

# Stravinsky, Ravel & Strauss



CLASSICAL SERIES

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16 & 17, AT 8 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

HANS GRAF, *conductor*

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY CHORUS

TUCKER BIDDLECOMBE, *chorus director*

### RICHARD STRAUSS

*Serenade in E-flat Major, Op. 7*

### IGOR STRAVINSKY

*Symphony of Psalms*

Psalm 38:13-14

Psalm 39:2-4

Psalm 150

*Nashville Symphony Chorus*

– INTERMISSION –

### MAURICE RAVEL

*Daphnis et Chloé*

*Nashville Symphony Chorus*

*This concert will last two hours, including a 20-minute intermission.*

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*This weekend's performances are  
dedicated to the Nashville Symphony Chorus,  
made possible by Mr. & Mrs. James W. White.*



## RICHARD STRAUSS

### *Serenade in E-Flat Major, Op. 7*

- Like Mozart, Strauss grew up under the influence of a powerful father who directed his musical education. The elder Strauss, Franz, performed as principal horn at the Court Opera in Munich and was a Wagner-loathing conservative who nevertheless performed in the world premieres of several of Wagner's operas.
- Strauss started composing as a child and studied composition privately before attending Munich University. He wrote this piece at age 17, while still in what we would today call high school.
- The piece is written for 13 wind instruments. Though it comes from early in Strauss' career, we can still hear his instinctive feeling for mixing colors and timbres. The Serenade was successful enough, following its 1882 premiere, to catch the attention of conductor Hans von Bülow, who would go on to be an early supporter of Strauss'.



## IGOR STRAVINSKY

### *Symphony of Psalms*

- *Symphony of Psalms* represents a notable shift in the career of this composer who was known for changing his style. After the opulence of his breakthrough score for *The Firebird* and the revolutionary primitivism of *The Rite of Spring*, this work was something different still — a stark, neo-Classical adaptation of sacred texts.
- Commissioned by Boston Symphony Orchestra music director Serge Koussevitzky, the work is a choral-orchestral setting of three Psalms, and it represents an expression of the composer's own Russian Orthodox faith.
- Prior to the premiere in 1930, Stravinsky wrote to a friend that the work was not “a symphony in which I have included psalms to be sung.” Instead, he explained, “It is the singing of psalms that I am symphonizing.”
- Stravinsky entirely omits clarinets and upper strings from the score, removing the traditional source of what we hear as a “warm” blend with voices. Instead, a sense of division between the chorus and orchestra brings a unique and sometimes chilly clarity to the sound.



## MAURICE RAVEL

### *Daphnis et Chloé*

- *Daphnis et Chloé* is the product of Ravel's collaboration with the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev, who had previously collaborated with Stravinsky on *The Firebird* and would stage *The Rite of Spring* one year after this work's premiere.
- The source material is an ancient poem attributed to the second-century Greek writer Longus. A love story focusing on the two title characters, the ballet's narrative alternates between atmospheric scenes, character-defining set dances and action sequences.
- The scale of the piece is larger than any of Ravel's other compositions, and the music was clearly conceived as part of a carefully integrated whole — the composer called it a “choreographic symphony.” He uses subtle blends of colors and harmonies, achieved in part through the singing of a wordless chorus.

## RICHARD STRAUSS



Born on June 11, 1864, in Munich, Germany; died on September 8, 1949, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

**Composed:** 1881

**First performance:** November 27, 1882, with Franz Wüllner conducting members of the Musicians' Association of Dresden

**First Nashville Symphony performance:** October 18, 1949, with music director William Strickland

**Estimated length:** 10 minutes

### Serenade in E-flat major, Op. 7

Richard Strauss is treasured for his unsurpassed gift for composing music that tells a story, whether in the tone poems that first made him famous or in the operas that rank among the glories of the 20th-century repertory. But the first piece to be played outside his native Munich was the purely instrumental *Serenade*, which he had written with no story attached. This is “absolute” (as opposed to programmatic) music inspired by the classical models that his father Franz, principal horn at the Court Opera in Munich, had taught him to revere.

