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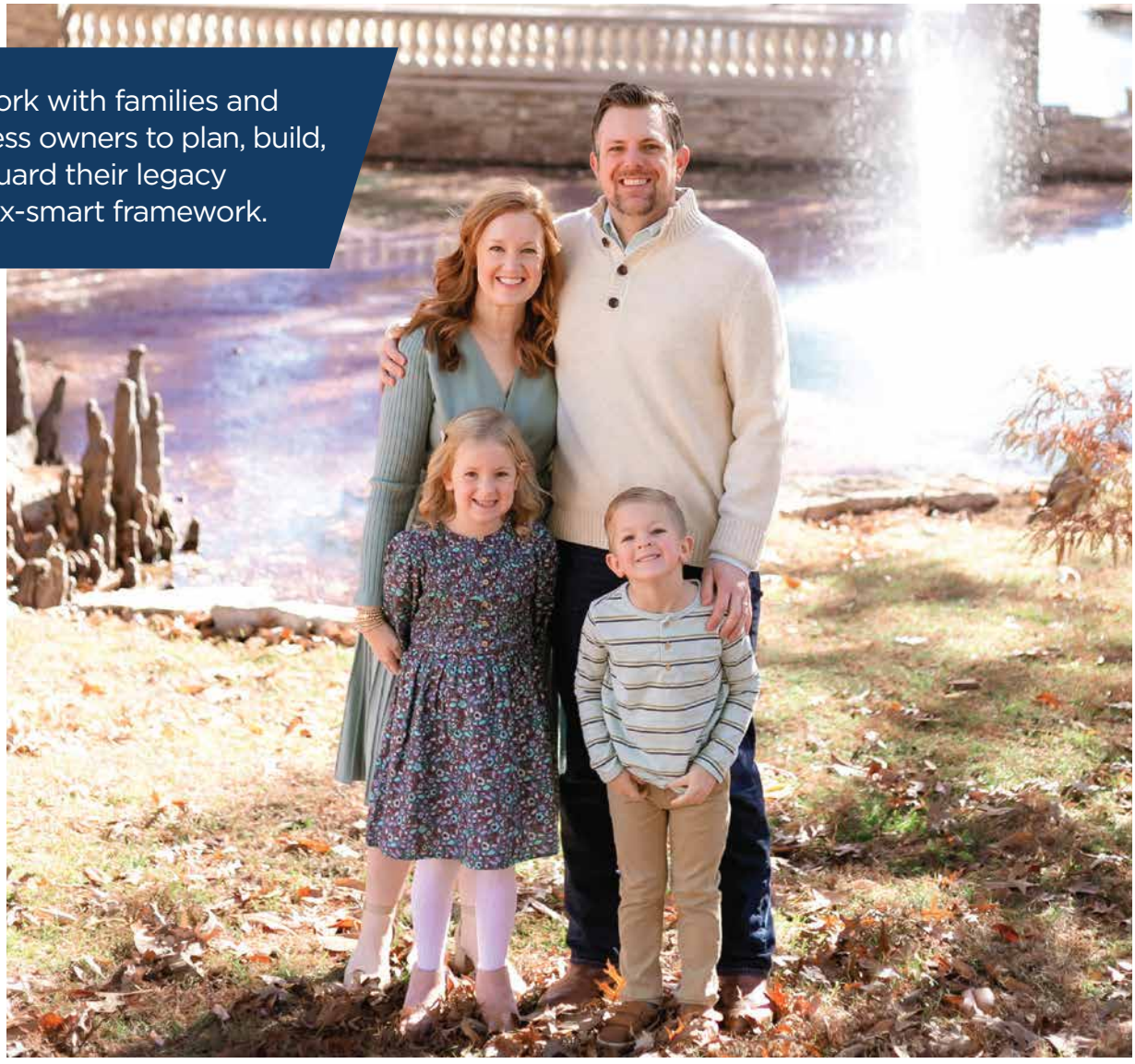
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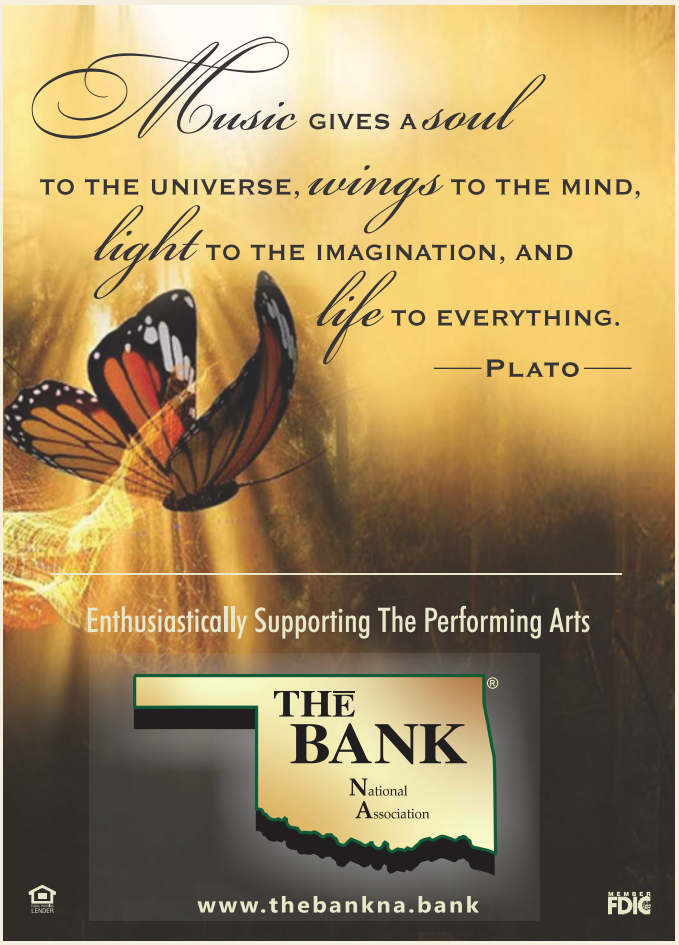
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Like most performing arts organizations, we rely on our family of loyal donors to help us continue to grow as a cultural destination, attracting an international roster of superb artists and performers to the center through prestigious partnerships.
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For information, contact Amy Miller at amiller@osugiving.com or 405.385.2139.







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THE FOUNDATION FOR THE MCKNIGHT CENTER The McKnight Foundation exists to manage and operate The McKnight Center for the Performing Arts at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma. The McKnight Foundation is governed by an eight-member board of trustees and an executive director. The Foundation is responsible for the operation and programming of The McKnight Center.

