

NATURE IN FULL SCORE

VC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

ASHLEY WALTERS, CONDUCTOR

SATURDAY
NOV

7

3:00 PM
2026

VC PERFORMING ARTS CENTER



Helen Yunker Auditorium
4700 Loma Vista Rd. Ventura CA
Pay-What-You-Can Admission

FEATURING

TARAH BROWN GILSON, VIOLIN

2026 ALLEGRO SOLO COMPETITION WINNER

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: Overture to *The Wasps*

A. DAVIS: *Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey*

SMETANA: "The Moldau" from *Má vlast*

HE / CHEN: *The Butterfly Lovers' Violin Concerto*

SIBELIUS: *Finlandia*



WELCOME!

Tonight's concert celebrates the many ways composers have found inspiration in nature. You'll hear the buzzing energy of The Wasps Overture, take a musical journey down the river in Smetana's The Moldau, and experience the many ways music can bring the natural world to life.

It has been a pleasure to work with our 2026 Allegro Solo Competition winner Tarah Brown Gilson, and I'm looking forward to our welcoming the next winners of our annual Allegro Solo Competition. Read more about the competition at vcpac.org and apply!

We are also honored to welcome Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Anthony Davis to Ventura College. Having Anthony on campus, sharing his music and working directly with our orchestra, is an extraordinary opportunity for our students. We are grateful to have him with us and excited to share this collaboration with you.

— Ashley Walters

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



Tarah Brown Gilson is a native of Ventura and has played the violin off and on since she was three years old and saw a group of violin students performing at the County Fair. She studied with Charl Ann Gastineau as a child, and more recently with Alex Fager. As a longtime member of the Ventura College Symphony Orchestra, Tarah has been excited to follow the evolution of the orchestra and its continuing role both as a community institution and a jumping off point for those embarking on musical careers. Tarah is an architect by day, and she comes home to her husband, 9-year-old son, and three cats.

VC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: "NATURE IN FULL SCORE"
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2026 – 3:00 PM

ASHLEY WALTERS, CONDUCTOR
TARAH BROWN GILSON, VIOLIN

VENTURA COLLEGE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
YUNKER AUDITORIUM, 4700 LOMA VISTA RD. / VENTURA, CA 93003

PROGRAM

Overture to *The Wasps*.....Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey.....Anthony Davis
(b. 1951)

"The Moldau" from *Má vlast*.....Bedřich Smetana
(1824-1884)

INTERMISSION

The Butterfly Lovers' Violin Concert.....He Zhanhao/Chen Gang
(b. 1933 / 1935-2026)

Tarah Brown Gilson, violin
ALLEGRO COMPETITION WINNER

Finlandia.....Jean Sibelius
(1865-1957)

Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey by Anthony Davis presented under license from G. Schirmer Inc. and Associated Music Publishers, copyright owners.



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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES (continued)

One of the “great living American composers” (New York Times), **Anthony Davis** is distinguished for his important contributions to opera, and for his symphonic, choral and chamber works. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and has been honored by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, OPERA America and many more.

Davis received the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Music for *The Central Park Five*, based on the true story of five teens wrongfully convicted of the rape of a white female jogger in Central Park. The opera premiered at Long Beach Opera in 2019 (later released on recording by Platoon in 2026), and was subsequently produced by Detroit Opera in 2025.

Davis’s *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* has taken on an almost mythic stature since its 1986 New York City Opera sold-out world premiere. A new production originated at Detroit Opera in 2022 and opened at the Metropolitan Opera in 2023. Both the 1992 and 2022 “X” albums were nominated for GRAMMY Awards®.

Major works include *Amistad*, *Wakonda’s Dream*, and *Tania* (centered on Patricia Hearst’s abduction). *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*, depicting families crossing the US-Mexico border, premiered in January 2026 in both San Diego and Tijuana.

His clarinet concerto *You Have the Right to Remain Silent* was inspired by his own experience being pulled over and held at gunpoint by the police for 45 minutes because he “matched the description” of a fleeing robbery suspect.

On Broadway, Davis has composed for Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*. His choral music includes *Voyage Through Death to Life Upon these Shores*, an *a cappella* work about the Middle Passage, and *Restless Mourning*, an oratorio offering a powerful evocation of September 11. Davis’s orchestral works have been performed by the Atlanta Symphony, Boston Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, and San Francisco Symphony. Davis is also known for his virtuoso performances as a solo pianist.

A graduate of Yale University, Davis holds the Cecil Lytle Endowed Chair in African American Music at the University of California, San Diego.

PROGRAM NOTES

Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey – Anthony Davis

Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey is inspired by a fable from African folklore. A monkey sits in a tree and teases a predatory lion. The fable is symbolic of the monkey as trickster, able by guile and intelligence to control the more powerful lion. The story resonates with the story of African-American slavery. Although he is always aware of the power and oppression around him, he uses the weapons of irony (signifying) in order to survive. Words, humor and music are the tools of sustaining identity and culture.

Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey is the final work in a trilogy of orchestral compositions which include *Esu Variations* and *Jacobs Ladder*. All three explore themes from my opera *Amistad* (1997). Musical themes in my work have a life of their own. They reappear as old, distorted friends, filled with symbolism. They always have character and personality apart from their initial inspiration.

