

Concert Program

NEC Philharmonia

Hugh Wolff, conductor

Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras

Wednesday, September 24, 2025

7:30 p.m.

NEC's Jordan Hall

PROGRAM

Maurice Ravel

(1875–1937)

Valses nobles et sentimentales

Modéré

Assez lent

Modéré

Assez animé

Presque lent

Assez vif

Moins vif

Épilogue: Lent

Intermission

Gustav Mahler

(1860–1911)

Symphony No. 5 (1901-1903)

Part One

Trauermarsch: In gemessenem Schritt.

Streng. Wie ein Kondukt.

Stürmisch bewegt. Mit größter Vehemenz

Part Two

Scherzo: Kräftig, nicht zu schnell

Part Three

Adagietto

Rondo-Finale: Allegro

Of the first composition on tonight's program, the composer **Maurice Ravel** wrote, "The title *Valses nobles et sentimentales* clearly indicates my intention to compose a series of waltzes following the example of Schubert. The virtuosity of *Gaspard de la nuit* makes way for a clearer kind of writing, sharpens the harmony, and clarifies the musical outlines. The *Valses nobles et sentimentales* were first performed amid protestations and catcalls at a concert of the Société Musicale Indépendante, in which the names of the composers were not revealed. The audience voted on the probable authorship of each piece. Mine was recognized, but only by a slight majority." This was the solo piano version of the piece, written in 1911. Despite the rude reception, Ravel did not lose faith in his work and orchestrated it a year later. As the title suggests, it is a suite of waltzes, more or less alternating between fast and slow, with Gallic sensuality and subtlety and Ravel's keen ear for piquant harmony and extravagant orchestral color. Seven waltzes are followed by an Epilogue, that recalls all the previous waltzes in dream-like fragments as the music fades away into perfumed silence.

Writing to his young wife in Vienna from Cologne, where he was rehearsing the world premiere of his *Fifth Symphony*, **Gustav Mahler** said, "Heavens, what is the public to make of this chaos in which new worlds are forever being engendered, only to crumble into ruin the next moment? What are they to say to this primeval music, this foaming, roaring, raging sea of sound, to these dancing stars, to these breathtaking, iridescent, and flashing breakers?"

Mahler began the *Fifth Symphony* in the summer of 1901, completing the work the following summer. The traditional four movement model, used as recently as the *Fourth Symphony*, gives way to five movements divided into three groups: a funeral march and a stormy second movement form the first group (about twenty-six minutes), the *Scherzo* (seventeen minutes) stands alone in the center, and the *Adagietto* and *Rondo-Finale* (together about twenty-four minutes) form the third group and round out the symphony's symmetry. The pairs of movements in the first and third groups are played without pause and are closely related to one another. The opening movement, marked "With measured step, strict, like a cortège," begins with the sounds of a funeral – trumpet fanfares alternating with elegiac *pianissimo* strings. The restrained atmosphere is interrupted by a dramatic *forte* upward leap and a falling minor second appoggiatura – music marked "Suddenly faster, passionate, wild." Grief is transformed into anger and despair, chromaticism replaces the triadic shapes of the opening. The quiet music returns but the leap up to a falling appoggiatura remains an important fixture of the changed landscape. The second movement, marked "Stormy, with the greatest vehemence," takes up the anger and despair of the previous movement's central section. The vehemence subsides suddenly and the funeral music from the first movement returns. Thus, this movement reverses the shape of the first and acts its foil: stormy music alternating with introspective funeral music. And it generates its form from the first movement's gesture of a rising interval and falling appoggiatura. Every section is launched this way: the opening passionate violin melody, the moment of deep introspection for cellos over a hushed timpani

roll, the jarring interruption of the stormy music by a direct quote from the first movement's funeral march, the sudden heroic moment (like a remembrance of youth and strength), and, above all, the burst of sunlight in the brass – first just a hint, later a full-fledged chorale in D major. But both glimpses of glory (a clue to how the symphony will end) are denied, obliterated by the return of the opening pessimism. Like the first, this movement ends in bitterness.

