University of Pittsburgh

Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences
Department of Music

The University of Pittsburgh Department of Music
—presents—

Welcoming Hope

University of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Roger Zahab, Director

Sunday, March 22, 2026 • 7:00 PM
Bellefield Hall Auditorium, University of Pittsburgh

315 S Bellefield Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

University of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Roger Zahab, director
Joe Pearson, undergraduate assistant conductor
Nick Fagnilli, graduate assistant conductor

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PROGRAM

Sinfonia Comatica **(2014)** **Judith Weir**

En vyolèt **(2025)** **Bryndon J. Ráschaul**

Chris Miller, flute; Daniel Cheng, violin; Finn Fitzgerald, viola; Allyssa Wagner, cello; Zoe Curtis, trombone; Michael Levin, bass clarinet

L'histoire du Soldat **("Soldier's Tale") (1918)** **Igor Stravinsky**

… "And now what am I going to do? What am I going to do now?"
Pastorale
… "Another punch or where do I go? To see the King!"
Royal March

Peyton Anderson, clarinet; Abi Grace Trauffer, bassoon; Andrew Levin, trumpet; Jack Isaac, trombone; Roger Zahab, violin; JP Tomlinson, double bass; Jacob Doran, percussion; Nick Fagnilli, conductor

a rather sacred special occasion **(2026)** **Paul Josha Lehman**
WORLD PREMIERE

Addie Kelly, JP Tomlinson, Cameron Wallace; double basses
Roger Zahab, conductor

Saint Paul's Suite **(1912)** **Gustav Holst**

I. Jig
II. Ostinato
III. Andante con moto
IV. Finale (The Dargason)

Joe Pearson, conductor

Akwaaba (Welcome) **(2019/26)** **Ernest Owusu-Poku (Ronaldo)**
orch. by Justice Turkson

In memory of Ernest Owusu-Poku
Roger Zahab, conductor

Program Notes

Judith Weir's Sinfonia Comatica was commissioned by CoMA (Contemporary Music for All) and premiered by them on 25 October 2014 at St John's Smith Square, London. The six parts designed for flexible scoring allow ensembles to perform it with whatever instruments are available.

En vyolèt emerged from a period of study of music from Miles Davis and Duke Ellington, whose distinct approaches to color, harmony, and ensemble writing left a strong impression. The piece explores how elements associated with jazz can be translated into a chamber music setting. The title, "En vyolèt" (in English: "In violet"), evokes a particular shade of smooth, soulful, and introspective sound. The ensemble is treated almost like a small palette, allowing the color between instruments to swing through in subtle ways reminiscent of jazz sonorities. — Bryndon Ráschaul

Bryndon Jefferson Ráschaul is an American composer from northeast Arkansas whose work explores the intersection of cultural curiosity, musical storytelling, and stylistic hybridity. His music often reflects an interest in global musical traditions, language, and place, drawing inspiration from an array of influences.

Igor Stravinsky wrote L'Histoire du Soldat "to be read, played and danced" with text by the Swiss writer Charles Ferdinand Ramuz. It was first conducted by Ernest Ansermet on September 28, 1918 in Lausanne, Switzerland just a few months before the end of the First World War.

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a rather sacred special occasion seeks to tell a fragmented story of three characters – a violinist, a statue, and a dancer, that exist close to one another physically, but whose paths never cross, except in broken moments of serendipity never noticed or addressed. It was inspired by a day spent with three such characters, all whose time with me was separate, and the affect they came to have on me as a singular memory. — Paul Joshua Lehman

Paul Joshua Lehman is a bassist, composer, and improviser living and working in the Black Hills of South Dakota, exploring connections to nature, and between humans, through sound.

As **Gustav Holst** notes in his original score: "**Saint Paul's Suite** was written for St Paul's Girls School Orchestra in 1912. By the time it was finished and copied the orchestra possessed woodwind instruments. Parts for the latter were added.

