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JESSIE MONTGOMERY COMPLETES THREE-YEAR TENURE AS CHICAGO SYMPHONY'S MEAD COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE WITH WORLD PREMIERE OF NEW PERCUSSION CONCERTO AND MORE IN CSO'S SPRING PROGRAMS

CHICAGO — When Grammy-winning composer Jessie Montgomery was chosen as the *Chicago Tribune's* 2023 Chicagoan of the Year for Classical Music, it was to honor her achievements as the [Chicago Symphony Orchestra \(CSO\)](#)'s Mead Composer-in-Residence. Now that three-year appointment draws to a close with two spring CSO programs featuring premieres of her music. Marking the third and final orchestral commission of her tenure, *Procession* (2024), a concerto for CSO Principal Percussion Cynthia Yeh, receives its world premiere performances from Yeh and the orchestra under Manfred Honeck's leadership (May 30–June 1). Two weeks later, violinist Joshua Bell joins the CSO for the Chicago premiere of Montgomery's "Space," as part of *The Elements* (2023), his acclaimed five-movement commissioning project (June 13–15). In addition, her violin duo *Musings*, a CSO MusicNOW commission that premiered in the series last year, will receive an encore performance, this time from CSO Artist-in-Residence Hilary Hahn and CSO Concertmaster Robert Chen, in the culminating program of Hahn's tenure (June 9). Montgomery also hosts a free performance by musicians of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, showcasing new music by the Young Composers Initiative, the high-school program she launched with support from the CSO's Negaunee Music Institute (May 31). More information is available at [cso.org](#).

World premiere of percussion concerto ([May 30–June 1](#))

Recognized with the 2024 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for her piano concerto, *Rounds*, Montgomery has already demonstrated her mastery of the concerto genre. *Procession*, however, represents her first concerto for percussion. Commissioned by the CSO for the upcoming subscription concerts, the work was composed in collaboration with Cynthia Yeh, the orchestra's percussion principal since 2007. In a program note, Montgomery explains:

“*Procession* was inspired by the idea of how people organize and participate in variations of processions. ... The percussion soloist plays a dual role with their counterparts in the orchestra – sometimes as the leader and sometimes the follower of the call and response themes throughout – demonstrating the unique role percussion can play as both a blending color and the sheer sonic power it has to overtake the orchestra.”

Juxtaposed with Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony, *Procession* receives its world premiere performances under the baton of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Music Director Manfred Honeck, who has already led accounts of Montgomery’s orchestral works *Banner*, *Strum*, and *Coincident Dances*. The composer will take part in pre-concert talks before all three performances, the last of which forms part of the 2023/24 CSO MusicNOW series.

Young Composers Initiative finale concert ([May 31](#))

With support from the CSO’s Negaunee Music Institute, Montgomery founded the [Young Composers Initiative](#) in 2022. During each year of the program, she has mentored Chicago-area teenaged composition students, all of whom received full scholarships to participate. Designed to foster diverse aspiring young composers, the program concludes its season with the world premieres of new chamber works created and workshopped under her guidance by Angel Alday, Clara Frantzen, Jaime García-Añoveros, Zachary Guo, Malik Muhammad, and Sylvia Pine. Musicians from the Civic Orchestra of Chicago will premiere these new compositions in a free chamber concert hosted by Montgomery herself. The composer, who will continue to lead the initiative through the 2024/25 season, says, “Mentorship and opportunities for young people are really important values that are close and dear to my heart.” Free tickets to this event may be reserved on [cso.org](#).

Chicago premiere of *The Elements*, featuring “Space” ([June 13-15](#))

Commissioned by renowned violinist Joshua Bell, *The Elements* (2023) is a five-part suite for violin and orchestra, comprising individual movements inspired by the natural elements and composed by Jake Heggie, Jennifer Higdon, Edgar Meyer, and Kevin Puts, as well as Montgomery. In the program note for “Space,” she writes:

“I was tasked with musically conveying the fifth element, space: one which encompasses all of the elements, all of the planets, and all the matter of the universe. ... In my composition, the solo violin takes on a melodic journey, pulling the listener both inward, into their own imagination of the universe, and outward, into the very depths of outer space.”

When Bell premiered *The Elements* with Hamburg’s NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, *Die Welt* singled out “Space” for praise, pronouncing Montgomery’s movement “fantastic.” Of the suite as a whole, after its U.S. premiere by the New York Philharmonic, the *Financial Times* observed:

“Even for composers known for their way with a lyrical line and satisfying harmonies, the fit between the movements was remarkable. Each was imaginative and distinctive while also flowing naturally from one to the other.”

Now Bell joins the CSO to give *The Elements* its Chicago premiere in three CSO subscription concerts led by Juraj Valčuha, Music Director of the Houston Symphony, alongside works by Weber and Shostakovich. Montgomery will again take part in pre-concert talks before all three performances, the last of which forms part of the 2023/24 CSO MusicNOW series.

Highlights of CSO residencies and activities, 2021–24

Jessie Montgomery was appointed CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence by Zell Music Director Riccardo Muti in April 2021 and officially began her three-year tenure in the role in July of that year. Since then, she has developed a significant presence in Chicago, where the *Chicago Reader* welcomed her recent Grammy win as “an appropriately gilded capstone to her fruitful tenure.” The residency’s first two seasons saw the Chicago Symphony and Muti give the world premiere performances of Montgomery’s first two orchestral CSO commissions, *Hymn for Everyone* and *Transfigure to Grace*, the first of which may also be heard on CSO Resound’s Grammy-winning 2023 release, *Contemporary American Composers*. In addition, the CSO performed Montgomery’s *Starburst*, *Strum*, *Coincident Dances*, and *Rounds*, whose Chicago premiere featured Marin Alsop and pianist Awadagin Pratt, its dedicatee. Montgomery’s music also received multiple performances from the Civic Orchestra of Chicago.

