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Press Contact:
[Hannah Sundwall](#)
[312-294-3083](#)

MAY PROGRAMMING AT SYMPHONY CENTER AND IN THE COMMUNITY

CHICAGO — The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA) presents a variety of programs in May, featuring the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) and renowned guest conductors and soloists performing at Symphony Center.

The month's classical schedule opens with continued performances of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony and Bartók's Third Piano Concerto, led by Karina Canellakis and featuring soloist Conrad Tao (May 1-3). Joyce DiDonato, the 2025/26 CSO Artist-in-Residence, sings Lieberon's *Neruda Songs* (May 7-9) led by Edward Gardner, before Samara Joy returns to join the CSO for a program spotlighting her singular voice and charisma (May 12). Conductor Juraj Valčuha leads an all-French program featuring Saint-Saëns' *Organ* Symphony (May 14-16), and James Gaffigan leads the CSO in a program of dance rhythms and playful invention, with CSO Assistant Concertmaster Yuan-Qing Yu in Kreisler's Vivaldi-inspired Violin Concerto (May 21-23). Conductor Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider and pianist Martin Helmchen close out the month with a program featuring works by Brahms, Strauss and Ravel (May 28-31).

Symphony Center Presents (SCP) concerts in May span an array of genres, from drummer-composer Mike Reed's program exploring Fred Hopkins' deep influence on avant-garde jazz (May 1) to Evgeny Kissin's eras-spanning recital pairing Beethoven with Chopin (May 17). Aida Cuevas, "La Voz de México," celebrates 50 years as an ambassador of Mexican and Latin American music (May 15), and Hilary Hahn returns with a rich exploration of French music, including sonatas by Debussy, Ravel and Fauré (May 24).

The CSO for Kids series presents two matinee programs of Mother Goose & the Cabinet of Wonder featuring singer-songwriter Natalie Merchant (May 9).

Ken-David Masur leads the Civic Orchestra of Chicago in Mahler's First Symphony (May 4) following a performance at New Trier High School (May 3), and, in collaboration

with New Music Chicago, Civic Orchestra Fellows perform a dynamic program featuring music selected from a call for scores (May 17).

Tickets and more information are available at [cso.org](https://www.cso.org).

[Explore](#) a chronological list of May 2026 concert programs.

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Canellakis, Tao & Tchaikovsky 5 ([May 1-3](#))

“With desire and passion,” Tchaikovsky writes on the score of his Fifth Symphony, and he’s as good as his word: It’s a work teeming with brilliant orchestral colors, stormy emotions and a fate motif that haunts each movement. Illinois native Conrad Tao is the soloist in Bartók’s Third Piano Concerto, the composer’s beguiling love letter to his wife and his native Hungary.

DiDonato Performs Neruda Songs ([May 7-9](#))

2025/26 CSO Artist-in-Residence Joyce DiDonato is “a supreme artist, as much through sheer triumph of spirit as through musicianship” (*Financial Times*). The esteemed mezzo-soprano sings the *Neruda Songs*, Peter Lieberman’s heartbreakingly sensuous song cycle set to the poetry of Pablo Neruda. Edward Gardner concludes the program with Walton’s tumultuous and alluring First Symphony.

Poulenc Gloria & Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony ([May 14-16](#))

Juraj Valčuha conducts three works that are distinctively French in their refinement, charm and ingenuity. Ravel’s “five children’s pieces” brim with delight and affection while Poulenc’s *Gloria* evokes, in his words, “frescoes with angels sticking out their tongues.” Saint-Saëns is simply epic in his *Organ* Symphony.

Sound and Fury ([May 21-23](#))

James Gaffigan leads the Orchestra in a lively program of dance rhythms and playful invention. Grieg’s *Holberg* Suite breathes fresh life into elegant dances from the Baroque era. CSO Assistant Concertmaster Yuan-Qing Yu takes center stage in Kreisler’s charming Violin Concerto, and Anna Clyne’s *Sound and Fury* finds inspiration in Shakespeare’s rhythmic use of language. Completing the program, Haydn’s Symphony No. 101 (*The Clock*) — whose Andante movement was demanded as an encore at its premiere — delights with witty surprises and its famous tick-tock rhythm.

