CHICAGO SYMPHONY

220 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60604
312-294-3000
chicagosymphony.org

Mary Louise Gorno
Chair, Board of Trustees
Jeff Alexander
President

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Press Contact:
Hannah Sundwall
312-294-3083

CHICAGO SYMPHONY DECEMBER PROGRAMMING

CHICAGO — Chicago Symphony December programming features a wide variety of events including Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) subscription concerts, Chicago Symphony Presents programs and festive programming for audiences of all ages.

Music Director Emeritus for Life Riccardo Muti returns to the podium for two weeks of programs. From December 3-5, Muti leads the CSO in Dvořák's Eighth Symphony, R. Strauss' Oboe Concerto featuring principal oboe William Welter and Bartók's *Two Pictures*. The following week, acclaimed pianist Yefim Bronfman joins Muti and the orchestra for Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24. Later in the month, conductor Masaaki Suzuki leads a stellar cast of soloists and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus for Handel's *Messiah*.

Holiday and family programming includes A Chanticleer Christmas, Elf in Concert, the CSO brass section's annual December spectacular, and the Once Upon a Symphony opening program, Stone Soup.

Broadway star Mandy Gonzalez and conductor Thomas Wilkins join the CSO for seven performances of Merry, Merry Chicago! from December 18-23. Civic Orchestra of Chicago principal conductor Ken-David Masur leads the Bach Marathon finale at Fourth Presbyterian Church. The CSO Chamber Music series continues with Audire Music at Epiphany Center for the Arts.

Tickets and more information are available at chicagosymphony.org.

Explore a chronological list of December 2026 concert programs.

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Muti, Welter & Dvořák 8 (December 3-5)
Under the direction of Music Director Emeritus for Life Riccardo Muti, Dvořák's Eighth Symphony unfolds its gorgeous melodies — a consummate tribute to the bucolic landscapes and folk dances of the composer's native Bohemia. Echoes of nature also pulse through Bartók's *Two Pictures*, while Strauss' Oboe Concerto — an autumnal,

nostalgic piece composed in the aftermath of World War II — features Principal Oboe William Welter.

Postcard from Vienna: Muti & Bronfman (December 10-12)
Nothing beats the December chill like a musical trip to old Vienna. Dance numbers evoke the city's glittering Christmas markets, imperial architecture and steaming mugs of glühwein. Vienna also means Mozart, whose graceful yet dark Piano Concerto No. 24 is performed here by the acclaimed pianist Yefim Bronfman. Riccardo Muti opens the program with the dramatic overture to *Don Giovanni*, one of Mozart's greatest operatic masterpieces.

Handel's Messiah (December 17-19)
Heaped with uplifting messages and intimate storytelling, Handel's *Messiah* never fails to inspire. While the iconic melodies — including "For Unto Us a Child is Born" and the *Hallelujah* Chorus — are instantly recognizable, hearing the full oratorio performed live is an unforgettable experience. A stellar cast of soloists and the Chicago Symphony Chorus join Masaaki Suzuki, whose past *Messiah* performances have been lauded as "bracing and vital" (*Washington Classical Review*).

CSO Chamber Music

Audire Music at Epiphany Center for the Arts (December 6)
Filled with memorable melodies, lively musical exchanges and irresistible charm, this program showcases two masters of musical storytelling. Beethoven's String Quartet No. 2 earned its nickname, the *Compliments* Quartet, for its gracious, lighthearted spirit. Dvořák's String Quintet No. 2 expands the traditional quartet with the addition of a double bass, adding richness and depth to the ensemble's sound. Written during the composer's rise to international prominence, the quintet displays the melodic ingenuity that would become a hallmark of Dvořák's music.

Please note: This event takes place at Epiphany Center for the Arts, 201 S Ashland Ave., Chicago

Family

Once Upon a Symphony: Stone Soup (December 5)
A hungry traveler arrives at a village where the townspeople claim they have no food to share. But the traveler pulls out a large pot, fills it with water, adds stones and says, "We have everything we need to make stone soup." Before long, the villagers contribute to the

broth and enjoy the most delicious soup they have ever tasted. In this musical adaptation of the classic tale, learn how the act of sharing fosters joy and celebration.

Once Upon a Symphony is designed to introduce children ages 3 to 5 to the world of classical music and the musicians of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Ignite your child's imagination with vivid storytelling and small ensemble performances, as well as sets, costumes and images created by Chicago Children's Theatre.

Produced and presented in partnership with Chicago Children's Theatre.

Movies

Elf in Concert (December 11-13)
Buddy was accidentally transported to the North Pole as a toddler and raised to adulthood among Santa's elves. Unable to shake the feeling that he doesn't fit in, the adult Buddy travels to New York, in full elf uniform, in search of his real father. This holiday season, relive this heartwarming holiday classic on a giant screen with members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra playing John Debney's wonderful score.

ELF and all related characters and elements © & ™ New Line Productions, Inc.

Holiday Concerts

A Chanticleer Christmas (December 8)
It wouldn't be the holidays without Chanticleer. The multiple Grammy Award-winning men's chorus delights listeners "with harmonies so lush they verge on the celestial" (*The Berkshire Eagle*). Hear the group's newest holiday program, spanning timeless carols, popular Christmas songs and its signature arrangements of festive spirituals.

Merry, Merry Chicago! (December 18-23)
Head to Chicago Symphony Center for a magical evening celebrating the most wonderful time of the year. Members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and conductor Thomas Wilkins are joined by Broadway star Mandy Gonzalez, whose soaring vocals have lit up *Hamilton* and *In the Heights*. This cherished holiday tradition features beloved carols, popular seasonal songs and sparkling holiday surprises — all in the lavishly decorated Orchestra Hall.