The question asked by the surprising emergence of D major amid the gloom is answered by the third movement, a *Scherzo* firmly in D major. This is a rustic country dance (*Ländler* or waltz) refracted through the prism of German Romanticism: a musical fairy tale with moments of humor and danger, elegance and awkwardness, storm and serenity. The solo horn acts as a kind of protagonist, leading the country dancing, lilting quietly in gentler passages, intoning dramatic warnings of impending danger, and echoing across the valley. The opening horn call (another triadic motif) brings us home after each adventure; the apotheosis of a coda combines all the movement's important motifs in a whirling dervish of energy.

Between the two summers of the symphony's composition (1901 and 1902), Mahler met the young Alma Schindler at a dinner party, proposed to her exactly one month later, and married her on March 9, 1902. Years later, the conductor Willem Mengelberg, one of Mahler's most trusted interpreters, wrote on the first page of the *Adagietto* in his own score of the symphony, "This...was Gustav Mahler's declaration of love to Alma. Instead of a letter, he sent her this music in manuscript, without any accompanying words... Both of them told me this!" It may be true that the drama in his personal life found musical expression in this slender movement. For a composer prone to creating giant canvases, the *Adagietto* is unusual. By far the shortest slow movement in any of Mahler's symphonies and scored for just strings and harp, it unfolds with simplicity and directness. The important appoggiaturas of the second movement now express a quieter, more intimate kind of yearning. As the final F major chord dies away, the horn – quiet since the *Scherzo* – takes up the violins' final A and launches us, without pause, into the rambunctious *Rondo-Finale*. The somber mood of the first movement and the anger and despair of the second seem long past, as Mahler (happy in love?) crafts an ebullient rondo full of energy and humor. The second subject is an ingenious reworking of the *Adagietto*'s middle section, and the coda affirms the D major chorale from the second movement. There Mahler cut off the chorale; here he lets it blaze forth in its full glory, as the symphony drives headlong to its triumphant conclusion, ending with a burst of collective laughter.

This symphony progresses from a somber funeral march in C-sharp minor to a brilliant rondo in D major, worlds away. As Mahler wrote to his wife, "New worlds are forever being engendered, only to crumble into ruin the next moment." The "foaming, roaring, raging sea of sound...dancing stars...breathtaking, iridescent, and flashing breakers" – we can hear them all in this symphony. It is a journey across the vast spectrum of human experience and emotion, exactly what Mahler believed a symphony should be. As he said in 1907 to Jean Sibelius, another original symphonist, "A symphony must be like the world – it must contain everything."

—Hugh Wolff

NEC Philharmonia
Hugh Wolff, conductor

First Violin

Evan Johanson
Hojung Kwon
Ravani Loushy Kay
Yixiang Wang
Thompson Wang
Tau-Ya Huang
Amelia Cannavo
Tara Hagle
Jusun Kim
Sungin Cho
Zixiang Lin
Kevin Kang
William Kinney
Haram Kim

Second Violin

June Chung
Kuan Hao Yen
Eleanor Markey
Arayana Carr-Mal
Emma Servadio
Jia-Ying Joy Wei
Minkyung Kang
Jooha Choi
Rina Kubota
Youngran Moon
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Isabel Chen

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Jeonghwan Yoon
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Nicolette Sullivan-Cozza
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Jack Wong
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Hyunji Cho
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Brian Choy
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Shengyu Cui +
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Nina Tsai
Sara Wen
Haylie Wu
Yufei Wu

Piccolo

Alexander Lehmann
Sara Wen
Haylie Wu
Yufei Wu

Oboe

Anna Choi ‡
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MacKenzie Kim
Christian Paniagua

English horn

Christian Paniagua

Clarinet

Carla Fortmann
Xianyi Ji
Eugene Jung ‡
Pin Kan +
Max Reed

E-flat Clarinet

Xianyi Ji

Bass Clarinet

Max Reed

Bassoon

Garrett Comrie
Valerie Curd +
Erik Paul ‡
Owen Schigiel
Joanna Yesol Ji

Contrabassoon

Owen Schigiel

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Hsuan Chiu +
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Qianbin Zhu ‡

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Kayla Adams +
Sebastián Haros
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Becca Bertekap
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Alex Russell +

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Special thanks to
Paul Biss, Daniel Getz, Mickey Katz, and Anthony D'Amico
for their work in preparing the orchestra
for this evening's concert.

