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## Chicago Sinfonietta announces 2025-26 season, **IGNITE**

The power of music to set passion, change, hope, and more ablaze, together

38th season highlights include:

*Six concert venues*

strengthening community ties throughout Chicago and the Suburbs:

Studebaker Theater, Chicago

Mandel Hall, Chicago

The Auditorium, Chicago

Harris Theater, Chicago

Wentz Concert Hall, Naperville

Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, Evanston

*Five Subscription Concerts*

*Four Premieres: three world, two commissions*

-Chicago Sinfonietta World Premiere Commissions:

new work by award-winning British composer Shirley J. Thompson

new Miles Davis 100th anniversary tribute by Assistant Principal violist and former  
Freeman Orchestral Fellow Seth Pae

-Live Concert World Premiere of Kathryn Bostic's Suite from the Hulu film,  
*The Supremes at Earl's All-You-Can-Eat*, based on the eponymous *New York*

*Times* Best Selling book by Chicago Sinfonietta cellist Edward Kelsey Moore

-Chicago Premiere of Bollywood music arranged for symphonic orchestra

*Guest Artists:*

Conductors and former Freeman Conducting Fellows Roger Kalia and Kedrick

Armstrong, vocalist Anuradha "Juju" Palakurthi, cellist Jeffrey Zeigler,

pianist Clayton Stephenson, Deeply Rooted Dance Theater

*One Symphonic Fire.*

**Chicago, IL** – Chicago Sinfonietta announced today details of IGNITE, a bold, dynamic season fueled by passion, creativity and expression, celebrating the power of music, the culture of Chicago, paying tribute to those who have and continue to inspire change, and lighting the way to deeper connections. The season is an open invitation to engage on one's own terms through a diverse, colorful, curated selection of contemporary and established music from around the globe and closer to home, genre-defying collaborations, powerful premieres, featuring symphonic music, reimagined, for everyone.

"We are thrilled to unveil a truly electrifying season," said [Sidney P. Jackson, Jr.](#), President & CEO of Chicago Sinfonietta. "In a world marked by uncertainty and division, the arts remain one of our most powerful forces for unity and transformation. Music can ignite something profound, hope, dialogue, reflection, and joy, and this season, we lean fully into that spark."

"Chicago Sinfonietta has always been at the forefront of innovation and equity in classical music, and our 38th season carries that legacy forward. Through five subscription concerts across six venues, we are not only expanding our reach, we are deepening our commitment to accessibility, representation, and artistic excellence. From championing women and BIPOC composers to reimagining the concert experience for today's world, we remain rooted in the belief that music is both mirror and catalyst. This season, we invite our community to join us not just as listeners, but as co-creators, to ignite change together."

"Storytelling is at the heart of every musical piece, and each work has the power to connect us to a larger world and to light passion within us," stated Music Director [Mei-Ann Chen](#). "This 2025-26 season is about bold storytelling - connecting us more deeply to each other, inspiring one another, and celebrating the community we help to create - all through orchestral sounds with an emphasis on blazing trails and strength! Our season, IGNITE, illuminates this and more, showing how even one story can affect change and embrace inclusion."

"Our 2025-26 begins with a celebration of Asian themes. The first half shines light on Indian music with a modern twist in the Chicago premiere of works arranged for Western instruments, sung by renowned Bollywood singer **Juju** in her Chicago Sinfonietta debut, and conducted by an early Freeman Conducting Fellow **Roger Kalia**, who shares the podium with me in this Season Opening program. The second half features works from my historic moments with this wonderful orchestra - with the iconic "Saibei Dance" by An-Lun Huang (the very first work I fell in love conducting the Chicago Sinfonietta as a guest conductor in an "East Meets West" theme) and Tyzen Hsiao's *The Angel of Formosa* (a work reflecting my original roots from Taiwan) - both were significant works in my first program as Music Director of Chicago Sinfonietta after our beloved Maestro Freeman passed the baton to me in 2011.

"Our uplifting and bright holiday concert is led by a more recent Freeman Conducting Fellow, **Kedrick Armstrong**, who experienced a meteoric rise in the industry after starting his tenure as the new Music Director of the Oakland Symphony this past season."

"Our annual Dr. King Tribute concert, which focuses on courage and community, features a live orchestral world premiere by our first Artist in Residence, American composer Kathryn Bostic - her Suite from *The Supremes at Earl's All-You-Can-Eat* Hulu film (based on Chicago Sinfonietta cellist Edward Kelsey Moore's *New York Times* Best Selling book of the

same title), and a reprise of our co-commission, *breathe/burn: an elegy*, by Joel Thompson in memory of Breonna Taylor, calling out injustice, which we premiered to the world in March 2021 as an online virtual concert. Cellist **Jeffrey Zeigler** makes his Chicago Sinfonietta debut in this powerful new work.