Strauss grew up under the influence of this powerful father, who directed his musical education. Franz Strauss was one of the most sought-after musicians of his era, but he was a Wagner-loathing conservative in his musical taste (who nevertheless performed in the world premieres of several of Wagner’s operas).

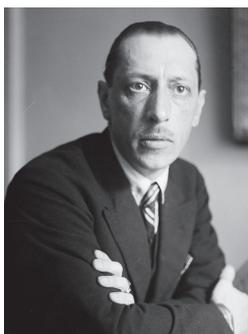
Young Richard had started composing as a child and studied composition privately before enrolling at Munich University, where his subjects were philosophy, the history of art and Shakespeare (rather than music). In his last year of what we would now call high school, at age 17, he completed the Op. 7 *Serenade*, and in the fall of 1882 it was premiered in Dresden, a city that would become closely associated with Strauss’ later career. The conductor, Franz Wüllner, had led the world premieres of Wagner’s first two *Ring* operas in Munich. The success of the *Serenade* won the attention of the highly influential conductor Hans von Bülow, a celebrity of the era who became a key early supporter of Strauss’.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Mozart’s wind serenades would have been familiar to Strauss thanks to his household environment, though the 13 wind instruments he uses here (woodwinds and horns) do not precisely replicate Mozartean scoring. Many hear strains of Mendelssohn as well in the oboe’s gentle opening theme. A Classical-era serenade was typically cast in multiple movements, but Strauss felt he had said all he needed to with a single movement, set at a leisurely *Andante* pace. The clarinet contributes the second theme, and the development is relatively simple, though already the young composer’s instinctive feeling for the possibilities of different mixtures of color and timbre is evident.

During these crucial years of searching for his voice, Strauss received this bit of advice in a letter from papa Franz: “Increasingly, it’s my experience that only melodious music makes a lasting impression on musicians and amateurs, and melody is the most viable element in music.” Richard would proceed not long after to evolve into something of a bad boy of the *avant-garde*, shocking the public with the bold orchestral experiments of his tone poems and, eventually, with his operas *Salome* and *Elektra*. Yet the obvious gift for melody that graces the *Serenade* would never fail him.

*The Serenade is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, as well as contrabassoon and 4 horns.*



## IGOR STRAVINSKY

Born on June 17, 1882,  
in Oranienbaum, Russia;  
died on April 6, 1971,  
in New York City

### *Symphony of Psalms*

**Composed:** January–August 1930; revised 1948

**First performance:** December 13, 1930, with Ernest Ansermet conducting the Brussels Philharmonic.

**First Nashville Symphony performance:**

April 4 & 5, 1977, with music director Michael Charry

**Estimated length:** 21 minutes

Igor Stravinsky underwent numerous metamorphoses throughout his long career, not unlike Pablo Picasso, his contemporary and occasional collaborator. The Russian composer made a style of changing styles, shaking up his image with a variety of artistic makeovers. Or that's how his contemporaries tended to view Stravinsky's seemingly restless shape-shifting. What had been the opulence of his breakthrough ballet *The Firebird* was replaced by a revolutionary "primitivism" and then, even more shockingly, a coolly "objective" attitude that appeared to do an about-face on the avant-garde, play-acting with 18th-century musical props.

Yet running through all of these phases is Stravinsky's unmistakable voice. Even his so-called neo-Classical phase accommodated a variety of stylistic approaches. With its interplay of stark, neo-Classical economy and sacred texts, the *Symphony of Psalms* — one of the most impressive masterpieces in Stravinsky's entire output — must have astonished its first audiences.

Moreover, most of the music for which Stravinsky was known up to that point was connected in some way with the theater. *Psalms* was the first large-scale commission for a concert hall that Stravinsky designated a "symphony," though he had already composed some "symphonic" works that did not earn public attention until later.

When the Boston Symphony Orchestra's music

director, Serge Koussevitzky, commissioned the *Symphony of Psalms* in 1930, he left it up to Stravinsky to decide what form the project should take, hoping for a "popular" piece for orchestra alone. Instead, the composer opted for a choral-orchestral work setting excerpts from three of the Psalms. In the 1920s, he had begun to re-explore the Russian Orthodox faith in which he had been raised, composing an a cappella setting of the Lord's Prayer in 1926. Biographer Stephen Walsh suggests that the global Depression — which forced a rude awakening from the giddy exuberance of the 1920s — may have left its mark, too, as seen in a wave of spiritually themed works by several of Stravinsky's contemporaries.

