

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEMPHIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA TO PRESENT FOUR NEW ORCHESTRAL WORKS

Innovative Collaboration Celebrates Emerging Talent through the Memphis Composers Institute

The Memphis Symphony Orchestra, the University of Memphis, and The Walden School join forces to present a groundbreaking program supporting the artistic growth of emerging composers selected through an international call for scores.

An exciting weekend of events, to be held February 7-9, will include open rehearsals, panel discussions, and a reception with musicians, and will culminate in the world premiere of four new orchestral works at Harris Hall at the University of Memphis at 2:00 PM on Sunday, February 9.

The concert will feature acclaimed violist Kimberly Sparr performing a new viola concerto commissioned by the Memphis Symphony Orchestra by composer and Walden faculty member and alumnus D. J. Sparr.

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MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE, January 29, 2025 — The **Memphis Composers Institute**, a collaborative initiative between the **Memphis Symphony Orchestra**, **The Walden School**, and the **University of Memphis**, proudly announces the winners of the 2025 Memphis Composers Institute. This year's selected composers — **Evan Erickson, Sina Karachiani, and Soomin Kim** — were chosen from an impressive pool of more than 100 applicants, who submitted scores from across the globe. Their works will be performed by the Memphis Symphony Orchestra in a special concert on **Sunday, February 9, 2025 at 2:00 PM**. The concert will be conducted by **Kyle Dickson**, Madeleine Luce Moore Assistant Conductor Chair of the Memphis Symphony.

The Memphis Composers Institute provides a unique opportunity for emerging composers to collaborate with a professional orchestra, receive mentorship, and refine their craft. The selection process involved a distinguished panel from The Walden School, University of Memphis, and the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, all working together to foster the next generation of composers through professional performance opportunities and an immersive orchestral setting.

Highlighting the program's impact, selected composer **Sina Karachiani** shared his enthusiasm, describing the experience as "invaluable" and added, "I'm incredibly excited to hear my work brought into life by this amazing professional orchestra. Opportunities for emerging composers to have their orchestral music performed are rare."

Highlights of the weekend include:

- **Friday, February 7:** Opening reception followed by the Memphis Symphony Orchestra's first rehearsal of the featured works. The evening rehearsal in Harris Hall at 7:30 PM is open to the public.
- **Saturday, February 8:** Meet the Musicians luncheon followed by panel discussions featuring members of the selection committee, performers, composers, mentors, and guest orchestra musicians. The evening concludes with a second MSO open rehearsal at Harris Hall at 7:30 PM, which is open to the public.
- **Sunday, February 9:** The weekend culminates with a 2:00 PM public concert featuring the world premieres of the new orchestral works.

"It's a privilege to introduce these three unique artistic voices to the Memphis community. Each of these works has something distinctive to say, and I look forward to working alongside the MSO and these phenomenal composers to bring these works to life," notes Memphis Symphony Orchestra conductor **Kyle Dickson**.

Meet the Winners of the Memphis Composers Institute

The Memphis Symphony Orchestra will premiere works by three extraordinary composers selected from an international call for scores. **Soomin Kim** (*star / ghost / mouth / sea*), **Evan Erickson** (*Obleck*), and **Sina Karachiani** (*Stranger of Kin*) bring fresh and compelling perspectives to the concert hall, blending influences ranging from Persian traditions to contemporary storytelling. Their works will debut alongside a new viola concerto by composer **D. J. Sparr** in an inspiring concert celebrating the next generation of orchestral music. The selection committee also wishes to acknowledge two composers whose compelling works received honorable mention: **William "Liam" Cummins** (*Joyas Voladoras*) and **Kian Ravaei** (*Majnun in the Wilderness*).

Caroline Mallonee, Walden alumna and director of The Walden School Creative Musicians Retreat, expressed her enthusiasm: “Walden is thrilled to support the three composers selected by the Memphis Composers Institute as they take an important step in their creative journeys. By helping these artists bring their music to life with the Memphis Symphony, we continue The Walden School’s mission of fostering creativity and collaboration through meaningful experiential opportunities.”

The selection committee for the Memphis Composers Institute included esteemed musicians from The Walden School (**Sky Macklay**, **Michael Kropf**, and **Caroline Mallonee**), the University of Memphis (**Kamran Ince** and **Mahir Cetiz**), and the Memphis Symphony Orchestra (**Kyle Dickson** and **Robert Patterson**), representing a distinguished and accomplished panel of experts. **D. J. Sparr** serves as the Artistic Coordinator of the Memphis Composers Institute.

Mahir Cetiz, Assistant Professor of Composition & Theory at the Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music, underscored the importance of the event: “I do not think I would be exaggerating when I say that the Memphis Composers Institute is going to be one of the most important new music events in 2025. This is a unique collaboration between The Walden School, Memphis Symphony Orchestra, and the University of Memphis-Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music, to showcase the works of three composers while providing an inspiring and eye-opening series of activities to our community.”

Concert Information

Memphis Composers Institute Concert

Sunday, February 9, 2025 | 2:00 PM

University of Memphis, Harris Hall

Suggested donation: **\$20 adults | \$5 children | Pay-what-you-can streaming available.**

For tickets, visit:

<https://memphis-symphony-orchestra.my.salesforce-sites.com/ticket/#/instances/a0FPb000005OKZ0MAO>

For a complete schedule of events for the weekend, visit:

<https://waldenschool.org/memphis-composers-institute/>

About the Artists

Evan Erickson — *Oobleck*

Clarinetist, composer, and engraver **Evan Erickson** studies under Robyn Jones (clarinet) and Kamran Ince (composition) at the University of Memphis. He has been a two-time finalist for the ASCAP Morton Gould Award (2023, 2024) and is passionate about championing underrepresented composers. He founded a non-profit Call for Scores initiative that has premiered the works of emerging artists with sponsorships from Dorico, Finale, and NotePerformer.

