

20

Protestra 2025

PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION PROTEST

A concert to benefit the
New York Immigration Coalition



March 1, 2025 @ 2PM

St. Paul & St. Andrew United Methodist Church
263 W 86th St, New York, NY



Dmitri Shostakovich | *Symphony No. 5*
J.E. Hernández | *Desert Shelter*
Edgar F. Girtain IV | *Unidades de Fuerza*

25

THANK YOU FOR COMING!

Protestra 2025: Presidential Transition Protest, is a critical response to the onslaught of executive orders and policy proposals since President Trump's inauguration that threaten individual rights and intentionally target marginalized groups. The title satirizes the Heritage Foundation's "Project 2025: Presidential Transition Project," a primary influence for many of these discriminatory policies. (While the organization has claimed that it is not affiliated with the President, it has boasted about its outsized influence on his first term in office.)

PROTESTRA is deeply concerned by government overreach that will deprive those on American soil—including many members of the PROTESTRA community—of their civil rights, such as restricted access to gender-affirming care for trans people, a basic disregard for the importance of diversity, government censorship of educational materials, and eliminating birthright citizenship.

Through this concert, PROTESTRA specifically aims to support those most urgently threatened by the federal administration's recent executive orders: immigrants and migrant groups. The Trump Administration has officially labeled the migrants desiring to enter the United States at the southern border as an "invasion" to justify detaining and removing people forcefully, while simultaneously barring pathways for individuals to come to or remain in the country legally. In protest of mass deportations that separate families and threaten the safety of tens of millions of people,

"Sadly, our government appears intent on dividing us, on depriving people of their autonomy and excluding them from the definition of what it means to be an American—based on nothing more than their identities," states PROTESTRA Founder and Board Chair Ian Vlahović. "PROTESTRA is wholly committed to being a radically inclusive organization and stands strongly against discrimination and harassment of every kind."

From the organization: Performing powerful music with a full symphony orchestra is the ultimate representation of the brilliance we can create when people of all different backgrounds work together. We hope our audience will join us in promoting a message of acceptance and unity and help us fundraise for an organization doing important work to help our neighbors."

Protestra 2025

PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION PROTEST

PROGRAM

UNIDADES DE FUERZA (2017)

EDGAR F. GIRTAIN IV

DESERT SHELTER (2022)

J.E. HERNÁNDEZ

Samuel Gray, **Violin 1** Elizabeth Jones, **Violin 2**

Kiley Rowe, **Viola 1** Rebecca Chaqor, **Viola 2**

Anthime Miller, **Cello 1** Malachi Brown, **Cello 2**

Choreography & Performance: NobleMotion Dance

Choreographers: Andy Noble & Dionne Noble

Costume Design: Grace Wacker

Dancers: La’Rodney Freeman, Colette Kerwick, Lindsey McGill, Tyler Orcutt, Maria Perez, Jacob Regan, Lauren Serrano, & Angelica Villa

INTERMISSION

SYMPHONY NO. 5 (1937)

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

I. Moderato

II. Allegretto

III. Largo

IV. Allegro non troppo

MUSICIANS

CONDUCTOR

Michelle Rofrano #

VIOLIN 1

Samuel Gray, **Concertmaster**
Elizabeth Jones
Justus Ross
Sarah Franklin
Dominique Valenzuela
Sharon Gunderson
Adeline Baban
Inês Ayer
Audrey Lo
Elsie Baldwin
Lara Lewison
Sunny Sheu

CELLO

Anthime Miller *
Sarah Overton
Maria Hadge
Chialing Pidd
Ines Purcell
Chris Cortez
Sasha Ono

OBOE

Megan Wojtyla *
Matthew Maroon

HORN

Shanyse Strickland *
Constance Mulford **
Ian Vlahović #
Emma Reber
Luis Montesdeoca

TUBA

Genevieve Blesch * #

VIOLIN 2

Nina Liu *
Dario Cazzani
Nick Batina
Allie Pritchard
Ava Avanti
Jessica Beberaggi
Jess Spencer
Sathvi Ramaseshan
Sonia Susi
Cristopher Basso
Shaleah Feinstein
Edan Sabah