Here is how Stravinsky inscribed his score: "This symphony, composed to the glory of GOD, is dedicated to the Boston Symphony Orchestra on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its existence." Sacred and secular are casually intermingled, the first of numerous indications that nothing is to be taken for granted with the *Symphony of Psalms*. Stravinsky defies expectations on every level.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Despite the allusion to the genre of the symphony — particularly in the context of his preceding works in the neo-Classical vein — the three-movement *Symphony of Psalms* is at a far remove from Classical archetypes. Moreover, the idea of an epic choral symphony, as pioneered by Beethoven in his Ninth, finds its virtual antithesis in Stravinsky's emotional reserve and compact proportions (three movements connected without pause). This work represents the polar opposite of the hyper-expressive individualism that the preceding century had idolized.

Defying expectations, the sonic signature Stravinsky devised for this score leaves out whole layers of the conventional orchestral apparatus. What is omitted is as important as what is used: the absence of clarinets and upper strings removes the traditional source of what we hear as a "warm" blend with voices. Instead, a sense of division between the chorus and instrumental ensemble (with its expansion of upper and lower woodwinds, as well as brass) brings a unique and sometimes chilly clarity to the sound. But the loss of comfortable

sonic illusions also engenders an austere beauty.

Initially, Stravinsky had intended to set the texts in Old Church Slavonic, but the use of Latin from the Vulgate translation of the Psalms is well-suited to this sound world. An acerbic E-minor chord, which sets the orchestral introduction to the first movement into motion, alternates with a rushing pattern of notes. The first movement proceeds as a march-like supplication from the chorus for divine assistance: lost humanity wandering in the wilderness. Stravinsky intensifies the prayer, ending in G major.

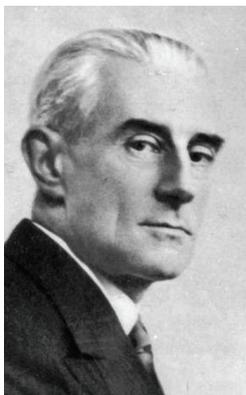
The sense of wandering continues in the second movement, now in the form of a fugue with two themes. The first is instrumental, while the second, in the chorus, works downward from sopranos to basses. Stravinsky describes this movement as an “overt use of musical symbolism” in three stages, setting three verses from this Psalm of “waiting for the Lord” as “an upside-down pyramid of fugues.” The architecture, Stravinsky observes, builds from the instrumental to the “next and higher stage” in the “human fugue.” The climactic outburst in the final minute (the “third stage,” corresponding to the “new song” of praise) “unites the two fugues.”

To the words of praise from the well-known Psalm 150, the last movement presents this “new song” as still another set of surprises. Stravinsky

avoids the sort of music conventionally associated with rejoicing, most obviously by his use of contrasting tempos. The distant serenity of the slow opening chorus yields to a faster passage based on an obsessively repeated rhythmic figure — the first music Stravinsky conceived for the piece. This faster music echoes *The Rite of Spring*, a reminder of the fundamental continuity amid all this composer’s stylistic shifts. There are even hints of a circus atmosphere — another juxtaposition of opposites at the heart of the *Symphony of Psalms*.

The slow music returns, followed again by the fast intrusion. Stravinsky later wrote that the latter was meant to depict Elijah ascending with his horses and chariot. Its “agitation is followed by the calm of praise” in the final hymn, which “must be thought of as issuing from the skies.” This concluding section traces a new repetitive pattern: three simple notes around which the chorus rotates in its praise, alighting on an unforgettably sounded chord of C major. Sweeping away all the preceding contradictions, this is Stravinsky’s final, awe-inspiring surprise in the *Symphony of Psalms*.

