



CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ASSOCIATION

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News

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PRINCIPAL VIOLA CHARLES PIKLER RETIRES AFTER 39 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

CHICAGO—Charles Pikler, principal viola of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO), performs in his final subscription concerts with the CSO [October 5-7, 2017](#) before officially retiring in December 2017 after a planned leave of absence. Pikler, a member of the Orchestra since 1978, holds the Paul Hindemith Principal Viola Chair, which was endowed by an anonymous benefactor in 2014.

Pikler, who originally studied violin, was appointed to a position in the violin section of the Orchestra in 1978 by then music director Sir Georg Solti. When former, longtime CSO Principal Viola Milton Preves retired, Pikler prepared for and won the principal viola audition, being named to the post by Solti in 1986. Prior to joining the CSO, Pikler launched his career as a violinist with the Minnesota Orchestra in 1971, later becoming a member of the Cleveland Orchestra (1974-76) and the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra (1976-78). In the 1995/96 season, he also served as a guest principal viola of the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa.

During his tenure, Pikler has been featured as a soloist with the Orchestra under Solti and Daniel Barenboim; other CSO titled conductors including Pierre Boulez, James Conlon and James Levine; as well as guest conductors Harry Bicket, Sir Andrew Davis, Charles Dutoit, Sir Mark Elder, Asher Fisch, Dennis Russell Davies and Nicholas McGegan.

In 1990, Pikler performed the world premiere of Frank Beezhold's Viola Concerto, which was dedicated to him, with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago in Orchestra Hall. He subsequently recorded the work in the composer's own transcription for piano and viola with Dorothy Shultz. Throughout his tenure, Pikler has maintained a strong connection with the Civic Orchestra, having led viola sectionals for thirty-one years.

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Beyond the CSO, Pikler also served as concertmaster of the Chicago Chamber Orchestra under Dieter Kober, touring and performing as soloist; Sinfonia Orchestra of Chicago; Orchestra of the Apollo Chours; Chicago Opera Theater Orchestra; Northbrook Symphony; and the Symphony of Oak Park and River Forest. He also served as principal viola of the Ars Viva Symphony Orchestra.

A chamber music enthusiast, Pikler has performed regularly with several ensembles including the Chicago Symphony String Quartet and the Tononi Ensemble. He has also been a guest artist with the Daniel String Quartet in Holland, the Vermeer Quartet of DeKalb and the Louisville String Quartet. Pikler also recorded the chamber music of Easley Blackwood with the composer as pianist for Cedille Records.

A native of Connecticut, Pikler studied piano with his parents and violin with Ben Ornstein and Oswald Lehnert, Bronislaw Gimpel at the University of Connecticut and Roman Totenberg at the Tanglewood Young Artist Program at the Berkshire Music Center. In addition to his musical studies, Pikler holds a degree in mathematics with honors from the University of Minnesota.

Pikler and his wife Ruth are the parents of David, a math teacher in Houston's prestigious Village School; Andrew, a software engineer in Tel Aviv, Israel; and Amy, a violist in the San Antonio Symphony.

During retirement, Pikler plans to complete a project he started in 1999, namely the remastering of many recordings of his late professor Bronislaw Gimpel. He considers this project well worth the effort, since he regards Gimpel's violin playing among the best on record.

Pikler receives the CSO's Theodore Thomas Medallion for Distinguished Service at the concert on October 5, 2017.

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