The Suite was published in 1922 by Messrs. Goodwin & Tabb for strings only. The MS wind parts are the property of the School."

Akwaaba **(meaning "Welcome" in Twi)** is an original musical composition by Ernest Owusu-Poku, composed around 2019, reimagined through the lens of Owusu-Poku's extensive journey from the rhythmic streets of Aboabo-Kumasi to the academic halls of the University of Ghana, Legon. Composed in C Major, the arrangement highlights the "Call and Response" patterns rooted in the Ghanaian highlife rhythmic groove and syncopations, set against simple Western classical compositional forms.

Listeners will hear the signature Highlife "bounce" carried by the lower strings and winds, while the brass and woodwinds engage in a vibrant Call and Response, a hallmark of African compositional technique emphasized during his studies at Legon. The work radiates the same optimism and "higher dimensions of rhythmic appreciation" that defined Owusu-Poku's life and his time at the University of Pittsburgh. — Justice Turkson

Ernest Owusu-Poku, affectionately known as "Ronaldo," was born on June 3, 1985, in Kumasi, Ghana, to the late Samson Acheampong and Madam Doris Nsiah. He was named after his uncle, the former Inspector General of Police (Ghana)—Ernest Owusu-Poku. Ernest grew up in a loving family that instilled discipline, humility, and a love of learning, qualities that defined his life. He made his home across Kumasi, Accra, and Pittsburgh, USA.

Ernest began his education in Kumasi, attending primary and junior high schools before Adventist Day Senior High School. As a young student, he was intelligent, focused, and deeply committed to his studies. Teachers and classmates admired not only his academic excellence but also his calm demeanor and respectful spirit. A quietly powerful presence, Ernest was a prolific keyboardist whose touch moved seamlessly through jazz, blues, and highlife. He performed with many of Ghana's leading musicians, founded the group G-Note, and played with several bands, bringing a generous spirit to every stage. After years of distinguished performance, Ernest moved to Accra to deepen his calling through scholarship.

In 2011, he enrolled in the University of Ghana's Diploma in Music program, later earning a Bachelor's degree in Music and Sociology. A sought-after sound engineer, he recorded numerous artists and ensembles while serving as Studio Manager in the Department of Music, where his meticulous ear and calm guidance helped shape the department's sound. He went on to complete a Master of Philosophy in Music at the University of Ghana, publishing on highlife, the recording industry, and archives, while mentoring peers with care.

Ernest moved to the United States in 2022, to pursue a doctorate in Ethnomusicology at the University of Pittsburgh. Passionate about returning Ghanaian highlife recordings and material culture to Ghana, he secured funding in 2024 and established a highlife archive at the University of Ghana—an ambitious, community-centered project that shaped his PhD work and stands as a testament to his vision.

After two years of doctoral study, Ernest returned to Ghana and married the love of his life, Vanessa Oheneba Takyi, his longtime friend and confidante. When they later lived together in the United States, their relationship—rooted in mutual respect and shared dreams—blossomed into a partnership marked by deep affection and unwavering support. Vanessa stood beside Ernest through his academic pursuits and musical endeavors, becoming not only his life partner but also a source of strength as he advanced his vision for Ghanaian music and culture.

Ernest cherished time with family—his mother, siblings, nieces, nephew, and cousins. He remained prayerful in his Christian faith. Those who knew him remember a reliable motivator with a quiet, soft-spoken grace, someone who steadied rooms and lifted others' best work forward. His communities spanned church and stage, studio and conferences: the Pentecost Church, the Ghanaian music industry, the Sound Engineers Association of Ghana, and the Society for Ethnomusicology. Across these circles, he braided performance, recording, archiving, and scholarship into a single practice.