*In addition to chorus, the Symphony of Psalms is scored for 5 flutes (5th doubling piccolo), 4 oboes, English horn, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, harp, 2 pianos, cellos and double basses.*



## MAURICE RAVEL

Born on Mar. 7, 1875,  
in Ciboure, France;  
died on Dec. 28, 1937,  
in Paris

**Composed:** 1909-12

**First performance:** June 8, 1912, in Paris in a production by the Ballets Russes, with Pierre Monteux conducting

**First Nashville Symphony performance:**

The *Daphnis et Chloé Suite No. 2* was first performed on February 12, 1957, with music director Guy Taylor, and the first performance of the complete ballet was on January 17 & 18, 1992, with music director Kenneth Schermerhorn.

**Estimated length:** 50 minutes

*Daphnis et Chloé*

**T**he most perfect of Swiss clockmakers” is how Stravinsky is said to have described his slightly older colleague Maurice Ravel. Biographer Roger Nichols points out that this comment need not be taken as a slur indicating the composer’s lack of feeling, but could just as well be seen as a nod of approval. Ravel’s own father was a mechanical engineer involved with the development of the automobile, and it’s not

hard to imagine Ravel’s relentless perfectionism stemming from his father’s rigor, while his Basque mother, who spent many years in Spain, imbued her son with a lifelong enthusiasm for Spanish culture. Rather than a case of “passion versus reason,” Ravel’s heritage suggests an intriguing mixture of traits. This is a man whose fascinations included classical antiquity, toys and gadgets, fashion, Siamese cats and Edgar Allan Poe.

*Ravel declared that his idea was to compose “a vast musical fresco, less concerned with archaism than with faithfulness to the Greece of my dreams, which is similar to that imagined and painted by French artists at the end of the 18th century.”*

It was through his connections to the Ballets Russes, the company established by the impresario Serge Diaghilev, that Ravel came into contact with Stravinsky, who had been lured to Paris by Diaghilev’s commission to write *The Firebird* in 1909. This expatriate company of Russian dancers and other artists had set up shop in Paris, where a craze for all things Russian held sway. Their production of the second act from Alexander Borodin’s opera *Prince Igor* that same year left a strong impression, encouraging Diaghilev to embark on a series of bold new commissions for future seasons.

This included music by the leading French composers of the era. One result was Ravel’s most ambitious work, the ballet *Daphnis et Chloé*. Among the fervent admirers of Ravel’s achievement was Stravinsky, who was simultaneously becoming an international celebrity through his own collaborations with Diaghilev. *Daphnis et Chloé* was first staged in 1912, and just one year later came the company’s epochal premiere of *The Rite of Spring*.

The source for *Daphnis et Chloé* is a novel-like romance from late antiquity attributed to the second-century Greek writer Longus. Ultimately a story of the triumph of love between the two title characters, the ballet’s narrative alternates between atmospheric scenes, character-defining set dances, and action sequences that advance the story line. Ravel declared that his idea was to compose “a vast musical fresco, less concerned with archaism than with faithfulness to the Greece of my dreams, which is similar to that imagined and painted by French artists at the end of the 18th century.”

The scale of this score is larger than any of Ravel’s other compositions, and the music was clearly conceived as part of a carefully integrated whole involving choreography by Michel Fokine

(who was credited with the scenario, adapted from Longus) and the visuals of set designer Léon Bakst. The unique dance style of Vaslav Nijinsky — who created the role of Daphnis, together with Tamara Karsavina as Chloé — inspired particular musical gestures. Ravel painted his “fresco” with the most subtle blends of colors and harmonies from an extended orchestral apparatus, including the use of a wordless chorus.

Friction between Diaghilev and the creative team nearly led to the cancellation of *Daphnis et Chloé*, which received only two performances in its first season. Ravel, meanwhile, became dissatisfied with the clashing visions of his collaborators and grew furious when Diaghilev decided to cut the wordless chorus from his score during the ballet’s London tour. The music is usually encountered in heavily abridged form, without chorus, in the second of the two concert suites extracted by Ravel. But even when performed outside its original theatrical context, the full-length ballet is a marvel of compositional design that suggests its own internal logic. In another famous characterization of the work, Ravel called it a “choreographic symphony.” Its deft, economic construction from a small group of motifs and harmonic ideas stands as a counterpart to the score’s dazzling spectrum of colors and sonorities.

