

CONCERTMASTER GWEN BRITS began violin lessons at age six in Lexington, Kentucky. After moving to Oregon, she performed with the Salem Youth Symphony, Oregon Pro Arte Youth Chamber Orchestra, Oregon All-State Orchestra, and the All-Northwest Orchestra. During her undergraduate years, she was a member of the Utah State University Symphony Orchestra and studied privately with William Fedkenheuer, now a member of the Miró Quartet. In Iowa, Gwen was an active performer with the Clark University Orchestra and the Dubuque Symphony Orchestra. She was also a member of the Provo-based contemporary folk band Molly in the Mineshaft and Dubuque's Bluegrass Alumatics. Gwen holds a master's degree in ESL instruction and has taught at UIC and Triton College; she is currently a student advisor at the Northwestern University International Students & Scholars Office. She lives in Forest Park with her husband and dog.



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Look what you could win before you go home today: Antique damask linen banquet cloth, Williams Sonoma placemats, vintage silver plate flatware, Royal Staffordshire English ironstone *Stratford Stage*, heavy leaded crystal ice bucket, 12 crystal wine goblets, 6 champagne glasses, a pair of Yugoslavian crystal candlesticks by Samobor, 4 candle votives, and an antique footed crystal bowl that would look lovely as a centerpiece when filled with roses. This elegant and complete table will also include wines, champagnes, & chocolates!

Hurry to the lobby and check it out!

Today is the last chance to purchase chances as the drawing is right after today's concert.

Jay Friedman, Music Director



June 14, 2026, 4:00 P.M.
Concordia University Chapel of Our Lord

Pohádka (Fairy Tale), Op. 16

**Josef Suk
(1874-1935)**

- I. About the Constant Love of Raduz and Mahulena and Their Trials
- IV. Runa's Curse and How It was Broken by True Love

Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26

**Max Bruch
(1838-1920)**

- I. Vorspiel (Prelude): Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio
- III. Finale: Allegro energico

Nikki Chooi, soloist

..... Intermission

Piano Concerto No. 1

**Alex Groesch
(1995-)**

- I. Furioso-Allegro con fuoco
- II. Agitato-Adagio
- III. Vivace Agitato

Mio Nakamura, soloist

Jay Friedman, conductor

This concert is unwritten by S/OP&RF first violinist Marylou Witz and also by Emerging Artists Chicago. The Symphony of Oak Park & River Forest is supported in part by grants from the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, Illinois Arts Council, Oak Park Area Arts Council, in partnership with the Village of Oak Park, and Cook County Arts.

Pohádka (Fairy Tale), Op. 16, is an orchestral suite from incidental music composed by **Josef Suk** for Julius Zeyer's mythological drama Radúz and Mahulena in 1897–1898. Zeyer's dramatic poem is a love story, combining classical fairy-tale motifs with mythological references. Suk started to write the incidental music in 1897 and soon became very attached to the material. In the end, he wrote overtures to each scene, intermezzos, as well as various vocal solos and choruses. The play was first performed on June 6, 1898, at the National Theatre in Prague, under the baton of Adolf Čech. Because the chance of the play receiving regular staging was small, Suk turned most of the music into a four-movement suite for large orchestra, which was first performed by the Czech Philharmonic in Prague on February 7, 1901.

Fairy Tale is one of the most popular of Suk's works. Its beauty was not unrecognized by the composer's father-in-law, Antonin Dvořák, who wrote "That is music from heaven". A solo violin representing the two lovers has a prominent role in the first and last movements, with the opening theme returning at the end of the piece.

Max Bruch, widely known and respected in his day as a composer, conductor and teacher, received his earliest music instruction from his mother, a noted singer and pianist. During his long career, Bruch held various posts as a choral and orchestral conductor in Cologne, Coblenz, Sondershausen, Berlin, Liverpool and Breslau, and in 1883, he visited America to conduct concerts of his own compositions. From 1890 to 1910, he taught composition at the Berlin Academy and received numerous awards for his work, including an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. Though Bruch is known mainly for three famous compositions for string soloist and orchestra (**Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor** and *Scottish Fantasy* for violin, and *Kol Nidrei* for cello), he also composed two other violin concertos, three symphonies, a concerto for two pianos, various chamber pieces, songs, three operas and much choral music.