LOCATION & BOX OFFICE HOURS The Box Office is located in The McKnight Center at 705 W University Ave, Stillwater, Ok 74074. Box Office hours: Mon-Fri, 12pm-6pm and two hours prior to showtime for McKnight Center season events. The Box Office opens one hour prior to Greenwood School of Music events. Telephone: (405) 744-9999. E-mail: info@mcknightcenter.org. To get up-to-date information on performances and events, please subscribe to our broadcast e-mail online at McKnightCenter.org.

PARKING Convenient parking is available for a fee in the adjacent 4th Ave Garage, accessed from 4th Ave or S Ramsey Street. Parking may also be available for free on certain city and campus streets. All parking is first come, first served.

ADMISSION & LATE SEATING Everyone, including children of any age, must have an individual ticket to enter the theater. All tickets must be scanned upon entry to the theater and tickets may be scanned only once.

The lobby opens two hours prior to an event. Theater doors open 30 minutes prior to curtain time. Latecomers may not be seated until an appropriate moment or asked to sit in a different location than printed on the ticket.

TICKET DONATIONS & EXCHANGES Tickets may be donated for a tax-deductible donation or designated as a complimentary ticket for student use. Subject to availability, tickets may be exchanged to an alternate production of the same performance (may incur additional prices and fees). Requests for donations or exchanges must be made 48 hours prior to the event date. Visit McKnightCenter.org for details or contact the Box Office at (405) 744-9999.

TOURS Tours of The McKnight Center are offered free of charge and last approximately 45-60 minutes. Scheduled tours occur every Tuesday at 2 P.M. and meet at the grand staircase in the lobby. Arrangements for private tours may be made by calling (405) 744-6820 or visiting McKnightCenter.org.

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES The McKnight Center facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities. Please ask about wheelchair-accessible seating when purchasing your ticket. Accessible parking is located on every level of the 4th Avenue Garage. The Hester Street entrance offers a passenger pick up and drop off lane, and the lobby is accessible by ramp and power-assist doors. Restroom facilities are located on both sides of the lobby and mezzanine levels. Service animals (dogs) for guests with disabilities are permitted. All other animals are prohibited. All service animals (dogs) must remain under the control of the handler at all times. The McKnight Center features induction loop technology for the deaf and hard of hearing. Inquire at Coat Check for assistance connecting. Devices are provided at no cost.

LOST & FOUND If you are seeking lost items, please contact the House Manager at (405) 744-6820.

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INCLEMENT WEATHER Performances are rarely canceled due to inclement weather. Under most circumstances the show will go on as planned. In the event of inclement weather, please plan accordingly and allow for extra travel time.

CAMPUS POLICIES Oklahoma State University is designated as a tobacco free campus. Tobacco and smoking preparation (electronic cigarettes, vapor devices, chewing tobacco, etc.) use is prohibited on university property, including in and around The McKnight Center for the Performing Arts.

Artists, events, times, and prices are subject to change without notice.

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Thank you to our generous donors



Welcome

to The McKnight Center's 2024-2025 Season!



Happy New Year! I hope you and your family enjoyed a wonderful holiday season, full of music and sweet memories. Maybe you're in the audience today because someone gifted you tickets – lucky you! We're thrilled to share special moments with you that only art and entertainment can provide.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra returns this January for their second tour to The McKnight Center. What a way to start the new year! When we first partnered with this incredible ensemble in 2023 for a day of masterclasses and a concert, it was their first visit to Oklahoma since 1987. In fact, this year's residency will be only their fourth time performing in our state. Their performances in Stillwater are part of a national tour that includes just six cities. We are so honored to be among the chosen communities that will savor the privilege of experiencing this distinguished orchestra.

With this visit to Stillwater, the symphony has expanded their residency, adding a second concert (each with unique programming) and two days of masterclasses for OSU's Greenwood School of Music students. Masterclasses will be offered for 14 instruments, led by principal musicians who have a passion for inspiring and mentoring the next generation of artists.



TODD ROSENBERG

Dylan Halliday learns from trombonist Michael Mulcahy during a 2023 masterclass

We have a profound belief in the power of building connections that go deeper than what our audiences see onstage to offer learning opportunities for students that are unique to their experience at OSU. In 2023, student Dylan Halliday was selected to perform in a masterclass with Chicago Symphony trombonist Michael Mulcahy. Of the masterclass experience, Dylan said "hearing how his brain works is like coming across a pot of gold." That single masterclass began a turning point for Dylan's education and career, leading him to be accepted for graduate study at Northwestern University, where Michael leads the trombone studio.



TODD ROSENBERG

OSU students learn from Chicago Symphony Orchestra musicians during masterclasses in 2023.

I know that great things are in store for Dylan, and I can't wait to receive updates on his progress and accomplishments. Every year, more than 1,000 OSU students are impacted by opportunities to learn directly from our visiting artists. Dylan's story is one of many, and I know that this year's residency will abound with similar magical moments.

As an educator, Michael says, "I want every student to leave better, or wiser, or more enlightened." I hope the same for each member of our audience throughout the season. Settle into your seat, and please, enjoy the performance.

Mark A. Blakeman

MARK A. BLAKEMAN

Marilynn and Carl Thoma Executive Director

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ON STAGE

This month at The McKnight Center



Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti, Music Director Emeritus for Life

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra returns to The McKnight Center for its second engagement with Maestro Muti at the podium. The orchestra will perform two unique concerts, featuring music from Bellini, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Verdi, and more.

While in Stillwater the orchestra will also provide masterclasses in 14 instruments for OSU music students as part of an on-site residency. Masterclasses are open to the public for observation and are free to attend.

Preludes: Pre-Concert Conversations

Join us in the Recital Hall one hour before the concert for an intimate discussion with special guests from the orchestra, hosted by OSU professor Dr. Thomas Lanners. Preludes is free to attend – no ticket needed.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23

Muti Conducts Tchaikovsky

7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24

European Voyage

7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall

Both concerts are sold out! Contact the box office to be placed on a waitlist.

The Magic of Jen Kramer

Just Announced!

The magic of Las Vegas comes to Stillwater! Magician Jen Kramer turns the impossible into the impossible-to-ignore, wowing audiences with her contagious smile and world-class sleight-of-hand. Whether she's transforming $1 bills into $100s or creating a larger-than-life social media page on stage, Jen brings a next-generation exuberance into the tradition-based magic world. Her headlining Vegas show features mind-boggling magic, audience participation, and jaw dropping fun for all!