Hugh Wolff

*Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras;
Chair, Orchestral Conducting*

Hugh Wolff joined the New England Conservatory faculty in 2008 and has conducted a large share of NEC's orchestral concerts every year since then. He has taught graduate students in an elite training program for orchestral conductors since 2009.

Wolff has appeared with all the major American orchestras, including those of Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Cleveland. He is much in demand in Europe, where he has conducted the London Symphony, the Philharmonia, the City of Birmingham Symphony, the Orchestre National de France, Czech Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Munich Philharmonic, and the Bavarian and Berlin Radio Orchestras. A regular guest conductor with orchestras in Japan, Korea, Scandinavia, Canada and Australia, he is also a frequent conductor at summer festivals.

Currently Laureate Conductor of the Belgian National Orchestra, Wolff was principal conductor of the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra from 1997 to 2006 and maintains a close relationship with that ensemble. He led it on tours of Europe, Japan, and China, and at the Salzburg Festival. Wolff was principal conductor and then music director of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (1988-2000), with which he recorded twenty discs and toured the United States, Europe, and Japan.

Performances with the Boston Symphony have included the world premiere of Ned Rorem's *Swords and Ploughshares* in Symphony Hall. Wolff was music director of the New Jersey Symphony (1986-1993) and principal conductor of Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival (1994-1997). He began his professional career in 1979 as associate conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra under Mstislav Rostropovich.

Wolff's extensive discography includes the complete Beethoven symphonies with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra and music from the baroque to the present. He has recorded or premiered works by John Adams, Stephen Albert, John Corigliano, Brett Dean, Lukas Foss, John Harbison, Aaron Jay Kernis, Edgar Meyer, Rodion Shchedrin, Bright Sheng, Michael Torke, Mark-Anthony Turnage, and Joan Tower and has collaborated on CD with Mstislav Rostropovich, Yo-Yo Ma, Steven Isserlis, Joshua Bell, Hilary Hahn, Dawn Upshaw, Jennifer Larmore, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, and jazz guitarist John Scofield. Three times nominated for a Grammy Award, Wolff won the 2001 Cannes Classical Award.

A graduate of Harvard College, Wolff studied piano with George Crumb, Leon Fleisher and Leonard Shure, composition with Leon Kirchner and Olivier Messiaen, and conducting with Charles Bruck. In 1985, Wolff was awarded one of the first Seaver/ National Endowment for the Arts Conducting Prizes.

A gift from the Calderwood Charitable Foundation endowed the Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras chair now occupied by Hugh Wolff.

He and his wife, harpist and radio journalist Judith Kogan, have three sons.

Symphonic Music at New England Conservatory

Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras Hugh Wolff is joined by Associate Director of Orchestras David Loebel, Chamber Orchestra founder Donald Palma, and a rich array of guest conductors and coaches for dozens of FREE orchestral concerts in NEC's Jordan Hall this year.

Visit necmusic.edu for complete and updated concert information:

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

NEC Chamber Orchestra, Donald Palma, artistic director

Strauss *Sextet for Strings* from *Capriccio*; Mozart *Serenade No. 6 in D Major*;

Weinberg *Symphony No. 7*, op. 81

Wednesday October 8, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Symphony, David Loebel, conductor

Tower *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*, No. 6; Haydn *Symphony No. 85, "La Reine"*;

Franck *Symphony in D Minor*

Wednesday, October 22, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

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and photography and audio or video recording are prohibited.

