

Sinfonietta plans musical celebration to mark 30th anniversary season



Mucca Pazza, which combines “marching band traditions and street theater experience with rock band sensibilities,” will be among the guests performing during the Chicago Sinfonietta’s final concert of its 30th anniversary season on May 12, 2018 at Wentz Concert Hall in Naperville. (Chicago Sinfonietta)

By **Kathy Cichon**
Naperville Sun

JUNE 29, 2017, 10:57 PM

Milestones, memories and musical mashups are all part of the plan as the Chicago Sinfonietta gets ready to celebrate its 30th anniversary season.

"The fact the Sinfonietta has made this milestone is really, I think a testament to, first of all, the incredible vision of our founder **Paul Freeman**, who was guiding force for the creation of the orchestra," Chief Executive Officer Jim Hirsch said. "But also all the people who come to the concerts, buy the tickets, make donations,

volunteer their time as board members and volunteers. And of course the dedication of our staff of musicians and the people who make every one of the concerts possible."

Essentially, it takes a village to raise an orchestra, he said.

"It really is true that these types of institutions only survive and thrive because people really make a point to support them and to take responsibility and to ensure that we have this kind of music in our communities," Hirsh said. "The Chicago Sinfonietta is Naperville's resident professional orchestra, and we're very, very proud to be part of that community."

Each Chicago Sinfonietta concert is performed twice — once at Wentz Concert Hall in Naperville and again at Symphony Center in Chicago. Season subscriptions and single concert tickets are currently available. This year's anniversary celebration features a variety of musical collaborations, commissions and guest performers.

Kicking off the 30th season is the concert, "Trademark (TM)." Performed at 8 p.m. Sept. 16 at Wentz Concert Hall and at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 18 at Symphony Center, the program will feature two world premieres commissioned by the Sinfonietta.

The concert begins with the performance of composer and violinist Jessie Montgomery's commissioned piece, "Coincident Dances." The other work making its world debut is Grammy Award-nominated Clarice Assad's "Sin Fronteras," which means "no boundaries." The Assad work will also have original choreography created and danced by the Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre.

"But that's not it. We'll also be collaborating with the Northern Illinois Steel Drum Ensemble," Hirsch said. "And we will be playing three pieces of music with them. One of the pieces of music was actually composed by a member of our orchestra, a wonderfully talented harpist named Faye Seeman. That piece is called 'Fayde to Blue.'"

The second concert of the season, "Regresar/Return: A Dia de los Muertos Celebration" will be performed at 8 p.m. Nov. 4 at Wentz Concert Hall and at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 6 at Symphony Center.

"We're going to be playing a lot of really fun repertoire," Hirsch said.

The annual concert will be the only one of the season conducted by someone other than the Sinfonietta music director, Maestro Mei-Ann Chen. Guest conductor Hector Guzman, music director of the Plano Symphony Orchestra, will lead the orchestra.

The concert will feature recreations of the audience's favorite moments from past seasons. It will begin with Aster Piazzolla's "Libertango," followed by a piece Silvestre Revueltas called "Sensemaya."

"The first half will actually end with a very special version of Mozart's 'Requiem' that will be performed by a 70-voice choir from Roosevelt (University)," Hirsch said. "(They) will be choir members in skeleton costumes and masks. It will be visually stunning."

Along with the choir, NewMoon Chicago will provide visual accompaniment. The Sinfonietta will not be performing the whole hour-long "Requiem," but rather selections from it.

"We're doing six movements from 'Requiem,' so it will be kind of a edited version of the piece," Hirsch said. "But very, very, stunning."

Also joining the Sinfonietta will be Cuerdas Clasicas, a 12-piece Mexican folkloric group, which will perform three pieces with the orchestra. The concert will end with the very famous Mexican piece called "Huapango" by Jose Pablo Moncayo.

Next up is another yearly tradition, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tribute. This year's concert, "Ask Your Mama," will be performed at 3 p.m. Jan. 14 at Pfeiffer Concert Hall in Naperville and at 7:30 p.m. Jan. 15 at Symphony Center.