## SCENARIO OF THE BALLET

Companions since childhood, Daphnis and Chloé are innocent foundlings who have been raised in the peaceful, pastoral landscape that serves as much of the ballet’s backdrop. Part One establishes the setting of pagan antiquity: on a spring afternoon, young men and women pause from tending their sheep to worship before an

altar representing three nymphs. Shepherdesses dance around Daphnis and trigger the first stirrings of jealousy in his beloved, Chloé. Similarly, she naively responds to the lustful advances of the oafish cowherd Dorcon, who engages in a dance contest with Daphnis but loses and is ridiculed by the assembled group.

After embracing Chloé, Daphnis is left alone to muse to himself but is unexpectedly tempted by the seductive dance of another shepherdess, Lyceion. Pirates have meanwhile stolen on the scene, and Daphnis rushes off to protect Chloé but is too late. A sandal left behind is evidence that the pirates have abducted her. Giving in to despair, Daphnis is comforted by the trio of nymphs, whose religious statues mysteriously come to life. They summon the form of Pan, god of the wild and protector of shepherds.

Part Two jump-cuts to the pirates' camp on the seacoast. We see their warlike dance, and then their leader orders Chloé to dance before claiming her for himself. Pan intervenes through his army of satyrs, and the miscreants flee in terror. A transition takes us back to the opening setting for Part Three, which begins with a brilliant depiction of daybreak in which Daphnis awakens before Pan's grotto and is joyfully reunited with Chloé. The couple dance a symbolic pantomime that reenacts the story of Pan's passion for the nymph Syrinx. Their dance becomes more passionate, and the country folk eventually join in for a general dance that ends the ballet in "joyful commotion."

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The ballet's three parts are seamlessly linked together. The longest is Part One, which opens with a ritualistic scene evoking a mystical aura. Undulating harmonies enhanced by the chorus form one of the central motivic ideas of the score, while the flute plays a theme of fluid rhythms associated with the nymphs and Pan. A solo horn then outlines the couple's love theme. Both pagan devotion and the various types of love and desire depicted in *Daphnis et Chloé* become interwoven through the course of the ballet. In the contrasting sequence

of dances that follow, Dorcon's grotesque movements are sharply characterized, as is the ensemble's mocking laughter. A lilting meter accompanies the graceful dance of Daphnis. Ravel's shimmering orchestration captures the ecstasy of his love, pitting this against the erotic dance of Lyceion, marked by clarinet figurations. After Chloé's abduction comes a "nocturne" of moody and exotic sonorities (including a wind machine) as the nymphs and Pan enter the scene.

An unaccompanied chorus serves as a transition to Part Two, which features the menacing, aggressive music of the pirates (with hints of Borodin). Chloé then dances in supplication, her plaintive state evoked by English horn, and tries to escape her captors. Ravel contrasts the fleeing pirates with the awe-inspiring sounds and textures of the god's timely intervention. His depiction of nature in the "Daybreak" sequence that opens Part Three is especially celebrated. Using divided strings, Ravel instructs the players to remove their mutes one by one as woodwinds mimic birdcalls. The chorus intensifies the impression of shafts of sunlight dispelling all darkness and worry.

It is not until this point that Daphnis and Chloé dance together for the first time, though they are performing a pantomime, with the flute representing Daphnis/Pan's role as a passionate suitor of his beloved nymph. A rapturous development of their love music abruptly segues into the orgiastic concluding dance. Ravel's complex rhythmic patterns proved especially tricky for the company, but their pulsating energy clearly accentuates the bacchanalian rites that end the ballet.

*Daphnis et Chloé* calls for a large orchestra of 2 flutes, alto flute, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, military drum, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam, castanets, tambourine, triangle, wind machine, crotales, celesta, xylophone, glockenspiel, 2 harps, strings and mixed chorus, as well as offstage piccolo, E-flat clarinet, horn and trumpet.

—Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.



