

Concert Program

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white top and a pearl necklace, holds a lit matchstick in front of her face. The flame is bright and illuminates her features. A microphone is positioned to the right of the matchstick. The background is dark.

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NEC Composers' Series
John and Arlene Heiss Residency Concert

Lamnth

Lilit Hartunian, violin
Nicholas Tolle, cimbalom

Sunday, September 14, 2025
8:00 p.m.
NEC's Jordan Hall

PROGRAM

All tonight's performances are world premieres.

Owen Johnson
'26 NEC/Tufts

Ghosts (2025)

Tianyi Wang
'26 DMA

Four Moments (2025)
ante
intra
epi
"ante"

Xize Wang
'25 MM, '30 DMA

their whiteness unravels in you: lapwings (2025)

Judith Berkson '04
(b. 1977)

Ozz (2025)

Intermission

Xiaofeng Jiang
'27 DMA

*Once more I see you in a dream where even
dreams feel false* (2025)

Grace Hughes
'26 MM

Round Bales and Young Corn (2025)

Alex Matheson
'26 DMA

Boston Light on Little Brewster Island (2025)

Program Notes

Johnson *Ghosts*

I am usually a linear composer, beginning at the beginning and ending at the end, with an idea of form and structure that crystalizes into a single, unchanging arc about halfway through the process. This piece was different. I went back and deleted sections, added sections in, and reorganized the exposition-to-climax-to-resolution flow multiple times. This resulted in a form that could be explained in several ways (quasi-sonata form, ABA, ABAB), though that none of those explanations I feel fully capture the piece. These possible forms are “ghosts,” remnants of previous, discarded trains of thought that now hold only partial sway over the piece.

In the music, these ghosts are shown through themes that return slightly out of time and place compared to their previous iterations. For example, the opening figure, a driving unison line shared between the Violin and Cimbalom, returns later, not as a triumphant restatement, but as a transition area between two other ideas. Likewise, the theme that ends the piece was present earlier, though not as a fully realized musical area, but rather as a formal marker between two other areas. Established themes become transitory, and transitory themes become cadential.

While writing this piece I was reading Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Pirsig's book also deals with ghosts, describing them as our way of making sense of the world by tapping into the ideas of previous thinkers: “Laws of nature are human inventions, like ghosts. Law of logic, of mathematics are also human inventions, like ghosts. We see what we see because these ghosts show it to us, ghosts of Moses and Christ and the Buddha, and Plato, and Descartes, and Rousseau and Jefferson and Lincoln, and on and on and on ... Your common sense is nothing more than the voices of thousands and thousands of these ghosts from the past.” In this way, artistic influences are “ghosts” for composers. The ghosts that have influenced this piece are innumerable, though this time, several of them are previous “me”s.

– Owen Johnson

Tianyi Wang *Four Moments*

ante-: prior

intra-: during

epi-: after

– Tianyi Wang

Xize Wang *their whiteness unravels in you: lapwings*

Lapwings breed between mid-March and June. The name ‘lapwing’ relates to the way they fly – zigzagging through the skies. I remember coming across a flock of lapwings moving through the sky and everything became extremely alive at that very moment. As a personal hobby, I have always been finding pleasure in observing nature and turning this mindfulness into various art forms. The white part of the lapwings is located at the center of their bellies, and when they brush through the air they move from invisible to visible, silently announcing their departure. I feel

obligated to search for a certain sound to capture this moment.

– Xize Wang

Berkson Ozz

While writing this piece for these incredible musicians of Lamnth, Lilit and Nick, I was working on several ideas when I heard about the passing of Ozzy Osbourne the legendary frontman of Black Sabbath. Ozzy's voice and the band were so singular yet almost single handedly started a new genre of heavy metal. Knowing that Nick is a fan of metal, I knew that he and Lilit would appreciate the sentiment. Lots of influences are running simultaneously through this work but I felt compelled to channel some of Ozzy's spirit into this piece by laying heavy riffs, repetition, and dissonant lines that the "Prince of Darkness" inspired in all of us. – *Judith Berkson*

Jiang *Once more I see you in a dream where even dreams feel false*

"Once more I see you,
A shadow moving among shadows, gleaming
For an instant in some bleak unknown light
Before passing into the night like a ship's wake swallowed
In water whose sound fades into silence ...
Once more I see you,
With a heart that's more distant, a soul that's less mine."
–Excerpts from Fernando Pessoa's *Lisbon Revisited* (1926)

– Xiaofeng Jiang

Hughes *Round Bales and Young Corn*

Round Bales and Young Corn was composed directly after I completed the Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa LII (RAGBRAI), a 435 mile week-long cycling event that spans from the Missouri to the Mississippi River. Completing this transformative event was the catalyst for this piece and its themes.

