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2023/24 CSO MusicNOW Season Programming Celebrates Work of CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery

CHICAGO — The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA) announces programming details for the 2023/24 Season of CSO MusicNOW, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s acclaimed contemporary music series. The series celebrates the vision and commitment to new music of CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery, who embarks on the third year of a three-year appointment and who has curated the CSO MusicNOW series since the 2021/22 Season. This year’s series juxtaposes the intimacy of two curated programs with two concerts featuring the full power and artistic brilliance of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

The series will include three CSO MusicNOW-commissioned works by Montgomery, Jasmine Barnes and Curtis Stewart as well as Montgomery’s third commissioned work for the CSO, a new Percussion Concerto written for Principal Percussion Cynthia Yeh. Additional highlights include a new composition by Montgomery which is a movement of a five-part suite for violin and orchestra and a program highlighting the work of the Blacknificent 7, a Black composer collective of which Montgomery is an active member. The series includes two Sunday performances at 4:30 p.m. and two Saturday programs at 7:30 p.m. The CSO MusicNOW experience includes preconcert events and postconcert parties to mix and mingle with the artists and fellow concertgoers. Subscriptions to the 2023/24 CSO MusicNOW series are available now with more information available at [cso.org](https://www.cso.org).

“Becoming part of the new music community in Chicago and doing this work as Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra has been a transformative experience for me,” said Jessie Montgomery. “In the CSO MusicNOW series, I have had the opportunity to curate and share work from composers who bring many perspectives and experiences to their music. What comes next will allow us to continue building a community of listeners for that work and a bridge for listeners to discover the new music being written for the full orchestra today. I invite our audiences to explore new music in all its forms with us next season.”

“Next season we are really looking forward to celebrating the work of Jessie Montgomery as CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence,” said Cristina Rocca, CSOA VP of Artistic Planning. “Jessie’s commitment to new music across the past two years and her curatorial flair have inspired us in so many ways, and we now have the chance to explore new possibilities for the CSO MusicNOW series with her. We’re also thrilled that two of Jessie’s new orchestral works will be part of concerts that will culminate our season and her time with us.”

Montgomery and the Blacknificent 7 ([Sunday, December 3, 4:30 p.m.](#))

The 2023/24 CSO MusicNOW series launches with a program that illuminates works by a dynamic network of black composers, the Blacknificent 7. The collective features CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery, Carlos Simon, Jasmine Barnes, Damien Geter, Shawn Okpebholo, Dave Ragland and Joel Thompson. The program will feature the world premiere of a CSO MusicNOW-commissioned work by Barnes which will feature bass-baritone Damien Geter and soprano Jasmine Barnes. Included on the program is Thompson’s *In Response to the Madness*, which is scored for string quartet and explores how music can be a response to chaos in our world. The program continues with Ragland’s *Eight Tones for Elijah* — a work that explores current social themes and serves as loving tribute to young Colorado violinist Elijah McCain who was arrested and assaulted by police on his walk home and died three days later in 2019. The work, which received its world premiere in 2021, is scored for vocalist and small ensemble. The evening’s program will also feature a special improvised introduction, interlude and postlude for violin and organ performed by Montgomery and Simon respectively. Also featured on the program is a work by Okpebholo, *CryptologiE*, written for flute, clarinet, violin and piano, and Ragland’s *I Believe*, which takes text derived from words found on the walls of a Holocaust concentration camp and will feature soprano Jasmine Barnes. Concluding the program is a new all-instrumental arrangement of Geter’s *Annunciation*, consisting of a series of seven visions that capture a moment of ecstasy between the narrator and his lover.

Audiences are invited to discover more about “The Modern Artist Collective” featuring members of the Blacknificent 7 in a preconcert panel presented by Chicago Humanities in collaboration with the CSOA.

