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-Valentine's Concert-



A scene from Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade"

"ROMANTIC FANTASIES"

Co-Sponsored by Sharon and Ed Minniear and

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DR. KEVIN P. BARTRAM,
MUSIC DIRECTOR

With
Wyatt Michael, vocals

Friday, February 9, 2024
Lifepoint Auditorium 7:30 p.m.

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Message from the Music Director



Happy Valentine's Day! Tonight's program is a tribute to "Romantic Fantasies". We'll open with the iconic *William Tell Overture*. William Tell was a real historical figure whose skill as an archer helped liberate his Swiss town from an autocrat. Rossini's opera focuses on the romantic notion of heroism, romantic love, and lost love.

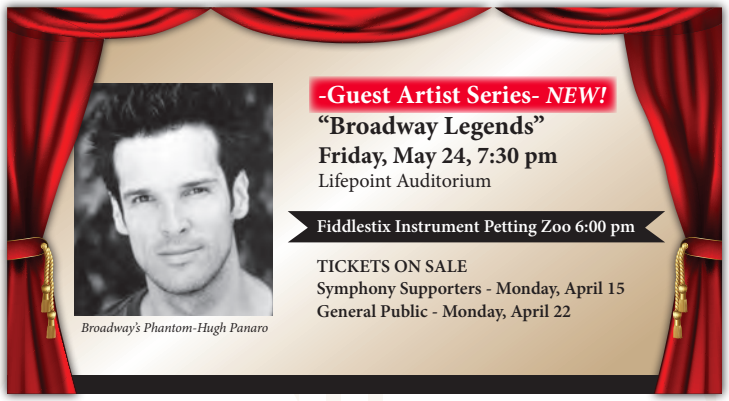
Gershwin's *An American in Paris* spins the tale of an American soldier, a mysterious French girl and an indomitable European city, each yearning for a new beginning in the aftermath of war. Stravinsky's *Firebird* ballet draws from Russian folklore, whereby the mythical and beautiful Firebird helps Prince Ivan Tsarevich free 13 princesses who have been imprisoned by an evil sorcerer.

With *Scheherazade*, however, the FSO becomes the musical narrator in an epic tale of The Arabian Nights as envisioned by Rimsky-Korsakov. The evil Sultan, whose theme is menacingly announced by the brass in the opening moments, had a nasty habit of executing his new brides on the morning after their wedding. But the Sultan is seduced by the bewitching stories told by his latest bride, Scheherazade, played by our concertmaster Robyn Bauer. For 1001 nights, she keeps his interest by relaying tales of Arabia, until finally he decides to spare her life.

Fantasies, legends, and love. The Fredericksburg Symphony is thrilled to share in this unique glimpse of romantic passion as told through music. We are also happy to welcome back to the stage Wyatt Michael, who sang with us last year. Thanks to the staff at Lifepoint and thank you to our audience for your continued support. We will conclude our season in May as we host three celebrated Broadway stars performing iconic show tunes.

Kevin P. Bartram

Dr. Kevin P. Bartram, Music Director
Fredericksburg Symphony Orchestra



PROGRAM

William Tell Overture ..... Gioachino Rossini

An American in Paris Suite ..... George Gershwin, arr. Whitney

The Firebird Suite ..... Igor Stravinsky
- Infernal Dance
- Berceuse
- Finale

INTERMISSION

Fly Me to the Moon ..... Howard, arr. Smith

What Kind of Fool Am I? ..... Newley, arr. Smith

Unforgettable ..... Gordon, arr. Smith
- Wyatt Michael, vocals

Scheherazade, op. 35 ..... Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Use of recording devices is prohibited.

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Thank you!

Maestro Kevin Bartram



Dr. Bartram has done it all in the field of music: celebrated conductor of both orchestras and bands, author, researcher, and guest speaker. With over 30 years' experience directing groups from the high school to college and professional ranks, he has a track record of producing extraordinary results. His high school groups were among the finest in the nation, earning a Grammy Signature Award in 2001 for Top 100 Program in the United States and an Exemplary Music Program Award from the Maryland Music Educators Association.

