

Happy Hour:

BEETHOVEN, BRAHMS AND THE ROMANTIC SPIRIT

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2026 AT 6 PM

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

KANSAS CITY
SYMPHONY

The 2026/27 season is generously sponsored by
Shirley and Barnett C. Helzberg, Jr.

PROGRAM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Sextet in E-flat Major for String Quartet and Two Horns, op. 81b
I. Allegro con brio
II. Adagio
III. Rondo: Allegro

Roy Femenella, horn
Elizabeth Gray, horn
Kristin Velicer, violin
Minhye Helena Choi, violin
Jenifer Houck, viola
Meredith McCook, cello

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Trio in E-flat Major for Horn, Violin and Piano, op. 40
I. Andante
II. Scherzo (Allegro)
III. Adagio mesto
IV. Finale: Allegro con brio

Elizabeth Gray, horn
Jun Iwasaki, violin
Sean Chen, piano

Musician Bios



ROY FEMENELLA

PRINCIPAL HORN, LANDON AND SARAH ROWLAND CHAIR

Roy Femenella is joining the Kansas City Symphony as principal horn in 2026. Born and raised in New York City, Roy has built a dynamic career as one of the most in-demand horn players of his generation. Prior to moving to Kansas City he was a member of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, where he performed for five seasons. Recently he has served as guest principal horn of the San Francisco Symphony and has appeared regularly with ensembles such as the Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony, l'Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and Swedish Radio Symphony. Additionally, he has appeared as guest principal horn of the Colorado Music Festival Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica de Minería in Mexico City and Orquestra Metropolitana de Lisboa in Portugal. Recent chamber music appearances include a tour performing the Brahms Horn Trio throughout China, as well as appearances in Carnegie Hall's Weill Hall with colleagues from the Metropolitan Opera. Roy also has appeared on several major motion picture soundtracks.

During the 2017 through 2020 seasons, Roy held a fellowship at the New World Symphony in Miami, during which he gave several performances of Richard Strauss' Horn Concerto No. 2 as a winner of the New World Symphony's Concerto Competition. He holds a degree from the Juilliard School and pursued additional studies at the Aspen Music Festival and School, where he held a fellowship for three summers.

A passionate teacher, Roy was recently appointed to the Carolyn Wahl Faculty Chair at the Kinhaven Music School in Weston, Vermont, where he enjoys spending the summer mentoring the next generation of talented horn players.



ELIZABETH GRAY

HORN

Elizabeth Schellhase Gray joined the Kansas City Symphony as second horn in November 2009. Prior to joining the Kansas City Symphony, she served as acting fourth horn for the Houston Symphony during their 2008/09 season.

Elizabeth graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Music in Horn Performance from Rice University, where she studied with Houston Symphony principal horn William VerMeulen. Upon graduation, she moved to Los Angeles to study with former San Francisco Symphony principal horn David Krehbiel. She won the position with the Kansas City Symphony during October of her first year and left school shortly thereafter to join the orchestra. During the summer of 2015, she served as the fourth horn for the Colorado Music Festival and has also played locally with Summerfest.

Elizabeth is a sought-after educator in the Kansas City area. She has taught at the Interlochen Arts Center Horn Intensive and given masterclasses at universities throughout the Kansas City area; several of her former students have received admission to major arts conservatory and university programs.

As a soloist, she has appeared with the Kansas City Symphony, Plymouth (Michigan) Symphony, Ann Arbor Concert Band and Plymouth Community Band. Former teachers also include Louis Stout, Corbin Wagner and William Brown. Elizabeth resides in Overland Park with her husband and three young children.



