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CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Klaus Mäkelä Zell Music Director Designate ■ Riccardo Muti Music Director Emeritus for Life

ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-SIXTH SEASON

Thursday, September 17, 2026, at 7:30

Friday, September 18, 2026, at 1:30

Saturday, September 19, 2026, at 7:30

Petr Popelka Conductor

Hilary Hahn Violin

SCHUMANN

Overture to *Manfred*, Op. 115

MENDELSSOHN

Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64

Allegro molto appassionato—

Andante—

Allegretto non troppo—Allegro molto vivace

HILARY HAHN

INTERMISSION

DVOŘÁK

Symphony No. 5 in F Major, Op. 76

Allegro ma non troppo

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro scherzando

Finale: Allegro molto

The appearance of Petr Popelka is made possible by the Juli Plant Grainger Fund for Artistic Excellence.

The appearance of Hilary Hahn is made possible with support from The Paul Ricker Judy Endowment Fund.

The appearance of Hilary Hahn is made possible with
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ROBERT SCHUMANN

Born June 8, 1810; Zwickau, Saxony, Germany
Died July 29, 1856; Enderich, near Bonn, Germany

Overture to *Manfred*, Op. 115



Robert Schumann's father August was a respected publisher who made a tidy sum printing pocket editions of works by Goethe, Schiller, and Byron, among others. Like his father, Robert was shy and bookish as a boy; he grew up reading the classics and showed great interest in becoming a writer himself.

Although he occasionally worked for his father, Robert wanted to perform and compose music, and he was the only one of four brothers who eventually quit the family business.

Long after he had made a name for himself as a pianist, composer, and critic, Robert continued to read voraciously, often by dim, flickering candlelight at bedtime. The powerful effects of literature may even have contributed to his frequent sleepless nights—a diary entry from 1829 reads “Bed-lecture: *Manfred* by Byron—terrible night.” Schumann



COMPOSED

1848–49, incidental music

FIRST PERFORMANCE

March 14, 1852; Leipzig, Germany.
The composer conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets,
2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets,
3 trombones, timpani, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

12 minutes

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

January 1 and 2, 1892, Auditorium
Theatre. Theodore Thomas
conducting

July 12, 1975, Ravinia Festival.
James Levine conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES

August 1, 1981, Ravinia Festival.
Jésus López-Cobos conducting

November 2, 3, 4, and 7, 2023,
Orchestra Hall. Daniel Harding
conducting

CSO RECORDINGS

1956. Bruno Walter conducting.
CSO (*Chicago Symphony
Orchestra in the Twentieth Century:
Collector's Choice*)

1977. Daniel Barenboim conducting.
Deutsche Grammophon

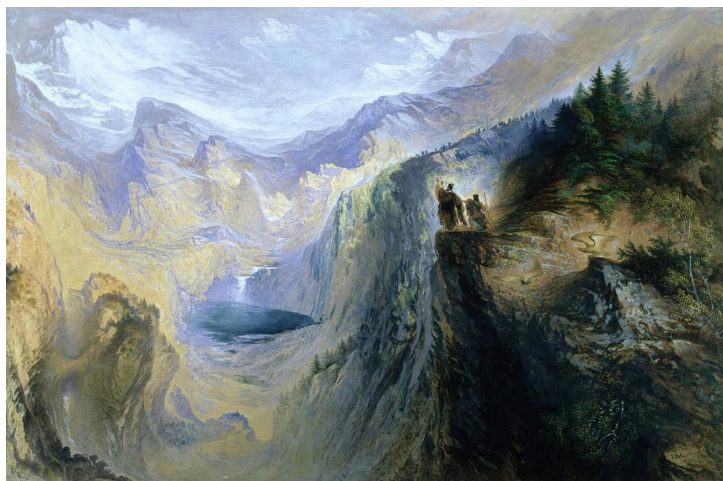
THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Robert Schumann at the age of forty. Daguerreotype portrait by Johann Anton Völlner (born 1817, death date unknown), Hamburg, Germany, 1850 | August Schumann (1773–1827), father of the composer, in an 1826 engraving by Friedrich Fleischmann (1791–1834) of an 1810 oil portrait by Gotthelf Leberecht Glaeser (1784–1851); and Christiane Schumann (1767–1836), mother of the composer, in an 1810 oil portrait by Glaeser | **NEXT PAGE, FROM TOP:** *Manfred on the Jungfrau*, watercolor by John Martin (1789–1854), 1837, inspired by Lord Byron's poem *Manfred*. Birmingham Museums Trust Collection, England | *A Robert Schumann (To Robert Schumann)*, 1893. Lithograph by Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904) of his painting. An angel crowns a bust of Schumann, while a scroll lists the composer's dramatic works *Das Paradies und die Peri*, *Genoveva*, *Manfred*, and *Scenes from Goethe's Faust*. Cleveland Museum of Art