On the final day of the ride, during the final 5-mile stretch, I was coasting across rolling hills overlooking the Mississippi River, and I was instantly reminded of the regionalist works of the Iowan artist Grant Wood (1891-1942). Specifically, the painting "Young Corn" (1931). As someone who grew up visiting eastern Iowa twice a year to see family, the area is very dear to me. So while cycling across the Wood-esque scenery, it was a very emotional moment. Mind you, I was exhausted! But it was extremely breathtaking none-the-less. In this piece, I wanted to capture that moment: the euphoria of the ride's end, the serene pastures and prairie that can be seen for miles, and the happy memories I have of visiting my grandparents there.

Thank you, Lilit and Nick of Lamnth, for performing and workshopping this piece.

– Grace Hughes

Matheson *Boston Light on Little Brewster Island*

On this day in 1716 construction began on Boston Light, the first lighthouse in what would become the United States. Over the intervening three centuries (Anthropocenturies?), the world has been altered beyond recognition—in no small part by the

dogged churn of seafaring for which this tower is a metonym. Poignantly, Boston Light was also the last American lighthouse to be automated (in 1989) and the last to keep a resident keeper: the indomitable Dr. Sally Snowman, who lived there until 2019 and retired, unreplaced, in 2023. Today Little Brewster Island is largely inaccessible, its dock storm-damaged, its vigilant beam requiring no human intervention.

What can be expressed of such a place, whose waters hold the drowned and whose signal guided countless others toward the Harbor's imperfect "safety"? From these historical details I've tried for an abstract portrait: displaced, out of time — temporal elasticity being such a special province of music. This is not a seascape, but a deliberately an empathetic response in sound: a blip in the fog, an infinitesimal mortal cry that, like another national eternal flame, means everything and nothing.

— Alex Matheson

Biographies

Lamnth is a violin and cimbalom duo founded in 2023 by Lilit Hartunian and Nicholas Tolle dedicated to building a new repertoire for their unique pairing. Their thoughtful and hands-on approach to collaborating has yielded new works by composers including Maya Bennardo, Darcy Copeland, Marti Epstein, Ash Graham, Sid Richardson, Golnaz Shariatzadeh, and Niloufar Shiri. Selected for a 2023 Avaloch Farm Music Institute residency, Hartunian and Tolle rehearsed and workshopped their first commissioned work, Mischa Salkind-Pearl's *Lines and Traces of Desire*, for a recording to be released in 2025. In 2024 they returned to Avaloch to create a new piece with Bahar Royae. Their second season in 2024-2025 saw premieres by Anthony Green, Curtis Hughes, John McDonald, and a residency with New Music Brandeis.

In 2024 they launched two annual initiatives: LamnthLab, an open call for composers that resulted in two commissions, and the Jack-o-Lamnthern Spooktacular, a Halloween concert that invites composers to "dress up" as other composers by arranging existing music for violin and cimbalom.

Hartunian and Tolle, long established members of the Boston new music community, are frequent performers with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, A Far Cry, Emmanuel Music, and Sound Icon, among other groups. They also frequently perform together with The Ludovico Ensemble, founded by Tolle, including a duo concert in March 2022 which led to the launch of this project.

Violinist **Lilit Hartunian** performs at the forefront of contemporary music innovation, both as a soloist and highly in-demand collaborative artist. First prize winner in the 2021 Black House Collective New Music Soloist Competition, Ms. Hartunian's "Paganiniesque virtuosity" and "captivating and luxurious tone" (*Boston Musical Intelligencer*) are frequently on display at the major concert halls of Boston, including multiple solo performances at Jordan Hall and chamber music at Symphony Hall (Boston Symphony Orchestra Insights Series), as well as at leading

academic institutions, where she often appears as both soloist and new music specialist. Highlights from the 2023 season included performances with A Far Cry at The Kennedy Center, Boston Modern Orchestra Project at Carnegie Hall, and [Switch~ Ensemble] at June in Buffalo, as well as the release of an album featuring A Far Cry, Roomful of Teeth, and pianist Awadagin Pratt. Described as “brilliantly rhapsodic” by the *Harvard Crimson*, Ms. Hartunian can be heard on New Focus Records, Innova Recording, SEAMUS records, New Amsterdam Records, and on self-released albums by Ludovico Ensemble and Kirsten Volness. As a collaborative artist and ensemble musician, Ms. Hartunian regularly performs with Boston Modern Orchestra Project, A Far Cry, Sound Icon, Emmanuel Music, Callithumpian Consort, Guerilla Opera, and Ludovico Ensemble, and recently performed as guest artist with the Lydian Quartet, Arneis Quartet, and The Rhythm Method.

