

MANSION  
**STRATHMORE**

*Music in the Mansion*

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**ALMA ENSEMBLE**

SARAH WARDLE JONES, *FLUTE*  
MICHELLE SMITH JOHNSON, *CLARINET*  
ERICA SIPES, *PIANO*

*Thursday, February 29, 2024, 7:30pm*



**PROGRAM**

***Valse Volante***

Helen Stowasser

***Canto de Harawi: Amadeoso***

Gabriela Lena Frank

***Rondo***

Anna von Schaden

***Portraits of Langston***

*Helen Keller*

*Danse Africaine*

*Le Grand Duc Mambo*

*Silver Rain*

*Parisian Cabaret*

*Harlem Summer Night*

Valerie Coleman

***Grace of the World***

Gwyneth Walker

## ABOUT THE ALMA ENSEMBLE

**Sarah Wardle Jones** is a flutist, designer, and writer having earned degrees in music performance from Taylor University and Bowling Green State University where she studied under Trudy Whitford and Nina Assimakopoulos respectively. As a flutist, she is honored to have co-founded Alma Ensemble and enjoys an active performing schedule in venues across the state. Besides championing the work of underrepresented composers, Sarah is passionate about teaching the next generation of flutists and maintains a private studio of creative and dedicated students who inspire her regularly. In addition to her work in music, Sarah currently serves as a UX specialist at LeadPoint Digital where she writes user-focused content and designs great experiences for the web. In her free time, she enjoys reading, movies, gardening, hiking, and spending time with her husband and their dog Iris.

**Michelle Smith Johnson**, clarinetist and accomplished music educator, is currently serving as a middle and elementary school orchestra director for her 14<sup>th</sup> year with Roanoke City Public Schools, where her ensembles consistently earn Superior Ratings at Virginia Band and Orchestra Director's Association (VBODA) Concert Assessment. Due to her outstanding achievements in music education and her positive impact on the lives of her students, Michelle was honored as John P. Fishwick Middle School's 2014 Teacher of the Year. As a co-founder of Alma Ensemble, she works with her co-founders and community partners to amplify the voices of underrepresented composers and to foster community engagement through chamber music. In addition to her work with Roanoke City schools and Alma Ensemble, Michelle serves as instructor of clarinet at Radford University. Michelle holds performance and Music Education degrees from Radford University as well as a Master of Music in Instrumental Conducting at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She is a member of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and an honorary member of Pi Kappa Lambda, a National Music Honor Society. In her spare time, Michelle loves hiking, golf, gardening, DIY home-improvement projects, cooking, and spending time with her husband, Sheldon, and their two Shih Tzu rescues, Song and Justine.

**Erica Sipes**, pianist, received her bachelor's and master's degrees in piano performance from the Eastman School of Music. She currently serves on the faculty of Radford University as a collaborative pianist. Previously, she has freelanced as a piano collaborator and coach in Michigan, Idaho, and Virginia. She has also performed with the Roanoke Symphony on occasion and has performed as a piano soloist with the New River Valley Symphony. In the summer of 2012, Erica officially launched her own business as a practice coach, offering coaching, workshops, planning sessions, and practice boot-camps for anyone that could use some help with practicing. She is also a prominent blogger, writing frequently about her views on performing, learning music, and the classical music world in general. In addition to practice coaching, piano collaborative work, and a busy performance schedule, you can watch Erica on her livestreamed sight-reading show entitled *Sight Reading Maverick* on her YouTube Channel that airs on Sundays.

**The Alma Ensemble** was founded by flutist Sarah Wardle Jones, clarinetist Michelle Smith Johnson, and pianist Erica Sipes. It was birthed from a desire of the founding members to create music in a way that is empowering and personally resonant. We place a high priority on playing music by other women composers, educating our audiences by creating context for the pieces we select, and challenging traditional performance paradigms that inhibit, rather than enhance, our ability to communicate and connect with an audience. In fact, we chose the name "Alma" because it speaks to our mission on several levels. Because we want to do our part in promoting the artistic work of women, we chose Alma Mahler as our namesake precisely because she could have used the social support that we ourselves, by comparison, enjoy. She is most famous for her relationships with prominent artistic men, but she was a composer in her own right who never received the opportunities of her romantic counterparts. "Alma" also means "nourishment" or "soul" which is something that we endeavor to bring to each performance for ourselves and our audiences.

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