The Andrews University Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Chris Wild, will present their spring concert, "Breath becomes the Wind," on Saturday, April 20, 2019, 8:30 p.m. at the Howard Performing Arts Center on the campus of Andrews University.

The concert will explore how throughout history human expression has led to various cultural dances. The program will begin with Chi Yong Yun, director of piano studies and associate professor of piano, featured as soloist in Sergei Rachmaninoff's romantic “Piano Concerto No.2.” Following intermission, the orchestra will explore a selection of dances and songs originating from Mexico, Russia and Hungary.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) was equally celebrated in his lifetime both as a pianist and composer. Like numerous pianist-composers in the century before him, his compositions were influenced by his tremendous gifts at the piano, which allowed him to push forward in exploring the most compelling possibilities with the instrument. He enjoyed
more rarefied company in finding critical success also as an orchestrator, with compositions such as his “Symphony No.2” and “Symphonic Dances” finding great success without relying on the inclusion of the piano. This evening’s “Piano Concerto No.2” is widely recognized as one of the most popular and enduring concertos in all of classical music.

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) lived in parallel alongside Rachmaninoff but approached musical composition from different perspectives, synthesizing some of the modernist techniques of the early 20th-century with local folk music. It is difficult to attribute a national identity to Bartók and his music since the small town he grew up in (now part of Romania) would see its national borders change multiple times during the 20th-century. His curiosity was piqued by his surroundings, enough so that he became recognized as one of the first practitioners of ethnomusicology, exploring “peasant music” in the lands surrounding Budapest and transcribing them both for personal and widespread use. The rhythms and melodies in Bartók’s “Dance Suite” are influenced by his discoveries with folk music but are not direct quotations of specific songs. He explains that movement “No. 1 is partly, and No. 4 entirely of an Oriental (Arab) character; the ritornello and No. 2 are of a Hungarian character; in No. 3 Hungarian, Romanian and even Arab influences alternate; and the theme of No. 5 is so primitive that one can only speak of a primitive peasant character here, and any classification of nationality must be abandoned.” In some instances, the less flattering label “Gypsy” is used to describe the music he heard in the hills of Eastern Europe.

The orchestra’s faculty and students have been assisted all year long by two students hailing from Mexico who are in their final years of study at Andrews. Edgar Luna Torres and Ricardo Reyna Alvarez will share the tradition of Mariachi music-making through the classic song written by Pepe Guízar in 1937, “Guadalajara.” Voice student Fabio Siniscarchio will join a selection of string and trumpet players in performing the song, which celebrates the characteristics and beauty of Guízar’s home city of Guadalajara.

Alexander Borodin’s opera “Prince Igor” was nearly finished when the composer passed away in 1887; his friend Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov helped complete it shortly after, and the opera was premiered in 1890. The “Polovtsian Dances” on this evening’s program are found in Act 2 of the opera and have found great popularity presented on their own in concert programs ever since. The opera is based on historic events from 1185, when Russia’s Prince Igor sought to defend his land from the encroaching Polovtsian tribe. As with Bartók’s “Dance Suite,” Borodin’s music was written during a time when the world’s citizens were becoming increasingly aware of cultures other than their own and explored their fascination by including oriental themes in the arts. “Polovtsian Dances” begins with gentle breath-like phrases that build upon one another, leading to rollicking dances reminiscent of galloping across the wide open spaces of ancient Russia.

Admission is free and no tickets are required for this concert. For additional information, contact the Howard Box Office at 269-471-3560. For a full season schedule of events at the Howard Performing Arts Center, visit howard.andrews.edu.