At the University of Mary Washington (2002-2020), he conducted the UMW Philharmonic Orchestra and taught courses in music education. In 2004, he created the Philharmonic Celebrity Series, which annually brought in world-class artists to perform with the college-community orchestra here in Fredericksburg. Artists included Itzhak Perlman, Renee Fleming, Sir James Galway, Joshua Bell, Kenny Rogers, Michael Feinstein, Tony Bennett, the Canadian Brass, Judy Collins, Nadya Salerno-Sonnenberg, Jose Carreras, Marvin Hamlisch, Kristin Chenoweth, and Paul Anka. He also added guest narrators including LeVar Burton and Henry Winkler.

Maestro Bartram became President of the College Orchestra Directors Association in 2017, after having served as the organization's first National Development Director, Vice-President, and President-elect. He has also served the Fredericksburg community in several capacities. In 2010, he joined the Arts Commission, eventually becoming Chairman, where he founded the Via Colori arts festival and led the effort to establish an Arts and Cultural District in Fredericksburg. He also served on the EDA Advisory Committee and as a member of the Rappahannock Rotary.

As a writer, Bartram has published several national articles on teaching and conducting and published a book in 2022 entitled "Great Teachers: Exploring Excellence in Education." Based on 15 years of observation and research, the book profiles and analyzes the technique of America's most iconic teachers across a wide spectrum of disciplines.

In 2021, Bartram returned to his roots as a K-12 teacher in the Fredericksburg City Schools. Seeking to give back to the community, he joined the staff at James Monroe High School and Walker-Grant Middle School as orchestra director.

He has a Bachelor of Music Education from Northwestern University, a Masters of Music in Orchestral Conducting from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and a Doctor of Music Education from Shenandoah Conservatory.

William Tell Overture
Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868)

By the age of 37, Gioacchino Rossini was possibly the most revered and certainly the most successful operatic composer of his day. He had written 38 operas since the tender age of 18, 28 of them in an incredibly prolific period of eight years, from 1812 to 1819. The French government brought him to Paris in 1824, where he was contracted to compose for the Théâtre Italien and the Opéra. It was for the latter that he wrote his final opera, *Guillaume Tell*, in 1829.

Based on a work by Schiller, the opera recounts the tale of the legendary Swiss hero, William Tell, during the time of the Swiss fight for independence from the Austrian Hapsburgs in the 14th century. Tell, a noted marksman with the crossbow, refuses to bow to a hat set up on a pole by the Austrian governor, Gessler. Gessler arrests him and says Tell will be freed if he can shoot an apple off of his son's head. Tell does so, but says if he had failed he would have shot Gessler and is chained again. Eventually Tell is freed long enough to kill Gessler, leading to a revolt by the Swiss.

After writing *Tell*, Rossini retired from composing operas. He was tired and at this time chronically ill; but though he eventually regained his health and continued to write piano works (such as the *Péchés de vieillesse,* or *Sins of Old Age*, 1857–1868) and sacred pieces (Stabat Mater, 1841), he had ended his theatrical career for good. Newly married to his second wife, he moved to Paris in 1855 and spent the rest of his days as a well-known gourmand, writing, "As far as I'm concerned, I know no more wonderful occupation than food."

The full opera, *Guillaume Tell*, is such a spectacle that it requires six hours to perform. The work combines Italian lyricism with the declamatory style, huge choral ensembles, and theatrical flourishes (ballets, processions) common to French opera. Yet though *Tell* appears to have been received positively at its premiere on August 3, 1829, it was quickly felt the work was too long, and the opera was soon being cut and cut again. Some companies performed only a semi-staging of the second act. An oft-told tale (though unverified) describes the head of the Opéra telling Rossini that "tonight we are performing the second act of your *Tell*," to which the composer replies: "Indeed! All of it?"

Not only was the opera Rossini's longest, its overture was his longest and most elaborate as well. Its musical imagery is seen by many as a precursor to the tone poem. Indeed, its depictions of a storm, a pastoral scene, and heroic riders are now the definitive musical metaphors for each of these images — as anyone who grew up watching American cartoons can tell you!