Ernest's sudden passing on October 31, 2025, has brought profound sorrow to his family, friends, and academic community. Yet his legacy lives on in the people he uplifted, the scholarship he advanced, the music he created, the artists he recorded and performed with, the students and colleagues he encouraged, and the archival home he helped build for highlife. He will be remembered as a person of integrity, faith, and vision—a loving husband, a devoted family man, and an inspiration to all who knew him. Though his time on earth was brief, his impact endures.

May his gentle soul rest in perfect peace.

Joe Pearson studies Music Composition and Environmental Science at the University of Pittsburgh. He is a multi-instrumentalist, with past performances as a guitarist, pianist, cellist, bassist, and percussionist. He recently sold out the limited-edition release of his debut album. The record is not available on streaming services but is instead self-published on his website: joepearson.music. His conducting journey started with his original piece for jazz orchestra "Fractal". Since then, he has been studying under Roger Zahab and is very grateful for the opportunity to work with the University of Pittsburgh Orchestra.

Nick Fagnilli is a composer (Ithaca College BM 2019) and educator (Carnegie Mellon University MM 2026) living in Pittsburgh, PA. He considers his music making and teaching as having a symbiotic relationship. Nick believes to teach is to collaborate artistically with students and discover new possibilities together. Outside of the classroom, Nick creates new compositions in a similar manner, allowing his friendships and connections in his life to inform and inspire him towards unique creative works. His music draws from a dizzying array of styles and performance practices but is unified by his unique approach to the creative decision-making process, using mind and body to interpret a logic after the fact of making choices. Nick believes that anyone who listens is a musician, and the listener-musician creates reality by listening and making choices that give rise to the governing logic of that reality.

Roger Zahab (b. 1957) enjoys instigating fairly complex and unpredictable interactions through his activities as composer, violinist/violist, improvisor, conductor, teacher, and writer. Born in Akron, Ohio of Lebanese American ancestry, his interests have ranged far and wide. He has fostered premieres of more than 250 works, and his repertoire spans some 700 years - from Guillaume de Machaut to the present.

Roger's work as composer and improvisor is primarily focused on music's place in society for everyone from young students to experienced new music specialists. Recordings include at the piano, performed by Robert Frankenberry, and at the violin. A new album, Magic and desire…songs of intimate connections by Gilda Lyons and Roger Zahab was released (digitally) on February 20, 2026 by Albany records.

Zahab is currently Teaching Professor, Director of the Orchestra, and Director of Undergraduate Studies. In 2011 he helped found the Vermont College of Fine Arts Master of Fine Arts in Music Composition program where he continues as core faculty member and instigator.

University of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Personnel

Joe Pearson, undergraduate assistant conductor
Georgia Paraskos, stage manager

J. Weir – *Sinfonia Comatica* / E. Owusu-Poku arr. Turkson – *Akwaaba*

Flute
Chris Miller
Van Slavishak

Oboe
Aaron Steinmetz
Adrianna Petraitis

Clarinet
Vivian Zhong
Peyton Anderson

Bassoon
Abi Grace Trauffer

Horn
Megumi Barclay
Al Riska

Trumpet
Andrew Levin
Brennan Fingal

Trombone
Jack Isaac

Tuba
Sam Morton

Percussion
Jacob Doran
Satyaj Bhargava
Joe Pearson

Piano
Billy Su

Strings

Violin I
Daniel Cheng, Erica Liu
Sean Consigli, Ava Luu
Heather Wu, Isaiah Hollinger

Violin II
Raymond Jewell, Georgia Paraskos
Calli Sophocles, Olivia Sinciline
Kyoungah Lee, Roger Zahab
(in Beethoven)

Viola
Finn Fitzgerald, Meghan Cherry
Celia Hoffman, Isabella Muthler
Isabel Sarsfield, Adria Jew
Henry Nalence

Cello
Allyssa Wagner, Matthew Enders,
Cate Lenchner, Caelyn Gollinger,
Sangita Das-Quigley, Alexander Whowell,
Owen Davis

Bass
JP Tomlinson, Addie Kelly,
Cameron Wallace