Jen was the first woman to be named Best Magician in the 2024 *Las Vegas Weekly* Best of Vegas Awards, and her show is a Tripadvisor Travelers' Choice Award Winner.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29

7 P.M. | Performance Hall



Martha Graham Dance Company



Known as the "Mother of Modern Dance," Martha Graham was a pioneer in creating a radically new and uniquely American style of dance. The Martha Graham Dance Company created GRAHAM100 – The First and The Future, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Martha Graham's work and legacy as one of the most influential forces of the 20th century. The GRAHAM100 program builds on the Company's legacy of innovation and its present and future vision based on this incomparable legacy.

The evening's program includes two works by Graham, including her seminal *Appalachian Spring*, with music by Aaron Copland; *We the People*, by choreographer Jamar Roberts, with music by Rhiannon Giddens, and more.

Preludes: Pre-Concert Conversations

Join us in the Recital Hall one hour before the concert for an intimate discussion with special guests from the dance company, hosted by OSU professor Dr. Thomas Lanners. Preludes is free to attend – no ticket needed.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8

7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall



Jennifer Koh

Recital Hall Roundup Concert Series

GRAMMY® Award-winning violinist Jennifer Koh is recognized for her intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance. She has expanded the contemporary violin repertoire through a wide range of commissioning projects and has premiered more than 100 works written especially for her. Named *Musical America*'s 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, Koh has won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, Concert Artists Guild Competition, and an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Jennifer will give a thrilling one-hour concert featuring works by Bach, Philip Glass, and Missy Mazzoli.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11

7 P.M. | Recital Hall



An Evening with Renée Elise Goldsberry

Special Valentine's Day Concert!

Renée Elise Goldsberry is a Tony and GRAMMY® Award-winning actress and singer currently starring on the critically acclaimed Netflix comedy series *Girls5Eva*, for which she has received Critics Choice and TCA Award nominations for her breakout performance as Wickie Roy. She won the Tony and a GRAMMY® for originating the role of Angelica Schuyler in the groundbreaking Broadway phenom *Hamilton*, also receiving a Primetime Emmy nomination for Disney+'s filmed version of the musical. A Broadway veteran, her memorable stage work includes seminal musicals such as *Rent*, *The Color Purple*, *The Lion King*, and *Dreamgirls*, among countless others. She'll perform her favorite songs from Broadway and beyond for this special Valentine's Day concert.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14

7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall



CHICAGO

CHICAGO is still the one musical with everything that makes Broadway shimmy-shake: a universal tale of fame, fortune, and all that jazz, with one showstopping song after another and the most astonishing dancing you've ever seen.

In the whirlwind of Chicago's Jazz Age, two of the Cook County Jail's most notorious murderesses—vaudeville star Velma Kelly and chorus girl Roxie Hart—become fierce rivals as they compete for headlines amidst a media frenzy.

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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22

1 P.M. & 7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23

1 P.M. | Performance Hall

SPOTLIGHT

On upcoming events



Chamber Music at The McKnight

Featuring Anne-Marie McDermott, piano; Edward Arron, cello; Jose Franch-Ballester, clarinet; Chad Hoopes, violin; Yura Lee, violin; Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, viola; and Ryan Williamson, horn

The McKnight Center's annual Chamber Music residency is known for wowing audiences with the magnetic charisma of its guest artists and the inspiring repertory of its musical lineup.

"Lavish Passions" features works hand selected by Anne-Marie McDermott and celebrates the passionate melodies of the Roma and eastern European cultures, featuring the magnificent Dohnányi Sextet and more.

"Musical Magic," part of the Roundup Concert Series, includes an intimate concert of duos, trios, and more, featuring the Moszkowski Suite and the luscious Elgar Piano Quintet.

While in Stillwater the Chamber Music musicians will also provide multiple masterclasses for OSU music students as part of an on-site residency. Masterclasses are open to the public for observation and are free to attend; check McKnightCenter.org and our social media channels for an updated schedule of events.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1

Lavish Passion

7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall

Preludes: Pre-Concert Conversations

Join us in the Recital Hall one hour before the Saturday concert for an intimate discussion with Anne-Marie McDermott and special guests, hosted by OSU professor Dr. Thomas Lanners. Preludes is free to attend – no ticket needed.

TUESDAY, MARCH 4

Musical Magic

7 P.M. | Recital Hall



Priscilla Block

Country artist Priscilla Block draws listeners in with her unfiltered, relatable songwriting, and catchy melodies. Her honest and up front approach promotes self-love, empowerment, and acceptance through her own blend of country pop and southern rock, dubbed "the Block Party sound."

Recognized by the ACMs with a nomination for New Female Artist of the Year and by CMT for Breakthrough Video of the Year as well as Collaborative Video of the Year, Priscilla has commandeered her place in country music with her fervent fan base and unmitigated honesty in songs.

SATURDAY, MARCH 29

7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall



Yarn/Wire

Recital Hall Roundup Concert Series

Described by *The New York Times* as "key figures from the contemporary music scene... with unmistakable devotion and excitement," Yarn/Wire is a New York-based percussion and piano quartet dedicated to the promotion of creative, experimental new music. Since its formation in 2005, the ensemble has garnered widespread acclaim for its steadfast commitment to adventurous compositions and unique collaborative approach to music making. With a worldwide presence, Yarn/Wire strives to connect with audiences, building community to help new compositions realize their full creative potential.

TUESDAY, APRIL 1

7 P.M. | Recital Hall



FRANK STEWART

Yefim Bronfman

Internationally recognized as one of today's most acclaimed and admired pianists, Yefim Bronfman stands among a handful of artists regularly sought by festivals, orchestras, conductors, and recital series. His commanding technique, power and exceptional lyrical gifts are consistently acknowledged by the press and audiences alike. Mr. Bronfman performs with "dazzling form, unleashing... an impossible lightness" (*The Washington Post*), and is widely regarded as one of the most talented virtuoso pianists performing today.

THURSDAY, APRIL 3

7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall



Mean Girls

Direct from Broadway, *MEAN GIRLS* is the hilarious hit musical from book writer Tina Fey (*30 Rock*), composer Jeff Richmond (*Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*), lyricist Nell Benjamin (*Legally Blonde*) and original director and choreographer Casey Nicholaw (*The Book of Mormon*).

The story of a naïve newbie who falls prey to a trio of lionized frenemies, *MEAN GIRLS* "delivers with immense energy, a wicked sense of humor and joyful inside-jokery." *USA Today* says, "We'll let you in on a little secret, because we're such good friends: GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!"