COMMENTS

always had a special affection for the British writer and, in 1840, he set one of Byron's poems to music as part of the song cycle *Myrthen*. Years later, Joseph von Wasielowski, Schumann's concertmaster in Düsseldorf, remembered that when the composer read aloud from Byron's *Manfred* "his voice suddenly failed him, tears started from his eyes, and he was so overcome that he could read no further."

Two years before Robert and his wife Clara moved to Düsseldorf in 1850, Schumann composed incidental music for a production of *Manfred*. He was thrilled and inspired by the challenge, commenting at the time that he had never before committed himself "with such love and outlay of force to any composition as to that of *Manfred*." Throughout his life, Schumann identified with tragic literary figures, and he may have seen something of himself in Byron's tormented hero, who wanders the Alps contemplating suicide and seeking oblivion. (Byron began his dramatic poem in 1816, shortly after visiting the Shelleys in the Swiss Alps, where eighteen-year-old Mary was hard at work on *Frankenstein*.) Schumann wrote an overture and incidental music for fifteen scenes; he began work on August 5, 1848, the day after he finished his only, ill-fated opera *Genoveva*.

Although it is often said that Schumann had no genuine theatrical talent and that he was inept at writing for orchestra, the powerful overture he composed for *Manfred* proves otherwise. From its quick curtain-raiser beginning (three rushed, offbeat chords), Schumann's overture is masterfully and economically scored



and an unerringly paced musical drama. It immediately casts a spell, setting the scene for the action to follow. Schumann has composed a character sketch in dark, unsettled music that grows in passion and urgency, then slowly collapses in the final pages. This is a magnificent and satisfying piece of music on its own, though, like any effective overture, it makes us eager to hear more. ■

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Born February 3, 1809; Hamburg, Germany
Died November 4, 1847; Leipzig, Germany

Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64



On July 30, 1838, Felix Mendelssohn wrote to his friend, the distinguished German violinist Ferdinand David, “I’d like to write a violin concerto for you next winter; one in E minor sticks in my head, the beginning of which will not

leave me in peace.” With those lines, Mendelssohn began his last great work—a masterpiece to refute claims of a career in decline and a concerto that would prove as popular as any ever written.

Sketches confirm that Mendelssohn knew very early on how this music would go, and an extensive correspondence with David, spanning six years, shows how much care went into the details. Mendelssohn was the architect; David his technical advisor.

David and Mendelssohn were kindred spirits; both were celebrated prodigies, born only a year apart. They became friends in 1825, the year Ferdinand David, fifteen, gave his first concerts in Berlin, and Felix Mendelssohn, sixteen, composed the magnificent Octet for strings that’s one of the greatest miracles in all music. That summer, after Abraham Mendelssohn moved his family to 3 Leipziger Strasse in Berlin, the

two young men became regular chamber music partners as well. (The son of the famous philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, Abraham would later say, “First I was the son of my father. Now I am the father of my son.”)

Ten years later, when Mendelssohn was named conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, he asked Ferdinand David to be his concertmaster. In 1843 Mendelssohn founded the Leipzig Conservatory; he appointed David to head his violin staff. (He also hired Robert Schumann to teach piano, composition, and score reading and soon added Robert’s wife

Clara to the piano faculty.)

Although Mendelssohn had written to David some five years earlier of his intention to compose a concerto for him, it wasn’t until 1844 that he found time to work on it in earnest. The concerto was completed on September 16, but as late as December 17 he wrote to David one last time, asking him to look at some changes he had penciled in, even though he had already sent the score off to his publisher, Breitkopf and Härtel.



