

## Art Talk – When East Meets West

By **Debbie Venezia** | Wednesday, August 13, 2025



It was 2011 when North Central College partnered with Chicago Sinfonietta (CS), an award-winning orchestral group with established ties to Chicago's Loop. Attracted to Wentz Concert Hall for its acoustics and aesthetic beauty, Jim Hirsch, former executive director and CEO, was eager to cross-pollinate CS's particular brand of innovative classical music with Naperville's diverse community of music enthusiasts and cultural consumers.

By September of that year, CS launched its season with the debut of Mei-Ann Chen as the organization's new music director. She has been at the podium ever since, enthraling audiences with her fervor and enthusiasm. This year, Chen opens CS's 2025 – 2026 season, IGNITE, a five-concert series that pays homage to the changemakers who foster awareness, promote understanding, and encourage deeper connections.

The series takes off on October 17 with Bollywood & Beyond, a performance described by Chen as "a colorful, energetic concert that celebrates Asian music and global artistry with special works from our history that highlight our mission of diversity, community, creativity, and unforgettable music." In curating the program, Chen chose works important to CS's history: the playlist includes selections from her first appearance at Wentz when she assumed the baton from CS's founding conductor, Maestro Paul Freeman.

It also features the "first-ever symphonic orchestral arrangements of irresistible Bollywood (India's Hollywood) gems that'll transport you across the world," said Roger Kalia, former Freeman Conducting Fellow and guest conductor for the concert's first half. "Many of these pieces hold a personal significance for me, as I was first introduced to them during my childhood by my father who is of Indian descent."

Anuradha Juju Palakurthi, guest singer and North American Bollywood sensation, chimed in. “Nearly 2.5 billion people across South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa love these melodies. To connect with Western audiences, we re-orchestrated them for a different set of instruments, carefully preserving their original essence.”

Sidney P. Jackson, Jr., CS’s president and CEO, sums up the power of music by saying, “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, and this season we lean fully into that spark.”

**IGNITE: Bollywood & Beyond**

7PM October 17, 2025

Wentz Concert Hall –171 E. Chicago Ave. Naperville, IL

Season tickets, offering a substantial 40% savings, are now available on CS’s website.