TUESDAY, APRIL 15
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16

7:30 P.M. | Performance Hall

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Bach to Bach with Jennifer Koh



JÜRGEN FRANK

BY NANCY C. HERMANN

Step inside the creative life of violinist Jennifer Koh and buckle up. She's intense. Her energy is limitless. She can perform a 60-minute solo in a Philip Glass opera while wearing a mustache, and three hours of non-stop Bach. She loves to eat. To dance. She does the very things that scare her and chooses vulnerability as a way to tap into the expressive depths of music. Her performances are wholly unforgettable.

On a wintry day at home in New York City, Koh is herding projects and programs at her new post as Artistic Director of the Fortas Chamber Music Concerts at Kennedy Center. She took a break to chat with *Ovations!* about what matters to her most. Known for her musical virtuosity and creative instincts, Koh dedicates her offstage work to addressing inclusivity, social responsibility and human connection. A champion of contemporary composers, she's premiered more than 100 works written especially for her.

One of Koh's most valuable life lessons came from her mother, who fled North Korea with a small photograph as her only possession. She journeyed the length of her country to find safety and a better life. "Literally, when you're a refugee, you don't have anything. You've lost everything. You and I would say, 'Oh, I'm starving,' but she experienced hunger that is actual starvation," lamented Koh. "I think one of the things I admired the most about her was her determination."

After making her way to the U.S., Koh's mother worked as a nanny while earning her Ph.D. "That takes a lot of discipline. In her situation, she could not lose faith or the determination to go where she believed she wanted to go. I think that's a quality that has been instilled in me."

Growing up in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, Koh took up violin at age three, using the Suzuki method to get her start. She later attended Ohio's Oberlin College, earning a performance diploma and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature. "I think that music as well as literature has this ability to take you into spaces that you wouldn't necessarily be in, and you feel things and connect to things that you wouldn't necessarily feel every day," she said. "There's some kind of empathy that comes from living within a character's consciousness and within the world that the author has created. I think it's no different when it comes to music. It's a way to see the world in a new way — to experience emotions differently."

Koh made her orchestral debut with the Chicago Symphony at age 11, when she met Isaac Stern. He introduced her to Jaime Laredo, who would become her teacher at the Curtis Institute, along with Felix Galimir. By the time she was 18, she had learned to play all of the standard repertoire.

"I feel like my entire community of teachers and colleagues are with me every step of the way, and I believe in making space and giving a platform to as many

people as possible. Whenever there is something that goes well or kind of positive in terms of my career, I feel like I'm bringing everybody with me, and I hope that will give me more placement to give them a platform. But truly, I mean definitely in performances, one always plays for somebody in a sense. So, I do. I do play for my teachers."

When she was younger, Koh felt compelled to thank them, but at a loss as to how she could match what she'd been given. It was a kind of generosity, support and care that seemed impossible to pay back. "As I got older, I realized they also carved out a space for me in this music world. They advocated for me, and that did change the course of my life. I am very conscious of the choices and decisions I make because they can change the course of somebody's life. I don't think I would be a musician if it wasn't for the time and effort people so generously gave to me. So that's something I feel like, 'How can I not do this for others when this gift was given to me?'"

One of the ways Koh pays it forward is by showcasing contemporary composers like Missy Mazzoli. Koh was familiar with Mazzoli's work and, over Chinese food and cupcakes, the two forged a friendship and the seed for *Dissolve, O My Heart*. It's a piece that references Bach's Partita No. 2 in D Minor.

"One thing my close friends know is that I love eating. I love food," disclosed Koh, laughing. "So that was the beginning of our relationship — eating and sharing — that experience with friends," she recalled of her first meeting with Mazzoli. Subsequently, their friendship has included shared Thanksgiving dinners and numerous collaborations. Mazzoli has written several pieces specifically for Koh.

For the McKnight Center concert on February 11, Koh will bookend the evening with two signature Bach pieces, opening with Bach's Partita No. 3 in E Major, followed by Philip Glass's *Knee Play 2* and *Sarabande in Common Time.* The evening will close with Mazzoli's *Dissolve, O My Heart* and the Bach piece that inspired it. Mazzoli has called the last movement of Bach's Partita No. 2 in D Minor, the "Chaconne," "the most famous piece of solo violin literature in the world."

Koh first came in contact with Philip Glass when she auditioned for him and director Robert Wilson for the 2012 revival of *Einstein on the Beach*. Premiered by Glass in 1976, the year Koh was born, the opera has been described as a non-opera, sans beach, with nearly five hours of minimalist music. The work is essentially the thought processes of Einstein as he develops the atomic bomb. It references the terrifying 1960 nuclear war movie *On the Beach*.

Initially, Koh had qualms about taking on the title role of Einstein, which included acting while executing immensely difficult music. She later realized that attempting whatever you're scared of is an opportunity to grow. "After that experience, I try to do all of the things that I'm afraid of doing," she said.

Dressed as the famous physicist, Koh played for nearly an hour straight during the *Einstein* production. "I felt that 60-minute period, physically," she acknowledged. To transform her from an Asian woman to a paunchy white male took almost an hour alone. "I do remember thinking, 'Oh, my God. How do men with mustaches eat without getting stuff all over their mustaches?,'" Koh quipped.

Despite her trepidations, Koh's performance was lauded as technically masterful and deeply emotive.

"I felt like for this [McKnight Center] program, I kind of wanted to follow that relationship and create that kind of journey of Missy's piece *Dissolve, O My Heart*. That was the first work she wrote for me, and *Knee Play 2* [from *Einstein on the Beach*] that I'm also doing for this program, was the first piece where I got to know Philip [Glass] and where Philip got to know me, musically. He later wrote *Sarabande* for me. Both Missy and Philip know that I have such a close relationship to Bach, and so both *Dissolve, O My Heart* and *Sarabande* are almost directly in conversation with Bach."

Koh became very close with director Robert Wilson and choreographer Lucinda Childs during *Einstein on the Beach*. That connection was a basis for Bach 6 Solo, a project that took Koh, Wilson and Childs ten years to complete. It involved four dancers moving to Bach's six Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, played in succession by Koh. The performance, Koh said, was her opportunity to develop her most intimate, deep connection with Bach. The piece premiered in Paris in 2021.

"In order to play that music in the way that I believe in, you have to enter a place of being where all of your skin has been removed, in a way," described Koh. "Especially playing Bach's marathon, about three hours long. There's something about that experience — the intensity of it — the vulnerability of it."