Nicholas Tolle is one of America’s premiere cimbalom artists. In 2019 he won 3rd prize in the Budapest Music Center International Cimbalom Competition. He has performed as soloist in Pierre Boulez’ *Repons* with the composer conducting at the Lucerne Festival in 2009, the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal with Péter Eötvös in 2012, and with Steven Schick at UC San Diego in 2017. Based in Boston, MA, he plays regularly with such groups as the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Emmanuel Music, and Sound Icon, and with his own group, the Ludovico Ensemble. He has performed with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, New York Philharmonic, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the International Contemporary Ensemble, and Ensemble Signal. He is featured performing Boulez’s *Repons* in the EuroArts documentary “Inheriting the Future of Music: Pierre Boulez and the Lucerne Festival Academy”, and in Kurtág’s music for cimbalom and voice on soprano Susan Narucki’s 2019 album *The Edge of Silence*, which was nominated for a 2020 Grammy award. His recording of Kurtág’s *Seven Songs* from *The Edge of Silence* was named one of the best classical tracks of 2019 by *The New York Times*.

Composer, mezzo-soprano, and pianist **Judith Berkson** explores microtonal writing for acoustic instruments. Other projects include *Liederkreis* which uses voice and electronics to create work that draws on 19th century lieder and experimental idioms. She has spent many years collaborating in the New York creative music scene both in improvised music and new music ensembles and in local scenes in noise and electronic music. Her music has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and on NPR. She has collaborated with the Kronos Quartet, City Opera, Laurie Anderson and has worked with new music ensembles including Mivos Quartet, Wet Ink, Yarn/Wire, and Bang On a Can. As a vocalist, she has premiered works by Mick Barr, Chaya Czernowin, Joe Maneri, Rick Burkhardt, Alvin Lucier, Gerard Pape, Julia Werntz and Aleksandra Vrebalov. She has collaborated on recordings for Nonesuch Records and Pi Recordings as well as a solo album of compositions on ECM Records. In 2022 she composed music for the film *Christopher at Sea*, a queer retelling of Schubert’s song cycle *Winterreise* which premiered at the Venice Biennale, and which won awards at SXSW and at Outfest LA. She is also a

cantor and has collaborated on Yiddish folk music with Theodore Bikel and Frank London. Her first opera *The Vienna Rite* about 19th century Viennese cantor Salomon Sulzer's friendship with composer Franz Schubert. Her latest opera, *Partial Memories*, about forgotten female artists Janet Sobel and Mary Gartside was commissioned by the NODO Festival in Ostrava, Czech Republic in 2022. She is currently based in Los Angeles and teaches at California Institute of the Arts.

Upcoming NEC Composers' Series Concerts

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NEC Composers' Series, Arthur Berger Memorial Concert

Sid Richardson, curator; Berger *Five Settings of European Poets*; Agócs *Hyacinth Curl*; Mallia *Alone*; Lister *Ordinary Heartaches and Other Poems of Michael Blumenthal*; Richardson *Inscribed on a Lintel*; Richardson *How Do I Love Thee?*

Wednesday, October 15, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Composers' Series, "Home"

Sophia Szokolay '19, '25 DMA, violin – an exploration of cultural identity and belonging, shaped by the experiences of migration and the quest for a sense of home in the midst of dissonance

Thursday, November 6, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

Other Upcoming Concerts at NEC

Faculty Recital: Paul Biss, violin and viola, **Miriam Fried**, violin,

Jonathan Biss, piano & Friends – works by Mozart, Dvořák, and Mendelssohn

Monday, September 22, 2025 at 8:00 p.m., Jordan Hall

Tuesday Night New Music

New music by NEC student composers, performed by their peers

Tuesday, September 23, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Philharmonia, Hugh Wolff, conductor

Ravel *Valses nobles et sentimentales*; Mahler *Symphony No. 5*;

Wednesday, September 24, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Philharmonia, Stefan Asbury, conductor

Berio *Requies*; Ravel *Le tombeau de Couperin*; Elgar *Symphony No. 1*

Monday, September 29, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

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Food and drink are not allowed in the concert hall,
and photography and audio or video recording are prohibited.

Assistive listening devices are available for all Jordan Hall concerts;
contact the head usher or house manager on duty or inquire at the Coat Room.

Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of management.