The cellos and string basses open the work, heralding the dawn. This section, though peaceful, is actually a virtuosic segment for the low strings: Rossini divides the passage into eight separate parts. Some "raindrops" from the woodwinds and swirling "wind" from the strings segue into a violent storm, with brass blaring and drums rolling. In the calm following, an English horn and flute sound the familiar tune now associated with

quiet, bucolic scenes. Rossini based this melody on the Swiss *ranz des vaches*, a tune played on the Alpine horn by cowherds to call in their cattle. Finally, a trumpet sounds the four notes known throughout the world as the opening of the theme for the Lone Ranger, though Rossini meant to signify the approaching Swiss army. The rousing rhythm is that of a popular dance called the *galop* — and what better dance to conjure up an image of galloping horses, whether of Guillaume Tell's Swiss Army or of the Lone Ranger's white steed? Hi ho, Silver, indeed!

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An American in Paris Suite
George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Far more than a mere Jazz Age travelogue, Gershwin's quintessentially American symphonic poem *An American in Paris* unfolds with radiant vitality and intoxicating energy. The work's spry longevity (ninety years and counting) would have come as a surprise to those critics who dismissed Gershwin's works as mere passing fancies. *The New York Evening Post*'s Oscar Thompson allowed that while *An American in Paris* might be all the rage circa 1928, "to conceive of a symphony audience listening to it with any degree of pleasure or patience twenty years from now, when whoopee is no longer even a word, is another matter."

Raised patrician pinkies notwithstanding, conductors knew a good thing when they heard it and snapped the piece up. The work's December 1928 premiere by Walter Damrosch and the New York Philharmonic-Symphony was followed by performances by such luminaries as Fritz Reiner, Artur Rodziński, Alfredo Casella, and maestro Henry Hadley. Even Arturo Toscanini—nobody's choice as an advocate for American music—turned in a whip crack rendition with the NBC Symphony. The first studio recording, with Nathaniel Shilkret conducting the Victor Symphony and featuring an uncredited George Gershwin himself on celesta, took place on February 4, 1929, less than two months after the New York premiere. Umpteen performances and recordings later, *An American in Paris* dances blithely towards its centennial, bedrock repertory, familiar and loved the world over.

An American in Paris eschews formal symphonic development in favor of a loose episodic structure charting the adventures of an American tourist sampling the glories of Paris and succumbing to fits of homesickness along the way. The work's most compelling features are its marvelous melodies—who isn't enchanted by the central "blues" section with its wailing trumpet solo and its glittering orchestration, featuring that quacking quartet of Parisian taxi horns. "It's not a Beethoven symphony, you know," commented Gershwin, perhaps in reaction to elitist reservations about the work's overriding *joie de vivre*. "If it pleases symphony audiences as a light, jolly piece, a series of impressions musically expressed, it succeeds."

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The Firebird Suite
Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

The Firebird would be the first of Stravinsky's truly original Diaghilev scores, but the opportunity came to him rather by accident. From eminent musicologist Richard Taruskin we learn that Diaghilev's original choice of composer for The Firebird had been Nikolai Tcherepnin, who withdrew from the project for reasons not entirely clear (though not before completing the music sketches of *The Enchanted Kingdom*). Anatoli Liadov, a man with a charming gift and a rather casual attitude about deadlines, was next in line. Liadov, for whatever reason, declined the *Firebird* project, as did the composer Diaghilev turned to next, Alexander Glazunov. Diaghilev may even have courted another composer, Nikolai Sokolov, before contacting Stravinsky. "After four refusals," Taruskin writes, "Diaghilev would indeed have been frantic. He would have been ready for any plausible candidate who would accept the commission." Stravinsky was eager to try his hand at a ballet score for Diaghilev—indeed, as Taruskin says, he began writing the *Firebird* music more than a month before Diaghilev turned to him.