Brahms, Strauss & Ravel La valse ([May 28-31](#))

Brahms’ First Piano Concerto awes with its grand scale, intense passion and unabashedly dramatic piano writing — the ideal showcase for Martin Helmchen, “who brings both freshness and expressive depth to everything he plays” (*Chicago Classical*

Review). Works by Ravel and Richard Strauss evoke the romance and intrigues of Vienna's bygone golden age.

Featured Concerts

Samara Joy & the CSO ([May 12](#))

Following her sold-out Symphony Center debut, Samara Joy returns to join the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for an unforgettable evening spotlighting her singular voice and charisma. As a five-time Grammy Award winner and "classic jazz singer from a new generation" (*NPR*), she is celebrated as a masterful interpreter and rightful heir to legends like Sarah Vaughan, Betty Carter, Abbey Lincoln and Carmen McRae.

CSO for Kids

Mother Goose & the Cabinet of Wonder ([May 9](#))

Join singer-songwriter Natalie Merchant, members of the CSO and special guests for a joyful singalong with Mother Goose. Perfect for ages 3-12, this captivating program features traditional nursery rhymes adapted by Merchant and orchestrated for an array of instrumental groups. Be a part of this magical musical world of learning and imagination.

Mother Goose & the [Cabinet of Wonder](#) is a co-production of Natalie Merchant, Chicago Children's Theatre and the Negaunee Music Institute at the CSO.

Symphony Center Presents

Aida Cuevas: 50 Years Singing to México ([May 15](#))

Prepare for an evening of passion, tradition and the soul-stirring beauty of timeless music. Aida Cuevas, the unrivaled queen of ranchera music and "La Voz de México" (the Voice of Mexico), celebrates her 50th anniversary as an ambassador of Mexican and Latin American music.

Hilary Hahn in Recital ([May 24](#))

Having embraced Chicago and its musical life during her three years as CSO Artist-in-Residence, Hilary Hahn returns to Symphony Center with pianist Tom Poster. Together, they explore three cornerstone sonatas by Debussy, Ravel and Fauré — each offering a distinct perspective on the textures and lyricism of a century of French music.

Symphony Center Presents Jazz

Mike Reed's Chicago Inspirations ([May 1](#))

Drummer-composer Mike Reed and a powerhouse ensemble of fellow Chicago improvisers explore the legacy of Chicago avant-garde jazz bassist Fred Hopkins. Saxophonist Geof Bradfield and talented high-school jazz musicians open the concert with Reed's collection of music composed in Chicago between 1980 and 2010.

Symphony Center Presents Piano

Evgeny Kissin ([May 17](#))

A piano sensation since his arrival on the international scene in the 1980s, Evgeny Kissin returns with an eras-spanning recital. Beethoven's revolutionary Piano Sonata No. 7 pairs perfectly with Chopin's varied mazurkas before a second half devoted to Schumann's deeply personal *Kreisleriana* and Liszt's dazzling Hungarian Rhapsody.

Civic Orchestra of Chicago

Civic Plays Mahler 1 at New Trier High School ([May 3](#))

The opening chapter in Mahler's symphonic cycle doesn't hold back. A radiant musical sunrise sets the stage for thumping folk dances, hunting scenes, a funeral procession and a storm-tossed finale that ends with a blaze of brass. Ken-David Masur begins the program with the jubilant prelude to the first act from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

This concert takes place at New Trier Township High School (385 Winnetka Ave., Winnetka). Tickets are free; reservations are required and open April 17.

Civic Plays Mahler 1 ([May 4](#))

The opening chapter in Mahler's symphonic cycle doesn't hold back. A radiant musical sunrise sets the stage for thumping folk dances, hunting scenes, a funeral procession and a storm-tossed finale that ends with a blaze of brass. Ken-David Masur begins the program with the jubilant prelude to the first act from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and Takemitsu's *Visions*, inspired by paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago and both commissioned and premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1990.

Civic Fellows & New Music Chicago ([May 17](#))

In collaboration with [New Music Chicago](#), Civic Orchestra Fellows perform a dynamic program featuring music selected from a call for scores.

This concert takes place in Buntrock Hall at Symphony Center. Tickets are free; reservations are required and open May 1.

Food and Beverage

Explore Symphony Center's on-site dining options for a seamless preconcert experience. Preorder a Sound Bites meal to enjoy in the Rotunda at Symphony Center 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 [cso.org/dining](https://www.cso.org/dining).

