

The Williams College Department of Music presents the [Berkshire Symphony in concert](#) on Friday, October 27, at 7:30 p.m. in [Chapin Hall](#) on the Williams College campus. There is a pre-concert talk with conductor Ronald Feldman at 6:45 p.m. in Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall. The concert is free and open to the public.

The program of American composers features *The Cowboys Overture* by John Williams, and “Cloudburst,” from the Grand Canyon Suite by Ferde Grofé. Charles Ives’ ode to his home region comes to life with Three Pieces in New England, [“Impression of the “St. Gaudens” in Boston Common,” “The Children’s Holiday at Putnam’s Camp,” “The Housatonic at Stockbridge.”] Rounding off the program is *The Wizard of Menlo Park* (1997) by Kevin Kaska, narrated by Cliff Schorer. The piece takes the form of an address on Thomas Edison (to commemorate the 150th anniversary of his birth) that mixes a soaring score with narration that tells the story of a unique and inventive person.

John Williams (b. 1932)

Overture to *The Cowboys* (1972)

John Williams is one of, if not the, greatest film composer in the history of cinema. With a career spanning over half a century, his music has received numerous accolades, including 7 British Academy Film Awards, 4 Golden Globe Awards, 25 Grammy Awards, and 53 Academy Award nominations, second only to Walt Disney. Some of his most famous scores include [Star Wars](#), [Indiana Jones](#), [Jaws](#), [E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial](#), [Harry Potter](#), [Jurassic Park](#), [Schindler’s List](#), [Fiddler on the Roof](#), [Home Alone](#), [Superman](#), and [Saving Private Ryan](#).

The curtain raiser to tonight’s Berkshire Symphony concert is the overture to less well-known but fantastic John Williams film, [The Cowboys](#), released in 1972.

In rural Montana, the aging Wil Andersen (John Wayne) is left to manage his horse and cattle ranch by himself after his ranch hands all leave their posts to join the Montana Gold Rush. He heads into the city of Bozeman in desperate need of assistance for his upcoming cattle drive, only to find it completely abandoned. On the way back home, he passes by a schoolhouse, where he meets a group of young, somewhat mischievous boys, and he considers the possibility of hiring them.

To his surprise, the boys all show up at Andersen's front door the following morning to volunteer for the drive, successfully proving their skills in a test to stay on top of a buckling horse. While they prepare for the drive, a group of adult cowboys, led by Asa "Long Hair" Watts (Bruce Dern), confronts Andersen, but, catching them attempting to lie about their past, he refuses to hire them. With the addition of Jebediah Nightlinger (Roscoe Lee Browne), a cook who rides the chuck wagon, Andersen's team is complete, and they begin their 400-mile-long journey across Montana.

At one point during the trip, a wheel to the chuck wagon breaks loose, and Nightlinger is forced to stay behind to repair it. Seeing this, Watts and his gang soon come out of hiding and trail much closer behind Andersen's team, surrounding them that night while the cowboys pitch camp. After taunting the boys, Andersen challenges Watts to a fight, getting the better over him despite his age. As Andersen walks away, Watts pulls out a revolver and shoots him in both arms and the leg before piercing him twice through the torso. With Nightlinger having fallen behind, the boys have no other adults to protect them, and are forced to give up the herd. In his dying moments, Andersen tells the cowboys how proud he is of them.

When Nightlinger returns, the boys take up arms and plan an ambush on Long Hair's gang, silently killing three of the outlaws before surrounding the rest. Stuck under a fallen horse with one of his legs tied to a rope, Watts begs for forgiveness before one of the boys fires into the air, spooking the horse away with Watts being dragged on the ground behind it. The crew delivers the cattle to Belle Fourche, South Dakota, where they purchase a tombstone for Andersen which reads "Beloved Husband and Father," signaling the fatherly role Andersen played during the drive.

