



New England
Conservatory

Concert Program

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NEC Symphony

Hugh Wolff, conductor

Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras

Sunday, February 1, 2026

8:00 p.m.

NEC's Jordan Hall

PROGRAM

Jennifer Higdon
(b. 1962)

Fanfare Ritmico (2000)

Béla Bartók
(1881–1945)

Deux Images, op. 10

En pleine fleur (In Full Flower): Poco adagio
Danse villageoise (Village Dance): Allegro

Intermission

Johannes Brahms
(1833–1898)

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, op. 98

Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Allegro giocoso
Allegro energico e passionato

Fanfare Ritmico celebrates the rhythm and speed (tempo) of life. Writing this work on the eve of the move into the new millennium, I found myself reflecting on how all things have quickened as time has progressed. Our lives now move at speeds much greater than what I believe anyone would have ever imagined in years past. Everyone follows the beat of their own drummer, and those drummers are beating faster and faster on many different levels. As we move along day to day, rhythm plays an integral part of our lives, from the individual heartbeat to the lightning speed of our computers. This fanfare celebrates that rhythmic motion, of man and machine, and the energy which permeates every moment of our being in the new century.

This work was commissioned by The Women's Philharmonic as part of The Fanfares Project. It was premiered in 2000 by the Women's Philharmonic, Apo Hsu, conducting.

— Jennifer Higdon

Jennifer Higdon is one of America's most acclaimed figures in contemporary classical music, receiving the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto, a 2010 Grammy for her Percussion Concerto, a 2018 Grammy for her Viola Concerto and, most recently, a 2020 Grammy for her Harp Concerto. Higdon's first opera, *Cold Mountain*, won the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere and the opera recording was nominated for 2 Grammy awards. In 2018, Higdon received the prestigious Nemmers Prize from Northwestern University, awarded to contemporary classical composers of exceptional achievement who have significantly influenced the field of composition. Most recently, she was invited to become a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Higdon enjoys several hundred performances a year of her works and her works have been recorded on more than 70 CDs.

Before ubiquitous and free music via streaming, and social media, trends in music traveled slowly. In 1907, Zoltan Kodály brought the scores of some new works of Claude Debussy back to Budapest and shared them with his colleague **Béla Bartók**. Bartók was looking for a way forward that rejected the hyper-chromaticism of Wagner and Strauss and found it in the transparent textures and radical free harmonies of Debussy. Written in the summer of 1910, Bartók's *Deux Images* (the French titles are his) show the dual influences of Debussy and his native Hungarian folk music. Cast in the traditional two-movement *lassú-friss* (slow-fast) pattern of Hungarian folk music, the first movement, *En pleine fleur* (In full flower), is a languorous tribute to Debussy; the second, *Danse villageoise* (Village dance), pure folk music. Bartók cannily found common ground in these two disparate styles in the pentatonic and whole-tone scales (both widely used by Debussy). After a hushed and mysterious opening, the first forte melody in horns and clarinets is pentatonic, as is the horn solo a few minutes later. After a passionate climax, the music dissolves into whole-tone harmonies – the last minute and a half is exclusively whole-tone. While the second movement is a folk-dance rondo, the opening phrase is whole-tone until the last note, and the stomping climactic accelerando pentatonic. Finding a way

to bind Eastern and Western strands together was a lifelong quest for Bartók – the early *Deux Images* a fine example.

When **Johannes Brahms'** *Fourth Symphony* was first performed in 1886, Liszt was an old man and Wagner had been dead for three years. There was no taking back their innovations. Mahler and Strauss would emerge in the next decade, followed soon by Schoenberg. For Brahms, fiercely proud, independent, and highly self-critical, this was an inner catastrophe. He knew he would never be part of the avant-garde; to the end, he remained true to his own classically rooted style. The *Fourth Symphony* is filled with rigid and archaic structures and relentlessly repetitive motifs. The opening melody repeats the same two-note rhythm eight times; the jagged dotted rhythm accompaniment to the second theme is likewise repeated eight times. The slow movement begins with another rhythmic motif repeated six times. The *finale* is thirty variations on an eight-measure ground bass Brahms took from a Bach cantata. Bach moved the bass line into several different keys in his four-minute chaconne, but for all thirty variations of the *finale*, lasting nine minutes, Brahms stubbornly resists changing the tonality of the bass line. It is as though he were purposely setting himself insurmountable musical challenges, both to decry the frustration they cause and to reveal beautiful solutions. A prisoner in a straitjacket of his own choosing, he breaks free with sheer musical brilliance. Despite its repetitive rhythm and simplicity, the opening melody is rich with yearning and pathos. The second subject, in the horns and cellos, similarly soars over its ironclad accompaniment. The stern repeated rhythm that begins the slow movement, apparently in C major, yields immediately to the surprising sweet sound of E major. And through sheer compositional virtuosity, Brahms manages to write over an unyielding ground bass, thirty variations of astonishing harmonic richness and emotional variety.