The first movement of the G Minor Violin Concerto, which Bruch called a "Prelude", is a dialogue between soloist and orchestra followed by a wide-ranging subject played by the violinist over a pizzicato line in the basses. A contrasting theme reaches into the highest register of the violin and is followed by scintillating passage work of scales and broken chords for the soloist. A stormy section for orchestra alone recalls the opening dialogue, which softens to usher in the lovely Adagio. This slow movement contains three important themes, all languorous and sweet, which are shared by soloist and orchestra. The music builds to a passionate climax before subsiding to a tranquil close. The finale begins with eighteen modulatory bars containing hints of the upcoming theme before the soloist proclaims the vibrant melody itself, enriched with copious multiple stops. A broad melody, played first by the orchestra alone before being taken over by the soloist, serves as the second theme. A brief development, based on the dance-like first theme, leads to the recapitulation. The coda, with some ingenious long-range harmonic deflections, recalls again the first theme to bring the work to a rousing close.



Canadian-American violinist **Nikki Chooi** has established himself as one of the most charismatic, versatile, and engaging performers of his generation. Praised for his powerful and poetic performances, he has earned international recognition as First Prize winner of the Michael Hill International Violin Competition and as a laureate of

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Harris Theater Millennium Park, Chicago

September 12, 2026, 7:00 p.m.

two charity concerts supporting Chi-Care and C.O.I.P.



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COPLAND *Lincoln Portrait*

PRICE *Concert Overture No. 2*

RACHMANINOFF *Symphonic Dances, op.45*



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Dr. Julie Tumma, violin



Dr. Abe Baker, violin



Dr. Chris Wood, trombone

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Mary Rose Lambke
Joe Langley & Brad Bartels
David & Roslyn Leehey in honor of Carole Benson
Lenore & Dan Mass
Jim & Melinda Robinson
Emmie Strassberg, in honor of her parents, Dave & Debbie Barford
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Emile & Jeannie Charest
Nina Chen
Guy Corl
Ann Courter & Norman Hirsch
KL Robertson Daly
Cheryl Flinn and Wayne Christenson, in memory of Diane Doll's aunt & Jan Widmaier's father
Steve Flinn
Glenn & Donna Gabanski
Helene & Stephen Gabelnick
Jessica Gerberi
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Irene Hansen
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Beth Hoover, in memory of Julie Tumma's father
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Lory Maltby
Sue McCowen & Randy Rapp, in honor of Beth Hoover
Laura Milewski
Mel Noel
Lisa Rathje & Rob Taylor
Richard J. Rizzo, in memory of Victor Recca
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Paul McCaffray
Patrick Murphy
Oak Park Alumni of SAI
Hertha Ozsula
James Pickard
Jeff Schroeder
Eleanor Sharpe
Amy Schropshire
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both the Queen Elizabeth and Tchaikovsky Competitions.

A dynamic leader and soloist, Nikki currently serves as Concertmaster of the Grammy Award-winning Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra. He was previously Concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and has appeared as guest concertmaster with the Boston Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Houston Symphony, Sydney Symphony, and Macao Orchestra.

As a soloist, Nikki has performed with major ensembles including the Vancouver Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic, National Orchestra of Belgium, Chamber Orchestra of Wallonie, Auckland Philharmonia, Puerto Rico Symphony, and National Taiwan Symphony Festival Orchestra. His recent solo appearances have included critically acclaimed performances at Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium and Lincoln Center's Rose Hall in New York.