Charles Ives (1874-1954)

Three Places in New England (1903-14, rev. 1929)

I. The “St. Gaudens” in Boston Common

II. Putnam’s Camp, Redding, Connecticut

III. The Housatonic at Stockbridge

After four successful years leading the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic, world famous conductor and composer Gustav Mahler returned to Vienna in the summer of 1910 with a copy of the score to [“The Camp Meeting.”](#) the third of four symphonies written by American composer Charles Ives, paying out of his own pocket to have it copied. Some scholars claim that Mahler had organized rehearsals of the piece with the intention of premiering it the next year. A performance led by the world’s most famous conductor would have been a major break for Ives, who throughout his life struggled to have his work even noticed by others. However, in May of 1911 Mahler died of heart disease, and, like many of his other compositions, “The Camp Meeting” spent decades on the shelf, until eventually it received its first performance almost forty years later in 1947, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Music. It is intriguing to speculate about how differently Charles Ives’ music would be recognized and accepted into the standard orchestral repertoire today if a champion such as Mahler had been active on his behalf more than thirty years earlier.

Born in Danbury, Connecticut, Charles Ives grew up listening to the sounds of the marching band parading through Danbury Town Square, led by his father, Edward, who had previously worked as a bandmaster during the Civil War. From a young age, Edward encouraged his son to experiment with new sounds, utilizing the full chromatic spectrum and polytonal harmonizations. The first of the Ives family had arrived in Boston in 1635, and so Charles was born into a family unfettered by academicism or reverence for European tradition, himself a democratic idealist strongly influenced by New England Transcendentalist authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. He studied music exclusively at American institutions, graduating with a degree in composition from Yale University in 1898. Ives composed in a style characterized by its vast freedoms; its fierce, chaotic independence; and its stubborn and rebellious nature.

Ives did not consider himself a modernist, though he conceded that this tag, however harmful, was unavoidable until a more suitable label was created. For this reason, he became lumped together with his European contemporaries, Arnold Schoenberg and Paul Hindemith, under the often detrimental title of “avant-garde.”

“I have never seen a note of Schoenberg’s music.” Ives once stated, “Hindemith didn’t really start to compose until about 1920.”

Indeed, in many respects Charles Ives was a composer ahead of his time, and the rhythmic complexities and uses of dissonance in many of his works continue to challenge even today’s most prestigious orchestras.

Ives began writing sketches of his orchestral set [*Three Places in New England*](#) in 1903 and completed the first version in 1914. It was not premiered until 1931 by the Chamber Orchestra of Boston, under the baton of Nicolas Slonimsky.

The first movement, [*“The ‘St. Gaudens’ in Boston Common.”*](#) references a monument sculpted by Augustus St. Gaudens in 1897 to honor Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the Union Army’s second all-Black regiment. The regiment led an assault on Fort Wagner, where troops passed through some Confederate fortifications, but ultimately they were forced to retreat. Out of 600, Colonel Shaw and 53 of his men were killed, while 216 were either captured, missing in action, or wounded. Nevertheless, the 54th was acclaimed for its valor, and the effort helped spur the further enlistment and mobilization of African American troops, a critical step in ensuring the Union’s ultimate victory. Sergeant William Harvey Carney received the Medal of Honor for his bravery, the earliest action for which the award has been given to an African American. The first movement resembles the unbalanced gait of the men marching up a hill, heading towards South Carolina.

The second movement, [*“Putnam’s Camp, Redding, Connecticut.”*](#) is a fantasy illustrating a child’s dream during a 4th of July picnic at the site of General Israel Putnam’s 1778-1779 winter quarters. Charles Ives recalls from his childhood an occasion when his father ordered two bands to enter Danbury Town Square from opposing sides at the same time and walk past each other playing different rhythms and in different keys. The movement was originally conceived as the merging and overlapping of two themes, called *Overture and March: “1776”* and *Country Band March*, which Ives had written in 1904 for a play by his uncle that was never produced.