BASS

Joe Weinberg *
Conor Riccomini
Mort Cahn
Billy Popfinger
Peter Wiseman
Maggie Cox

BASSOON & CONTRABASSOON

Jae M Author *
Katherine Munoz
Chris Whitacre
Contrabassoon

TRUMPET

Lindsay Ross *
Dominic Sinicrope
Eli Goldstein

PERCUSSION

Natalie North
Tamika Gorski
Jacky Xu
Mani Jones

VIOLA

Kiley Rowe *
Linnea Marchie
Rebecca Chaqor
Heather Wallace
Alec Santamaria
Nick Pauly
Joseph Rittendale
Mitsuru Kubo

HARP

Liann Cline

FLUTE & PICCOLO

Jackie Traish *
Marisa Dolcimascolo
Savannah Gentry
Piccolo

CLARINET

Dylan Aguayo *
Ben Nylander
Danny King
Eb Clarinet

TROMBONE

Oscar Mendez *
Julie Zedeck
Jacob Elkin
Bass Trombone

TIMPANI

Tyler Hefferon

PIANO & CELESTA

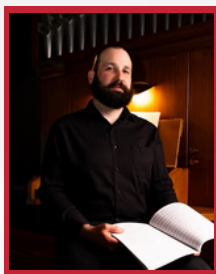
Nacho Ojeda

* **Principal**

** **Assistant Principal**

NoBan Alumni

PROGRAM NOTES



Unidades de Fuerza | Edgar F. Girtain IV

Edgar Girtain's *Unidades de Fuerza* (Unity of Strength) is a powerful musical statement born from a moment of social and political urgency. Originally composed for PROTESTRA's inaugural performance, the piece serves both as a protest against immigration bans and as a heartfelt call for unity and empathy.

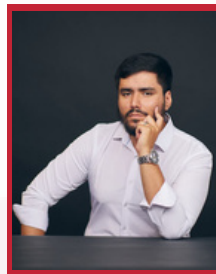
At the core of *Unidades de Fuerza* lies a profound message: the strength of a community is forged through the coming together of its individual parts. Girtain constructs the work from small, distinct musical themes — "little pieces," as he describes them — which gradually coalesce, building momentum and force as they intertwine. Just as these musical fragments unite to form a cohesive whole, the piece symbolizes the collective power that emerges when people work in solidarity toward a common goal.

For Girtain, composition is an emotionally driven process, with each element of a piece needing to be compelling and resonant. He emphasizes that *Unidades de Fuerza* is not merely a political statement but also an invitation for listeners to bridge divides and find beauty in shared experiences. As the composer reflects, "We have to learn how to bridge gaps and make connections with our political enemies, learn to love your enemy... I hope that everyone finds something beautiful and moving in [my music] and that through that experience, people can come together."

The work's structure mirrors its message: just as individuals must unite to create collective strength, Girtain's carefully crafted musical units gather force as they converge, ultimately forming a vibrant, unified soundscape.

PROTESTRA Music Director Michelle Rofrano has spoken about the significance of returning to this piece for its New York City premiere, noting that it reflects the ensemble's mission to use art as a vehicle for activism and human rights. In this way, *Unidades de Fuerza* transcends music — it becomes an anthem of hope, resistance, and the enduring power of community.

With its emotional depth and striking relevance, *Unidades de Fuerza* stands as both a work of art and a call to action, urging us to recognize the strength we possess when we stand together.



Desert Shelter | J. E. Hernández

Desert Shelter is a deeply personal and powerful work composed by J.E. Hernández, a Mexican-born, Houston-based composer known for his exploration of personal and cultural narratives through music. Hernández's work often addresses themes of environmental displacement, generational trauma, and cultural identity, and *Desert Shelter* reflects his commitment to confronting these issues through his compositions.

The composition is scored for string sextet and dance and focuses on the harrowing journey of migrants who attempt to cross the harsh desert landscape. Hernández learned of the physical toll that the desert takes on the human body—migrants' bodies breaking down from the brutal heat, exhaustion, and dehydration.