"Our fourth subscription concert is a testimonial to trailblazing women and a celebration of firsts, and features all women composers, including the Chicago Sinfonietta commissioned world premiere of a new work by Shirley J. Thompson presented in a collaboration with **Deeply Rooted Dance Theater** in celebration of the dance troupe's 30th anniversary, and the Chicago Sinfonietta premiere of Amy Beach's *Gaelic Symphony* - through which she became the first American woman to publish a symphony in 1894 and to have it performed by a major American Orchestra in 1896.

"To open the Season Finale, we have commissioned Chicago Sinfonietta Assistant Principal Violist and former Freeman Fellow, Seth Pae, for a Miles Davis Tribute celebrating the 100th anniversary of this Illinois-born artist. Our program anchors on African American composer William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* - a riveting and intense work that the Chicago Sinfonietta has performed several times before. This work, being one of three most significant works premiered in the 1930s by history-making African American composers (William Grant Still's 1931 *Afro-American Symphony*, Florence Price's 1933 *Symphony No. 1 in E Minor*, and Dawson's aforementioned 1936 work), has seen a revival movement across the country in recent years following Chicago Sinfonietta's championing. Pianist **Clayton Stephenson**, who debuted with us in 2016, returns to perform George Gershwin's popular *Rhapsody in Blue*.

"Later in this season, we will also release our latest recording, *Black Being*, produced by our longtime collaborator, Cedille Records. A unique multi-media project created by Flutronix (distinguished flutists and composers, Nathalie Joachim and Allison Loggins-Hull), I have no doubt that this new album will take the recording industry by storm.

"I welcome you to join us in sharing the journey of storytelling through music and IGNITING your passion!"

Chicago Sinfonietta Board Chair **James Weidner** remarked, "Chicago Sinfonietta has always been at the forefront of inclusion and the power of music to create positive change. This season, under our new President and CEO Sidney P. Jackson, Jr., is another thrilling chapter in our legacy, painted with the varied and beautiful colors of cultures that make up our Chicagoland community. We move forward with courage from the roots of our past and are so proud to present our exciting season and introduce our new leader to Chicago."

**Chicago Sinfonietta**  
**IGNITE - 2025-26 Season**

### [Bollywood & Beyond](#)

Opening Season Concert

Mei-Ann Chen, conductor

Guest Artists

Roger Kalia, conductor

Anuradha “Juju” Palakurthi, vocalist

Friday, October 17, 2025

Wentz Concert Hall, Naperville - 7 PM

171 E Chicago Ave, Naperville, IL

Saturday, October 18, 2025

Studebaker Theater - 7 PM

410 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL



Arr. Bala G. and D.J. SPARR Selections from “Symphony Masala” (Chicago Premiere)

Roger Kalia, conductor; Anuradha “Juju” Palakurthi, vocalist

Tyzen HSIAO *The Angel from Formosa*

Reena ESMAIL *Teen Murti*

Maurice RAVEL *Mother Goose Suite*

An-Lun HUANG *Saibei Suite No. 2, Op. 21: Saibei Dance*

Mei-Ann Chen, conductor

A celebration overflowing with joy, color, energy, light, and sound – *Bollywood & Beyond* is a journey that pays homage to global creativity and human and cultural connections. Let the Chicago premiere of the first-ever symphonic orchestral arrangements of irresistible Bollywood gems (India’s Hollywood) transport you across the world with renowned, award-winning vocalist Anuradha “Juju” Palakurthi, and former Freeman Conducting Fellow, conductor Roger Kalia. Return to the West during the concert’s second half with Music Director Mei-Ann Chen leading selections from past concerts, including her first guest appearance, the concert in which Sinfonietta Founder Paul Freeman passed her the baton, and Chicago Sinfonietta’s 2018 incredibly popular “Sea of Light” Diwali program featuring the Sinfonietta debut of a work by Indian American composer Reena Esmail. Feel the rhythm of the music light the way as you cross the world in one night.