“I very much want to have your views on all this,” he wrote, “before I turn it over to the printer.” David gave the world premiere on March 13, 1845, with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra conducted by Danish composer Niels Gade. It was a great success.

THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Felix Mendelssohn, 1847. Oil portrait by Wilhelm Hensel (1794–1861), the composer’s brother-in-law. Düsseldorf City Museum, Germany | Ferdinand David (1810–1873), Mendelssohn’s boyhood friend and soloist in the world premiere of his Violin Concerto in 1845. David was also concertmaster of Leipzig’s Gewandhaus Orchestra and assumed its musical direction after Mendelssohn’s death in 1847. Lithograph by Johann Georg Weinhold (1813–1880), 1846 | **NEXT SPREAD:** Palais Groeben, the Mendelssohn family residence at 3 Leipziger Strasse, Berlin. Illustration from *Famous Israelite Men and Women*, vol. 1, by Adolph Kohut (1848–1917). Published by Leipzig-Reudnitz, ca. 1900

COMMENTS

The concerto turned out to be Mendelssohn's last orchestral work, a powerhouse finale to a career burdened by the promise of spectacular early accomplishment—even the *Italian* and *Scottish* symphonies hadn't surpassed the masterpieces of his teens—the Octet and the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In achievement and popularity, the violin concerto proved to be their equal.

This violin concerto has long been too well known for an easy appraisal of its real virtues and innovations. In 1921 the British music critic Donald Tovey wrote, "I rather envy the enjoyment of anyone who should hear the Mendelssohn concerto for the first time and find that, like *Hamlet*, it was full of quotations." Perhaps the most famous of the quotations in the concerto is the very opening, a wonderful, singing violin melody launched after just two measures of orchestral "curtain"—a theme so effortlessly right that it comes as a surprise to learn that it gave Mendelssohn considerable trouble. (The essence of both the theme and its accompaniment is all there in the first sketch; as Mendelssohn told David, it was a beginning that wouldn't leave him in peace.)

Although Mendelssohn wasn't the first composer to introduce his soloist at the start of a concerto, he seized on the happy idea of letting soloist and orchestra explore the exposition together, abandoning the traditional double exposition (one for orchestra alone, a second led by the soloist). The idea was part of Mendelssohn's design from the beginning, and it was followed by nearly every nineteenth-century composer, except for Brahms and Dvořák. Equally novel (though less imitated) is Mendelssohn's decision to move the soloist's cadenza from the end of the movement to the crucial juncture of the development section and the recapitulation. The soloist now takes the spotlight at the most dramatic moment in the movement—it's a powerful and satisfying tactic. The cadenza concludes with a series of arpeggios that continues even after the orchestra bursts in with the main theme, a reversal of their traditional roles.

Novelty shouldn't overshadow the music's less historic moments. The first movement is one of Mendelssohn's greatest creations—there's evidence of his fastidious craftsmanship and inspiration in every bar. Notice, in particular, how he handles the important change of key and mode (from minor to major): the solo violin quickly descends three octaves to its lowest G, where it becomes the bass line to a new melody in the clarinets and flutes.

In his own *Scottish* Symphony, Mendelssohn had played with going from one movement to another without a break. He now conceives his entire concerto, in three movements,

COMPOSED

1844

FIRST PERFORMANCE

March 13, 1845; Leipzig, Germany

INSTRUMENTATION

solo violin, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

27 minutes

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

August 4, 1893, Music Hall at the World's Columbian Exposition. Maud Powell as soloist, Theodore Thomas conducting

February 7 and 8, 1896, Auditorium Theatre. Émile Sauret as soloist, Theodore Thomas conducting

July 26, 1941, Ravinia Festival. Yehudi Menuhin as soloist, Carlos Chávez conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

March 7, 8, 9, and 12, 2024, Orchestra Hall. Gil Shaham as soloist, Jakub Hrůša conducting

July 25, 2024, Ravinia Festival. Augustin Hadelich as soloist, Marin Alsop conducting

CSO RECORDINGS

1947. Mischa Elman as soloist, Désiré Defauw conducting. RCA

1962. Nathan Milstein as soloist, Walter Hendl conducting. VAI (video)

1979. Kyung-Wha Chung as soloist, Sir Georg Solti conducting. London (video)

1980. Shlomo Mintz as soloist, Claudio Abbado conducting. Deutsche Grammophon

1993. Itzhak Perlman as soloist, Daniel Barenboim conducting. Erato



as one continuous flow of music. The first bridge is accomplished by a single note—a low B in the bassoon—that outlasts the final chord of the opening *Allegro* like a stuck key on a pipe organ. The sustained B finally rises the half step to C, suggesting a new key—C major—and, in turn, a new movement.