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

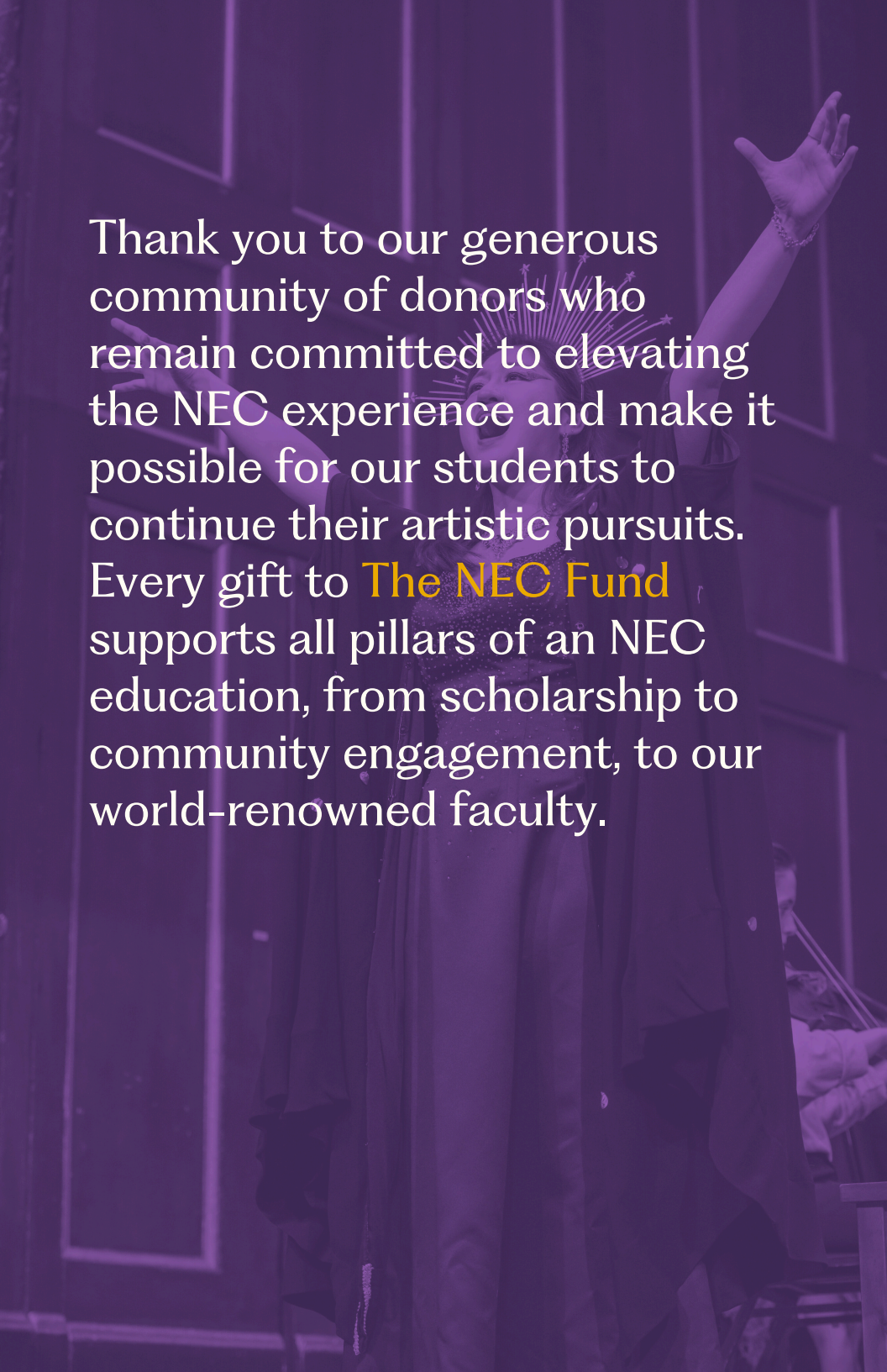
Andrea Kaylin
President

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 at the front of the orchestra, facing the musicians. A soloist in a bright red jacket and dark pants stands in the center of the stage, holding a microphone. The audience is seated in the foreground, seen from behind, looking towards the stage. A large white rectangular box is overlaid on the upper half of the image, containing text.