The dance, originally choreographed by Andy & Dionne Noble of NobleMotion Dance, brings the music to life in a visceral and corporeal way. The dancers embody the struggle of migration, physically representing the pain, determination, and endurance of those making the dangerous trek through the desert. The work transcends the broader issue of migration; it becomes a deeply personal reflection on the human cost of these journeys. The piece serves as both a meditation on the suffering of migrants and a call for empathy and understanding.

Hernández's commitment to social causes is evident in *Desert Shelter*, which is part of his ongoing exploration of environmental displacement, migration, and personal narratives. His work continues to use music and multimedia art to engage communities and raise awareness about critical issues. In *Desert Shelter*, Hernández invites audiences to reflect on the invisible stories of those who cross borders in search of a better life, urging them to consider the toll these journeys take on the body, spirit, and soul. Through this multi-disciplinary collaboration, Hernández creates a work that is not only an artistic statement but also a powerful social commentary on the realities of migration.

As a composer, Hernández has had his work performed by prestigious institutions such as the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, and Houston Grand Opera.

As a composer, Hernández has had his work performed by prestigious institutions such as the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, and Houston Grand Opera. His music blends traditional and multi-disciplinary forms, drawing from his cultural heritage in Tabasco, Mexico, and Houston, Texas, to tell stories that resonate deeply with both personal and collective histories. In addition to his composition work, Hernández is the founder of ConcertiaHTX, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting social causes through new music and multimedia art.



Symphony No. 5 | Dmitri Shostakovich

Dmitri Shostakovich: The Man Behind the (Iron) Curtain. There are few figures more controversial, polarizing, and propagandized in the history of Western classical music. Was he an ideologically misguided apparatchik whose bombastic symphonies extolled the glory of the Soviet Union? Or was he a bitter, chain-smoking humanist opposed to the murderous regime under which he lived yet compelled to operate and succeed within it, who covertly imbued his music with the spirit of resistance against totalitarianism of all stripes? The truth, as is so often the case, probably lies somewhere between two extremes. But political leanings aside, there is no doubt that Shostakovich's unique compositional voice cemented his place as the greatest composer to emerge from the hermetic USSR, an immensely talented symphonist who rightfully earned his reputation as a successor to the likes of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Mahler.

By the end of 1936, Shostakovich was in dire straits. Earlier that year, his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* and his ballet *Bright Stream*, both extremely popular works up to that point, had been harshly denounced in the Communist Party newspaper, *Pravda*. Although the reviews were unsigned, Shostakovich knew that Joseph Stalin—who had attended a performance of *Lady Macbeth* and stormed out early, disgusted—must have at the very least mandated their publication.

Disowned by the Union of Soviet Composers, Shostakovich's commissions dried up and most of his monthly income along with them. Only an orchestra with a literal death wish would program his music. All but a few of his friends and colleagues refused to associate with him, with some publicly distancing themselves from him as well. He had continued to work on his highly unconventional, highly exploratory *Fourth Symphony*, completed it that May, and scheduled a December premiere. But at the dress rehearsal, it was pulled from performance. It's unclear whether this was Shostakovich's decision or someone else's, but the newspaper *Soviet Art* reported that he retracted the piece himself "on the grounds that it in no way [corresponded] to his current creative convictions and [represented] for him a long-outdated creative phase." He would hide the *Fourth Symphony* away for the next quarter-century. Broken and suicidal, Shostakovich packed a small suitcase and spent his nights smoking in the dark, waiting to be "disappeared" into the night.

And then, as the harsh Russian winter began to thaw...Shostakovich started to write, and quickly. The secret police hadn't come yet, but he knew his life and quite possibly the lives of his wife and soon-to-be-born daughter were still at risk. So in an act of musical self-preservation, he slammed on the brakes and threw the car in reverse.

He publicly announced this change of plans and his desire to seek rehabilitation through a new Fifth Symphony. He opted for a pared-down orchestra compared to the 100+ musicians he had enlisted for his massive Fourth Symphony. He retreated to the safety of more conventional symphonic form: four movements instead of three, sonata form for the first, a waltz for the second, a slow and emotionally intense third movement, a barnburner finale. Thematically, he decided not to completely reinvent the wheel, transforming and simplifying several elements of the Fourth and reusing them in the Fifth. He finished the symphony in three months and announced a performance in the late fall. It premiered in Leningrad on November 21, 1937...but how would it be received?