This work begins with a syncopated ostinato in the trombones – a recurring motif for the “Trickster.” The strings and woodwinds introduce the Trickster dance motif. The second section evokes the ocean. The cellos and bass clarinet play a floating ostinato that recalls the shuffle of the blues. Another ocean motif with flutes, muted strings and harp leads us back to the Trickster motif, with the melody in the violas.

After another slow section, recalling the opening of *Jacob's Ladder*, another dance begins. A waltz follows with the melody played by the trombone before returning to the Trickster motif in the trombones and tuba, then the bassoons and basses before the entrance of the horns, which evokes *Esu Variations*.

A brutal ostinato begins the climax of the piece, with the Trickster's Dance playing in the strings in its most realized fugal form. The horn harmonies played earlier return in the upper strings with an eerie melody in the bassoons. The waltz motif intercedes before the climactic return of the horn motif with the trombones and trumpets clashing against the horn harmonies.

Tales (Tails) of the Signifying Monkey concludes with the return blues shuffle underneath an ocean motif. A final visit by the Trickster riff ends the piece.

– Anthony Davis (www.anthonydavismusic.com)

PROGRAM NOTES

The Butterfly Lovers' Violin Concerto *He Zhanhao (b. 1933) and Chen Gang*

The Butterfly Lovers' Violin Concerto retells one of China's best-loved legends. Zhu Yingtai, a young woman who longs to study, disguises herself as a boy and travels to Hangzhou for school, where she befriends Liang Shanbo and the two swear to be brothers. Her father then promises her to the son of a rich family, and the friends are parted. Liang dies, Zhu follows him in death, and the two are reborn as a pair of butterflies.

He Zhanhao and Chen Gang were students at the Shanghai Conservatory when they wrote the concerto in 1959. It premiered that May at the Shanghai Music and Dance Festival, with eighteen-year-old violinist Yu Lina as soloist. The music tells the story in one continuous movement.

A harp, flute and oboe open the piece, and the violin sings a flowing melody about Zhu's childhood. On the road to school, a cello, the voice of Liang, answers the violin, and a joyful cadenza celebrates the friends' vow. Then come Zhu's protest against her father, followed by a tender love duet between Zhu and Liang, then music of anger and grief. To close, the opening theme returns as the lovers metamorphose into butterflies.

In this work, the composers skillfully blend elements of East and West. The melodies draw on Yue opera and Chinese folk songs and use the pentatonic scale, while the orchestra and the concerto form come from the Western tradition. At times, the solo violin echoes the sounds of the traditional Eastern instruments, the *erhu* and the *pipa*. This is a story that is universal and timeless, with many similarities to Romeo and Juliet, although this folk tale took place long before that story.

The concerto was banned during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when its story of love and individual freedom was seen as dangerous, and it returned to the stage in 1978. It has since become so beloved in China that it is often called "our symphony."

FLUTE

Bonnie Griffin
 Mary Peterson
 Dori Riggs
 Mia Ruiz

OBOE

Kimaree Gilad^{∞^}
 Cameron Hartich§
 ENGLISH HORN

CLARINET

James Gilmore
 Alejandro Portillo
 Brian Walsh^

BASSOON

Nick Akdag^{∞^}
 Susan Thiroux

TRUMPET

Jeff Frumkin
 Michael Hunter
 Dominic Quirino
 Victor Rodriguez
 Israel Ruiz

HORN

Rachel Berry§
 Emma Lumsden§

TROMBONE

Santiago Lucky Estrada
 Jared Geronimo
 BASS TROMBONE
 Gwang Kim^{∞^}

EUPHONIUM

Tim Hansen
 Jonathan Tellez

TUBA

Dylan Perez
 Robert Strother

PERCUSSION

Brooklyn Clement
 Jordan Curcuruto^{∞^}
 Matt Rosales
 Jack Sturgeon

VIOLIN I

Kyler Chu[°]
 CONCERTMASTER
 Niv Ashkenazi§
 Tarah Brown Gilson
 Angela Gonzalez
 Rachel Greenup
 Kathleen Roos
 Breanna White

VIOLIN II

Janeane Napp[°]
 Angel Alvarez
 Julissa Bozman^
 Brian Block
 Hannah Kelley
 Brianna Rendon
 Diego Salas

VIOLA

Margot Aldcroft§
 Briana Bandy§
 River Beal
 Diane Gilbert^
 Connie Hood

CELLO

Lola Bobrow[°]
 Nancy Clarin
 Nathan Gallardo
 Erika Duke Kirkpatrick^
 Paul Moranda
 Rachel Newbold
 Emmanuel Romero

BASS

Nathan Cardenas
 David Wolfe
 Catherine Young

HARP

Emmy Pearson

PIANO

Alexandra Curry

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ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT



Ventura College's Department of Performing Arts prepares students to pursue careers in music, theatre, and dance. Students have the opportunity to study with a highly qualified and recognized faculty in a variety of ensembles including Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Music Ensembles, College Chorus and Singers, VC Musical Theatre & Opera, Jazz Band, VC Dance, and VC Theatre.

For more information, visit our website:

www.venturacollege.edu/performing-arts

SPECIAL THANKS

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SUPPORT



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, Nov–12 / 7:00 PM

VC Choirs at the Mission

Mission San Buenaventura
211 E Main St, Ventura, 93001

FREE COMMUNITY PERFORMANCE

Friday, Nov–13 / 7:00 PM

Chamber Music at the Mission

Mission San Buenaventura
211 E Main St, Ventura, 93001

FREE COMMUNITY PERFORMANCE