

Guest conductor David Robertson joins contemporary classical sensation JJJJ in her Houston Symphony debut this weekend as she performs Steven Mackey's guitar concerto *Aluminum Flowers*. Paired with this piece are Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and Mozart's *Symphony No. 41*. What is the throughline that unites these vastly different pieces?

Composer Steven Mackey says: "Mozart is my biggest hero, partly because it took me a while to come to him. At first, it just sounded like ricky-ticky baby cliched classical music, and then I realized, this music is about movement. It delineates all these different topographies but still ties them together. Once I grokked that, it really excited me and has been something that I have been pursuing ever since—music as movement. I would say the same thing about Stravinsky. Stravinsky is about juxtapositions, in contrast to Mozart, who is about transitions—Stravinsky is about the different places. But they have in common that there is a big wide world uncovered in the music."

You can find the full program, complete with conductor and artist bios, [on our website](#).

The resources below were compiled for you to use as you see fit, to complement your current classroom objectives or pass along to individual students attending who you think would benefit from certain ideas.

IGOR STRAVINSKY'S *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*

Written in 1947 as a tribute to the composer Claude Debussy, Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* is scored entirely for winds and brass. Rather than building the piece around one long, singable melody, Stravinsky creates a constantly changing landscape of contrasting sounds, rhythms, and instrumental colors. As you listen, think about how Stravinsky uses the unique sounds of individual instruments and groups of instruments to create interest and shape the music.

Listen
Here!

Questions to Consider:

- What sounds stand out to you? What instruments or combinations of instruments catch your attention?
- How does the absence of strings change the sound of the ensemble?
- Choose one instrument you hear prominently. What do you think Stravinsky is asking that instrument to contribute to the overall sound?

STEVEN MACKEY'S *Aluminum Flowers*

Aluminum Flowers was written in 2023 as a commission from the Curtis Institute of Music to celebrate the 100th anniversary of its founding. The work is dedicated to two guitarists, Jiji Kim (who will be joining the Houston Symphony for this performance) and Gretchen Menn.

Listen
Here!

This piece is divided into five movements, each featuring a different guitar effect.

1. Introduction –played with a nylon string, classical style guitar
2. Echo – electric guitar with a delay pedal
3. Cancion – electric guitar with overdrive and distortion
4. Fantasia – prepared guitar with a guitar pick threaded through the strings (gong-like sound) and a bottle neck that slides up and down the string.
5. Loop – electric guitar with a loop pedal

“I was playing in rock bands, and my fallback position in case I didn’t become a rock star was to be a physicist somehow...Within the first two weeks of taking [a music appreciation class in college], I decided that I wanted to be a musician.”

Steven Mackey

Questions to Consider and activities to try:

- What can your instrument do that another instrument can’t easily imitate?
- Pick a note on your instrument that is easy to play. How many different musical characters can you create from the same pitch? Can you make your instrument sound like another instrument?
- Below is a list of effects Mackey uses throughout this piece. As you listen, think about what musical problem does each effect solve? How does Mackey use the orchestra to amplify these effects? If you could choose three effects from the list below to add to your instrument, what would you choose and why?
 - Distortion
 - Echo/delay
 - Reverb
 - Looping
 - Pitch shifting
 - Prepared instrument (guitar pick on string, bottle neck)
 - Overdrive

Videos to Learn More:

[Steven Mackey on Composing "Aluminum Flowers" - YouTube](#)

MOZART'S *Symphony No. 41 in C Major (Jupiter)*

Symphony No. 41 is the last of Mozart's symphonies. "Mozart composed his final three symphonies during the summer of 1788...the three symphonies were likely composed for a concert series in August, although it is uncertain whether these concerts took place." –Calvin Dotsey

Listen
Here!

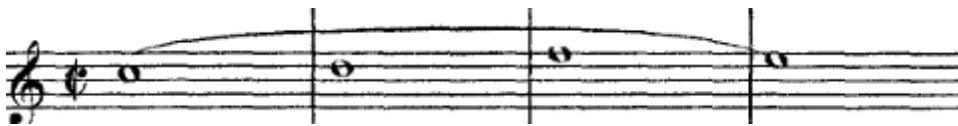
While the symphony is full of memorable melodies, one of its most remarkable features is the way Mozart combines several musical ideas at once. This technique, called **counterpoint**, occurs when independent melodies are played simultaneously, creating a musical conversation between different instruments or sections.

In the fourth movement, Mozart introduces five main themes and uses them interchangeably as counterpoint. **Choose one of the themes listed below and play it on your instrument.** As you listen to the final movement, identify each time you hear your chosen theme. Here are some questions you might consider:

- What instrument or section plays your theme most often?
- Does your theme always sound the same?
- What helps you recognize your theme when another theme is playing at the same time?
- Who seems to be "leading" when your theme and another theme happen together?

All themes below are written in the treble clef but appear throughout the movement in all clefs.

Theme 1



Theme 2



Theme 3



Theme 4



Theme 5



[This video](#) contains a visual analysis of the finale with each theme color coordinated.

Videos to learn more:

[Magnificent Counterpoint in the Finale of Mozart's Jupiter Symphony](#)

[Mozart: Symphony No. 41 - finale \(Another Day, Another Masterpiece\)](#)

[Why Is Mozart Genius?](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA

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We look forward to seeing you at Jones Hall soon!