Koh founded the ARCO Collaborative in 2014, promoting inclusivity in classical music by commissioning and developing works by underrepresented composers. Led by Koh, ARCO undertook a large and grati-



JÜRGEN FRANK

fying project during the Pandemic. It was an extremely difficult time for musicians, and particularly for young composers trying to make a start. Life in the heart of New York City was harsh in terms of loss of life and human interaction, recounted Koh. She remembers a harrowing six weeks alone in her apartment, listening to sirens and not having close contact with another soul. In 2020, ARCO created the outreach she titled *Alone, Together*. It involved 20 established composers donating a 30-second work for solo violin, who also recommended a freelance composer to write a short piece on commission. Koh then premiered both the donated works and commissioned pieces on YouTube.

"I think the whole point of our lives is 'what have we done for others? What have we done for other people?'" she said.

The *New York Times* called Koh's *Alone, Together* digital album "a marvel in a time of crisis." She performed music from it at the 2022 Grammy Awards. Comprising 39 world-premiere recordings, the album won Koh a Grammy for "Best Classical Instrumental Solo."

Following lockdown, Koh enjoyed a renewed appreciation for music as something that is communal. Whether she's in the audience or onstage, she's keenly aware of the audience's presence.

"I can hear them breathing. I can *feel* them breathing," she said. When she returned to the stage post-Pandemic, her first concert was performing Solo Bach. "I remember how overwhelming it was because I hadn't felt that for such a long time. And it changes everything. It changes like the timing between things. It was almost shocking. Conceptually, I understood that, but then it was like so clear. It's remarkable really. It is an incredible communal experience you're in if you're in an audience. Certainly, as a performer, I feel it *so* much."



JÜRGEN FRANK

Koh says she began to understand her mother through the project *Everything Rises*, a 2022 multi-media performance collaboration with bass-baritone Davóne Tines. The piece draws on family histories, using her mother's voice and those of Tines' grandmothers. It speaks to themes of identity and race, particularly for musicians of color who navigate the classical music world. More currently, Koh released an album in June 2024, titled *Trouble,* with Harvard professor, composer, pianist and writer Vijay Iyer. Combining jazz, classical and contemporary music, the album's centerpiece is a violin concerto dedicated to Vincent Chin, a victim of racial violence.

In addition to the shared project, Iyer and Koh bonded over the loss of their fathers. Her own father's death impacted her deeply. She traveled to Korea, where she felt a connection to him, and grieved his loss. Providing a touch of levity to our conversation, she added, "I ate Korean barbecue and Korean fried chicken every single day!" An all-day festival at the Kennedy Center that Koh created and curated in November 2024, called Sounds of US, included Koh playing *Scenes from Living and Dying*, composed for Koh by Missy Mazzoli. She explored the concept of death through the music and its impact on the living.

"I guess I'm making peace with grief because that's a universal experience," offered Koh. "In any case, I think I'm beginning to realize that every single project is actually incredibly personal, but I think, in the end, is universal."

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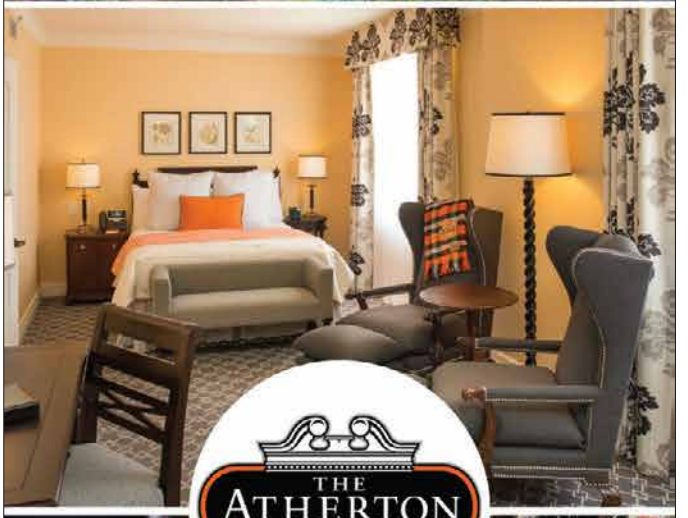


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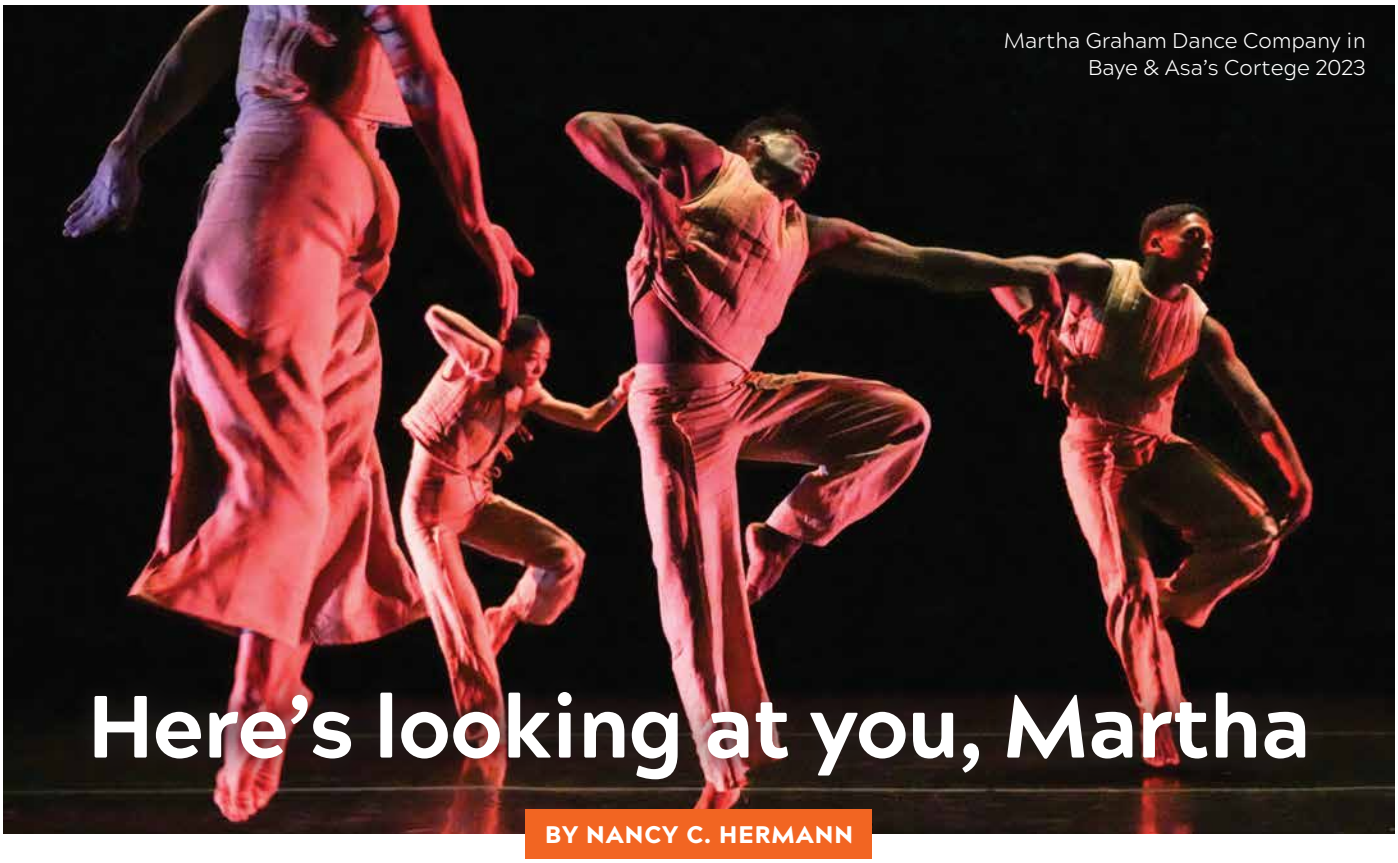