"This concert will actually be performed at Pfeiffer Hall rather than Wentz because we needed more seats because we think we're going to have a huge audience," Hirsch said.

The program will feature the Midwestern premiere of Laura Karpman's award-winning piece called "Ask Your Mama," which is based on the [Langston Hughes](#) poem "Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz."

"It has only ever been performed three times before," Hirsch said. "Twice in New York, and once in Los Angeles."

The piece is a 12-movement jazz symphonic work that includes a lot of multimedia elements including projections and recorded tracks of Langston Hughes actually reciting some poetry, he said. It will feature the Grammy-nominated jazz singer Nnenna Freelon, along with renowned opera soprano Janai Brugger.

"And we are in the process of speaking to some very, very high profile spoken-word artists," Hirsch said.

In March, which is Women's History Month, the Sinfonietta will perform "Hear Me Roar," a concert completely dedicated to women and classical music. Performances are at 3 p.m. March 11 at Wentz Concert

Hall and at 7:30 p.m. March 12 at Symphony Center.

"This concert will feature one world premiere and three Chicago premiere pieces all composed by women," Hirsch said.

The program will start with "Dances in the Canebrakes" by Florence Beatrice Price, "who is the first minority composer to ever have one of her works performed by a major U.S. orchestra," he said.

"From there we're going to perform a piece that's only been performed two other times, and this is the Chicago debut," Hirsch said.

The work, Jennifer Higdon's "Dance Card," will be followed by the Chicago premiere of Mary Kouyoumdjian's "Become Who I Am," which features the Glen Ellyn-based Anima Singers children's choir.

The second half of the concert includes the world premiere of Reena Esmail's "Avaaz," along with the Chicago premiere of Dora Pejacevic's "Symphony in F-sharp minor."

The final concert of the season has undergone a couple of tweaks since it was first announced, "but really exciting ones," Hirsch said.

The concert, "Praise & Punk: The Ending of all Endings," will be performed at 8 p.m. May 12 at Wentz Concert Hall and 7:30 p.m. May 14 at Symphony Center. It will open with the Chicago premiere of the James Lee piece "Come Unto Me," a Gospel symphonic work that will be performed by the orchestra and the Apostolic Church of God Sanctuary Choir, Hirsch said.

The Camille Saint-Saens work "La Muse et le Poete" feature two guest soloists, cellist Ifetayo Ali and violinist Melissa White.

"What makes both of these soloists really special is they are both winners of the Sphinx Competition, which every year awards the finest African-American and Latino string choirs in the United States," Hirsch said. "Both of these musicians have won that award."

The second half of the concert includes Mucca Pazza, described by Hirsch as a 30-piece performance art punk marching band.

"We played with them once before and the audience just went insane about it," he said.

Together with the Sinfonietta, they will perform a suite of movements from "Romeo and Juliet" by Sergei

Prokofiev.

"Not only will (they) perform them, but they will also be acted out by members of the marching band," Hirsch said. "So it's going to be this really bizarre combination of music and performance art/theater. I have no idea what to expect, but it will be spectacular and something no one has ever seen before."

The suite of movements will also include an alternate, happy ending to "Romeo and Juliet" by Prokofiev.

"It's almost never, ever performed, and we're going to perform the happy ending," Hirsch said. "So it will be 'Romeo and Juliet' as no one's ever seen it before."

The final piece of the concert — and anniversary season — will be "The Ending of all Endings."

"We're going to take three of the most iconic classical music endings of all time and creating a little medley out of them," Hirsch said. "So every time the audience thinks the concert is about to end, it's not. It will just be a really fun way to put a cap on our 30th anniversary season."

Kathy Cichon is a freelance writer for the Naperville Sun.

Chicago Sinfonietta 30th Anniversary Season

When: Sept. 2017-May 2018

Where: Wentz Hall, 171 E. Chicago Ave., Naperville (January concert in Pfeiffer Hall, 310 E. Benton Ave., Naperville)

Tickets: \$49-\$62, \$10 for students

Information: 312-284-1554; www.chicagosinfonietta.org

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