

Ignite!

DANCE ON FIRE



Concert Preview by AJ Harbison

Music and dance have existed together since the dawn of humanity and are found in every human culture. Our first concert of the 2026–27 season celebrates music, rhythm and dance and their influences on one another. From the ballet music of Russian composer Aram Khachaturian to symphonic dances from *Fiddler on the Roof*, from the refined *Blue Danube* waltz to *La Conga del Fuego Nuevo* (The Conga of the New Fire) by Arturo Márquez, join us on **October 10 at 7:00 p.m.** for a fiery celebration when music and movement come together!



Music from the Americas and Cuba

Arturo Márquez (b. 1950)

La Conga del Fuego Nuevo

(The Conga of the New Fire) (2001)



Arturo Márquez was born in Mexico to a musical family, and absorbed many Mexican and Latin American musical styles growing up. (We performed his *Danzón No. 2* at our “Guitarras del Sol” concert last fall.) This piece uses the rhythms of the conga, a Cuban carnival dance that was the origin of the conga line popularized in the U.S. by bandleaders like Xavier Cugat. The “new fire” was an Aztec ceremony in pre-Columbian Mexico where all fires were extinguished and new fires were lit, signifying the beginning of a new world. Márquez’s piece is colorfully orchestrated and driven by the large percussion section, which

accents the end of the conga phrases. The middle section of the piece features a mariachi-style melody accompanied by claves, which slows down only to be interrupted by the opening material returning and leading to a fiery ending.

Johnny Richards (1911–1968)

“La Suerte de los Tontos”

**(The Fortune of Fools) from *Cuban Fire Suite*
(1956, arr. John Whitney 2008)**

Johnny Richards was born Juan Manuel Cascales in Mexico to a Spanish father and a Mexican mother. He began arranging music for Stan Kenton and his band in 1950 and moved to New York City in 1952. Kenton had recorded multiple singles with Latin influences, but he said, “A lot of the Latin guys around New York complained: ‘It’s wrong, you’re not writing the music correctly.’” As a result, he commissioned Richards to write an authentic Latin suite and Richards spent months listening to and learning from the Cuban and Hispanic musicians in New York City. Richards’ suite was recorded as Kenton’s album *Cuban Fire Suite*, and it was an immediate hit for both Kenton and Richards. The section we’re performing is the fourth movement, based on Yoruba drumming rituals originating in Nigeria and passed down through generations of enslaved Africans in Cuba.



Robert Sheldon (b. 1954)

Danzas Cubanas

(Cuban Dances) (2010)

Robert Sheldon is one of the most performed composers of concert band music in the world. This set of Afro-Cuban dances was commissioned by the band directors of the Palm Beach County Bandmasters Association, in memory of their Cuban colleague and fellow band director Ubaldo Montesino. We are performing an arrangement by the composer for orchestra. Sheldon writes, “*Danzas Cubanas* is a set of three original dance-like movements celebrating the joy and energy of Afro-Cuban music and the people of this island-nation. The opening conga sets the mood, followed by a gentle and alluring son-salsa. The closing dance is a fast-paced mambo.”

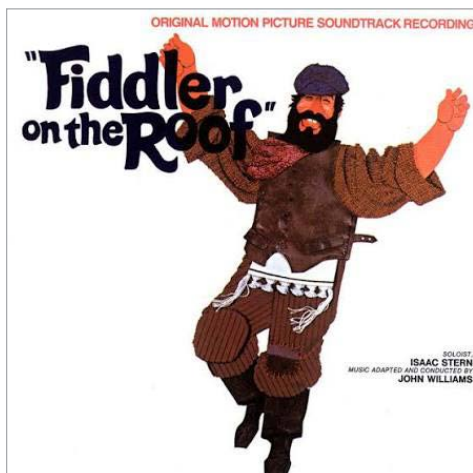


Jerry Bock (1928–2010)

Symphonic Dances

from *Fiddler on the Roof*

(1964, arr. Ira Hearshen 2008)



The iconic 1964 musical *Fiddler on the Roof* was the first Broadway musical to run to 3,000 performances, and the 1971 film brought the magic of the story and its music to an enthusiastic audience of millions. Jerry Bock drew on the rich musical resources of traditional Jewish prayers and klezmer music to compose his score. In 2008, Ira Hearshen, an experienced composer and arranger for film and TV, combined five songs from the musical into the symphonic dance suite on our concert today. The suite includes the opening ensemble number “Tradition,” “Wedding Dance #1 — The Bottle Dance” from Tzeitel and Motel’s wedding, “Perchik and Hodel Dance” from the second wedding, the touching “Chava Sequence” as Tevye reflects on his daughter Chava’s elopement with Fyedka, and the rousing “To Life — Dance” as the big finish.

Fun fact: An early-career John Williams adapted, arranged and conducted the music from the stage musical for the film version, which won him his first Oscar — Best Scoring: Adaptation and Original Song Score.