Before the final note could finish reverberating in the hall, the crowd erupted. It was a triumph. Censors and citizens alike applauded and cheered for half an hour. Shostakovich would live to fight another day.

To the ears of the Communist Party officials in attendance, it was a 45-minute socialist realist apology more than sufficient to rehabilitate the wayward composer. But according to Shostakovich, "There should always be two layers in music." This symphony may be far deeper, far more personal than the authorities were apparently capable of hearing. Just as there are certain high-pitched frequencies that children can hear but adults cannot, it would seem there were sentiments that the average Soviet citizen felt in the Fifth while the party elites remained oblivious.

Shostakovich was famously tight-lipped when asked for guidance in interpreting his music, even more so when inquiring minds tried to decipher his programmatic and narrative intentions, if any (a prudent defense mechanism in a society where you never knew who might be listening).

But he clearly embraced the notion that what makes music so endlessly captivating is that everyone listening to a piece of music—or, for that matter, conducting or performing a piece of music—will interpret it in their own way, and it will almost certainly impact them differently from one listening to the next.

This was the particular brilliance of Shostakovich: He developed a keen intuition for how his music would be received by different listeners and wrote effectively for all of them while they were seated in the same concert hall. It's said you can't please all of the people all of the time, but Shostakovich seems to have figured it out with his Fifth Symphony, or at least got pretty close.



END PROGRAM NOTES.





MICHELLE ROFRANO, CONDUCTOR

Michelle Rofrano is an Italian-American conductor with a keen interest in the intersection of art, storytelling, and social activism. An avid opera conductor, upcoming engagements in the 2023-24 season include debuts leading *Cenerentola* with Toledo Opera, *L'Amant Anonyme* with Madison Opera, *Turandot* with Fargo Moorhead Opera, and a return to the Curtis Institute of Music leading a double bill of *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* and *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Recent projects include conducting *The Turn of the Screw* with the Curtis Institute, *Amelia al Ballo* with the Juilliard School, *La Traviata* and *Cendrillon (Viardot)* with City Lyric Opera, *The Fall of the House of Usher (Glass)* with Orpheus PDX, *Don Quichotte at Camacho's Wedding (Telemann)* with Opera Saratoga, and both *Trouble in Tahiti* and new Francesca Zambello production of *The Queen of Spades* with The Glimmerglass Festival. In 2022-23, Rofrano was involved in several exciting experimental opera projects, including conducting the meditative opera *Song of the Ambassadors (Skye/Allado-McDowell)* at Alice Tully Hall, a groundbreaking opera in development that interweaves music, science, and technology; and music directing the recorded project *No One Is Forgotten: An Immersive Opera*, the first opera designed for 3D Spatial Audio adapted from the original play by Winter Miller and co-composed by Paola Prestini and Sxip Shirey. Rofrano has previously served as cover conductor with companies such as San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Glimmerglass Festival, Spoleto Festival USA, Florida Grand Opera, and Opera Birmingham. A champion of social progress in the field of classical music, Rofrano is the Founder and Artistic Director of PROTESTRA, an activist orchestra that advocates for social justice through diverse programming and benefit performances. She is also a co-creator of Girls Who Conduct, an initiative that mentors young women and non-binary musicians in an effort to achieve gender parity on the conducting podium.

ABOUT PROTESTRA



Founded in 2017 with their first concert, #NoBan, a response to the first Trump Administration's xenophobic immigration policies, PROTESTRA has gone on to explore a variety of societal issues and use music to advocate for equality and human rights. Formally incorporated in 2020, PROTESTRA is a volunteer-run orchestra and 501(c)(3) that bridges the divide between advocacy and classical music. PROTESTRA's grassroots orchestral benefit concerts inspire activism by contextualizing classical music performance through multimedia education, and turn voluntary audience donations into targeted support for mission- and policy-driven groups related to the concerts' themes. PROTESTRA prioritizes diversity, equity, inclusion, representation, and accessibility in both its hiring and programming practices. For more information, visit protestra.org.