KRISTIN VELICER

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL SECOND VIOLIN

Kristin Velicer is the assistant principal second violinist with the Kansas City Symphony. She has performed and toured internationally with numerous major orchestras including the Houston Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra and Grant Park Symphony Orchestra. She has been a featured soloist with both the Kansas City Symphony and National Repertory Orchestra in Colorado and is a guest artist with the Summerfest Concert Series in Kansas City. Kristin has appeared on National Public Radio as a featured soloist and chamber musician on “Performance Today” and “Houston in Concert.” She was an invited performer in the Carnegie Hall tribute to Alexander Schneider, founder of the New York String Orchestra Seminar. Kristin served on the faculty of the Rocky Mountain Summer Conservatory in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, where she also performed with the Strings Festival. Additional summer festival appearances include the Sunflower Music Festival and the Blossom Music Festival. She holds a bachelor’s degree in violin performance from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, where she studied with Kathleen Winkler. While at Oberlin, she received the prestigious Conservatory Dean’s Talent Award. Kristin later received her master’s degree from the Rice University Shepherd School of Music, where she studied with Raphael Fliegel and Kathleen Winkler.



MINHYE HELENA CHOI

SECOND VIOLIN

A native of Seoul, South Korea, violinist Minhye Helena Choi began her musical studies at age 5. After winning major competitions in Seoul, she continued her studies at the Young Artist Performance Academy at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. She has won top prizes at multiple Canadian music competitions, among others. She has appeared as a soloist with the Cathedral Bluffs Symphony and the Canadian Sinfonietta and has given a solo recital at the Glenn Gould Recital Hall. An avid chamber and orchestra musician from a young age, she has participated in music festivals such as Tanglewood, Schleswig-Holstein, Academia Chigiana and Banff Centre. Minhye holds degrees from the Peabody Conservatory and Yale University, studying with Victor Danchenko and Syoko Aki. She was a member of the Canton and Akron symphonies while she was a student pursuing an artist diploma at the Cleveland Institute of Music. She joined the Kansas City Symphony in 2014. In the summer of 2017, Minhye joined the faculty of the ENCORE chamber music festival in Cleveland, where she regularly performs chamber music and teaches young talents.



JENIFER HOUCK

VIOLA

Originally from Pismo Beach, California, Jenifer Houck began studying the violin at age 5, under the tutelage of Diane Byington. Avidly performing around the Central Coast while growing up, Jenifer won prizes in several competitions, including the National Exchange Club. At age 11, she performed in the Disney National Youth Orchestra under conductors Jung-Ho Pak, Daniel Hege and Henry Mancini. During this time, she also actively performed in musical theater, commercials and TV shows. Throughout high school Jenifer won spots in the All-State Orchestra and Choir. Officially switching to the viola at 19, she completed her undergraduate work at Southern Methodist University as a student of Barbara Sudweeks. Jenifer has soloed with several orchestras, and before coming to Kansas City was co-principal of the New World Symphony (Miami, Florida) and the Verbier Orchestra (Switzerland), as well as frequently subbing with the Dallas Symphony. In Kansas City, Jenifer enjoys trying new restaurants, kayaking and playing chamber music with her quartet. Her other hobbies include crocheting, obsessing over her dogs, Grady and Franklin, and reading, but most of all she enjoys traveling with her husband, Alex. In the past few years, they have traveled to Alaska, Mexico, fifteen European countries and several countries in Africa. Jenifer joined the Kansas City Symphony in January of 2008.



MEREDITH MCCOOK

CELLO

Meredith McCook was born in Tyler, Texas, and joined the cello section of the Kansas City Symphony in 2015. Before playing in Kansas City, she played with the New World Symphony in Miami under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas for four years. She completed her master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music in New York, where she studied with Alan Stepansky, and she received her bachelor's degree from the University of North Texas, where she studied with Eugene Osadchy. Meredith has performed at numerous festivals including Spoleto, Artosphere, Thy (Denmark), Tanglewood Music Center, Music Academy of the West, Canada's Young Artists' Programme, Kennedy Center, Domaine Forget and Summit. She has been assistant principal cello with the Britt Summer Festival in Oregon since 2014. She also has studied with David Geber and Hans Jensen, and was a winner of the University of North Texas concerto competition, the Young Texas Artists competition and the Manhattan School of Music's Fuchs chamber music competition. When not playing with the Kansas City Symphony, Meredith also enjoys teaching, playing chamber music, playing in her cello duo ("2CellosKC") with Kansas City Symphony Associate Principal Cellist Susie Yang, and playing with her two dogs — a Chesapeake Bay Retriever and a Sheepadoodle.



