2025 - 2026 Season

Mondavi Center
UC DAVIS

Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Riccardo Muti, conductor

Sunday, January 18, 2025 | 2 PM
Jackson Hall

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A Season of Debuts and Discovery

Discovery Awaits is the theme of the Mondavi Center's 25-26 Season, continuing and building on last season's commitment to artist debuts. From January through March, 12 of the 14 artists we present will be appearing for the first time. It's an impressive bunch, if we do say so ourselves!

Our roster of debut artists ranges from those in the early stages of building stellar careers, to established (and in one case legendary) ensembles making their long-awaited first appearances.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, led by Maestro Riccardo Muti, are the legends in the lineup, and an ensemble we've been trying to bring to Davis since the Mondavi Center opened more than two decades ago.

Malpaso Dance Company's debut has been a long and winding labor of love. I had the chance to see this incredible company at home in Havana in 2018, after which we immediately booked them for our 19-20 Season. COVID had other plans. It took us eight years to rebook them. It was so worth the wait.

As part of an increased focus on the African diaspora in our programming, we will welcome for the first time the extraordinary Ghanaian singer and storyteller Okaidja Afroso, followed a few weeks later by the Ndlovu Youth Choir from South Africa. As well, Alsarah & The Nubatones make their debut, bringing their special brand of "East African retro-pop" for two nights in the Vanderhoef Studio Theatre.

Violinist Randall Goosby, who was among our most popular debut artists in the 24-25 Season, returns as part of the debut of the Sphinx Virtuosi. Sphinx is an organization dedicated to increasing representation in classical music and developing exceptional talent. This is our first time working with them on a performance. I'm sure it won't be our last.

It has been impressive and deeply meaningful to witness how the Mondavi Center community has embraced the spirit of discovery and our mission to support rising stars.

For that I am deeply grateful.

Discovery Awaits,

Jeremy Ganter
Executive Director

ROBERT AND MARGRIT MONDAVI CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTS

Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Riccardo Muti, conductor

PROGRAM

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98 — Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
- *Allegro non troppo*
- *Andante moderato*
- *Allegro giocoso*
- *Allegro energico e passionato*

INTERMISSION

Divertimento, Suite from *The Fairy's Kiss* — Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
- *Sinfonia*
- *Danses suisses*
- *Scherzo*
- *Pas de deux*

Boléro — Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's U.S. Tour is generously sponsored by Zell Family Foundation.

PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Land Acknowledgement

We should take a moment to acknowledge the land on which we are gathered. For thousands of years, this land has been the home of Patwin people. Today, there are three federally recognized Patwin tribes: Cachil DeHe Band of Wintun Indians of the Colusa Indian Community, Kletsel Dehe Wintun Nation, and Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation.

The Patwin people have remained committed to the stewardship of this land over many centuries. It has been cherished and protected, as elders have instructed the young through generations. We are honored and grateful to be here today on their traditional lands.

excellence.ucdavis.edu

Program Notes

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98

Johannes Brahms
Born: May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany
Died: April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

Brahms's Fourth Symphony is his final statement in a form he had completely mastered, although for a very long time he was paralyzed by the nine examples by Beethoven. It's difficult to imagine what Beethoven or Brahms might have done next, since their last symphonies seem to sum up all either knew of orchestral writing. The difference is that Beethoven's choral symphony opened up a vast new world for the rest of the nineteenth century to explore, while Brahms reached something of a dead end. But what a glorious ending it is. Brahms was never one to forge new paths—like Bach and Handel, he added little to the historical development of music—and yet he always seemed to prove that there was more to be said in the language at hand.

Brahms's Fourth Symphony begins almost in mid-thought, with urgent, sighing violins coming out of nowhere; it often disorients first-time listeners. (Brahms meant it to: he originally wrote two preparatory bars of wind chords and later crossed them out, letting the theme catch us by surprise.) The violins skip across the scale by thirds—falling thirds and their mirror image, rising sixths—a shorthand way of telling us that the interval of a third pervades the harmonic language of the entire symphony. (It also determines key relationships: the third movement, for example, is in C major, a third below the symphony's E minor key.)