Jessie Montgomery & Curtis Stewart ([Sunday, March 3, 2024, 4:30 p.m.](#))

The CSO MusicNOW series continues with a program that highlights music created by two artists who are composers and performers — three-time Grammy Award-nominated violinist/composer Curtis Stewart and violinist/composer Jessie Montgomery — including world premieres of CSO MusicNOW-commissioned works by the two composers. Led by Chicago Opera Theater Music Director Lidiya Yankovskaya and featuring musicians from the CSO, the program features Stewart as soloist in his stunning new violin concerto, *Embrace*, which includes various forms of call and response between audience and performer. Also on the program is Stewart’s work for solo violin, *of Love*, a through-composed set of episodes that serve as a personal requiem.

CSO MusicNOW audiences are also invited to attend a preconcert performance by Chicago-based Black chamber music collective, [D-Composed](#).

Montgomery & Bruckner 7 ([Saturday, June 1, 2024, 7:30 p.m.](#))

Expanding on the celebration of Montgomery’s work as CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence, CSO MusicNOW programming extends into concerts that highlight her orchestral music. In the first of two June programs that feature her music, guest conductor and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Music Director Manfred Honeck leads the CSO in the world premiere of Montgomery’s third CSO-

commissioned work for the Orchestra, a new Percussion Concerto written for Principal Percussion Cynthia Yeh. Honeck has been a champion for Montgomery's work in recent years, having led performances of *Banner*, *Strum*, *Coincident Dances* and more with the Pittsburgh Symphony and the CSO. Completing the program is Bruckner's Seventh Symphony that awes with its distinct breadth, drama and rapturous intensity.

The Elements with Joshua Bell ([Saturday, June 15, 2024, 7:30 p.m.](#))

Capping the CSO MusicNOW 2023/24 series is a CSO concert that features not only Montgomery's work but the work of four other leading American composers in a new five-movement suite for violin and orchestra. Grammy Award-winning violinist Joshua Bell presents *The Elements*, commissioned by Bell and written by composers Jake Heggie (Fire), Jennifer Higdon (Air), Edgar Meyer (Water), CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery (Ether) and Kevin Puts (Earth). Guest conductor and Houston Symphony Orchestra Music Director Juraj Valčuha frames the program with Weber's *Oberon* Overture and Shostakovich's jaunty, mischievous First Symphony.

Major support for CSO MusicNOW is generously provided by the Zell Family Foundation, the Sargent Family Foundation, the Sally Mead Hands Foundation, the Julian Family Foundation and The Aaron Copland Fund for Music.

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

All artists and programs are subject to change.

About CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery

Jessie Montgomery, who begins her third season as the CSO's Mead Composer-in-Residence in 2023/24, serves as curator of the CSO MusicNOW series. Montgomery will also receive her second CSO MusicNOW commissions in 2023/24 to write small ensemble works.

Montgomery has already developed a significant presence in Chicago. The CSO MusicNOW's 2018/19 season featured both her string quartet *Break Away* and the world premiere of her string ensemble arrangement of Julius Eastman's *Gay Guerrilla*, while CSOtv's 2020/21 digital season saw virtual performances of her orchestral work *Starburst*, by the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and her chamber piece *Strum*, the string orchestral version of which also received a live CSO performance in June 2021. Montgomery's own music was also featured in CSO MusicNOW concerts during the 2021/22 Season. In May 2022, Riccardo Muti led the world premiere of her CSO-commissioned work, *Hymn for Everyone*, the first of three works she will write for the Orchestra during her appointment as Mead Composer-in-Residence. Her next commission as Composer-in-Residence is *Transfigure to Grace*, premiering May 11.

Tickets and patron information

Subscriptions for the four-concert CSO MusicNOW series at Symphony Center start at \$90 and are on sale now. Tickets for all CSO MusicNOW concerts can be purchased by contacting Patron Services. Representatives are available to assist with ticket packages by web chat at cso.org, by calling 312-294-3000 (Monday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.), or by emailing patronservices@cso.org.

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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 greatest orchestras in the world. Since 2010, the pre-eminent conductor Riccardo Muti has served as its 10th music director. Jessie Montgomery is Mead Composer-in-Residence, and Hilary Hahn is CSO Artist-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 63 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 Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus have earned 64 Grammy Awards from the Recording Academy. Two Grammys were awarded in 2011 for Muti's recording with the CSO and Chorus of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* (Muti's first of eleven 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 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.