The Ballets Russes made a specialty of dancing pieces that were inspired by Russian folklore—primeval Russian history being a cultural obsession of the moment—and *The Firebird* was perfectly suited to the company's designs. The tale involves the dashing Prince Ivan Tsarevich, who finds himself one night wandering through the garden of King Kashchei, an evil monarch whose power resides in a magic egg, which he guards in an elegant box. In Kashchei's garden, the Prince captures a Firebird, which pleads for its life; the Prince agrees to spare it if it gives him one of its magic tail-feathers, which it consents to do. Thus armed, the Prince continues through his evening and happens upon thirteen enchanted princesses. The most beautiful of them catches his eye, and (acting under Kashchei's spell) lures him to a spot where Kashchei's demonic guards can ensnare him. But before he can be put under a spell himself, the Prince uses the magic tail-feather to summon the Firebird, which reveals to him the secret of Kashchei's magic egg. The Prince locates and smashes the egg, breaking the web of evil enchantment, and goes off to marry the newly liberated Princess, with whom, of course, he will live happily ever after.

A French critic reported his experience of hearing Stravinsky play through his work-in-progress that winter in Saint Petersburg: "The composer, young, slim, and uncommunicative, with vague meditative eyes, and lips set firm in an energetic looking face, was at the piano. But the moment he began to play, the modest and dimly lit dwelling glowed with a dazzling radiance. By the end of the first scene, I was conquered: by the last, I was lost in admiration. The manuscript on the music-rest, scored over with fine pencilings, revealed a masterpiece."

Stravinsky's score is one of music's great showpieces of orchestration, a remarkable tour-de-force for a twenty-eight-year-old composer, even one who had issued from the studio of Rimsky-Korsakov, himself acknowledged as a wizard of instrumentation. Although Stravinsky would "slim down" his orchestra for

the concert suites he would later assemble from his *Firebird* score, the orchestration for the original ballet production was truly opulent. Within a couple of years Stravinsky would call for an even larger orchestra in *The Rite of Spring*, and on occasion he was known to program excerpts from the original *Firebird* score along with *The Rite of Spring*, taking advantage of the impressive symphonic resources that would need to be brought together for the latter in any case.

The orchestral effects in *The Firebird* are often astonishing and everywhere beautiful. The Stravinsky biographer Stephen Walsh has observed: "Much of Stravinsky's Rimsky-Korsakov training had been in the field of orchestration. All the same, it is hard to explain the sheer precision of sonority in most of *The Firebird* except in terms of an instinctive grasp of the properties of instrumental sound, an almost infallible inner ear."

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Scheherazade, op. 35
Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908)

I would guess that ninety-nine percent of Rimsky-Korsakov performances in this country are accounted for by three works, the *Capriccio espagnol, Scheherazade*, and the *Russian Easter Overture*, all written within the space of about a year and a half in 1887 and 1888. In fact, these works virtually marked the end of Rimsky-Korsakov's career as a composer of orchestral music. In 1889, he determined to devote most of his energies to writing for the theater.

As a boy and young man, Rimsky-Korsakov, many of whose ancestors had been military or naval men, planned a life in the navy. Nicolai's musical gifts had also manifested early, and by the time he began cadet school, he was already a fairly good pianist and an eager if unpolished composer. When he was seventeen, his piano teacher introduced him to Mily Balakirev, intellectual leader of the group of nationalists—himself, Borodin, César Cui, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov—who came to be known as the Mighty Handful or the Mighty Five.

The still teenaged Rimsky-Korsakov fell under Balakirev's spell immediately. He continued his naval pursuits for a time—not without profit, because his travels to the United States (during the Civil War), the Near East, and Asia were immensely stimulating to his imagination—but the first important step toward turning him into a real composer had been taken. He was still, in his own description, "an officer-dilettante who sometimes enjoyed playing and listening to music," but with his return to Russia and renewed contact with Balakirev, his proper destiny became clear to him.

He became the complete musical citizen. He composed, but he also conducted, taught, and was a generous friend to colleagues. In the winter of 1887-88, he was bringing into performable shape the unfinished opera

Prince Igor by his recently deceased friend Alexander Borodin. While engaged with this music, with its east-of-Saint-Petersburg flavor, he conceived the idea of *Scheherazade*.