Brahms has a wonderful time playing with the conventions of sonata form in the first movement. He seems to make the classical repeat of the exposition, but, only eight measures in, alters one chord and immediately plunges into the new harmonic fields of the development section. Listen for the great point of recognition—at *ppp*, the quietest moment in the symphony—with which Brahms marks the recapitulation. For twelve measures, the music falters like an awkward conversation, the winds suggesting the first theme, the violins not seeming to understand. Suddenly they catch on and, picking up the theme where the winds left off, sweep into a full recapitulation capped by a powerful coda.

In the Andante moderato, Brahms takes the little horn call of the first measure and tosses it throughout the orchestra, subtly altering its color, rhythm, and character as he proceeds. A forceful fanfare in the winds introduces a juicy new cello theme. (It turns out to be nothing more than the fanfare played slowly.) Near the end, shadows cross the music. The horns boldly play their theme again, but the accompaniment suggests that darkness has descended for good.

The lightning flash of the Allegro giocoso proves otherwise. This is music of enormous energy, lightened by an unabashed comic streak—unexpected from Brahms, normally the most sober of composers. Here he indulges in the repeated tinklings of the triangle, and he later boasted that "three kettledrums, triangle, and piccolo will, of course, make something of a show." Midway through, when the first theme's thundering left foot is answered by the puny voice of the high winds, the effect is as funny as anything in Haydn.

Throughout his life, Brahms collected old scores and manuscripts to study their pages to see what history might teach him. More than once, he spoke of wanting to write a set of variations on a theme he remembered from a cantata by Bach. But no one before Brahms had seriously thought of writing a strict passacaglia—a continuous set of variations over a repeated bass line—to wrap up a symphony.

The finale to Brahms's Fourth Symphony isn't a musty, academic exercise, but a brilliant summation of all Brahms knew about symphonic writing set over thirty-two repetitions of the same eight notes. Trombones make their entrance in the symphony to announce the theme, loosely borrowed from Bach's Cantata no. 150, *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich* (I Long for You, O Lord) [the cantata is no longer thought to be by Bach]. To bring the ancient passacaglia form into the nineteenth century, Brahms superimposes over his variations the general outline of sonata form, with an unmistakable moment of recapitulation midway through.

A look at the finale in its entirety reveals the sturdy four-movement structure of the classical symphony: Brahms begins with eight bold and forceful variations, followed by four slow variations of yearning and quiet eloquence, an increasingly hectic dancelike sequence, and an urgent and dramatic final group that provides a triumphant conclusion.

One can follow Brahms's eight-note theme from the shining summit of the flute line, where it first appears over rich trombone harmonies, to the depths of the double bass, where it descends as early as the fourth variation, supporting a luscious new violin melody. Even in the twelfth variation, where the theme steps aside so the focus is on the poignant, solemn song of the flute, the spirit of those eight notes is still with us. And as Arnold Schoenberg loved to point out, the skeleton of the main theme from the first movement also appears in the penultimate variation, like the ghostly statue in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The finale is as magnificent and as satisfying as any movement in symphonic music; it's easy to assume that, having written this, Brahms had nothing left to say. We'll never know whether that was so, or if, in the end, he simply ran out of time.

Divertimento, Suite from *The Fairy's Kiss*

Igor Stravinsky

Born: June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum, Russia

Died: April 6, 1971, New York City

Igor Stravinsky had known and loved Tchaikovsky's music from childhood—certainly ever since he was taken to *The Sleeping Beauty* for the first time at the age of seven or eight. Some thirty years later, acting on a suggestion from Diaghilev, Stravinsky even orchestrated two passages from *The Sleeping Beauty* that Tchaikovsky had cut before the first performance. Stravinsky's next work, the opera *Mavra*, was dedicated to "the memory of Tchaikovsky, Glinka, and Pushkin," and prompted by Diaghilev's *Sleeping Beauty* revival. And so, in 1928, when Stravinsky was asked to compose a ballet inspired by Tchaikovsky's music for Ida Rubinstein's new company, Stravinsky jumped at the challenge. The ballet was to be produced in November 1928, on the thirty-fifth anniversary of Tchaikovsky's death.

For his subject, Stravinsky turned to Hans Christian Andersen, whose powerful and fantastic tales had been part of Stravinsky's childhood, along with Tchaikovsky's music. He picked Andersen's "The Ice Maiden," apparently finding in Tchaikovsky's creative life (branded by the Muse's kiss) a parallel with the tale of a boy who is doomed by the kiss of the Ice Maiden. The ballet was described as an allegory.