The symphony is one of very few in the entire repertoire that begins and ends in a minor key. Unlike his *First Symphony*, where darkness gives way to light, or his *Third*, where brooding energy is transfigured in the coda, Brahms' *Fourth* remains decidedly pessimistic. This was quite striking to late-nineteenth century listeners. The conductor Felix Weingartner wrote some years later, "I cannot get away from the impression of an inexorable fate implacably driving some great creation, whether it be an individual or a whole race, toward its downfall...[The *finale*] is seared by shattering tragedy, the close being a veritable orgy of destruction, a terrible counterpart to the paroxysm of joy at the end of Beethoven's last symphony." As Brahms biographer Jan Swafford noted, "Brahms saw himself as the meager but last-ditch embodiment of the great Germanic tradition, the line of Schütz and Bach through Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann. He believed that when he died, that lineage would die." Though he lived another eleven years, Brahms never returned to symphonic form.

– Hugh Wolff

NEC Symphony
Hugh Wolff, conductor

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Rentso Stavrev
Tzu-Yi Wu
Jessica Kartawidjaja
Miranda Isbitts
Eddy Au Yeung
Rey Kao
Johannes Lidden
Anna Suzuki
Yoonjin Hwang
Amaryn Olmeda
Naama Ben Zaken

Second Violin

Mara Zaner
Irene Koo
Cooper Olsen
Kira Bayer
Clark Snavely
Jiyu Oh
Noga Barlev
Bo-Yuan Jeng
Roger Chen
Dora Oliva Devoghel
Tokuji Miyasaka
Hana Taylor

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Greta Coleman
Zhixuan Quan
Sam Chan
Diogo Pimentel
Yiming Ma
Sing Yin Li
Wenhai Wang
Nolan An
Celine Bares
Seoyeon Bay
Peyton Crony
Daniel De La Cruz

Principal players

+ Higdon
* Bartók
† Brahms

Cello

Xinchen Jessica Zhang
Nayoung Kim
Yu-Hua Lin
William Parkes
Yun-ting Chiang
Yeon Soo Park
Edelweiss Pak
Heewon Woo
Joseph Hung
Noah Vin

Bass

Liana D. Logan
Wanming Chen
Kexin Zhao
Ming Zhong
Flute
Nina Zeya Ma ‡
Hanyu Mei
Yuxin Song *
Yuzuka Williams +

Piccolo

Nina Zeya Ma +
Hanyu Mei *
Yuxin Song ‡

Oboe

Annie Jung +
Myungha Song *
Evan Work ‡

English horn

Annie Jung

Clarinet

Rohan Miovic
Haoran Sun *
Fan-En Wu +
Taein Yi ‡
Hanlin Yu
Zhenyue Zheng

Bass Clarinet

Rohan Miovic +
Zhenyue Zheng *

Bassoon

Jiayue Chen
Declan Johnston ‡
Jiaheng Xie
Dingding Xiong +
Keer Zhou *

Contrabassoon

Declan Johnston *
Jiaheng Xie +
Dingding Xiong ‡

French horn

Mathys Elbaz ‡
Hans Jerosch
Daniel Ma
Karlin Rhee
Jaden Rudnicki *
Elyse Schlesinger +

Trumpet

Lily Clark +
Harry James II
Anry Ramirez
Richard Taylor II *
Gavin Waterman †

Trombone

Reece Cowan *
Quinton Krull †
Jongbin Park +
Jaewon Shim

Bass Trombone

David Sato +
Kyeongmin You *†

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Isaias Fabian Mondragon

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Samuel Kerr +
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Linjia Chen +
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Special thanks to
Zenas Hsu, Noriko Futagami, 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, Head of Orchestral Conducting Stefan Asbury, and a rich array of guest conductors and coaches for dozens of FREE orchestral concerts in NEC's Jordan Hall this year.

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NEC Opera: Donizetti *L'elisir d'amore*

Steven Goldstein, director; Robert Tweten, conductor

Monday & Wednesday, February 2 & 4, 2026 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Chamber Orchestra, Donald Palma, artistic director

Mendelssohn *Sinfonia No. 10 in B Minor*; Maxwell Fairman *Rhapsody Noir* (2025);

Johann Baptist Vanhal *Concerto for Double Bass in E-flat Major* - Dennis McIntyre '27, soloist; Haydn *Symphony No. 52 in C Minor*, Hob I:52

Wednesday, February 11, 2026 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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New England
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Welcome to NEC!

I am thrilled to welcome you to New England Conservatory's 2025–26 concert season — a celebration of the power that music has to inspire and connect us to 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.

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Andrea Kalyn
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