Ultimately, Ives would incorporate over a dozen tunes into this piece, including *Yankee Doodle*, *The British Grenadiers*, and John Philip Sousa's *Semper Fidelis*, which represent the marching Revolutionary Army.

The final movement, "[The Housatonic at Stockbridge.](#)" was inspired during Ives' Sunday summer morning walk in 1908 with his newly-married wife, Harmony, through Stockbridge, a town 35 miles south of Williamstown.

"We walked in the meadows along the [Housatonic] river, and heard the distant singing from the church across it. The mist had not entirely left the river bed, and the colors, the running water, the brooks and elm trees were something that one would always remember," Ives wrote.

Ives employs repeated notes in the violins to illustrate the mist and fog gliding over the water, while the violas and an English horn mimic the congregation's voices.

Ferde Grofé (1892-1972)

Grand Canyon Suite (1929-31)

V. Cloudburst

In 1857, Lieutenant Joseph Christmas Ives (to the extent of my research, he is unfortunately not related to Charles Ives) led an Army expedition surveying the Colorado River as a potential shipping route for the transportation of troops and supplies. He and his men studied the navigability of the waterway and along the path collected botanical specimens, many of which were new to science. Disheartened by the harshness of the land's arid environment and the overall lack of natural resources, however, he wrote in his notes,

"The region is altogether valueless, and after entering it, there is nothing to do but leave. Our has been the first, and will doubtless be the last, party ... to visit this profitless locality."

Lieutenant Ives did not anticipate that just over fifty years later, the territory would be declared a national monument by President Theodore Roosevelt, and ten years after that, a national park. The topological anomalies of the region's vistas and gorges would prompt dozens of scientific inquiries and change the field of geology forever. For the next one-hundred years, the destination would continue to evoke awe and wonder for the millions who make the pilgrimage every year to see it, its glowing landscape inspiring thousands of creative endeavors

in photography, painting, literature, and music. Lieutenant Ives was surveying the Grand Canyon.

One of the many pieces of art inspired by the beauty of the region was Ferde Grofé's [*Grand Canyon Suite*](#). In contrast to Lieutenant Ives, Grofé praised the Grand Canyon, writing, "The richness of the land and the rugged optimism of its people had fired my imagination. I was determined to put it all to music some day."

Ferdinand Rudolph von Grofé was born on March 27, 1892 in the East Side of New York City to a musical family. His father, Emil, worked as an actor and singer, and his mother, Elsa, played the cello. Elsa herself came from a strong lineage of professional musicians, her father the Assistant Principal cellist of the Metropolitan Opera during the 1880s, and her uncle the concertmaster of the LA Symphony. Needless to say, young Ferde, as he was nicknamed, had much in the way of a musical upbringing, and after moving to Leipzig, Germany, he began learning to play the violin and piano at the age of five, studying under his mother while she attended the Leipzig Conservatory.

Soon, however, his father passed away, and his new stepfather discouraged any further musical study. Living again in America, Grofé decided to run away from home at the age of fourteen, traveling across the country and taking up odd jobs, including positions as a bookbinder, truck driver, elevator operator, newsboy, typesetter, steelworker, usher, and milk vendor.

In 1909, after writing his first composition, he reconciled with his family and returned home, joining the LA Symphony as a violist. The lure of popular music, however, gradually drew him away from the concert stage. Grofé would spend his summers roaming the open country of the American West playing jazz piano in hotels, vaudeville houses, dance halls, and mining towns. During his spare time, he took up the banjo and played in jazz bands, eventually forming his own group.

It was in San Francisco that Grofé first caught the attention of Paul Whiteman, a bandleader at the forefront of the "symphonic jazz" movement. Grofé was soon hired to arrange popular tunes for the instruments played by Whiteman's orchestra. His top song with Whiteman, "Whispering," was one of the record industry's first million-sellers. In 1924, he made his break when he was asked to arrange a new piece written for two pianos by fellow American composer

George Gershwin so it could be played by a full orchestra. Completing the full score eight days before the premiere, the first performance of *Rhapsody in Blue* gave Grofé his rise to fame.