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

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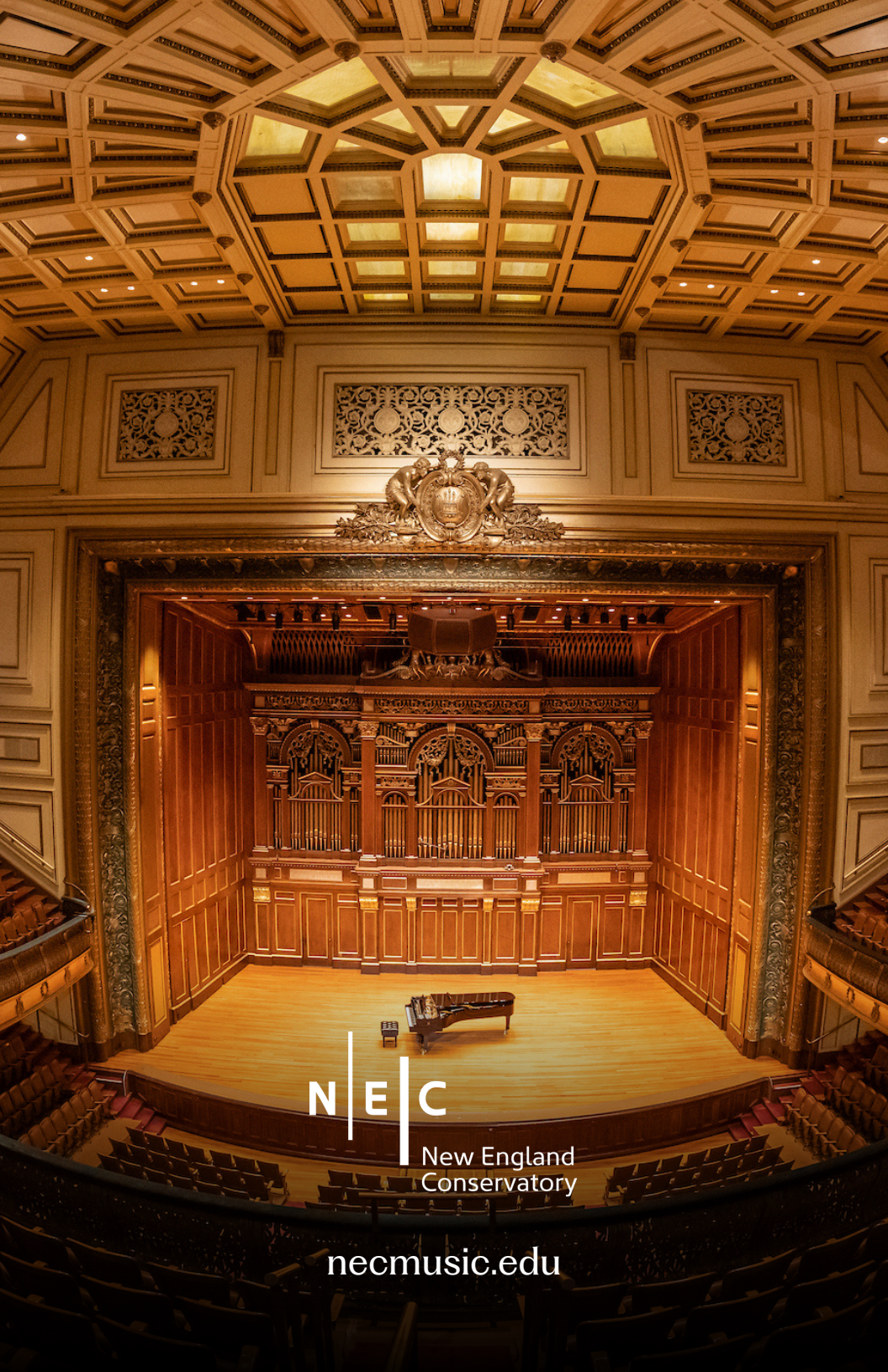
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