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**CURATED BY MEAD COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE
JESSIE MONTGOMERY, CSO MUSICNOW's 2021-22 SEASON
CONCLUDES ON MAY 23 WITH "CONCERTO"**

CHICAGO — Connecting Chicago audiences with the widest possible range of today's new music, the CSO MusicNOW series continues at the Harris Theater on May 23 with "Concerto." Curated by CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery, the program combines recent works for soloist and chamber ensemble by contemporary composers Joan Tower, Alyssa Weinberg and James Moore with a work by Montgomery herself. CSO Principal Flute Stefán Ragnar Höskuldsson, cellist Gabriel Cabezas and composer-guitarist Moore are the featured soloists, joining musicians from the [Chicago Symphony Orchestra](#) under the leadership of Jeffrey Milarsky, music director of Juilliard's AXIOM.

A laureate of both the Sphinx Medal of Excellence and the ASCAP Foundation's Leonard Bernstein Award, series curator Jessie Montgomery has emerged as one of the most compelling and sought-after voices in new music today: a composer who is "pretty much changing the canon for American orchestras" (*New York Times*). MusicNOW's "Concerto" opens with a new arrangement of her ensemble piece *Overture* (2022), about which she says:

"*Overture* is a one-movement orchestral tutti steeped in harmonic textures inspired by a fusion between jazz and American classical harmonies, Baroque rhythmic gestures and polyphonic tension."

The program continues with *Rising* (2009) for flute and string quartet by Joan Tower (b. 1938), a key mentor of Montgomery's, who will be in attendance at the concert. Widely recognized as one of today's most important living American composers, Tower has

amassed a string of honors including two Grammy Awards and *Musical America's* 2020 Composer of the Year. She explains:

"I have always been interested in how music can 'go up.' ... The main theme in *Rising* is an ascent motion using different kinds of scales – mostly octatonic or chromatic – and occasionally arpeggios. These upward motions are then put through different filters, packages of time and varying degrees of heat environments which interact with competing static and downward motions."

At the upcoming performance, *Rising* – hailed as "an extremely evocative piece of great beauty which represents everything that is the best about contemporary music" (*Music Web International*) – will feature CSO Principal Flute Stefán Ragnar Höskuldsson, who regularly appears as a concerto soloist with the orchestra.

Scored for cello and orchestra, and designed to highlight the solo instrument's broad spectrum of tonal color, *Caligo* (2019) is by Alyssa Weinberg (b. 1988), whose compositions win praise for their "frenetic yet cohesive musical language" (*I Care if You Listen*) and "heavyweight emotional dimensions" (*Bachtrack*). She writes:

"In Latin, *caligo* translates roughly to mist, darkness, haze, obscurity, a dizzying fog. I wanted to create a piece that felt like it hovered in this endless mist, infinitely suspended, floating ethereally through the vast and cavernous haze. *Caligo* is a single-movement meditation through this imagined space, fixating on an almost hallucinatory texture that ebbs and flows throughout the piece. The solo cello line leads us through the texture like a beam of light coming in and out of focus, hinting at a path through the fog."

At the May 23 concert, the cello soloist will be Sphinx Medal of Excellence-winner Gabriel Cabezas, whose performances are marked by "polished execution with a burnished warmth of tone" (*Chicago Tribune*). A Chicago native and former winner of the Crain-Maling Foundation CSO Young Artists Competition, Cabezas is also a longtime collaborator of Weinberg's, having previously performed and recorded *in the sand*, *Pieces of Light: Shimmer* and other of her works.

MusicNOW's program concludes with the first public performance of *Sleep Is Shattered* (2021), a showpiece for electric guitar and chamber orchestra by James Moore (b. 1979). A composer, guitarist, bandleader and all-round "model new music citizen" (*New York Times*), Moore says:

"I have spent a good chunk of my career navigating the challenges of bringing the electric guitar to the classical concert stage. Although we are often seen as outsiders in this setting, guitarists bring to the table an exceptional ability to traverse between

acoustic and electronic sound worlds. ... The title *Sleep is Shattered* is taken from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I often draw inspiration from poetry in my compositions, and for me the task of writing my first piece for orchestra required a similarly lofty and complex source. In the epic poem, Dante is an outsider exploring the wild and fantastical worlds of the Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso. Throughout his journey he frequently falls to sleep in fatigue or faints from overwhelming emotion, and it is often in these moments that he is transported between worlds. I used these passages as my guiding metaphor for the piece."

Offering "a perfect example of what electric guitar in a modern classical context *should* sound like" (*Guitar Moderne*), Moore will undertake the solo role in the upcoming performance himself.

About Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery

As Mead Composer-in-Residence, Jessie Montgomery serves as curator of CSO MusicNOW through the 2023-24 season. From April 28 to May 3, CSO Music Director Riccardo Muti led the world premiere performances of her new Chicago Symphony Orchestra commission, *Hymn for Everyone*, and she will also receive commissions to write two more new orchestral works for the CSO and a number of new chamber pieces for CSO MusicNOW. She is already fast developing a presence in Chicago. 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. Earlier this season, Manfred Honeck led performances of her 2017 orchestral work *Coincident Dances* in October subscription concerts.

Tickets and patron information

Tickets for CSO MusicNOW's "Concerto" concert on May 23 are \$20. Patron Services representatives are available to assist with ticket purchases by web chat at [cso.org](https://www.cso.org), by calling 312-294-3000 (Tuesday–Friday, 10am–4pm), or by emailing patronservices@cso.org.

The performance takes place at the Harris Theater with safety measures in place. Proof of vaccination is required for entry, and masks are required at the performance. More patron information is available at [cso.org/safeandsound](https://www.cso.org/safeandsound).

All artists and programs are subject to change.

The Mead Composer-in-Residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is endowed through a generous gift from Cindy Sargent and the late 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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Click [here](#) for high-resolution photos.

CSO MusicNOW

Monday, May 23 at 7:00 p.m.

Harris Theater, 205 E. Randolph St, Chicago IL

“Concerto”

Musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Jeffrey Milarsky, conductor

Stefán Ragnar Höskuldsson, flute

Gabriel Cabezas, cello

James Moore, guitar

Program curated by Jessie Montgomery, Mead Composer-in-Residence

MONTGOMERY: *Overture*

TOWER: *Rising*

WEINBERG: *Caligo*

MOORE: *Sleep Is Shattered*

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