Grofé began work on the *Grand Canyon Suite* in 1929, and it was premiered in 1931 by Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra. He was soon appointed as the conductor of the Capitol Theater Orchestra in New York City, and so he had the opportunity to rescore the suite and expand its instrumentation beyond Whiteman's twenty-piece ensemble into what it is today.

Each of the suite's chapters focuses on a central feature of the Canyon, from its brilliant sunset, when [daylight](#) hangs in the balance with the age-old loneliness of the cool night, to the mystery of the [Painted Desert](#). The third movement, "[On The Trail](#)," tells the story of cowboys riding reluctant burros down the Canyon's steep walls, whining hee-haws played by the strings and woodwinds alongside the clomps of the mule's hooves, played using coconut shells.

["Cloudburst,"](#) the fifth and final movement, represents a looming storm that brings in a menacing change of atmosphere, biting winds, torrential downpours of rain, and the full fury of lightning and thunder. In a flash of musical brilliance, the storm abates and nature again rejoices in the clear, vast grandeur of the canyon. Grofé writes,

"This composition was born of sight, sound, and sensations common to all Americans. I think I have spoken of America in this music simply because America spoke to me, just as it has spoken to you and to every one of us. Always we must realize that there is much more to hear. Our land is rich in music, and if you listen, you can hear it right now. This is our music you hear, surging forth, singing up to every one of us."

Kevin Kaska (b. 1972), text by Clifford Schorer (b. 1966)

The Wizard of Menlo Park (1997)

Thomas Edison (1847-1931), the father of modern technology, is considered by numerous historians to have had more of an impact upon the course of the 20th Century than any other person. Many of his 1,093 patents have defined the standard of living we enjoy in the modern day. Examples include new inventions like the phonograph, the motion picture projector, rechargeable alkaline batteries, the electric pen (the precursor to modern copying machines as well as tattoo pens), the world's first electric power creation and distribution system, and, what many call his most important invention, an electric lightbulb practical enough for widespread, commercial use.

Edison also improved upon the ideas of his predecessors. He invented the carbon transmitter, an improvement upon Alexander Graham Bell's telephone system, making phone calls across longer distances possible. Edison created the automatic telegraph, which increased the rate at which messages could be sent and received from Samuel Morse's 40 words per minute to over 1,000. Many say that Edison's greatest invention, however, was the systemization of the process of invention itself – the process by which today's research and development centers function has been influenced in some way or another by Edison's original Menlo Park, New Jersey "Idea Factory."

Born in Seattle, composer and arranger Kevin Kaska came to Boston to study composition at the Berklee College of Music. There, he met Boston Pops Assistant Conductor Ronald Feldman, who commissioned him to write a piece celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of the man who gave the world recorded music. *The Wizard of Menlo Park* was premiered at Symphony Hall on Father's Day, 1997. Behind a narration of Thomas Edison's life story, the orchestra plays themes both energetic and nostalgic, signaling the rapid, tumultuous changing culture of late-Industrial-Revolution America. The percussion section plays repeated notes representing the assembly-line production system of the future while sustained tones in the woodwind and string sections add a sense of nostalgia for the past. This then breaks off into a jazzy, Gershwin-esque section featuring a solo piano. Along with triumphant brass fanfares, everything then comes together for a stunning climax.

As a result of the success of *Menlo Park*, Kaska moved to Los Angeles, California, where he has maintained a busy career. His work has been featured in over 100 motion pictures and performed by over 80 symphony orchestras around the world. Some of his most famous collaborators have included Clint Eastwood, John Williams, Seiji Ozawa, Hans Zimmer, and jazz musicians Maynard Ferguson and Arturo Sandoval.

–Richard O’Donnell ‘27