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## **CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ASSOCIATION RECEIVES \$50 MILLION GIFT FROM THE ZELL FAMILY FOUNDATION**

### **Transformational Gift Supports CSOA Programs and Builds on Commitment to Secure Long-Term Financial Stability**

CHICAGO — At a meeting of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA) Board of Trustees and members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) it was announced today that the CSOA is the recipient of a \$50 million gift from Helen and Sam Zell on behalf of the Zell Family Foundation (ZFF). This transformational gift is one of nearly 200 gifts made to the CSOA's ongoing *SEMPRE ALWAYS* capital campaign chaired by Helen Zell and brings the current total raised to \$215 million. Launched in 2020 with a significant leadership gift from ZFF, the *SEMPRE ALWAYS* campaign was established to secure long-term financial stability for the CSOA, support and advance the CSO's vibrant 134-year tradition of musical excellence and nurture the ongoing positive impact of music and music education on society.

Funds from this extraordinary \$50 million gift will allow the CSOA to continue to advance its strategic goals. The gift provides vital funding to strengthen the organization's balance sheet by reducing debt over time. The gift also increases the CSOA's endowment and is earmarked to provide essential funding for musician and staff retirement benefits, the CSO's prestigious domestic and international touring activities, special artistic projects shaped by CSO music directors, and digital content initiatives for marketing and promotion.

Helen Zell has held various leadership roles with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA) over the years, beginning in 2007 as a member of the Board of Trustees, and in her historic tenure as the first woman CSOA board chair, which included two consecutive three-year terms between 2015 and 2020. She also served as chair of the CSOA Music Director Search Committee which recommended the appointment of Klaus Mäkelä as the CSO's 11th music director in April 2024. She remains a member of the CSOA's Board of Trustees, serving as one of three vice chairs and as part of the Executive Committee of the Board.

Helen Zell described the motivation behind her gift, saying, “As an avid supporter of the arts, I understand the importance of philanthropy in filling the gap between earned revenue and operating expenses. The generosity of donors will ensure the long-term sustainability of our great cultural institutions that add vitality and beauty to our lives and communities.” Zell added, “I’ve been a champion of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for many years, and I think about this gift as an investment in preserving the CSO’s future.”

Helen Zell is the president and executive director of the Zell Family Foundation, which was established by her late husband, the global, industry-agnostic entrepreneur and investor Sam Zell. The foundation supported many of Helen’s and Sam’s areas of interest over years, which have included educational institutions, Jewish-related organizations, culture, health, public policy, and social services.

CSOA President Jeff Alexander stated, “We are honored and deeply grateful to receive this extraordinary gift from Helen and Sam Zell on behalf of the Zell Family Foundation. We celebrate their strong philanthropic vision that paves the way for a bright future for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association and all the ensembles it supports and programs it delivers. Helen’s exceptional dedication to the association and to the *SEMPRE ALWAYS* campaign has inspired donors from across the CSOA family to add their support for the music that they love and the activities that enrich the lives of so many people in Chicago, across the U.S., and around the world.”

Zell Music Director Designate Klaus Mäkelä noted, “I am enormously inspired by Helen Zell’s passionate devotion to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. We immediately connected at our first meeting and since then have shared many conversations about the essential need to maintain the legacy of this great Orchestra, which she has supported so generously in the past and with this incredible new gift.”

[SEMPRE ALWAYS: The Campaign for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra](#) is an ongoing capital campaign that advances the Orchestra’s preeminent role as a cultural icon showcasing musical brilliance, leadership and innovation. Campaign contributions support four main priorities: achieving financial sustainability, sustaining musical excellence, expanding education and community engagement and strengthening Chicago’s cultural fabric.

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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. Daniil Trifonov is the CSO Artist-in-Residence for the 2024/25 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 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](#) 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](#), 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](#) 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.