Music from Europe

Johann Strauss II (1825–1899)

An der schönen blauen Donau

(By the Beautiful Blue Danube), op. 314 (1866)



The most famous waltz in the world has perhaps a surprising backstory. In 1865, Austrian composer Johann Strauss II (son of the composer Johann Strauss I but no relation to the composer Richard Strauss) received a commission from the Vienna Men's Choral Society to write a choral work. Strauss delayed due to his other commitments, and in the interim Austria lost the Seven Weeks' War to Prussia. Morale in Vienna was low and he decided to return to the commission to write something to lift people's spirits. He completed the original choral version in 1866, and the Choral Society's resident poet wrote satirical lyrics lampooning the lost war and the bankrupt city: "Wiener seid's froh! Oho! Wieso?" (Viennese be happy! Oho! But why?). The premiere of this version was given by the Society on February 15, 1867. It was a bit of a flop, due allegedly to the fact that both the singers and the audience hated the words. Strauss arranged it for orchestra alone (the version we know today) and premiered it at the Paris World's Fair later that year, where it was an instant hit.

The full composition comprises five different waltzes (of which the famous one is just the first) along with a coda that brings the third, second and first waltzes back before a fast, flashy ending.

Fun fact: There is another choral version of the piece in addition to the satirical original. Franz von Gernerth, who was best known as a member of the Austrian Supreme Court but who was also a composer and lyricist himself, wrote a more respectable text in 1889 titled "Donau so blau" (Danube so blue).

Bonus fun fact: When Strauss' stepdaughter Alice von Meyszner-Strauss asked the composer Johannes Brahms for his autograph, in addition to his signature he wrote out the first few bars of this waltz and added, "Leider nicht von Johannes Brahms" (Unfortunately not by Johannes Brahms).

Camille Saint-Saëns (1903–1978)

“Dance of the Gypsy”

from *Henry VIII*

(1883, arr. Kirt Mosier 2014)



In a departure from some of the other compositions on this program, Camille Saint-Saëns used folk music in *Henry VIII* — not folk music from his own culture but from the one he was writing about. The French composer researched English, Scottish and Irish folk melodies in his opera about the English king trying to divorce Catherine of Aragon in order to marry Anne Boleyn. In this dance from Act II, he pulls in yet other folk music influences, for a Roma performer in the ballet section of the opera. The dance uses the chromatic inflections that we associate with Roma music before breaking into an “oom-pah-pah” waltz rhythm.

Music from Russia

Aram Khachaturian (1903–1978)

“Lezginka” and “Sabre Dance”

from *Gayane* (1942)



Aram Khachaturian was one of the most important composers of the Soviet Union in the 20th century. He was Armenian (Armenia having been annexed by the Soviet Union in 1920) and used Armenian folk music and dances in his works. *Gayane*, a ballet, was one of his most popular pieces during his lifetime and remains his best-known music today. Both of the selections we are performing come at the end of the ballet, in Act IV, as the community celebrates a triple wedding with a wide variety of folk dances. The Lezginka is a dance from the North Caucasus region in a fast 6/8 meter; Khachaturian's version is dizzying with its swirling strings and insistent percussion. The Sabre Dance, as its name suggests, features men dancing with swords and incorporates elements of Armenian folk music. Khachaturian wrote that it “came into being quite by accident,” as he wrote it after the rest of the ballet when the director of the premiere performance requested one more dance. He composed it in eleven hours and it was orchestrated, staged and rehearsed within just two days. Surprisingly, this last-minute addition has become by far Khachaturian's most popular piece and one of the most recognizable works in all of 20th-century classical music. It has been arranged innumerable times, including for piano, violin, accordion, harmonica, flute, balalaika and the Armenian instruments shvi and duduk, as well as [foxtrot](#), [boogie](#), [blues/psychedelic](#), [folk metal](#), [progressive rock](#) and [techno](#) versions, plus a [version sung by the Andrews Sisters with lyrics added](#).

[↑ Click to listen!](#)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

“Dance of the Tumblers”

from *The Snow Maiden* (1881)

60 years before Khachaturian’s ballet *Gayane*, Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov was similarly drawing from folk music, dances and stories. While he is best known in the West for his purely orchestral music like *Scheherazade*, *Capriccio espagnol* and the *Russian Easter Overture*, his most complex and colorful music comes from his operas. Rimsky-Korsakov was always at his most inspired when working on program music (music based on a story), and this was the case with his 1881 opera *The Snow Maiden*, based on a Russian fairy tale. The “Dance of the Tumblers,” or Clowns, is the most famous excerpt, appearing in Act III of the opera as well as being the fourth movement of the suite drawn from it. While it shares some musical similarities with Khachaturian’s Sabre Dance (swirling strings, bass I-V-I-V patterns and offbeat accents in the percussion), it is decidedly more lighthearted and whimsical — fitting, whether the performers are tumblers or clowns!



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