PRESS RELEASE
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CHICAGO CHILDREN’S THEATRE AND CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA DEBUT NEW MY MAGIC BREATH VIRTUAL VIDEO FOR KIDS THAT USES MUSIC AND ART TO TEACH THE CALMING POWER OF MINDFUL BREATHING

First Lady of Chicago Amy Eshleman narrates new video based on popular children’s book; My Magic Breath premieres as part of the Chicago Public Library’s “Live at the Library Series” Thursday, September 10, 10 a.m. CT

Click here for photos and screen grabs.

CHICAGO, IL, September 3, 2020 – Chicago Children’s Theatre and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association are set to premiere My Magic Breath, a new virtual co-production that fuses classical music and modern animation to help young children—along with their parents, caregivers, and teachers—harness the calming and restorative power of mindful breathing.

My Magic Breath was developed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic to create a meaningful resource for children and families during this time of uncertainty. The video co-production is an extension of the ongoing partnership between Chicago Children’s Theatre and the Negaunee Music Institute at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) on the Once Upon a Symphony programs developed to introduce young children to classical music and the arts through storytelling and theatre. It is the first in several virtual video projects the two organizations expect to release during the 2020-21 season. The Chicago Public Library is participating as a presenting partner for these special projects.

The 15-minute video, for children ages 4 to 8, will premiere Thursday, September 10 at 10 a.m. CT as part of the Chicago Public Library’s “Live at the Library” series, its digital story time that has streamed live daily since April to help keep Chicago’s kids engaged and learning while schools are closed. Visit the library’s Facebook page, facebook.com/chipublib/live to watch the digital world premiere screening, or go to CCTV: Virtual Theatre and Learning from Chicago Children’s Theatre or cso.org/mymagicbreath. Following the premiere, My Magic Breath will be posted for free, on-demand online streaming.

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Chicago Children’s Theatre and Chicago Symphony Orchestra to debut My Magic Breath virtual video – pg 2 of 6

My Magic Breath beautifully combines animated storybook illustrations, solo musical performances by musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and narration by First Lady of Chicago Amy Eshleman.
Rooted in calm, simple text that helps children see themselves in the illustrated characters, *My Magic Breath* also provides real world tools to support children’s social and emotional wellbeing. Particularly during this time of uncertainty and the stress of going back to school, in-person or virtually, *My Magic Breath* doubles as an engaging animated program kids will enjoy, and a potential new relaxation solution for children and their families.

Based on the popular children’s picture book *My Magic Breath* by New York Times bestselling author Nick Ortner and Alison Taylor, and illustrated by Michelle Polizzi, *My Magic Breath* encourages children to breathe along as they learn how to make angry or sad thoughts disappear. The video starts with the question “Do YOU have the magic breath?” Then, the First Lady of Chicago narrates this empowering and beautiful story that weaves together soothing interludes of classical music performed by CSO soloists and colorful animation by a Chicago Children’s Theatre video artist to show kids how breathing can help them feel better.

Each musical vignette features a different Chicago Symphony Orchestra musician—Robert Chen, Concertmaster; Karen Basrak, cello; David Griffin, horn; Jennifer M. Gunn, flute; and Lawrence Neuman, viola—performing an excerpt from a solo work by J.S. Bach. Featured works include Bach’s *Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major, Prelude* (Karen Basrak, cello), *Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major, Gigue* (David Griffin, horn), *Sonata for Violin No. 1 in G Minor, Adagio* (Robert Chen, violin), *Flute Partita in A Minor, Corrente* (Jennifer Gunn, flute) and *Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major, Sarabande* (Lawrence Neuman, viola).

Chicago Children’s Theatre tapped Liviu Pasare, a local animator, video artist and one of CCT’s longtime artistic collaborators, to create the whimsical computer animation that brings *My Magic Breath* to life. Pasare animated the original book’s child characters, look and feel while adding playful, multi-colored swirls, clouds and stars of calm and relaxation that flow from and around the musicians’ instruments as they play. The illustrated characters watch the musicians’ performances and breathe along with Amy Eshleman.

In this time, *My Magic Breath* can help steer children into a serene space of mindfulness, self-awareness and balance. “Cell phones, iPads, social media…kids have influences that they’ve never had before, and they come with good and bad,” said Ortner, author of *My Magic Breath*. “What *My Magic Breath* tries to do is mitigate some of the bad—not slowing down enough, not taking the time to breathe—but instead to learn to be present, to ‘just be’ in the world.”

“The Center for Childhood Resiliency has recently partnered with Chicago Children’s Theatre to enhance their programs focused on teaching strategies for coping with stress and trauma in young children. We are so excited for them to share this wonderful tool for young kids and their parents to learn and practice mindfulness, “ said Colleen Cicchetti, PhD, and Executive Director of Lurie Children’s Hospital’s Center for Childhood Resiliency.