Nikki's festival appearances span Marlboro, Rockport, and La Jolla SummerFest in the United States; Dresden Musikfestspiele, Moritzburg Festival, and Kammermusik Utrecht in Europe; Musica Viva in Australia; and Chamber Music New Zealand. In 2010, he was a recipient of the Gene Witz Memorial Scholarship at the Stean's Institute at Ravinia Festival. Deeply committed to collaboration, he performs with his brother, violinist Timothy Chooi, and has shared the stage with renowned artists including Yo-Yo Ma, JoAnn Falletta, and the ensemble Time for Three.

A dedicated educator, Nikki has presented classes at the Curtis Institute of Music, Morningside Music Bridge Program, the San Francisco Conservatory, and The Orchestra of the Americas Academy.

Born and raised in Victoria, Canada, he trained at the Victoria Conservatory, Mount Royal Conservatory, Morningside Music Bridge, and the National Arts Centre Young Artist Programme before graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music and The Juilliard School, studying with Joseph Silverstein, Ida Kavafian, and Donald Weilerstein.

Nikki performs on a 1713 Stradivarius graciously provided by the company CANIMEX INC. from Drummondville, Quebec, Canada, and a 1749 G.B. Guadagnini on extended loan through the Stradivari Society of Chicago. Nikki uses Thomastik Infeld Dynamo strings.

On 1/26/2014, he performed the DVOŘÁK Violin Concerto in A Minor, Op. 53, with The S/OP&RF under the baton of Jay Friedman.



Piano Concerto No. 1 was composed by SOPRF principal cellist and audio-video recording artist **Alex Groesch**. Alex is a Chicago-area composer writing large-scale orchestral works rooted in lyricism, momentum, and dramatic storytelling. His music is symphonic in scale, emotionally direct, and grounded in romanticism, while speaking in a contemporary voice. His work includes symphonies, concertos, and collaborative stage projects, with a particular focus on long-form narrative music that invites audiences into a sustained emotional journey.

Alex had these words to say about the piece on today's program:

What inspired me the most was hearing Mio play with The S/OP&RF. I knew I wanted to write a piano concerto for her someday after hearing her perform for the first time! It's an honor to write something for someone as talented and genuine as her!

When I start writing a piece, I typically have no plan other than the emotions I want the music to convey. I think of all the memories, people, places, etc. that make me feel those emotions, and I begin brainstorming melodies, usually by improvising on the cello. Writing melodies feels like mining for thoughts I can't express in words. When I solidify a few melodies, I build the piece off of those.

This piece is about powerful despair and bittersweet nostalgia. It's about the overwhelming feeling that sometimes tragedy is a part of life and there's nothing we can do about it. The first movement begins with the orchestra passionately proclaiming something like "things will not be ok and we are not in control". The piano spends the next 30 minutes exploring this statement, sometimes escaping, but always eventually caught. The cadenza at the end of the third movement is an acceptance.



Regarded as an "acclaimed pianist" by the Chicago Tribune, **Mio Nakamura** is an in-demand soloist, collaborative artist, and chamber musician in Chicago and abroad. Her solo career includes a Carnegie Hall Winners Recital, performances on WFMT-FM, and concerto appearances with orchestras such as the Northwest and Evanston Symphony Orchestras, The Symphony of Oak Park & River Forest, and the Kyoto New Festival Orchestra. A passionate collaborator, Nakamura served as principal piano of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and has performed with Yo-Yo Ma at the League of American Orchestras Conference. She regularly appears as an orchestral keyboardist and rehearsal pianist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chicago Philharmonic, performing at major venues including Symphony Center, Ravinia, Auditorium Theatre, The Chicago Theatre, Harris Theater, Millennium Park, and Carnegie Hall. She is also active in chamber music series across Chicago, including

performances with CSO chamber programs and regional festivals. Nakamura earned bachelor's and master's degrees with honors, as well as a performance diploma, from Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts. Her mentors include Mary Sauer, Ludmila Lazar, Mitsuko Uchida, David Schrader, John Sherer, Michiko Takeuchi, Junko Ishida, and Iyuko Ogawa. A recipient of the Steinway & Sons Top Teacher Award (2021, 2024), Nakamura currently maintains a private studio, serves as collaborative pianist for the Brass Program at Roosevelt University, and is Artistic Director of Emerging Artists Chicago. Today's concert is Nakamura's eighth appearance as soloist with The Symphony of Oak Park & River Forest. Previous performances include Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23 (2025), Liszt's Totentanz and Missa Solemnis (2024), Schumann's Piano Concerto (2022), Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (2021), Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini (2013), Liszt's Totentanz (2010), and Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 (2008).