From the beginning, he could not quite make up his mind about the balance between the programmatic and the purely musical elements. How much *Arabian Nights*, how much just music? And while programmatic elements were undoubtedly present in *Scheherazade* and played an important part in the shaping of the work, Rimsky-Korsakov did not want his listeners to be distracted by being glued to extra-musical detail.

He headed the score with this preface:

"The Sultan Shahriar, convinced of the duplicity and infidelity of all women, vowed to slay each of his wives after the first night. The Sultana Scheherazade, however, saved her life by the expedient of recounting to the Sultan a succession of tales over a period of one thousand one nights. Overcome by curiosity, the monarch postponed the execution of his wife from day to day, and ended by renouncing his sanguinary resolution altogether."

The composer's own thoughts about *Scheherazade* as expressed in his memoirs are worth attending to:

> The program I had been guided by consisted of separate, unconnected episodes and pictures from *The Arabian Nights*, scattered through all four movements of my suite. The unifying thread consisted of the brief introductions to the first, second, and fourth movements and the intermezzo in movement three, written for violin solo and delineating Scheherazade herself as she tells her wondrous tales to the stern Sultan. The final conclusion of the fourth movement serves the same artistic purpose.
>
> In this manner, developing the musical material quite freely, I had in view the creation of an orchestral suite in four movements, closely knit by the community of its themes and motifs, yet presenting, as it were, a kaleidoscope of fairy-tale images and designs of Oriental character.
>
> In composing *Scheherazade* I meant the hints [conveyed by the titles] to direct the listener's fancy but slightly on the path which my own fancy had traveled. All I had desired was that the listener, if he liked my piece as *symphonic music*, should carry away the impression that it is beyond doubt an Oriental narrative of some numerous and varied fairy-tale wonders and not merely four pieces played one after another and composed on the basis of themes common to all four movements.

Scheherazade is a wonderful piece. It is full of glorious solo opportunities. Its vitality, the charm of its tunes, and the effortless brilliance of its orchestration never fail to make an impression and to give delight.

One of the programmatic elements of which we can be certain is the portrayal of Sultan and Sultana in the first minute. The unison and *fortissimo* proclamation that opens the work obviously represents the former, a brutal psychopath. Fairy-tale chords for soft woodwinds lead to the seductive and flattering violin-voice of

Scheherazade herself.

And now the symphonic suite can begin. The first movement is spacious music—call it Prelude, call it "The Sea and Sinbad's Ship," or simply Allegro non troppo. The measures are broad, and the pace of harmonic change is majestic. The Sultan's motif is the principal one; the Scheherazade violin also returns, and in a manner that suggests she is doing more than just telling stories. Development is cleverly and effectively mixed with simple statement and restatement. The chapter ends dreamily.

The tender third movement returns to the more leisurely gait of the first. It is a lovely flow of lyric invention, scored with remarkable finesse, the writing for quiet percussion being especially charming. Scheherazade has her say, but it is with the lyric main theme that the movement comes to its gentle and smiling close.

The finale opens much as the first movement did, with the contrast of Sultan and Sultana, though this version is more elaborate. The music, after this double introduction, is quick and exciting. With the appearance of the Sultan's theme, grandly declaimed by the trombones against swirling strings, the suite arrives at its rhetorical high point. It subsides into sinister shudderings, punctuated by a single stroke on the tam-tam—a nice instance of the composer's elegant economy with all his colorful percussion. Appropriately enough, it is Scheherazade who has the last word. When her sinuous melody returns, her mode of address is sweet and capricious. Then she repeats way down on the fourth string and the music climbs, slowly, slowly, into the ether. This is going to be the first secure night's sleep the lady has had in almost three years.

