arrangements have been published by Beijing Universal Audio & Video Publishing House and premiered at prominent venues such as the National Library Arts Center, the Central Conservatory of Music, and China Central Television (CCTV). Chan's original compositions also showcase her versatility. Her works include the guzheng and piano piece *Mirror, Flower, Water, Moon* (2021), the traditional ensemble miniature *Bright Moonlight* (2023), the guzheng solo piece *Tango: Dance of the Strings* (2023) and *Preface of Nanyin* (2023). All these pieces premiered at the Central Conservatory of Music. Notably, *Earth and Water Sequence* was featured in the "Gardenia—Ye Xiaogang and His Students' Works Concert," earning recognition from leading Chinese arts and music publications, such as *China Art News* and *China Culture Daily*, as well as CCTV's *Music Weekly*.

In 2024, Chan composed the chamber music piece *Imagery of the Tang Dynasty*, which premiered at Beijing Concert Hall to widespread acclaim. Her active contributions to guzheng composition have established her as a prominent and dynamic composer in the field.

Save the Date for JMU's Spring String Thing 2025!



Spring String Thing
Music, Magic, & Memories!

May 30 - June 1, 2025

Open to students grades 7-12
Registration opens Feb. 1, 2025

Visit bit.ly/jmusst for
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on registration and
the camp!

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Questions? Email ssst@jmu.edu

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Johnny Park, *orchestra librarian*

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Sunny Robertello

Thien Phan

Cello

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Adriana Dryden

Bass Trombone

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Tuba

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Timpani and Percussion

Josh Sheppard*

Adelaide Hoffmann

Brian Willey

Thomas Creighton

Piano

Ryan Walker

Harp

Lea Kung

*denotes section leader/co-section leader