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CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA NAMES KLAUS MÄKELÄ AS NEXT MUSIC DIRECTOR

Mäkelä will Become Eleventh CSO Music Director at Start of 2027/28 Season

CHICAGO — Today, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA) Board of Trustees voted unanimously to approve the recommendation of the CSOA Music Director Search Committee to appoint Finnish conductor Klaus Mäkelä as the next Music Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO): the eleventh in the ensemble's 133-year history. Following a term as Zell Music Director Designate, effective immediately, Mäkelä will begin an initial five-year tenure as Zell Music Director in September 2027. In this role, he will conduct the orchestra a minimum of 14 weeks per season: 10 weeks of subscription and other concerts in and around Chicago, plus four weeks of domestic and international tours.

CSOA President Jeff Alexander said:

“In his first two memorable engagements with the CSO, Klaus Mäkelä established an exceptional connection with our musicians and demonstrated his ability to deliver extremely moving performances of a wide range of repertoire. As we got to know him off the podium and witnessed – in addition to his extraordinary musical talent – his passion for the artform, keen interest in music education and the legacy of the CSO, and innate ability to connect warmly and sincerely with our trustees, volunteers, concert attendees, donors, and administrative staff, it quickly became clear that he was the ideal choice to lead the orchestra into the future. I am delighted with this outcome.”

Klaus Mäkelä responded:

“I am honored to have been chosen as Music Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and inspired to embark on this journey with an orchestra that combines such brilliance, power, and passion. I look forward to getting to know the musicians more over the coming years, and am grateful for the time this allows for us to establish and deepen our relationship, in preparation for what is a major and exciting commitment.”

Mäkelä will be 31 when he commences his tenure as Zell Music Director in Chicago at the start of the 2027/28 season, coinciding with his inauguration as Chief Conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. He explained:

“From 2027/28 my main responsibilities will be my partnerships with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Until then I remain committed to my ongoing collaborations with the Orchestre de Paris and Oslo Philharmonic. I look forward to all the music-making we have planned for the next three seasons and to returning to both institutions on a regular basis after my official tenures are completed.”

While in Chicago for his CSO engagement on April 4–6, 2024, Mäkelä conducts the Orchestra in three subscription concerts, with a program including the U.S. premiere of Sauli Zinoviev’s *Batteria*, Shostakovich’s Tenth Symphony and Shostakovich’s First Cello Concerto, featuring Sol Gabetta in her CSO debut. Throughout the week, Mäkelä will also meet with CSO musicians, supporters, and staff.

As Zell Music Director Designate, Mäkelä is also scheduled to lead two weeks of subscription concerts in the 2024/25 season, with featured repertoire including Mahler’s Third Symphony and Brahms’s Second Piano Concerto, with CSO Artist-in-Residence Daniil Trifonov as soloist. Mäkelä will gradually devote longer periods to subscription concerts, touring engagements, and other activities in the 2025/26 and 2026/27 seasons. He will make his podium debut at the Ravinia Festival, the CSO’s summer home, in summer 2026.

Mäkelä made his debut with the CSO in April 2022, to both critical and audience acclaim. When he returned to the CSO podium in February 2023, the *Chicago Tribune* observed that “Mäkelä and the CSO astonished again and again with their sheer clarity.” *Classical Voice North America* marveled at “the potent chemistry evident between Mäkelä and the musicians, not to mention between Mäkelä and the audience, on both occasions.”

As part of the selection process, members of the CSOA Search Committee experienced Mäkelä conducting seven programs in five cities: New York, San Francisco, Oslo, and Tokyo, as well as Chicago.

CSOA Board Vice Chair and Chair of the Music Director Search Committee Helen Zell explained:

“The sheer energy and intensity that Klaus Mäkelä communicates in his performances feels absolutely fresh and thrilling. Those who have heard him with the CSO know that the atmosphere becomes electric – you leave the concert hall transformed and inspired. Having met and spoken with this exceptional artist on multiple occasions, I am continually impressed with his warmth and focus, as well as his palpable joy in music making.”

Assistant Principal Bassoon William Buchman, Vice Chair of the CSO Members’ Committee and member of the Music Director Search Committee, said:

“The rich history and remarkable legacy of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra demand the most uncompromising standards to keep the orchestra in the vanguard of symphony orchestras worldwide. From Klaus Mäkelä’s first moments on the podium, the musicians of the orchestra recognized that we were working with a conductor of extraordinary ability. His natural leadership drew our immediate focus, and the clarity of his musical ideas made it feel effortless to perform at the high level for which we strive. The musician members of the search committee are excited that Klaus Mäkelä will be our next Music Director, and we are confident that the Chicago community will share that same excitement.”