Throughout her appointment, the composer has served as curator of CSO MusicNOW, which connects Chicago audiences with the widest possible range of today’s new music. Series highlights included a 2023 program devoted to new and recent work by members of the Black composers’ collective known as the Blacknificent 7, as well as concerts featuring the world premieres of new MusicNOW commissions, including Montgomery’s own *Concerto Grosso* and *Musings* for two violins, which she premiered with fellow violinist Rachel Barton Pine. Further deepening her ties to the local community, she has served on the Advisory Board of the CSO’s African American Network, which hosts an annual series of programs to engage Chicago’s culturally rich African American community. Last season, she and the CSO’s Negaunee Music Institute launched the Young Composers Initiative, through which she has taught and mentored local teen composers, overseeing the world premiere performances of their works.

Montgomery’s tenure continues through June, after which she plans to maintain close connections with Chicago. As well as continuing her work with the Young Composers Initiative next season, she looks forward to *Rounds*’ return to Chicago, when the Sphinx Virtuosi orchestra makes its Symphony Center debut with a program featuring Pratt’s performance of the Grammy-winning concerto (Feb 25, 2025).

Other recent projects and honors

Named *Musical America*’s 2023 Composer of the Year, Jessie Montgomery is “one of the most distinctive and communicative voices in the U.S.” (*BBC*). Beyond Chicago, her recent projects include *Five Freedom Songs* (2021), a song cycle commissioned for Julia Bullock by a consortium that includes the Boston and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras; *I was waiting for the echo of a better day* (2021), a site-specific collaboration with Bard SummerScape and Pam Tanowitz Dance; *BECAUSE* (2021), a theatrical work for the National Symphony Orchestra; *I Have Something to Say* (2019) for Cathedral Choral Society and the Cincinnati Symphony; *Passacaglia* (2021), a flute quartet for the National Flute Association; and three concertos:

DIVIDED (2022) for cellist Thomas Mesa and Sphinx Virtuosi, *L.E.S. Characters* for violist Masumi Per Rostad (2020), and *Rounds* for pianist Awadagin Pratt (2021). Pratt's debut recording of the concerto with A Far Cry for New Amsterdam Records was chosen as one of NPR's Best Albums of 2023, and it was with *Rounds* that Montgomery made history earlier this spring, when she became the first Black composer to win the Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition. Currently serving as Artist-in-Residence at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music and Composer-in-Residence at Bard College, Montgomery is Professor of Violin and Composition at The New School in New York City. Her future projects include commissions for the New York Philharmonic and for Alisa Weilerstein's *FRAGMENTS* series.

The Mead Composer-in-Residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is endowed through a generous gift from the late Cindy Sargent and Sally Mead Hands. The CSO thanks the following donors who provide major support for new music programming: the Zell Family Foundation, Cindy Sargent, the Sally Mead Hands Foundation and the Julian Family Foundation.

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Jessie Montgomery: culminating programs as CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence, spring 2024

May 30–June 1

Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck, conductor

MONTGOMERY: *Procession* (world premiere of CSO commission; with Cynthia Yeh, percussion)

BRUCKNER: Symphony No. 7

May 31

Young Composers Initiative Finale Concert

Musicians of the Civic Orchestra of Chicago

Jessie Montgomery, host

MUHAMMAD: Untitled

PINE: "Pull of Life" from [] *Through* [] for String Quartet

GUO: *OPERA(S)*

GARCÍA-AÑOVEROS: *El Darién*

FRANTZEN: *Ghost Light Vignettes*

ALDAY: *Glorious Resurrection*

June 9

Hilary Hahn, violin

Andreas Haefliger, piano

Robert Chen, violin

Stephanie Martinez, choreographer

Laura Morton La Russa, dancer

BRAHMS: Violin Sonata No. 1 in G, Op. 78

BANKS: *Through My Mother's Eyes**

MONTGOMERY: *Musings* for two violins

SIMON: *Shards of Light**

BRAHMS: Violin Sonata No. 3 in D minor, Op. 108

* *Solo violin works to be performed with dancer*

June 13–15

Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Juraj Valčuha, conductor

WEBER: Overture to *Oberon*

PUTS, MEYER, HIGDON, HEGGIE, MONTGOMERY: *The Elements* (Chicago premiere; with Joshua Bell, violin)

SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony No. 1

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Chicago Symphony Orchestra: [cso.org](https://www.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 distinguished 10th music director from 2010 until 2023, became Music Director Emeritus for Life at the beginning of the 2023/24 Season. Jessie Montgomery is Mead Composer-in-Residence and Hilary Hahn is CSO Artist-in-Residence.

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 nationally, and since 1892, has made 64 international tours, performing in 29 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](https://www.cso.org/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 the Negaunee Music Institute. The [Chicago Symphony Chorus](https://www.cso.org/chicago-symphony-chorus), founded by Margaret Hillis in 1957, is the country's largest professional chorus. Founded by second music director Frederick Stock during the 1919–20 season, the [Civic Orchestra of Chicago](https://www.cso.org/civic-orchestra-of-chicago) is a training ensemble for emerging professionals with Ken-David Masur serving as its principal conductor. [Symphony Center Presents](https://www.cso.org/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.