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Martha Graham Dance Company in Baye & Asa's Cortege 2023

STEVEN PISANO

Here's looking at you, Martha

BY NANCY C. HERMANN

The phenomenal Martha Graham Dance Company will soon mark its centennial anniversary. Founded by Graham in 1926, America's oldest dance troupe is commemorating its exalted history during a three-year period by staging performances throughout the world.

"We hope to celebrate our entire 100 years, which we couldn't fit into one year," said Janet Eilber during an *Ovations!* interview. A former Graham dancer, she's helmed the Company as Artistic Director since 2005. "There were so many aspects of the Graham legacy. It's got so much breadth and depth, and we just needed that time."

THE COMPANY PARTY

Eilber explained that the comprehensive celebration, titled GRAHAM100, is divided into three seasons. The first, "American Legacies," is about Graham's social activism, her modernism and her many American collaborators involved in the dance revolution created by Graham during the 1930s.

Next, "The American Arts," outlined Eilber, "moves into dances of the mind — the psychological ballets and the discoveries about space and time that Graham initiated in the 1940s and '50s." GRAHAM100 takes a final look at its founder's work with "The Masterpieces." Said Eilber, "We'll be dancing the best of the best."

All contributing to the big party, PBS is creating a documentary about Graham and the anniversary. A coffee-table book will be available, and the New York Public Library is doing an exhibit. In addition, the Martha Graham Dance Company (MGDC) plans to license the grand ballets to students and to companies around the world. Two new pieces, commissioned for GRAHAM100, will be seen at the McKnight Center on February 8. Eilber noted that there are many moving parts in the anniversary project, with several cultural partners involved. "We're just hoping to make people aware of the many facets of the legacy."

In addition to her years with MGDC, Eilber danced under the direction of Bob Fosse and Agnes DeMille, and enjoyed starring roles on the big screen and television. Having performed all of Graham's iconic pieces during her career, she was a featured dancer for the Company's 50th anniversary performance in 1976.

"I'm uniquely positioned in the center of our legacy," she said. "I knew many of the generations of dancers who came before me, who were my teachers and mentors. They were the original cast members of some of the great Graham works. And, of course, I've known almost everyone who's been in the Company since I was, so it's that kind of overarching view of our family — generations of Graham dancers," she reflected. "It really is like a family because of the oral tradition of dance. It's passed on personally from one generation to the next. Body to body. The dancers wear the same costumes. They are literally following in the footsteps of the generations before them as they learn the choreography that was created 70 or 80 years ago for other dancers."

GRAHAM UNGUARDED

Eilber knew Graham (1894-1991) well, and at one point accompanied her to the White House when Graham received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Gerald Ford. As Eilber and Graham rode together in the limousine after the ceremony, Graham shared that during her White House red carpet moment, when she was flanked by uniformed soldiers and flags, that she wished her mother could have seen her. It was a vulnerable moment for the woman who fearlessly, it seemed, had forged a frontier in art.

More broadly, "Graham was whatever she needed to be in any given moment," remembered Eilber. "As a director, she could read people. She understood people by just looking at them. The way they moved. So, as a director, if she knew you needed a tyrant, she'd be a tyrant. If you needed a mother, she would be that mother. She was totally intuitive about interactions with people, and not just with other dancers, but with people she sat next to at a dinner table, and then walked home with a big donation to the Company," Eilber added.

"What people don't know about her is that

she could be *very* funny. She had a great sense of humor and loved a good joke. She could be very flirtatious with men. She loved men. And, yes, she was eloquent and insightful. The direction she would give you in the studio was life-changing."

Graham was the daughter of a physician who studied nervous disorders. He observed closely how his patients moved, as Graham would later observe the human body in all states. "The Graham theatre speaks only if the movement is totally supported by the internal image," instructed Eilber, "by the 'inner-landscape' as Martha used to call it."

"Contraction and release" are central to the Graham dance vocabulary. The movement is based on the breath. Graham had discovered a connection through her studies between emotion, body language and breath. Also, key to her technique was the idea that the torso was the body's motor. The core muscles and the weight of the body propel movement. Graham liked to describe it by conjuring the image of a baseball pitcher's windup and the powerful release of the ball. Also notable in Graham's work is the "parallel position," which Eilber described as similar to the stance one might take on skis. Graham was interested in "representing both the joys and effort of being a human being," said Eilber. "She struggled to find a physicality that would represent that."

ERRAND INTO THE MAZE

Graham's technique will be on display during the McKnight Center program with one of her most iconic works, *Errand into the Maze* [1947]. The title came from the opening line of a poem, written by Ben Belitt, which was dedicated to Graham. The source material for the piece is the Greek story of Theseus, who is sent into a maze to confront and destroy the Minotaur. The myths Graham incorporated in her work tapped the elemental, primary emotions that Graham was trying to express. In Graham's iteration of Theseus's quest, he is replaced by a woman protagonist, and the quest is about confronting her own inner demons, symbolized by the "Creature of Fear."

"One of Graham's innovations was actually choreographing the mind. She takes you inside a woman's imagination or inside her memories," said Eilber. "That errand into the maze is inside her fears. It's a psychological confrontation."

The choreography for *Errand Into the Maze* during GRAHAM100 is exactly as Graham created it, elaborated Eilber. Since the original sets were lost during Hurricane Sandy in 2012, they've been re-envisioned. "We stripped away the sets. We went for much simpler costumes and wanted a different design so that audiences can appreciate the incredible modernism of the choreography itself. That's the version we are bringing to Oklahoma."