Chaired by CSOA Trustee and Past Board Chair Helen Zell, the CSOA Music Director Search Committee comprised CSO musicians Yuan-Qing Yu (Assistant Concertmaster), John Sharp (Principal Cello), Kenneth Olsen (Assistant Principal Cello), Alexander Hanna (Principal Bass), William Buchman (Assistant Principal Bassoon), and Michael Mulcahy (Trombone); CSOA Board Chair Mary Louise Gorno, Vice Chair Chester Gougis, Life Trustees Ling Z. Markovitz, and Robert Kohl; Trustee Roderick Branch; and CSOA President Jeff Alexander, Vice President for Artistic Planning Cristina Rocca, and Vice President for Orchestra and Building Operations Vanessa Moss.

About Klaus Mäkelä

“Perhaps the fastest-rising conductor of his generation” (*New York Times*), Finnish conductor Klaus Mäkelä launched his tenure as Chief Conductor of the Oslo

Philharmonic in 2020 and as Music Director of the Orchestre de Paris the following year. In 2022, he was appointed Artistic Partner of Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, where he assumes the title of Chief Conductor in September 2027. He has been an exclusive Decca Classics artist since 2021, when he became the first conductor signed by the label in more than four decades, and only the third to date.

Now in his fourth season with the Oslo Philharmonic, Mäkelä recently led the orchestra on a three-week tour of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, before giving concerts this season in Vienna, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Paris, and in the Norwegian capital. Previous highlights of his Oslo tenure include summer residencies at the Edinburgh and Lucerne festivals, an appearance at London's BBC Proms, and the orchestra's most extensive post-pandemic European tour to date. Recorded for Decca, their complete Sibelius symphonic cycle received Edison and Classica Awards and was nominated for *BBC Music magazine's* Best Orchestral Album of 2023. Mäkelä was also awarded the 2022 Sibelius Prize for his "outstanding efforts to promote contact between Finnish and Norwegian musical life."

Currently in his third season with the Orchestre de Paris, Mäkelä recently completed a North American tour, with concerts in Boston, Ann Arbor, Montreal, and at New York's Carnegie Hall. Past concert highlights include a Japanese tour, residencies at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, and performances in Vienna, Hamburg, Essen, Cologne, Munich, Luxembourg, Amsterdam, and at home in the Philharmonie de Paris. Following the success of their all-Stravinsky album, he and the orchestra released their second Decca recording, a pairing of Stravinsky and Debussy, in March 2024. *Le Figaro* notes: "Mäkelä's gestures are freer and more flexible than ever, proof of the relationship of trust that exists between this extraordinary conductor and an orchestra that has never been so close."

Dedicated to working intensively with the orchestras with which he is most closely associated, Mäkelä limits his guest engagements, performing this season with the Cleveland Orchestra and Munich Philharmonic. Previous guest engagements include performances with the Berlin Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and London Philharmonic Orchestra, of which *The Times* wrote in 2021: "Here was something truly special: a conductor who reveled in freshly imagining each sound."

After studying conducting with Jorma Panula at Helsinki's Sibelius Academy, Mäkelä went on to hold positions as Artistic Director of Finland's Turku Music Festival and Principal Guest Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Also an accomplished cellist, he takes part in occasional chamber concerts with members of the

Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre de Paris, and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, as well as at Switzerland's Verbier Festival.

Learn more about Klaus Mäkelä at the artist's website – klausmakela.com.

About the CSO conducting legacy

Throughout its distinguished history, the CSO has counted 10 of the most notable and respected conductors as music director:

Theodore Thomas (1891 to 1905)
Frederick Stock (1905 to 1942)
Désiré Defauw (1943 to 1947)
Artur Rodzinski (1947 to 1948)
Rafael Kubelík (1950 to 1953)
Fritz Reiner (1953 to 1962)
Jean Martinon (1963 to 1968)
Sir Georg Solti (1969 to 1991)
Daniel Barenboim (1991 to 2006)
Riccardo Muti (2010 to 2023)

The CSO enjoys an ongoing artistic partnership with distinguished conductor and immediate past music director [Riccardo Muti](#), who now holds the title of Music Director Emeritus for Life. Muti led the orchestra on a critically acclaimed, three-week European tour in January 2024, and is scheduled to return for appearances with the CSO in Chicago and on tour in the 2024/25 and 2025/26 seasons.

The CSO music director position is endowed in perpetuity by a generous gift from the Zell Family Foundation.

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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. Riccardo Muti, the Orchestra's distinguished 10th music director from 2010 until 2023, was named Music Director Emeritus for Life beginning with 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](#) 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.