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Welcome to NEC!

I am thrilled to share New England Conservatory's 2025-26 concert season—a celebration of the power of music to connect and inspire one another.

Whether you are seated in one of our concert halls or watching online, we hope the performances of our students, faculty, and guest artists uplift you.

Above all, we thank you for supporting our students as they cultivate their artistry and contribute to the world through music.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

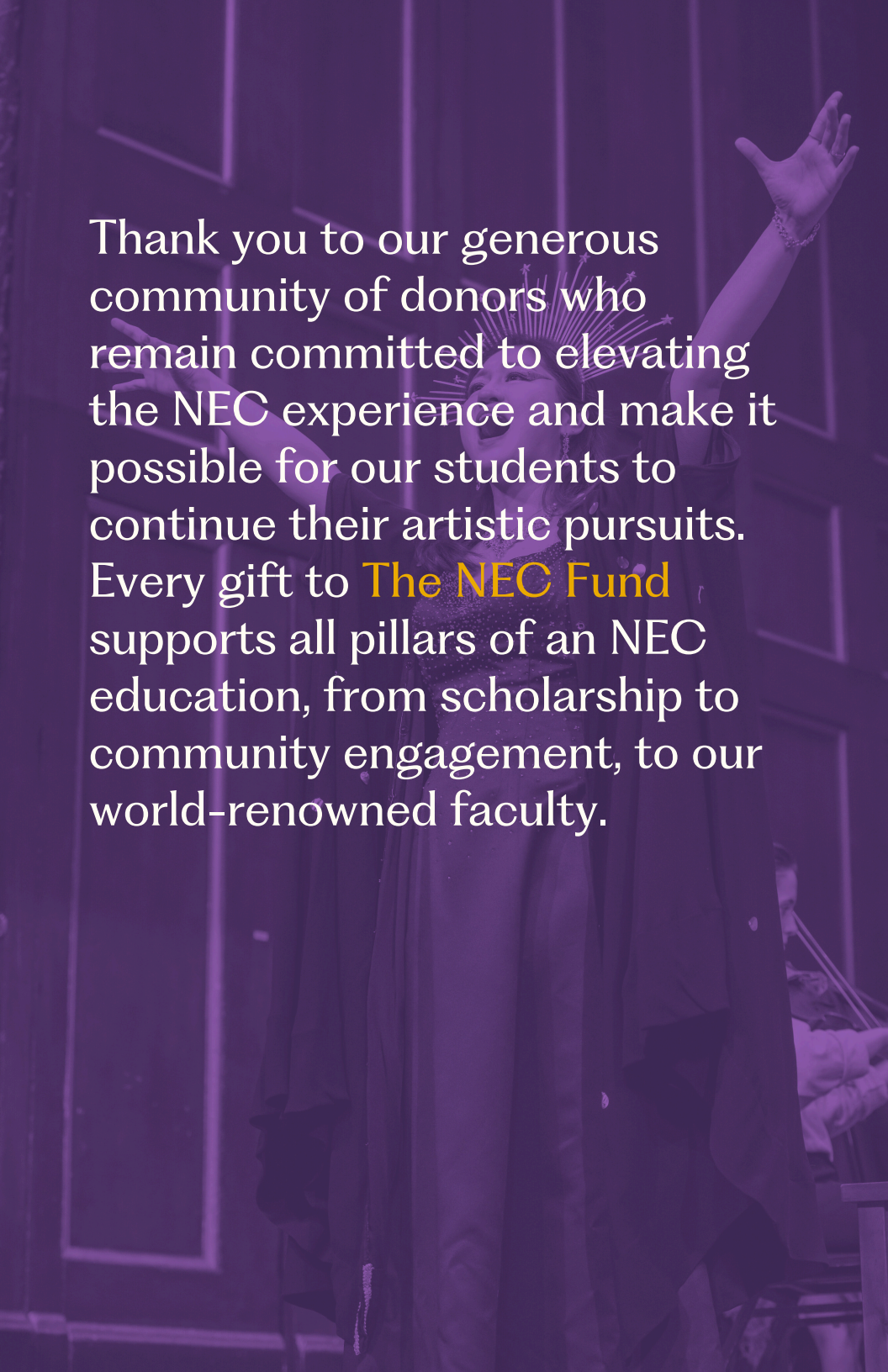
Andrea Kaylin
President

A large orchestra is performing in a grand hall with ornate wood paneling and a high ceiling. The stage is lit with warm, golden light. A conductor in a dark suit stands on the right, facing the orchestra. A soloist in a bright red jacket and dark pants stands in the center of the stage, holding a microphone. The orchestra consists of many musicians playing various instruments, including violins, violas, cellos, and double basses. In the foreground, the backs of many audience members' heads are visible, showing they are seated in a large hall. A white rectangular text box is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

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N | E | C

A woman in a black dress with a starburst headpiece, arms raised in a celebratory gesture, against a purple background.