### [Holidays of Hope](#)

Concert 2

Kedrick Armstrong, guest conductor

Friday, December 19, 2025

Wentz Concert Hall - 7 PM

171 E Chicago Ave, Naperville, IL

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Mandel Hall - 7 PM

Mandel Hall, 1131 E 57th St, Chicago, IL





Nigel HESS *A Christmas Overture*  
 Quinn MASON *Christmas Eve*  
 Peter JAFFE *Symph-Hanukkah*  
 Vítězslava KAPRÁLOVÁ *Christmas Prelude*  
 Duke ELLINGTON *Nutcracker Suite (After Tchaikovsky)*  
 Samuel COLERIDGE-TAYLOR *Christmas Overture*  
 Robert Xavier RODRIGUEZ *Pinata*  
 Augusta HOLMÈS *Le Nuit et l'amour*  
 Leroy ANDERSON *Sleigh Ride*  
 Malcolm ARNOLD *The Holly and the Ivy (Fantasy on Christmas Carols)*  
 Arr. PARKS *Joyeaux Noel! A Holiday Sing-A-Long*

No one brings the wonder and sparkle of the holidays to Chicago like Chicago Sinfonietta - and we're not referring to the glimmering luminaria in the hall! The third festive family-friendly celebration is led by former Freeman Conducting Fellow Kedrick Armstrong, who conducts traditional favorites to new takes on beloved gems to global favorites in this concert guaranteed to lighten your spirits. President and CEO Sidney P. Jackson, Jr. (a trained opera singer), hosts the annual audience sing-along. Join us for an evening that will set your hearts aglow with the sounds of the season.

[Open Heart: MLK Tribute](#)

Concert 3

**Mei-Ann Chen, conductor**

**Guest: Jeffrey Zeigler, cellist** (Chicago Sinfonietta Debut)

**Sunday, January 18, 2026**

**Wentz Concert Hall - 4 PM**

**171 E Chicago Ave, Naperville, IL**

**Monday, January 19, 2026**

**The Auditorium Theater - 7 PM**

**50 East Ida B. Wells Drive, Chicago, IL**



Kathryn BOSTIC *Suite from The Supremes at Earl's All You Can Eat*

**(Live performance World Premiere)**

Joel THOMPSON *breathe/burn: an elegy (Reprise of Chicago co-commission)*

with Jeffrey Zeigler, cellist

Antonin DVORAK *Symphony No. 9, "From the New World"*

Community, courage and compassion are at the center of this season's annual MLK Tribute Concert. Chicago Sinfonietta draws on history, focusing on unity, resilience, the bonds of family and friendship. Inspired by Chicago trailblazer Dr. Daniel Hale Williams who performed the first open-heart surgery in 1893, this concert reminds us that opening hearts is also a social mission. With works influenced by spirituals, people, relationships, and injustice, this season's tribute is where the sparks of courage meet the fires of change.

[Still I Rise:](#)  
[Women's History Month](#)

Concert 4

Mei-Ann Chen, conductor

Guest: Deeply Rooted Dance Theater

Friday, March 6, 2026

Wentz Concert Hall - 7 PM

171 E Chicago Ave, Naperville, IL

Saturday, March 7, 2026

Harris Theater - 7 pm

205 E Randolph St, Chicago, IL



Florence PRICE *Dances in the Canebrakes*

Marinna MARTINES *Sinfonia in C Major*

Shirley J. THOMPSON New work (*Chicago Sinfonietta Commission, World Premiere*)

with Deeply Rooted Dance Theater

Amy BEACH *Gaelic Symphony*

*Still I Rise*, Chicago Sinfonietta's tribute to the women who refuse to be held back – who break molds, blaze trails and rise- again and again with power, grace, and purpose, honors the cultural legacy of empowered women present and past. Featuring music from the first American woman to have a symphony published, the first Black American woman to have her music performed by a major American orchestra (and who was active in the Chicago area for almost 30 years), to an 18th century acclaimed Viennese woman composer and the world premiere of a new Chicago Sinfonietta commission that explores the idea of Seventh Sense, celebrating a predominantly female superpower, from the British woman composer claimed as “the present and future” of British classical music, this is more than a concert; it's a movement.

[American Rhapsody:](#)  
[Season Finale](#)

Concert 5

Mei-Ann Chen, conductor

Clayton Stephenson, pianist (CS return)

Friday, May 8, 2026

Wentz Concert Hall - 7 PM

171 E Chicago Ave, Naperville, IL

Sunday, May 10, 2026

Pick-Staiger Hall - 3 PM

Northwestern University, 50 Arts Circle  
Drive, Evanston, IL



Seth PAE Miles Davis Tribute  
(*Chicago Sinfonietta commission in honor of 100th anniversary of Davis' birth*)  
George GERSHWIN *Rhapsody in Blue*  
with Clayton Stephenson, pianist  
William DAWSON *Negro Folk Symphony*

Chicago Sinfonietta closes its 38th season with a nod to the upcoming 250th anniversary of our country, and ignites a bold, inclusive vision of America with vibrant, emotional works both current and past that pay homage to resilience, culture, American flair, and hope, one glorious note at a time.

## TICKETS

Season tickets for Subscribers *on sale now*.  
Single tickets will go on sale August 15.

Choose from:

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Save 40% when you subscribe to our full 5-concert season. Subscribers receive **five complimentary Bring a Friend** tickets!