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**My Magic Breath – Behind the Scenes**

The Negaunee Music Institute at the CSO and Chicago Children’s Theatre have a long history of collaborating on the CSO’s *Once Upon a Symphony* series, a program that features CSO musicians and introduces young children 3 to 5 to the amazing world of classical music. Developed in 2011 by Yo-Yo Ma during his first year as the CSO’s Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant, the CSO has collaborated with Chicago Children’s Theatre’s to produce and present highly engaging, interactive live experiences for young audiences on such family-friendly musical presentations as *The Ugly Duckling, The Elves and the Shoemaker* and *Jack and the Beanstalk*.

“This spring, said Jon Weber, Director, School and Family Programs, Negaunee Music Institute, CSO, “since we were not able to present those vibrant and engaging live performances, CCT Artistic Director Jacqueline Russell and I began discussing how we might collaborate on content that responds to emotional challenges and anxieties that children and adults are experiencing during these uncertain times.”
“We all can benefit from a few calming, ‘magic breaths’ on a daily basis,” added Jacqueline Russell, Co-Founder and Artistic Director, Chicago Children’s Theatre. “We are thrilled that this collaboration gives us an opportunity to demonstrate how the arts can help address the pressing needs of children in our city.”

“I’m thrilled to join with the Chicago Children’s Theatre and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to share how classical music, theater, animation and storytelling can help children relax,” said First Lady of Chicago Amy Eshleman. “To rest for a moment. To gain control of their emotions. To breathe. These days in particular, learning simple relaxation techniques to maintain positive emotional balance are important skills for children, as well as parents, teachers and caregivers.”

“This partnership between cultural and civic organizations—the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association, Chicago Children’s Theatre, Chicago Public Library—is intended to increase access and enhance impact,” Weber added. “We hope that My Magic Breath will be a welcome resource as children—along with parents, caregivers, and teachers—start school remotely, and that they will continue to look to arts organizations for support.”

The complete My Magic Breath creative team includes Chicago Symphony Orchestra musicians Karen Basrak (cello), David Griffin (horn), Robert Chen (violin), Jennifer Gunn (flute) and Lawrence Neuman (viola); narration by First Lady of Chicago Amy Eshleman; Liviu Pasare, animation; Todd Rosenberg, videography; Charlie Post and Mat Lejeune, audio engineering; J.S. Bach, music; and, Jacqueline Russell and Jon Weber, directors. The video is inspired by the book My Magic Breath: Finding Calm Through Mindful Breathing by Nick Ortner and Alison Taylor, illustrated by Michelle Polizzi.

Chicago Children’s Theatre thanks the Susan M. Venturi Fund in memory of James and Roslyn Marks to support theater education access.

Support for Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association programming for children and families is provided by Abbott Fund, John Hart and Carol Prins, Kinder Morgan, PNC, Michael and Linda Simon, the Walter and Caroline Sueske Charitable Trust and an anonymous family foundation. Allstate Insurance Company is the CSOA Youth Education Program Sponsor.

My Magic Breath - creative team biographies

Amy Eshleman (narrator) is the First Lady of Chicago, the wife of Mayor Lori Lightfoot. Her focus and passion is creating interest-driven, out-of-school opportunities for young people in Chicago and across the country—including the "My CHI. My Future." initiative that launched earlier this year. From 2015-2017, she was the Partnerships Lead at the Digital Youth Network at DePaul University, spearheading the development of resource-sharing partnerships for the Chicago City of Learning. From 2012-2015, she was Program Leader for Education at the Urban Libraries Council. And for 18 years beginning in 1994, she was the Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Planning and Partnerships at the Chicago Public Library, where she helped launch citywide initiatives such as One Book, One Chicago, YOUmedia, CyberNavigators and Kraft Great Kids.


Liviu Pasare (animator) has a Chicago-based practice creating works and visual experiences using new media and technology. He practices as a projection designer, cinematographer, editor, and animator, and has produced, directed and performed for live multimedia experiences. He has worked with Chicago Children’s Theatre for almost a decade and is enchanted for being one of the many artists and collaborators of the company. He also has been affiliated with theaters and artists such as Luftwerk, Nick Cave, Bob Faust, The Seldoms, Collaboration,
Chicago Symphony Orchestra musician biographies

Robert Chen (Concertmaster, The Louis C. Sulder Chair) has been Concertmaster of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1999. During his years as concertmaster, he has been featured as soloist with Riccardo Muti, Daniel Barenboim and Pierre Boulez, among others. He gave the CSO premiere of György Ligeti’s Violin Concerto, Elliott Carter’s Violin Concerto and Witold Lutoslawski’s Chain Two, as well as the world premiere of Augusta Read Thomas’s Astral Canticle. In addition to his duties as concertmaster, Chen enjoys a solo career that includes performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Swedish Radio Orchestra, Moscow Philharmonic and more (full bio).

Karen Basrak (cello) joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra cello section in 2012. A native of Arlington Heights, she has performed extensively throughout the U.S. and Europe, and appeared with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Northwest Symphony Orchestra. Basrak is on the faculty of the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University (full bio).

David Griffin (horn) is the fourth horn of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Upon graduating from Northwestern University in 1987, Griffin began his career with the Rochester Philharmonic and followed with positions in the orchestras of Montreal and Houston before joining the Chicago Symphony in 1995. Griffin has served as guest principal horn of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Saint Louis Symphony, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and Shanghai Radio Orchestra. In September 2017, Griffin traveled to Japan for a solo tour, performing recitals in Tokyo, Nagasaki, and Osaka (full bio).