Emerging Artists Chicago is a community of local musicians driven to support young performing artists. As an instructor, pianist, and collaborative performer, Mio Nakamura was inspired to create a safe virtual space as the pandemic began to take over her students' routines. With the help of fellow music-enthusiast and entrepreneur, John Fife, they founded EAC in September 2020. Since then, they have opened many doors for young professionals and made generous contributions to the music community. To learn more about Emerging Artists Chicago, please visit <https://www.artchi.org>.

For a biography of conductor **Jay Friedman**, please see your Program Book.

June 14, 2026 Personnel

First Violins

Gwen Brits 5 ++
Eliot Abarbanel 9
Nina Chen 10
Victoria Gabrielsen 1
Caitlin Hillyard 5
Abraham Marcial Manzola 2
Chuqing Meng 2
Ingrid Schimnoski 8+
Cheryl Toncray-Smerz 10 ~
Joyce Westphal 5
Bethany Watts 1
Marylou Witz 19
Peiran Zhao 1

Second Violins

Carol Janossy 48 *
Rupa Datta 1
Cheryl Flinn 33
Isabela Flores 5
Lisa Gaspero 4
Megan Mayberry 1
Judy Meredith 28
Melissa Proulx 3
Emilysue Reichardt 2
Elizabeth Tan 2
Julie Tumma 25
Wailin Wong 9

Violas

Uli Widmaier 9 *
Sarah Duffy 4
Keith Jones 7 +
Adrienne Kitchen 1
Heather Lough 10
Jackie Sabuda 10
Janet Widmaier 9

Cellos

Alex Groesch 8 *
Viktoria Baldacci 2
Andrea Charest 6
Christian Hernandez 9
Joy Hoang 2
Petr Husták 15
Jeanne Johannesen 12
Mara Leonard 16
Lenore Mass 31
Peter Mertka 1
Double Basses
Kristina Lee 24 *
Thea Grendahl Christou 15

Ceazar DePaoli 5
James Janossy 19
David Malatesta 13
Macy Wilson 2

Harp

Jennifer Ruggieri

Flutes

Laurel Tempas 12
Marcia Hustad 9
Julie Siarny 24, *Piccolo*
Oboes
Debbie Barford 47 *
Elliot Lichtenberg 1 +
Linda Johnson 54

Beth Hoover 48,
English Horn

Clarinets

Diane Doll 52 *
Jim Robinson 13
Cristian Zavala 1, *Bass*
Alto Saxophone
Dan Moffett 2

Irwin Broidy, Deborah Granite, Bruce Kaminski,
Michael Reardon, Nancy Schwider, William Wallace

Bassoons

Martha Mitchell Cavender 7 *
Lisa Rathje 14
Xavier Woodley, *Contra*

French Horns

David C. Barford 46 *
Michael Papierniak 35
Emily Torrey 3
Shivani Maisuria 3
Melinda Z. Robinson 25

Trumpets

Dale Kerner 46 *
Edward Kerner 10
Augustine Melecio 7

Trombones

Noah Harstad 2
Patrick Zielinski 40
Lance Malina 42, *Bass*

Tuba

Cheldon White 1

Percussion

Tim Nichen 2*
Matt Hart 13
Michael Daniel 56
Stage Manager
Jon Zimmer

++ Concertmaster
+ Assistant Section Leader

*Principal
~ Section Organizer
^ String Intern

After name indicates
how many years in the
S/OP&RF