Parking and Transit Options

Exclusive parking rates are available through Millennium Garages, the Preferred Parking Partner for 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 Symphony Center's 67 E. Adams St. entrance. A round-trip North Shore Shuttle service is available for Friday matinees. Visit [cso.org/transit](https://www.cso.org/transit) for more parking and transit options.

Patron Information

Contact Patron Services for personalized assistance online at [cso.org/contact](https://www.cso.org/contact) or by calling [312-294-3000](tel:312-294-3000), Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

All artists and programs are subject to change.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association acknowledges support from the Illinois Arts Council.

The 2025/26 Civic Orchestra season is generously sponsored by Lori Julian for the Julian Family Foundation, which also provides major funding for the Civic Fellowship program.

The Civic Orchestra of Chicago acknowledges support from the Illinois Arts Council.

The Canellakis, Tao & Tchaikovsky 5 performances are sponsored by the Bonnie Ann Barber Endowment Fund, which recognizes the importance of the CSO to Chicago and aims to preserve and support the CSO's legacy for future generations.

Funding for educational programs during the 2025/26 Season of SCP Jazz has been generously provided by Dan J. Epstein, Judith Guitelman and the Dan J. Epstein Family Foundation.

Chicago Jazz, *DownBeat* Magazine and WDCB 90.9FM Jazz are Media Partners for Mike Reed's Chicago Inspirations and Samara Joy & the CSO.

The Artist-in-Residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is made possible through a generous gift from James and Brenda Grusecki.

The performances of DiDonato Performs Neruda Songs are generously sponsored by United Airlines.

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The appearance of the Chicago Symphony Chorus for the Poulenc Gloria & Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony concert has been made possible by a generous gift from The Grainger Foundation.

The Poulenc Gloria & Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony concerts are supported in part by the League of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association Endowed Concert Fund.

Newsradio 105.9 WBBM is a Media Partner for the Sound and Fury concerts.

The Brahms, Strauss & Ravel La valse concert is sponsored by Zell Family Foundation & Ling Z. and Michael C. Markovitz.

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Chicago Symphony Orchestra: cso.org

Founded by Theodore Thomas in 1891, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is consistently hailed as one of the world's great orchestras. In April 2024, Klaus Mäkelä was named the Orchestra's 11th music director, and he will begin an initial five-year tenure as Zell Music Director with the 2027/28 Season. Riccardo Muti, the Orchestra's 10th music director from 2010 until 2023, became Music Director Emeritus for Life at the beginning of the 2023/24 Season. Joyce DiDonato is the CSO Artist-in-Residence for the 2025/26 Season.

The CSO commands a vast repertoire, from baroque through contemporary music. Its renowned musicians perform more than 150 concerts annually, in Orchestra Hall at Symphony Center in downtown Chicago and each summer at the Ravinia Festival in suburban Highland Park. The ensemble regularly tours domestically, and since 1892, has made 65 international tours, performing in 30 countries on five continents.

Patrons around the globe enjoy weekly radio broadcasts of CSO concerts and recordings via the WFMT Radio Network and online at [cso.org/radio](https://www.cso.org/radio). Launched in 2007, [CSO Resound](#) is the ensemble's Grammy Award-winning independent record label, featuring live performances with world-class conductors and guest artists. Since 1916, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus have amassed an extensive discography that has earned 65 Grammy awards from the Recording Academy.

The CSO is part of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA), which also includes the Chicago Symphony Chorus, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Symphony Center Presents and Negaunee Music Institute. The [Chicago Symphony Chorus](#), founded by Margaret Hillis in 1957, is the country's largest professional chorus. Donald Palumbo is the Director of the Chicago Symphony Chorus. Founded by second music director Frederick Stock during the 1919/20 Season, the [Civic Orchestra of Chicago](#) is a training ensemble for emerging professionals with Ken-David Masur serving as its principal conductor. [Symphony Center Presents](#) features guest artists and ensembles across an expansive array of genres, including classical, jazz, world and contemporary. The [Negaunee Music Institute](#) offers community and educational programs that annually engage more than 200,000 people of diverse ages and backgrounds throughout the Chicagoland area.

Through the Institute and numerous other activities — including annual free community concerts in Chicago neighborhoods — the CSO is committed to using the power of music to strengthen bonds with its longtime patrons and create connections with new audiences.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association is supported by thousands of patrons, volunteers and institutional and individual donors. The Negaunee Foundation provides generous support in perpetuity for the work of the Negaunee Music Institute.