JUN IWASAKI

CONCERTMASTER, MILLER NICHOLS CHAIR

Jun Iwasaki was appointed concertmaster of the Kansas City Symphony by Music Director Michael Stern and joined the Symphony at the beginning of the 2022/23 season. A graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music's prestigious Concertmaster Academy, he has been hailed for his combination of dazzling technique and lyrical musicianship. In a review of his performance at the Mimir Chamber Music Festival, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram called him "the magician of the evening. He could reach into his violin and pull out bouquets of sound, then reach behind your ear and touch your soul."

Prior to joining the Kansas City Symphony, Jun served as concertmaster of the Nashville Symphony from 2011 to 2022 and the Oregon Symphony from 2007 to 2011. Throughout his career, he has appeared with numerous other orchestras, including the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Blossom Festival Orchestra, Rome (Georgia) Philharmonic, New Bedford Symphony, Canton Symphony, Richardson Symphony, Cleveland Pops Orchestra, Plano Symphony Orchestra and Huntsville Symphony. In addition, he has served as guest concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony, Gulbenkian Orchestra (Portugal), São Paulo Symphony Orchestra (Brazil), Santa Barbara Symphony, National Arts Centre Orchestra (Ottawa) and Canton (Ohio) Symphony Orchestra.

As a chamber musician, Jun has been a part of the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, La Jolla Summerfest, Chamber Music Northwest, Mainly Mozart, Chamber Music International and Mimir Chamber Music Festival, among others.



SEAN CHEN

PIANO

A “thoughtful musician well beyond his years” (The Republic), pianist Sean Chen shares his “alluring, colorfully shaded renditions” (New York Times) and “genuinely sensitive” (LA Times) playing with audiences around the world in solo and chamber recitals, concerto performances and masterclasses, after having won the 2013 American Piano Awards, placing third at the 2013 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition and being named a 2015 Annenberg Fellow. He is the Jack Strandberg/Missouri Endowed Chair Associate Professor of Piano at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory, and has performed with many prominent orchestras, including the Fort Worth, Indianapolis, Kansas City, San Diego, Knoxville, Hartford, Louisiana Philharmonic, Milwaukee, North Carolina, Pasadena, Phoenix, Santa Fe and New West symphony orchestras, as well as the chamber orchestras of Philadelphia, Indianapolis and South Bay. He has collaborated with such esteemed conductors as Leonard Slatkin, Michael Stern, Gerard Schwarz, Nicholas McGegan, Miguel Harth-Bedoya and Marcelo Lehninger. Sean is married to Kansas City Symphony first violinist Betty Chen.



KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY



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Disney's The Muppet Christmas Carol in Concert

NOV. 27, 2026 AT 7 PM

NOV. 28, 2026 AT 1 PM AND 7 PM

NOV. 29, 2026 AT 2 PM



Cody Fry Christmas

DEC. 11, 2026 AT 8 PM



The Polar Express in Concert

DEC. 23, 2026 AT 7 PM

DEC. 24, 2026 AT 11 AM



Handel's Messiah

DEC. 4, 2026 AT 7 PM

DEC. 5, 2026 AT 7 PM

DEC. 6, 2026 AT 2 PM



Christmas Festival

DEC. 17, 2026 AT 7 PM

DEC. 18, 2026 AT 7 PM

DEC. 19, 2026 AT 1 PM AND 7 PM

DEC. 20, 2026 AT 2 PM AND 7 PM

GET TICKETS AT KCSYMPHONY.ORG

Christmas Festival performances supported by UMB

Handel's Messiah, Cody Fry Christmas, Christmas Festival and The Polar Express in Concert is generously sponsored by NTDF Neighborhood Tourist Development Fund Kansas City