The *Andante* is one of Mendelssohn's loveliest songs without words, a full paragraph of sweet melody and sensitive scoring. (Even in his last letter to David, Mendelssohn was still worrying about the effect of the mixed bowed and plucked accompaniment.) The mood

darkens midway through, with the entrance of trumpets and timpani. The bridge to the finale is accomplished by fourteen measures at a transitional tempo, in the character of a recitative before a showstopper aria. This is truly virtuosic material—roulades, scales, and rapid passagework in virtually every measure—cast in Mendelssohn's characteristic fleet and dancing style. The scurrying main theme carries the day at the expense of a little march tune that passes for a second subject. There's a fancy coda, and, in the final bar, the soloist's high E pierces the stratosphere. ■

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born September 8, 1841; Mühlhausen, Bohemia (now Nelahozeves, Czech Republic)
Died May 1, 1904; Prague, Bohemia

Symphony No. 5 in F Major, Op. 76



To the late nineteenth century, Dvořák was the composer of five—not nine—symphonies. His first four, never published during his lifetime, were unknown, and so his last, *From the New World*, spent its first half century as no. 5. The F major symphony performed at these concerts is *really* Dvořák's fifth, although it took some time to get this

all straightened out. Like his nineteenth-century colleagues Schubert and Bruckner, Dvořák has been good to musicologists, who sometimes make a living cleaning up after the fact. Only with the publication of Dvořák's first four symphonies in the 1950s (the long-lost First Symphony was rediscovered after the composer's death and performed for the first time in 1936) did we begin to use the current numbering.

This F major symphony is Dvořák's most significant product of 1875, a result of the encouragement he felt after winning the Austrian State Stipendium—along with powerful endorsements and four hundred gulden—for the first time, and the most promising sign that the judges had picked extremely well. The prize launched one of the most prolific years of Dvořák's career, and in addition to this symphony, composed in just six weeks during the summer, he also wrote his five-act grand opera *Vanda* in three months and turned out several substantial chamber pieces as well. But the symphony is the giant leap—a great advance over anything he had written before. It's easy now to see it as a score of extraordinary promise, because we know the brilliant Seventh Symphony, for example, or the timeless *From the New World* that followed, but the Fifth Symphony itself is a very impressive accomplishment.

We tend to think of Brahms and Dvořák as contemporary symphonists—their most famous symphonies were all premiered within the span of some fifteen years—who influenced each other in various ways. (When Dvořák began his Seventh, for example, he was still under the spell of Brahms's new Third, which he had just heard.) But Dvořák composed this F major symphony a year before Brahms finished his first, and so this is his answer to the classics by Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann that he knew, not a

COMPOSED
1875

FIRST PERFORMANCE
March 25, 1879; Prague, Bohemia

INSTRUMENTATION
2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets
(2nd doubling bass clarinet),
2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets,
3 trombones, timpani, triangle,
strings

**APPROXIMATE
PERFORMANCE TIME**
44 minutes

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES
January 24 and 25, 1919, Orchestra
Hall. Adolf Weidig conducting

**MOST RECENT
CSO PERFORMANCES**
January 24 and 25, 1919, Orchestra
Hall. Adolf Weidig conducting

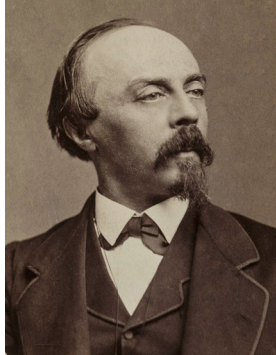
December 7, 8, 9, and 12, 2017,
Orchestra Hall. Neeme Järvi
conducting

THIS PAGE: Antonín Dvořák, portrait, ca. 1880. Private collection, anonymous artist. Photo by Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Getty Images