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Maambo Mujala

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PROTESTRA's work is more crucial than ever.

Join us in taking a stand!

Click below to learn more about becoming a
Season Sponsor or Monthly Member.

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NYIC

ABOUT THE NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION

The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) is an umbrella policy & advocacy organization that represents over 200 immigrant and refugee rights groups throughout New York.

The NYIC serves one of the largest and most diverse newcomer populations in the United States. The multi-racial and multi-sector NYIC membership base includes grassroots and nonprofit community organizations, religious and academic institutions, labor unions, as well as legal and socioeconomic justice organizations. The NYIC not only establishes a forum for immigrant groups to voice their concerns, but also provides a platform for collective action to drive positive social change.

Since its founding in 1987, the NYIC has evolved into a powerful voice of advocacy by spearheading innovative policies, promoting and protecting the rights of immigrant communities, improving newcomer access to services, developing leadership and capacity, expanding civic participation, and mobilizing member groups to respond to the fluctuating needs of immigrant communities. For more information, visit nyic.org.

Contribute further to our crowdfunding campaign for NYIC:

[DONATE](#)

Special Thanks



Heartfelt thanks to St. Paul & St. Andrew UMC for the rental of their facilities, and to Brent Ness, Kevin Arthur, Jr., and Steven Yee for all their help and attention throughout the past week. We are proud to produce this concert at a church with such a strong commitment to love-inspired action and social justice.

ARTS LAUREATE

Tech Production:

Christian Amonson - Owner, Founder

Audio Engineer - Adam Klein

Lara Mitofsky Neuss - PROTESTRA Liaison

Pamela Wess - Video Engineer

www.artslaureate.com

Mirna Plakalović & Shane Michael Brown

NYPL for the Performing Arts

Reid Dunlea and Indira Martinez, NYIC

Dan Wright, Photographer

Kamna Gupta, Rehearsal Conductor

Thanks to Centanni Percussion for the rental of their instruments.

Substitute Musicians

Juan Carlos Narváez - flute & piccolo

Michael Dwinell - oboe

Elia Foster - clarinet

Sanford Schwartz - bassoon

Ben Hommowun - horn

Erik Hyman - horn

RESOURCES

Protestra 2025: Presidential Transition Protest

Resources For Further Learning and Action

Crowd-Sourced by the PROTESTRA Organizer Team

Website with protest + resistance resources:

<https://www.fiftyfifty.one/>

Contact your U.S. House Rep:

<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

Contact your U.S. Senator:

<https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>

Call your representatives:

<https://5calls.org/>

Project 2025 Tracker - See how many of the Heritage Foundation's policy proposals have already been enacted:

<https://www.project2025.observer/>

Keep an eye on new Executive Orders coming out of the White House:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/>

Litigation tracker (NYU School of Law):

<https://www.justsecurity.org/107087/tracker-litigation-legal-challenges-trump-administration/>

Court Watch (litigation tracker - it's current, even though it says 1/30/2025):

<https://www.courtwatch.news/p/lawsuits-related-to-trump-admin-executive-orders>

Democracy Docket (Marc Elias, voting rights lawyer):

<https://www.democracymarket.com/>

Charities to follow and support:

ACLU

<https://www.aclu.org/>

Southern Poverty Law Center

<https://www.splcenter.org/>

Democracy Forward

<https://democracyforward.org/>

EV Loves NYC:

<https://www.evloves.nyc/>

The New York Immigration Coalition:

<https://www.nyic.org/>

Book recommendations:

- Democracy for the Few - Michael Parenti
- On Tyranny: 20 Lessons from the 20th Century - Timothy Snyder
- A People's History of the United States - Howard Zinn
- The Trouble with Reality: A Ruminant on Moral Panic in Our Time - Brooke Gladstone

Blog recommendations:

Emptywheel (Marcy Wheeler)

<https://www.emptywheel.net/>

Social media account recommendations:

Rebecca Watson (skepchick)

<https://www.youtube.com/@RebeccaWatson>

<https://www.patreon.com/rebecca>