CORTEGE

The second piece on the February McKnight program is *Cortege*, choreographed by the duo Amadi "Baye" Washington and Sam "Asa" Pratt. They've known each other since First Grade, noted Eilber. "It's remarkable to watch them work together. They're both wildly smart, intellectual and also very physical." The team took a deep dive into the Martha Graham archives, loosely referencing Graham's *Cortege of Eagles* in their new work.

"When I commission a new work, I really look for artists, choreographers, who work in as different a style from Martha Graham's as possible," emphasized Eilber. "I don't want anything that's Graham-esque, because I have Graham."

While Baye and Asa drew inspiration from Graham, their piece is entirely their own. Eilber described *Cortege* as having a very dynamic and physical vocabulary, which is quite different from Graham, she pointed out. "And yet, our dancers are remarkable in it."

The choreographers' electronic score sampled some of the music Graham had used in *Cortege of Eagles*, and they incorporated dance poses borrowed from her. *Cortege* references the Trojan War, which was a topic Graham addressed. Eilber believes that the tragedy of war – man's inhumanity to man – is a theme of the piece, and that it's also a reminder of how dark collective energy can be.

APPALACHIAN SPRING

One of Graham's most well-known and beloved works is *Appalachian Spring*, with music that won Aaron Copland the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1945. The title of the piece comes from a Hart Crane poem. Set in 19th-century Pennsylvania, its story concerns a young couple getting married, a threatening war and the restrictive community that impacts their wedded bliss. "Simple Gifts," a Shaker hymn from 1848, is a well-known segment of Copland's score.

As an inspiration to create the original set for *Appalachian Spring*, Graham and designer/sculptor Isamu Noguchi, went to the Museum of Modern Art to look at a sculpture by Alberto Giacometti. Though the original is long gone, the MGDC created one that the McKnight Center was eager to have on its stage. Eilber noted that the McKnight was able to raise the money needed to bring it. "So, we will have the *Appalachian Spring* set with us," she said.

Eilber thinks there is a real conversation between *Applachian Spring* and the last piece on the program, Jamar Roberts's *We the People*. "Martha, Copland and Noguchi created *Appalachian Spring* as their contribution to the war effort [1944]. It's about American hope and optimism and community, and in reaction to some of the darker sides of the American conversation that were happening in the early '40s during the war. That's true of Jamar's work as well. *We the People* is in reaction to some of the more difficult parts of the American conversation — nationalism, immigration and Civil Rights — which are very similar to what they were in the '40s. I think these two dances, which are wildly different in style, resonate with each other beautifully."

WE THE PEOPLE

When considering the piece that became *We the People*, Eilber first started with composer Rhiannon Giddens, who has won both a Grammy and a Pulitzer. Jamar Roberts's work with Giddens's music presented a challenge. He was essentially crafting a piece with serious themes, but the music, incorporating banjo in a sort of bluegrassy, sittin'-on-the-front-porch vibe was lighthearted. Even so, it proved to be a good combination, Eilber surmised, "because Jamar felt he had to work *against* the music." He basically had to layer the idea of protest into music that was much like a hoedown.

Roberts had been a dancer with Alvin Ailey for 20 years and then its resident choreographer. He came to mind, Eilber said, because he often uses jazz and popular music in his choreography. He also trained in the Graham technique. "The Graham vocabulary has always been in my body," he told the *New York Times*, "and it's always been in my work."

REFLECTION

Looking back over 100 years, it is difficult to imagine a time when there was not a wholly original American form of dance — not borrowed from the Europe or Asia, but gleaned from American ideals, viewpoints and experience. Through GRAHAM100, the evolution of modern dance beginning with Martha Graham is revisited and honored.

"America had become a world power after World War I, but we were still borrowing our art forms from other cultures, and it was a time for us to have our own forms of self-expression," remarked Eilber. In a time when O'Keefe, Hemingway, Frank Lloyd-Wright and Gershwin were defining America with their work, Graham did that for dance. "Martha's advice to dancers was 'know your country; know its rhythms; know its space; know the peoples who contribute to the American ethos; and make a dance form out of that."

One hundred years later, Graham still speaks to America's heart.

BUILDING A DEEPER APPRECIATION

Interview with Jonathan Drummond





Why do you support the McKnight Center?

Having had success with instrumental band music in high school, I had the good fortune to be recruited to be the Drum Major for the Cowboy Marching Band as a freshman and held that position for four years at Oklahoma State University. I also sang second tenor with the Concert Chorale, played my trombone in the Wind Ensemble and even sang the opening number for the Theater Department's production of *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* in my sophomore year. Prior to Ross and Billie McKnight's generous gift which inspired the incredible facility we have today, I had supported the OSU music department and had served on the OSU Friends of Music Board for many years. When the opportunity arose to become a Patron of The McKnight Center, my daughters and I knew that this project was one that we could wholeheartedly support. It combined all of our passions for the arts with an ability to support the student educational experience on campus.

Were the arts an important part of your childhood?

Music and the performing arts have always been a part of my life. My mother, Carol Ann Killian Drummond, was trained in classical ballet and taught for the Dorothy Lynch Studio for many years prior to establishing her Drummond School for Dance. She always utilized collaborative pianists in the studio for her students' lessons which allowed her to control the music's rhythm and tempo. I was fortunate to work as her pianist for four years. The immersive experience from the piano bench allowed me to participate in the students' experience which provided a much deeper appreciation for the art of ballet.

Our mother admired Moscelyne Larkin, who had founded the Tulsa Ballet with her husband Roman Jasinski; therefore, we were lucky to be able to attend many ballet performances as we were growing up. She taught all of us the value of expressing ourselves creatively. Unlike other dance studios, she wouldn't provide a revue-type recital to showcase her students but would actually choreograph adaptations of classical ballets like *Coppelia*, *The Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *Swan Lake*. Her many students from Osage County were introduced to these timeless works while learning to express themselves creatively through dance.

Why do you think The McKnight Center is an important part of Oklahoma State University?

One of the ultimate goals of a higher education is to allow a student to fully mature into a well-rounded person. The OSU Cowboy Code reminds us that "being a Cowboy isn't in our clothes, it's in our character." We develop our character by learning from people who are different from us and broadening our understanding of the world around us. The McKnight Center is a place for students to actually interact with world-class musicians through our residency workshops as well as personally performing in a world class venue. There are very few universities who have committed to bringing the caliber of programming and student interactions which we are able to experience within the halls of The McKnight Center. All members of the Oklahoma State Cowboy Family are able to enjoy the benefits that The McKnight Center makes possible through the collaboration of our faculty, staff, and students.