OPPOSITE PAGE: Hans von Bülow (1830–1894)—to whom Dvořák dedicated his Fifth Symphony—photographed by George Kendall Warren (1834–1884). Albumen print, ca. 1875. Louise St. John Westervelt Collection of Theatrical and Musical Photographs, the Newberry Library, Chicago

reaction to Brahms. (In fact, if either composer had an influence on the other at this point, it's the other way around: Brahms got to know at least three of Dvořák's symphonies while he was still writing his first.) Dvořák's F major symphony sings with his own unmistakable voice; it's free of the heavy Wagnerian fog that clouds some of his early works and has a natural warmth and simplicity that often eluded Brahms. Still, Dvořák couldn't escape the inevitable comparison to Brahms: when he dedicated this symphony to Hans von Bülow, the great conductor said he was thrilled to accept this honor from Dvořák, "next to Brahms, the most gifted composer of today."

This symphony is the first important work of Dvořák's maturity, and Simrock insisted (against Dvořák's wishes) on publishing it with a phony, high opus number to give it the stature of an even later composition. (Simrock picked op. 76, which puts it in the company of pieces composed a full decade later, even though Dvořák had appropriately written op. 24 at the top of his manuscript.) For a work saddled with such a convoluted numbering history, the music itself is a marvel of natural, unfussy expression and clarity of form. The entire symphony reveals remarkable assurance and control, suggesting that the speed of its composition was the result of certainty, not haste.



very end, when Dvořák opts for quiet contentment over visceral excitement.

The melancholy Andante—an intermezzo in a moderate tempo rather than a self-important slow movement—suggests the *dumka*, the mournful peasant dance that Dvořák loved.

The scherzo, which follows immediately after only a moment's hesitation, takes its time shaking the spell of the Andante before it breaks into a jovial, rustic dance. (The way Dvořák blurs the distinction between the two inner movements is novel and highly effective.)

The finale shatters the symphony's pastoral mood with its powerful opening in A minor—an unexpectedly foreign key in an F major work. Dvořák shrewdly withholds F major for a very long time, which only adds to the suspense and drama. This entire movement, with its driving rhythms, big themes, and heated development, confirms Dvořák's stature as a natural symphony composer. Both the brief, unannounced return of the opening material of the first movement, *pianissimo*, and the triumphant recovery of F major, celebrated with pealing trumpets, only add to its continuous sense of excitement and discovery. ■

The opening Allegro ma non troppo is filled with genial, outdoorsy music—clarinet birdcalls and hunting horns paint an inviting pastoral scene in high summer. The movement is vigorous and muscular until the

*Phillip Huscher has been the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1987. His history of the Orchestra, *Passing the Baton: The Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Music Directors Who Shaped Its Greatness*, will be published on September 28 by The University of Chicago Press.*



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Petr Popelka Conductor

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

March 1 and 2, 2024, Orchestra Hall. Mendelssohn's *The Hebrides Overture*, Schubert's Symphony no. 6, and Beethoven's Symphony no. 7

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES

December 4, 5, 6, and 7, 2025, Orchestra Hall. Brahms's Symphony no. 3 in F major, Aucoin's *Song of the Reappeared* with Julia Bullock, and Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*



Acclaimed for his captivating, authentic, and inclusive approach to conducting, Petr Popelka becomes the general music director designate of the Bavarian State Opera starting the 2029–30 season. He has served as

chief conductor of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra since the 2024–25 season.

Highlights of the 2026–27 season include, in addition to concerts and tours with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, his debuts with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Orchestra National de France. He also returns to the Cleveland Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Staatskapelle Berlin, Staatskapelle Dresden, Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Danish National

Symphony Orchestra; and to the Zurich Opera House, where he conducts Verdi's *Don Carlo*. This past summer, he led music by Mozart at the Salzburg Festival.

Previous debuts have taken him to the Berlin and Munich philharmonic orchestras, the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, and the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo, among others.

As a celebrated opera conductor, Popelka made guest appearances at the Bavarian State Opera (*Káťa Kabanová* and *Rusalka*), Staatsoper Unter den Linden (*Tosca*), Deutsche Oper Berlin (*Tristan and Isolde*), Semperoper Dresden (*Die Nase*), Theater an der Wien (*Schwanda* and *Die Fledermaus*), Zurich Opera House (*Don Giovanni*), Norwegian Opera in Oslo (*Elektra*), and the National Theatre in Prague (*Rusalka*, *Carmen*, *The Marriage of Figaro*).