# NASHVILLE SYMPHONY CHORUS

**TUCKER BIDDLECOMBE**, director

## SOPRANO

Beverly Anderson†  
 Esther Bae  
 Amie Bates  
 Elizabeth Belden  
 Jill Boehme  
 Stephanie Breiwa  
 Christine Brosend  
 Daphne Bugelli  
 Sara Jean Curtiss  
 Claire Delcourt  
 Katie Doyle  
 Kacie Dunham  
 Allison Espada  
 Becky Evans-Young  
 Kelli Gauthier  
 Rebecca Greer  
 Grace Guill  
 Ally Hard  
 Stacey Haslam  
 Vanessa Jackson\*  
 Katie Lawrence  
 Jennifer Lynn  
 Alisha Menard  
 Jean Miller  
 Jessie Neilson  
 Angela Pasquini Clifford  
 Mandy Pennington  
 Samantha Petry  
 Anna Kristine Phillips  
 Beth Pirtle Ring  
 Sarah Beth Sewell  
 Renita J. Smith-Crittendon  
 Ashlenn Snyder  
 Paige Stinnett  
 Clair Susong  
 Marva A. Swann  
 Marjorie Taggart  
 Angela Thomas\*  
 Jennice Threlkeld  
 Jan Staats Volk†  
 Sylvia Wynn  
 Callie Zindel

## ALTO

Carol Armes  
 Kathy Bearden  
 Mary Bond  
 Vinéecia Buchanan  
 Mary Callahan\*  
 Cathi Carmack†  
 Kelsey Christian  
 Lisa Cooper  
 Janet Keese Davies  
 Carla M. Davis†  
 Amanda Leigh Dier  
 Cara Frank  
 Katie Gillett  
 Elizabeth Gilliam  
 Debra Greenspan  
 Bevin Gregory  
 Judith Griffin  
 Leah Handelsman  
 Kathleen Hiltz  
 Amanda Hopkins  
 Sidney Hyde  
 Liza Marie Johnston  
 Leah Koesten  
 Stephanie Kraft  
 Shelly McCormack  
 Sarah Miller  
 Asha Moody  
 Jessica Moore  
 Stephanie Moritz  
 Shelia Mullican  
 Valerie Nelson  
 Alexandra Niederle  
 Lisa Pellegrin  
 Annette Phillips  
 Lauren Ramey  
 Stacy L. Reed  
 Debbie Reyland  
 Anna Lea Ritchie  
 Jacqueline Scott  
 Laura Sikes  
 Hannah Sims  
 Madalynne Skelton  
 Sarah C. Stallings  
 Caroline Talbert\*  
 Kathryn Whitaker

## TENOR

Eric Boehme  
 Daniel Brashear  
 Brett Cartwright  
 Taylor Chadwick  
 Bullock Demere  
 David DuBose  
 Joe A. Fitzpatrick  
 Fred Garcia  
 Danny Gordon\*  
 Kory Henkel  
 William F. Hodget†  
 Ron Jensen  
 Dillon Kruppa  
 Lynn D. McGill  
 Alex Moore  
 Don Mott  
 Ryan Norris  
 Nathan O'Connell  
 Bill Paul  
 John Perry  
 Keith Ramsey  
 David M. Satterfield†\*  
 Zach Shrout  
 Daniel Sissom  
 Seth Skiles  
 Eddie Smith  
 Stephen Spark†  
 Joel Tellinghuisen  
 Christopher Thompson  
 Richard Wineland  
 Scott Wolfe  
 John Logan Wood

## BASS

Gilbert Aldridge  
 Anthony R. Barta  
 Kevin Brenner  
 James Cortner  
 Nicholas Davidson  
 Dustin Derryberry  
 Mark Filosa  
 Ian M. Frazier  
 Stuart Garber  
 George Goetschel  
 Tim Goodenough  
 Duane Hamilton  
 Richard Hatfield†  
 Carl Johnson  
 Kenneth Keel  
 Justin Kirby  
 Matthew Landers  
 Bill Loyd  
 Rob Mahurin\*  
 Adam Mamula  
 Bruce Meriwether  
 Andy Miller  
 Christopher Mixon  
 Steve Myers  
 Jason Peterson  
 Steve Prichard  
 Dan Silva  
 Merv Snider  
 Larry Strachan  
 David B. Thomas\*  
 Alex Tinianow  
 Sam Trump  
 Brian Warford  
 Justin Westley  
 Eric Wiuff  
 Jonathan Yeaworth

Debra Greenspan,  
*President*  
 Sara Crigger,  
*Librarian*  
 Jeff Burnham,  
*Accompanist*

\* Section Leader  
 † 25+ year members