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Sunday, Jan. 26 at 5 PM, RH
** Faculty Recital: Susan Miranda, oboe*

Thursday, Jan. 30 at 5 PM, RH
Sophomore Recital: Alayna Tolbert, piano

FEBRUARY

Sunday, Feb. 2 at 5 PM, RH
Graduate Recital: Clayton Ford, clarinet

Sunday, Feb. 2 at 7:30 PM, RH
Graduate Recital: Andrew Deaver, trombone

Friday, Feb. 7 at 5 PM, RH
Freshman Recital: Eli Jim, piano

Sunday, Feb. 9 at 5 PM, RH
Junior Recital: Ainsley Carmichael, soprano

Sunday, Feb. 9 at 7:30 PM, RH
** Double Reed Faculty Recital*

Monday, Feb. 10 at 7:30 PM, PH
** Jazz Orchestra & Jazz Ensemble Concert*

Tuesday, Feb. 11 at 7:30 PM, PH
** Wind Ensemble Concert*

Thursday, Feb. 13 at 7:30 PM, RH
Percussion Ensemble Recital

Saturday, Feb. 15 at 5 PM, RH
** Faculty Recital: Dr. Tomomi Sato, piano*

Saturday, Feb. 15 at 7:30 PM, RH
Graduate Recital: Shuqi Cao, piano

Sunday, Feb. 16 at 5 PM, RH
Junior Recital: Connor Gilbert, trumpet

Sunday, Feb. 16 at 7:30 PM, RH
Senior Recital: Jonathan Hall, trumpet

Tuesday, Feb. 18 at 5 PM, RH
** Faculty Recital: Wendy Bickford, clarinet*

Tuesday, Feb. 18 at 7:30 PM, RH
Senior Recital: Isabella Trevino, flute

Sunday, Feb. 23 at 5 PM, RH
Senior Recital: Katherine Fox, oboe

Monday, Feb. 24 at 7:30 PM, PH
** Symphonic Band Concert*

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Saturday, October 12, 2024 | 7:30 PM

Claire Chase
Tuesday, October 22, 2024 | 7 PM

TINA: The Tina Turner Musical
Wednesday, November 6, 2024 | 7:30 PM
Thursday, November 7, 2024 | 7:30 PM

esperanza spalding
Friday, November 15, 2024 | 7:30 PM

Craig Taborn
Tuesday, November 19, 2024 | 7 PM

An Evening with Vince Gill
Friday, November 22, 2024 | 7:30 PM

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Thursday, December 5, 2024 | 7:30 PM

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Friday, January 24, 2025 | 7:30 PM

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Saturday, February 8, 2025 | 7:30 PM

Jennifer Koh
Tuesday, February 11, 2025 | 7 PM

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Friday, February 14, 2025 | 7:30 PM

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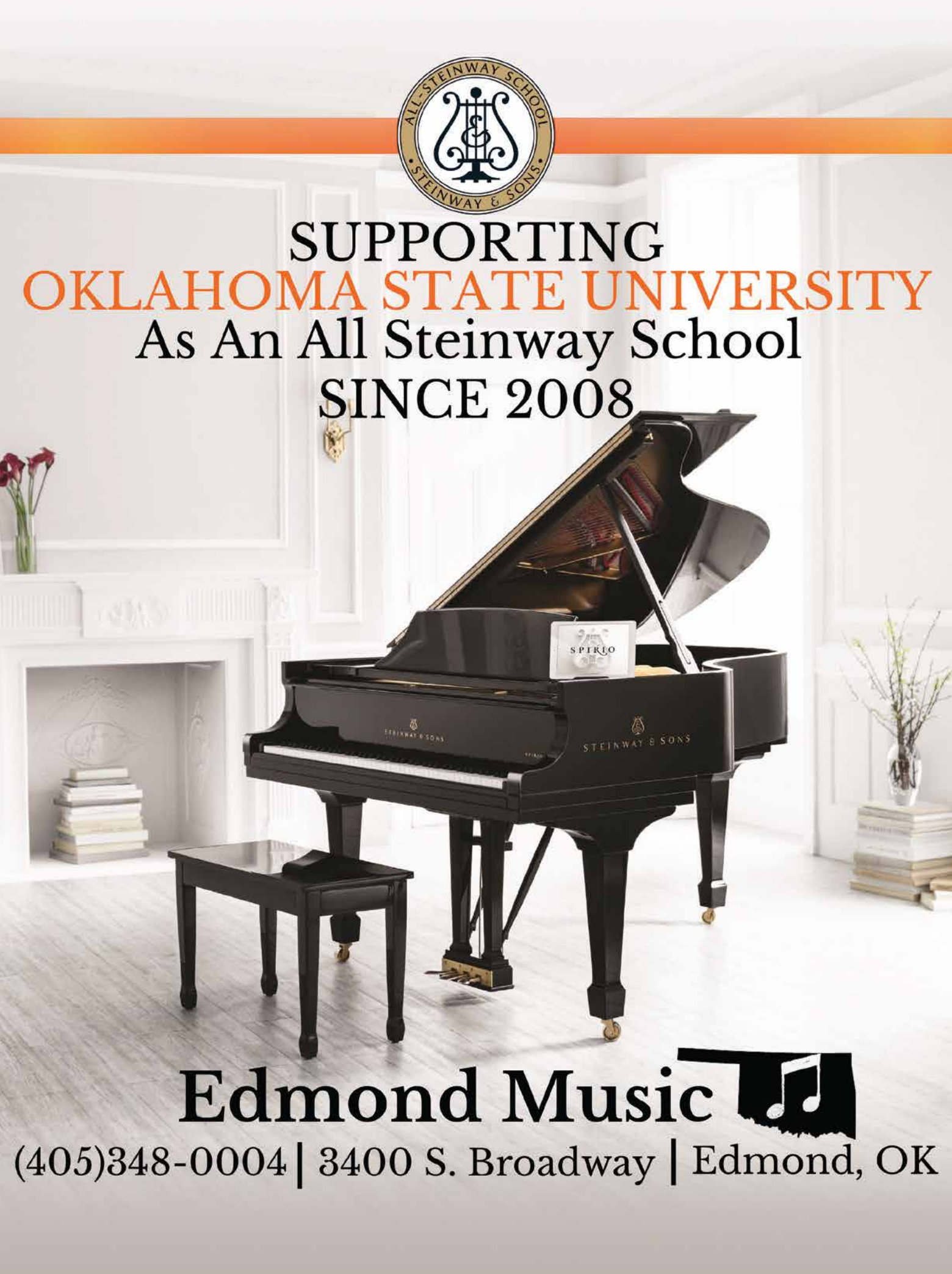
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