Petr Popelka launched his conducting career during the 2019–20 season after serving as deputy principal double bass at the Staatskapelle Dresden from 2010 to 2019. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed as chief conductor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra in Oslo (2020–23) and subsequently led the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra (2022–26). He received his musical training in his hometown of Prague and in Freiburg, Germany. He is also active as a composer.

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Hilary Hahn Violin

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

March 29, 30, 31, and April 3, 2007, Orchestra Hall.
Goldmark's Violin Concerto, Charles Dutoit conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES

December 7, 8, and 9, 2023, Orchestra Hall. Brahms's Violin Concerto, Mikko Franck conducting



Three-time Grammy Award-winning violinist Hilary Hahn melds expressive musicality and technical expertise with a diverse repertoire guided by artistic curiosity. Hahn is a prolific recording artist and commissioner of new

works, and her twenty-three feature recordings have received every critical prize. Hahn currently serves as a member of the Juilliard School's string faculty, following her earlier tenure as visiting artist in Juilliard's Music Division in the 2023–24 season; recent seasons have also seen her serve as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first-ever artist-in-residence, artist-in-residence at the New York Philharmonic, and curating artist of the Dortmund Festival.

Hahn has personally commissioned and championed works by a diverse array of more than forty living composers, including Steven Banks, Jennifer Higdon, Jessie Montgomery, and Carlos Simon. Her 2021 album, *Paris*, features the world premiere recording of Rautavaara's *Deux Sérénades*, written for Hahn and premiered by her in 2019. Other recent commissions include Michael Abels's *Isolation* Variation, Hahn's recording of which was nominated for a Grammy; Barbara Assiginaak's *Sphynx Moth*; Lera Auerbach's Sonata no. 4: *Fractured Dreams*; and Six Partitas by Antón García Abril. García Abril, Auerbach, and Rautavaara were among the twenty-seven composers who contributed to *In 27 Pieces: the Hilary Hahn Encores*, Hahn's Grammy-winning multi-year commissioning project.

Hahn related to her fans naturally from the start of her career. Her Bring Your Own Baby concerts create opportunities for parents of infants to share their enjoyment of live classical music with their children. Her social media-based initiative, #100daysofpractice, has transformed practice into a community-building celebration of artistic development; since Hahn created the hashtag in 2017, fellow performers and students have contributed more than one million posts. A former Suzuki student, she released new recordings of the first three books of the Suzuki Violin School in 2020. In 2019 she released a book of sheet music for *In 27 Pieces* that includes her own fingerings and bowings and performance notes for each work.

Hahn is a prolific and celebrated recording artist whose feature albums on Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, and Sony have all opened in the top ten of the *Billboard* charts. Recent releases include *Night After Night*, a collection of James Newton Howard's scores for the films of M. Night Shyamalan, for which Hahn reprised her contributions to his score for *The Village*; and a Gramophone Recording of the Year Award-winning disc of Ysaÿe's six sonatas for solo violin. Three of her albums have been awarded Grammys. Higdon's Violin Concerto, which was composed for Hahn and recorded by her in 2008, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

Hilary Hahn is the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions. In recent seasons, she received the Avery Fisher Prize; was named *Musical America's* 2023 Artist of the Year; delivered the keynote speech of the Second Annual Women in Classical Music Symposium; received the 2021 Herbert von Karajan Award; and was awarded the Eleventh Annual Glasshütte Original Music Festival Award, which she donated to the Philadelphia-based music-education nonprofit Project 440. Hahn was the 2022 Chubb Fellow at Yale University's Timothy Dwight College. She also holds honorary doctorates from Middlebury College in Vermont and Ball State University in Indiana, where there are three scholarships in her name.

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The ensemble's history began in 1889, when Theodore Thomas, the leading conductor in America and a recognized music pioneer, was invited by Chicago businessman Charles Norman Fay to establish a symphony orchestra. Thomas's aim to build a permanent orchestra of the highest quality was realized at the first concerts in October 1891 in the Auditorium Theatre. Thomas served as music director until his death in January 1905, just three weeks after the dedication of Orchestra Hall, the Orchestra's permanent home designed by Daniel Burnham.