Sina Karachiani — *Stranger of Kin*

San Francisco-based **Sina Karachiani**, an alumnus of The Walden School's Creative Musicians Retreat, blends Western classical music, Persian traditions, and electronic media to explore themes of self and personal growth. His work *Whirling Onward* was performed by the USC Thornton Symphony Orchestra, and his Double Bass Sonata won first prize in the MACCC Composition Contest. *Stranger of Kin* is inspired by his grandmother's struggle with Alzheimer's Disease.

Soomin Kim — *star / ghost / mouth / sea*

Composer and singer **Soomin Kim** explores identity, technology, and storytelling through music. She is a three-time recipient of the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award (2019, 2020, 2022) and the 2024 winner of the University of Florida Call for Scores by Women Composers. Kim's compositions have been featured at the Ravinia Festival, Sydney Festival, Aspen Music Festival, and Norfolk New Music Workshop. She currently serves as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Composition at Oberlin Conservatory.

D. J. Sparr — *Extended Play: for Viola and Orchestra*

Composer and electric guitarist **D. J. Sparr**, whom *Gramophone* recently hailed as "exemplary," is one of America's preeminent composer-performers. He has caught the attention of critics with his eclectic style, described as "pop-Romantic...iridescent and wondrous" (*The Mercury News*) and "suits the boundary erasing spirit of today's new-music world" (*The New York Times*). *The Los Angeles Times* praises him as "an excellent soloist," and the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* says that he "wowed an enthusiastic audience...Sparr's guitar sang in a near-human voice."

D. J. Sparr, named one of NPR listeners' favorite 100 composers under 40 in 2011, was the electric guitar concerto soloist on a 2018 GRAMMY-Award-winning album with JoAnn Falletta and the London Symphony Orchestra. He has composed for and performed with renowned ensembles, including the Houston Grand Opera, Cabrillo Festival, New World Symphony, Washington National Opera, and Eighth Blackbird. A recipient of awards from BMI, New Music USA, and the League of Composers/ISCM, Sparr was a Young American Composer-in-Residence with the California Symphony and is a faculty member at The Walden School's Creative Musicians Retreat in Dublin, New Hampshire. His works and performances appear on Albany,

Naxos, Innova Recordings, and Centaur Records. Based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Sparr teaches at LSU's Roger Hadfield Ogden Honors College, and his music is published by Bill Holab Music.

Kyle Dickson, conductor

American conductor **Kyle Dickson** is celebrated for his dynamic presence on the podium. He is Assistant Conductor of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra and Music Director of the Memphis Youth Symphony. From 2021-2023, Dickson was a Salonen Fellow with the San Francisco Symphony and Assistant Conductor of the Chicago Sinfonietta.

Dickson has appeared as Guest Conductor with the National Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Portland (ME) Symphony, and Oakland Symphony with recent debuts with the Louisville Orchestra, Pasadena Symphony, and the Grant Park Music Festival. As Cover Conductor, Dickson has been engaged by the New York Philharmonic, St. Louis Symphony, and the San Diego Symphony as well as serving as Assistant Conductor for concerts with the NDR Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Orchestre de Paris, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

A champion for youth and diversity in the arts, Dickson created the award-winning MUSIC REPRESENTS series and was Assistant Conductor for Carnegie Hall's NYO2 in 2022. He has worked as guest conductor with youth orchestras across the country including ICYOLA, Colburn Academy Virtuosi and the Chicago Youth in Music Festival.

Kimberly Sparr, violist

Kimberly Sparr, praised for her versatility and virtuosity, is a soloist, chamber, and orchestral violist. She is the Associate Professor of Viola at Louisiana State University, violist of the Atlantic Chamber Ensemble, and a member of the trio Scabaret. She is also on the faculty of the Brevard Music Center.

Sparr has held assistant principal roles with the Richmond Symphony and Colorado Music Festival and has performed with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, and Washington National Opera. She has appeared as a concerto soloist with ensembles including the LSU Symphony, Colorado Music Festival Orchestra, Amarillo Virtuosi, Pittsburgh Civic Orchestra, Texas Tech University Symphony Orchestra, LSU Wind Ensemble, and the Lubbock Symphony Orchestra. She has also been a guest artist with Agarita and the Harrington String Quartet.

An experienced educator, Sparr has taught at Texas Tech University, The College of William and Mary, and UMBC. She has also served on the faculty of the National Music Festival and the Summer Strings Academy for Girls.

About the Memphis Composers Institute

The Memphis Composers Institute is a partnership between the **Memphis Symphony Orchestra**, **The Walden School**, and the **University of Memphis**, dedicated to fostering the next generation of composers through professional performance opportunities and mentorship in an immersive orchestral setting.

About The Walden School

The Walden School provides innovative and immersive music education programs, offering musicians of all ages opportunities to develop their creativity and collaborate with professional musicians. Known for its student-centered approach, The Walden School fosters artistic growth in a supportive and engaging environment.

About Memphis Symphony Orchestra

The Memphis Symphony Orchestra (MSO) is a cornerstone of the cultural life in Memphis, bringing world-class performances and educational programs to the community. MSO is dedicated to artistic excellence and outreach, inspiring audiences through innovative programming and a commitment to fostering new music.

About the University of Memphis Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music

The Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music at the University of Memphis is a leading institution in providing music education, offering comprehensive programs in performance, composition, and music technology, among other concentrations. With world-renowned faculty and state-of-the-art facilities, the school prepares students for dynamic careers in the music industry.

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