Chicago Symphony Presents

Chicago Symphony Orchestra Brass (December 15)
Celebrated worldwide for its brilliance, finesse and gleaming power, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra brass section presents its annual December spectacular. CSO trombone Michael Mulcahy conducts a showcase of sparkling arrangements and original works for brass, specially tailored to these musicians.

Civic Orchestra of Chicago

Bach Marathon Finale (December 14)
Celebrate the season in true Baroque splendor as Civic Orchestra musicians perform four of Bach's sumptuous *Brandenburg* concertos in Fourth Presbyterian Church's stunning sanctuary. Packed with variety and verve, the concertos range from the intricate sonic tapestries of the Third and Fourth to the daring keyboard pyrotechnics of the Fifth and the dark string colors of the Sixth. Ken-David Masur leads the conclusion of the program with the elegant and majestic dances of Bach's Fourth Orchestral Suite.

Tickets become available on November 30.

Food and Beverage

Explore Chicago Symphony Center's onsite dining options for a seamless preconcert experience. Preorder a Sound Bites meal to enjoy in the Rotunda before the concert — or make a reservation to dine at the Thomas Club, offering a prix fixe menu featuring traditional American fare and a spectacular view of Lake Michigan. View menus and learn more at chicagosymphony.org/dining.

Parking and Transit Options

Exclusive parking rates are available through Millennium Garages, the Preferred Parking Partner for Chicago Symphony Center. The closest parking garage is the Grant Park South Garage, located at 325 S. Michigan Ave. Valet parking is available for select performances at Chicago Symphony Center's 67 E. Adams St. entrance. A round-trip North Shore Shuttle service is available for Friday matinees. Visit chicagosymphony.org/parking for more parking and transit options.

Patron Information

Contact Patron Services for personalized assistance online at chicagosymphony.org/contact or by calling 312-294-3000, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

All artists and programs are subject to change.

The Muti, Welter & Dvořák 8 concerts are made possible by the Juli Plant Grainger Fund for Artistic Excellence.

Appearances of Maestro Riccardo Muti with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra are generously supported by the Helen Regenstein Principal Guest Conductor and Conductor Emeritus Fund.

A Chanticleer Christmas is generously sponsored by The Negaunee Foundation.

The CSO Brass concert is generously sponsored by The Schmidt Family Fund.

The Thursday evening performance of Handel's Messiah is generously sponsored by Cynthia Bates in memory of Kevin Rock.

Movies in concert are generously sponsored by Megan and Steve Shebik.

The appearance of the Chicago Symphony Chorus has been made possible by a generous gift from The Grainger Foundation.

The 2026/27 Civic Orchestra season is generously sponsored by Lori Julian for the Julian Family Foundation, which also provides major funding for the Civic Fellowship program.

Major support for the Civic Orchestra of Chicago is also provided by Robert & Isabelle Bass Foundation, Inc.; John and Leslie Burns; Robert and Joanne Crown Income Charitable Fund; Nancy Dehmlow; Leslie Fund, Inc.; Philip Lumpkin; Judy and Scott McCue; Margo and Michael Oberman; Sandra and Earl Rusnak, Jr.*; Barbara and Barre Seid Foundation; Lisa and Paul Wiggin; Marylou Witz, and an Anonymous Donor.

Chicago Symphony and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago acknowledge support from the Illinois Arts Council.

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Chicago Symphony: chicagosymphony.org

Chicago Symphony is a beacon of musical excellence and inspiration, both in Chicago and around the world. The organization stewards three acclaimed classical music ensembles, including the renowned Chicago Symphony Orchestra; presents a dynamic performance series with guest artists, and comprises an embedded music education institute. At Chicago Symphony, the legendary sound of the CSO meets the future of music, inviting everyone to experience and connect with the transformative power of live performance.

The iconic Chicago Symphony Orchestra is the core ensemble, recognized worldwide for its artistic force and command of a deep, evolving repertoire. The CSO has been at the forefront of classical music since its founding in 1891, with a long history of introducing new compositions to the United States and the world. The CSO's vitality continues to inspire music lovers with nearly 150 concerts annually, weekly syndicated radio broadcasts and a catalog of celebrated recordings.

Klaus Mäkelä, a leader of classical music's next generation, begins his tenure as Zell Music Director in the 2027/28 Season, ushering in a new chapter for the CSO. His appointment as the 11th music director deepens Mäkelä's creative partnership with the musicians that began when he first conducted the Orchestra in 2022. Mäkelä succeeds Riccardo Muti, who held the position from 2010 to 2023 and now serves as the CSO's music director emeritus for life.

Chicago Symphony's other ensembles include the Chicago Symphony Chorus, the nation's largest professional chorus known for its extraordinary quality, and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, a prestigious ensemble for early-career musicians that prepares its members for multifaceted and meaningful careers in orchestral music and beyond. Chicago Symphony Presents features world-renowned guest artists in jazz, global, and chamber music and offers one of the country's most distinguished piano recital series.

Chicago Symphony Center is our primary venue and home to the historic Orchestra Hall, where the CSO has performed for over a century. Located adjacent to Millennium Park, the Center is the musical heart of the Chicago Cultural Mile. The CSO's summer home is the Ravinia Festival on the North Shore, where the Orchestra performs a popular series of outdoor concerts each year.

As a cultural leader, we provide exceptional musical experiences and education for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. The Chicago Symphony Negaunee Music Institute produces concerts for schools and families, organizes free and low-cost public programming at venues throughout Chicago, and offers world-class musical training to tomorrow's musicians. The Institute also spearheads social impact initiatives that highlight the unique ability of music to foster empathy and healing.

Whether you are a classical music aficionado, looking to discover new artists or seeking connection with your community, Chicago Symphony is where you belong.