Thank you to our generous community of donors who remain committed to elevating the NEC experience and make it possible for our students to continue their artistic pursuits. Every gift to **The NEC Fund** supports all pillars of an NEC education, from scholarship to community engagement, to our world-renowned faculty.

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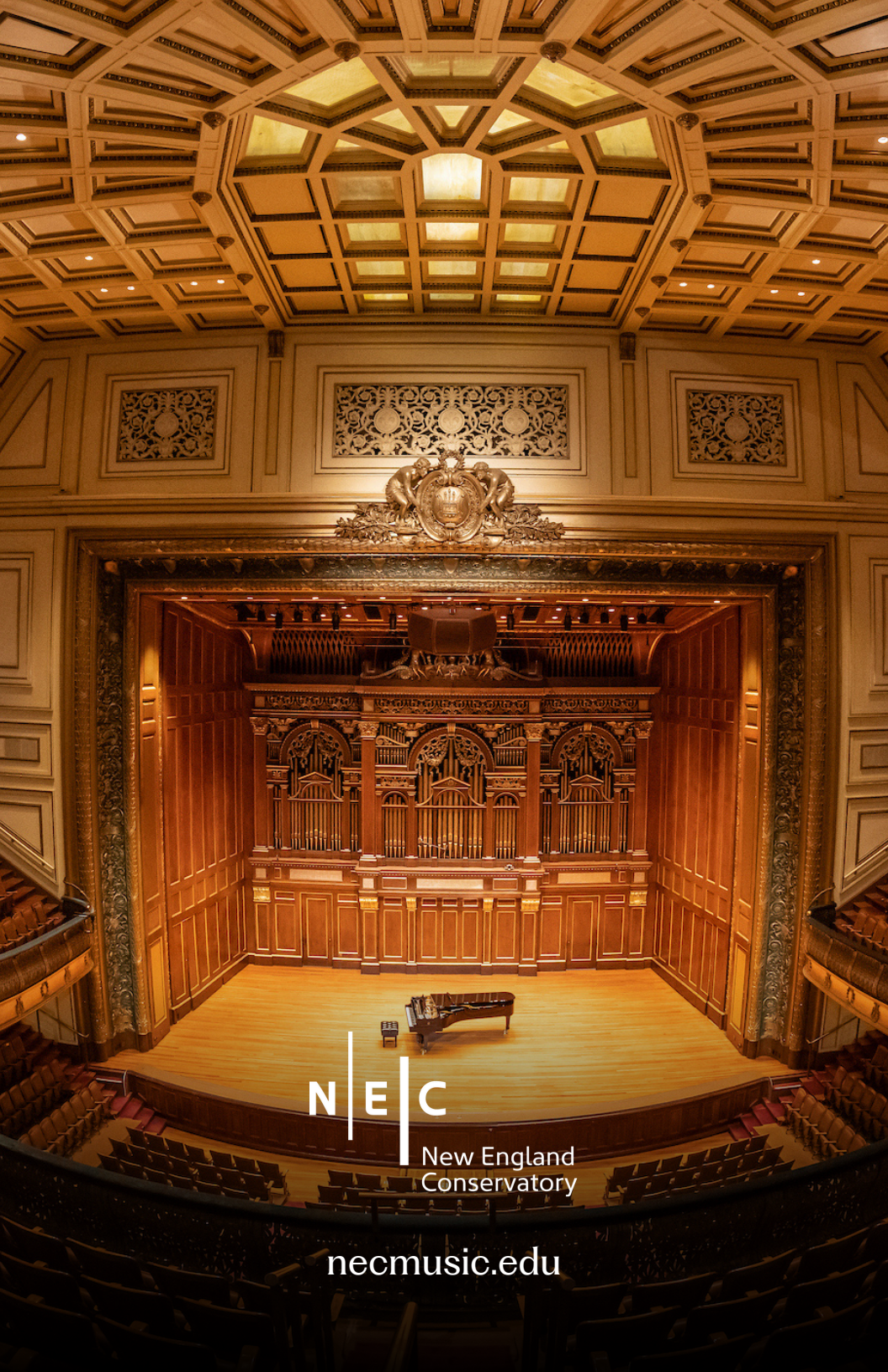
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