Jennifer M. Gunn (flute) has been hailed for her “virtuosic poise” by the Chicago Tribune and as “a dazzling piccolo virtuoso” by the Palm Beach Daily Herald. She was appointed to the position of Piccolo of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra by Maestro Daniel Barenboim in 2005. Since joining the CSO, she has been active in the life of the Orchestra many ways including performances on the CSO’s contemporary music series, MusicNow, CSO Chamber series and Once upon a Symphony series designed for families with young children. Gunn has also participated in the Dream Out Loud Music Education Advocacy Campaign and joined Maestro Riccardo Muti for several of the programs for at-risk and incarcerated youth at Chicago area juvenile justice centers (full bio).

Lawrence Neuman (viola) has been a member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1991. Before coming to Chicago he was violist with the Miami String Quartet. As a chamber musician he frequently is heard throughout Chicago and has performed across the United States and in Europe. He has appeared at festivals and chamber music series in Boston, Marlboro, La Jolla, Madison, Napa, Portland and Davenport. Chamber music collaborators have included Daniel Barenboim, Pinchas Zukerman, Yefim Bronfman, Lydia Artyumiw, Gil Shaham and Aaron Rosand (full bio).

About Chicago Children’s Theatre

“The Chicago theater scene is legendarily vibrant, so naturally a number of companies tailor productions to younger audiences. The cream of the crop is Chicago Children’s Theatre.”
– Chicago Tribune

Chicago Children’s Theatre was founded in 2005 with a big idea: Chicago is the greatest theater city in the world, and it deserves a great children’s theater. Nearly 15 years later, Chicago Children’s Theatre is the city’s largest professional theater company devoted exclusively to children and young families. CCT has established a national reputation for the production of first-rate children’s theater with professional writing, performing, and directorial talent and high-quality design and production expertise.
In January 2017, the company celebrated the opening of its new, permanent home, Chicago Children’s Theatre, The Station, located at 100 S. Racine Avenue in Chicago’s West Loop community. The building, formerly the Chicago Police Station for the 12th District, was repurposed into a beautiful, LEED Gold-certified, mixed-use performing arts, education and community engagement facility that now welcomes all Chicago families.

CCT provides tens of thousands of free and reduced price tickets to under-resourced schools each season in partnership with Chicago Public Schools. CCT also continues to grow its performing arts and STEAM education programs, offering classes, workshops, winter and spring break camps, and summer camps for ages 0 to 13.

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Last year, Chicago Children’s Theatre won the 2019 National TYA Artistic Innovation Award from Theatre for Young Audiences/USA. In addition, Chicago Children’s Theatre has garnered six NEA Art Works grants, and in 2017, became the first theater for young audiences in the U.S. to win a National Theatre Award from the American Theatre Wing, creators of the Tony Awards.

Chicago Children’s Theatre is led by Co-Founders, Artistic Director Jacqueline Russell and Board Chair Todd Leland, with Board President Armando Chacon. For more, visit chicagochildrenstheatre.org.

About the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Founded by Theodore Thomas in 1891, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is consistently hailed as one of the greatest orchestras in the world. Since 2010, the pre- eminent conductor Riccardo Muti has served as its 10th music director. Missy Mazzoli is Mead Composer-in-Residence.

From baroque through contemporary music, the CSO commands a vast repertoire. Its renowned musicians annually perform more than 150 concerts, most at Symphony Center in Chicago and, each summer, at the suburban Ravinia Festival. They regularly tour nationally and internationally. Since 1892, the CSO has made 62 international tours, performing in 29 countries on five continents.

People around the globe listen to weekly radio broadcasts of CSO concerts and recordings on the WFMT radio network and online at cso.org/radio. Recordings by the CSO have earned 62 Grammy Awards, including two in 2011 for Muti’s recording with the CSO and Chorus of Verdi’s Messa da Requiem (Muti’s first of eight releases with the CSO to date). Find details on these and many other CSO recordings at cso.org/resound.

The CSO is part of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association, which also includes the Chicago Symphony Chorus (Duain Wolfe, Director and Conductor) and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago (Ken-David Masur, Principal Conductor), a training ensemble for emerging professionals. Through its prestigious Symphony Center Presents series, the CSOA presents guest artists and ensembles from a variety of genres—classical, jazz, world, and contemporary.

The Negaunee Music Institute at the CSO offers community and education programs that annually engage more than 200,000 people of diverse ages and backgrounds. Through the Institute and other activities, including a free annual concert led by Muti, the CSO is committed to using the power of music to create connections and build community.

The CSO is supported by thousands of patrons, volunteers and institutional and individual donors. The CSO’s music director position is endowed in perpetuity by a generous gift from the Zell Family Foundation. The Negaunee Foundation provides generous support in perpetuity for the work of the Negaunee Music Institute. For more information, visit cso.org and csosoundsandstories.org.

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