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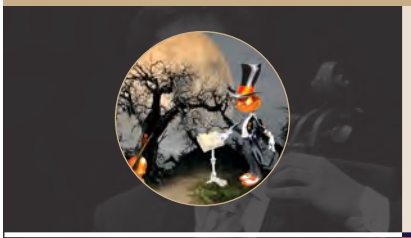
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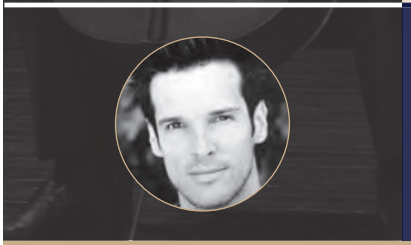
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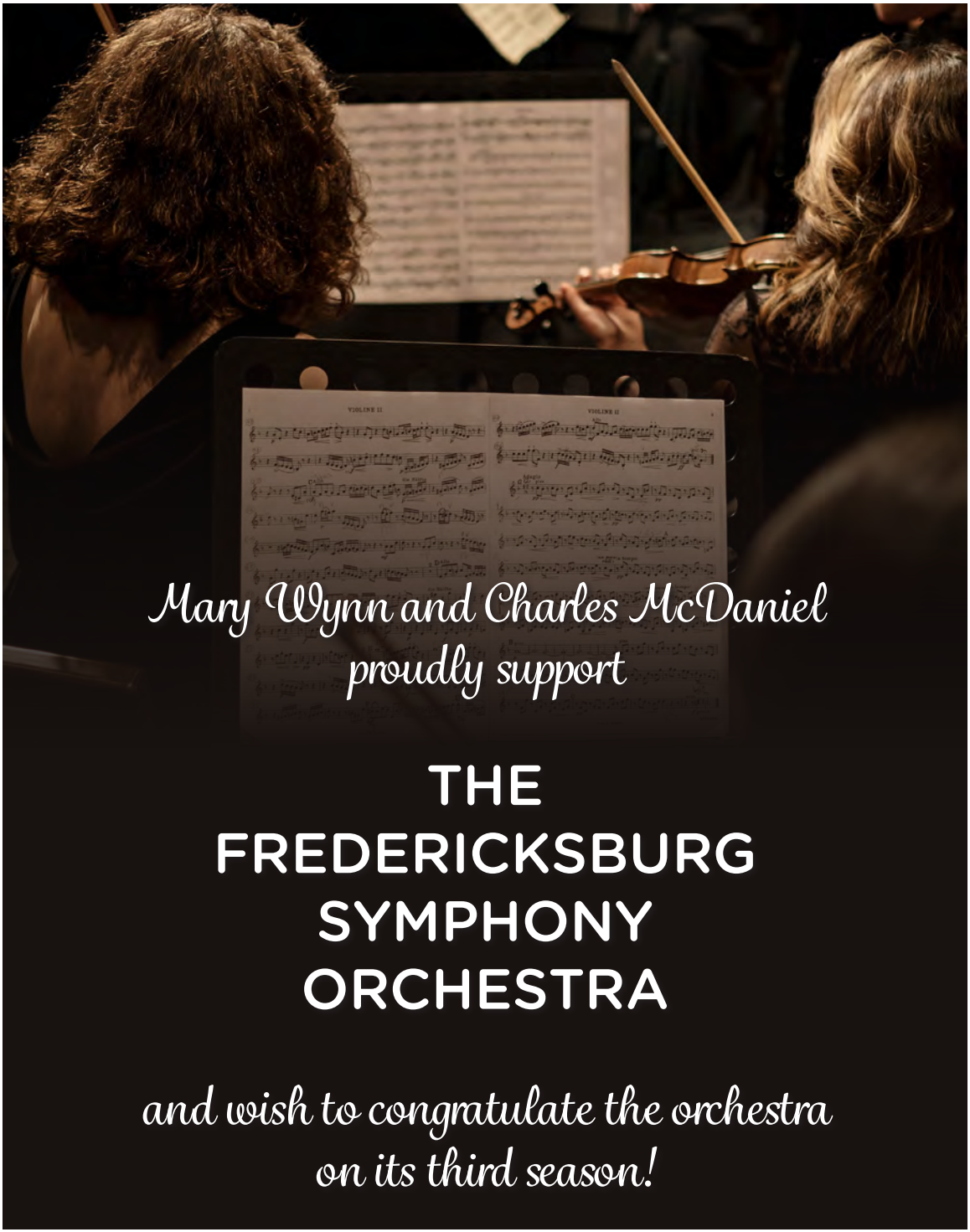
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