Frederick Stock, recruited by Thomas to the viola section in 1895, became assistant conductor in 1899 and succeeded the Orchestra's founder. His tenure lasted thirty-seven years, from 1905 to 1942. Stock founded the Civic Orchestra of Chicago—the first training orchestra in the U.S. affiliated with a major orchestra—in 1919, established youth auditions, organized the first subscription concerts especially for children, and began a series of popular concerts.

Three conductors headed the Orchestra during the following decade: Désiré Defauw was music director from 1943 to 1947, Artur Rodziński in 1947–48, and Rafael Kubelík from 1950 to 1953. The next ten years belonged to Fritz Reiner, whose recordings with the CSO are still considered hallmarks. Reiner invited Margaret Hillis to form the Chicago Symphony Chorus in 1957. For five seasons from 1963 to 1968, Jean Martinon held the position of music director.

Sir Georg Solti, the Orchestra's eighth music director, served from 1969 until 1991. His arrival launched one of the most successful musical partnerships of our time. The CSO made its first overseas tour to Europe in 1971 under his direction and released numerous award-winning recordings. Beginning in 1991, Solti held the title of music director laureate and returned to conduct the Orchestra each season until his death in September 1997.

Daniel Barenboim became ninth music director in 1991, a position he held until 2006. His tenure was distinguished by the opening of Symphony Center in 1997, appearances with the Orchestra in the dual role of pianist and conductor, and twenty-one international tours. Appointed by Barenboim in 1994 as the Chorus's second director, Duain Wolfe served until his retirement in 2022.

In 2010, Riccardo Muti became the Orchestra's tenth music director. During his tenure, the Orchestra deepened its engagement with the Chicago community, collaborated with visionary musicians and composers, and realized many notable performances of operas in concert. In September 2023, Muti became music director emeritus for life.

In April 2024, conductor Klaus Mäkelä was announced as the Orchestra's eleventh music director and will begin an initial five-year tenure as Zell Music Director in September 2027. In July 2025, Donald Palumbo became the third director of the Chicago Symphony Chorus.

Carlo Maria Giulini was named the Orchestra's first principal guest conductor in 1969, serving until 1972; Claudio Abbado held the position from 1982 to 1985. Pierre Boulez was appointed as principal guest conductor in 1995 and was named Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus in 2006, a position he held until his death in January 2016. From 2006 to 2010, Bernard Haitink was the Orchestra's first principal conductor. Pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet is the CSO's artist-in-residence for the 2026–27 Season.

The Orchestra first performed at Ravinia Park in 1905, later helped to inaugurate the Ravinia Festival in 1936, and has been in residence nearly every summer since. Listeners enjoy the weekly CSO Radio Broadcast Series as well as releases from the ensemble's extensive commercial discography. Recordings by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus have earned sixty-five Grammy awards from the Recording Academy.

The musicians of the Orchestra are deeply involved in the Negaunee Music Institute, which reaches students, families, and early-career musicians through free and low-cost programming and world-class training.



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Chicago Symphony Orchestra

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The CSO's music director position is endowed in perpetuity by a generous gift from Zell Family Foundation.

The Louise H. Benton Wagner and Erika and Dietrich M. Gross Principal Flute chairs are currently unoccupied.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra string sections utilize revolving seating. Players behind the first desk (first two desks in the violins) change seats systematically every two weeks and are listed alphabetically. Section percussionists also are listed alphabetically.

Learn more about the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association's musicians, concerts, and supporters at cso.org.

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Commemorate your trip to Orchestra Hall with exclusive CSO souvenirs. The Store is open before all CSO and select Symphony Center Presents concerts. Regular store hours are Tuesday–Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visit symphonystore.com to shop online.

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- **Children:** Children 8 years of age and older are welcome to attend concerts at Symphony Center. Family concerts and select holiday and movie concerts are open to children 3 years of age and older. All children, regardless of age, must have their own tickets for all performances.
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- **Electronic devices:** Before the concert begins, mobile phones and other electronic devices must be turned off or set to silent mode. The use of photography, audio, and video equipment is not permitted during the music.

Please note: As of this season, Box Level seating is now assigned.

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