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No hidden fees or checkout surprises. Subscribers enjoy our deepest discounts; the best seats in house; complimentary Bring a Friend tickets for each concert attended; our digital program book shared two weeks early; AND exclusive invitations to CS special events. Plus, we'll share a special 25% personal discount code for any future single ticket purchases. To order, click the links above, visit [www.chicagosinfonietta.org](http://www.chicagosinfonietta.org), contact our Box Office at 312.284.1554, or email us at [BoxOffice@ChicagoSinfonietta.org](mailto:BoxOffice@ChicagoSinfonietta.org) to secure your subscription or ask questions.

## Pay What You Can Program

Making classical music accessible to all is a central part of Chicago Sinfonietta's mission. Now in its third season, CS offers the nationally recognized *Pay What You Can* (PWYC) program, a frontrunner in the field, inspiring other organizations to adopt this practice. Patrons can pay what they choose for a concert ticket, with prices starting at \$5.

## [EDUCATION and COMMUNITY PROGRAMS](#)

*Sinfonietta in Your Neighborhood* is Chicago Sinfonietta's community centered initiative that brings the orchestra's vibrant spirit directly into the heart of Chicago's diverse neighborhoods. Through intimate chamber performances, interactive experiences, and creative collaborations with local artists and organizations, this program breaks the

boundaries of traditional concert halls—making music accessible, inclusive, and reflective of the city’s rich cultural landscape. From parks and libraries to community centers and storefronts, Sinfonietta in Your Neighborhood fosters connection and belonging through the universal language of music. Audiences of all ages can enjoy dynamic performances that blend classical traditions with contemporary sounds and culturally resonant programming.

Chicago Sinfonietta’s educational programming is designed to instill and develop a love of classical music in Chicago-area students from 4th through 12th grade. Through partnerships with more than 12 schools in Chicago and the Western Suburbs, these programs, *MakingMUSIC* and *ENCORE*, fortify and expand existing music education curricula. Chicago Sinfonietta positions itself as a catalytic “link” in the chain of music education by working with teachers to identify areas of need and invite students to become active participants in the music they love. Chicago Sinfonietta serves of 1,500 students each school year. 86% are students of color.

### **FREEMAN FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM**

Chicago Sinfonietta’s landmark training program, the Freeman Fellowship program (referred to as Project Inclusion until it’s rebranding in 2022) is a nationally recognized groundbreaking initiative and an integral part of the organization’s mission to change the face of symphonic music. Part of the orchestra’s long history of work that has made Sinfonietta a leader in the field of diversity, equity and inclusion nationwide, the multi-faceted, in-depth, financially compensated 9-month professional development program is dedicated to developing emerging musicians, conductors, and composers into highly skilled, fully rounded artists who positively impact their communities and the world of music. Launched in 2008 under late Sinfonietta founder Maestro Paul Freeman, and guided by Music Director Mei-Ann Chen since 2011, The Freeman Fellowship trains and mentors diverse early career musicians in the fields of chamber music, orchestral music, conducting and composing. All Fellows are provided practical, firsthand experience and mentoring onstage and off, including but not limited to: one-on-one mentoring, performance opportunities and rehearsals, community events, masterclasses and workshops with experts in the field, publicity (including website development, social media, presentation, interviews, biographies, photos, and speaking skills), technical training, constructive feedback, and nuanced discussions on cultivating diversity, accessibility, community building, and leadership.

### **ONLINE**

The Sinfonietta offers opportunities to explore and engage with classical music online through its online materials offering pre-concert commentary, artist interviews, monthly newsletter, social media posts, and much more. Visit the website for links to Sinfonietta’s various online outlets.

### **ABOUT CHICAGO SINFONIETTA**

A tenured orchestra and acclaimed cultural leader that champions diversity, equity, and inclusion by creating community through curated symphonic experiences, Chicago Sinfonietta (CS) is a modern 21st century orchestra that is redefining symphonic music, and the way it is performed. As a source of community through music, ensuring and inspiring a continued investment in diversity and inclusivity in the genre of classical music to promote fairness and equity, the organization is recognized as ground-breaking, dynamic, and daring. With core values built around being culturally responsive and advocates of inclusivity in all aspects of the 38-year-old organization’s work, Chicago Sinfonietta’s unrelenting commitment to being at the forefront of innovation drives its



high standard of symphonic experiences. CS takes pride in leading by example with immersive audience engagement activities, impactful career development, education, and extensive community outreach programs. Visit the Sinfonietta's website for more details on education, community and intermission events. [www.chicagosinfonietta.org](http://www.chicagosinfonietta.org)

Click [here](#) for downloadable season images.

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