Having already breathed new life into music by Pergolesi in *Pulcinella*, here Stravinsky decided to use music by Tchaikovsky, limiting himself only to works not written for orchestra. But where *Pulcinella* fashioned something purely Stravinskian out of old music he held in no particular regard, *The Fairy's Kiss* is a loving homage to his favorite Russian composer. Later, Stravinsky claimed he could no longer remember "which music is Tchaikovsky's and which mine," but at various times he identified (not always accurately) a number of Tchaikovsky's songs and piano pieces that he had borrowed. (Lawrence Morton eventually narrowed the debt list to some fourteen works.)

Stravinsky set to work with untiring enthusiasm. He rented a room in a mason's cottage where he could work undisturbed. The music was barely completed in time for the premiere, which the composer conducted, on November 27, 1928; Stravinsky wasn't entirely pleased with Bronislava Nijinska's choreography (the public evidently shared his view), but he had been too busy finishing the music to check out the dancing.

The music is prime Stravinsky, largely based on lesser Tchaikovsky. Only two Tchaikovsky works are used complete; the rest are excerpts. Most are taken from little-known songs and piano miniatures. Stravinsky's handling of borrowed material runs the gamut: he merely assigns instruments to the notes of Tchaikovsky's popular humoresque for piano, but much of the original music is so totally transformed that it's easy to understand Stravinsky's not remember-ing which music was whose.

As early as 1931, Stravinsky approved playing excerpts from the forty-five-minute ballet score as a concert-hall suite. In 1945 he finally settled on his own suite, which he called the Divertimento, cutting out nearly half of the music but including substantial chunks from the first three of the ballet's four scenes.

In 1962 Stravinsky returned to Russia after nearly fifty years. The Stravinskys, along with Robert Craft, arrived in Moscow on September 21. On October 4 they flew to Leningrad, where Stravinsky was met by Vladimir Rimsky-Korsakov (the youngest son of the composer), who was then living in the apartment where Stravinsky had written *The Firebird* more than half a century before. On October 8 Stravinsky conducted a concert of his own music. Before the performance, Stravinsky addressed the crowd, saying that he had attended his first concert in this hall: "Sixty-nine years ago I sat with my mother in that corner," he said, pointing, "at a concert conducted by Nápravník to mourn the death of Tchaikovsky." He then conducted music from *The Fairy's Kiss*.

Boléro

Maurice Ravel

Born: March 7, 1875, Ciboure, France

Died: December 28, 1937, Paris, France

One of the most famous pieces ever written, *Boléro* began as an experiment in orchestration, dynamics, and pacing. Ravel was quick to tire of his exercise—he once said that, although people thought it his only masterpiece, "Alas, it contains no music." But he didn't object to being famous. Late in 1927, Ravel accepted a commission from Ida Rubinstein and her ballet company to orchestrate six piano pieces from Albéniz's *Ibéria* as a sequel to his brilliant scoring of Mussorgsky's *Pictures from an Exhibition*. But when Ravel returned from his whirlwind concert tour of America and encountered problems with the exclusive rights to *Ibéria*, he dropped the project and instead chanced upon a tune with "a certain insistent quality" that became *Boléro*. "I'm going to try and repeat it a number of times without any development, gradually increasing the orchestra as best I can," he remarked at the time, and that's precisely what he did.

Boléro was an immediate success as a ballet, but its real heyday started after Rubinstein's exclusive rights ran out, and the first concert performances began. Ravel was embarrassed by its popularity:

> I am particularly anxious that there should be no misunderstanding as to my *Boléro*. It is an experiment in a very special and limited direction, and it should not be suspected of aiming at achieving anything different from, or anything more than, it actually does achieve. Before the first performance, I issued a warning to the effect that what I had written was a piece lasting seventeen minutes and consisting wholly of orchestral texture without music—of one long, very gradual crescendo. There are no contrasts, and there is practically no invention except in the plan and the manner of the execution.

One can imagine Ravel's dismay when he realized that this was the music that would carry his name around the world. But, while Boléro is by no means his most accomplished or sophisticated work, it is, like every single piece in the Ravel canon, impeccably detailed and polished music. (In forty years, Ravel only wrote about sixty works, nearly all of which belong in the standard repertoire—an almost unparalleled achievement.) The first tune, stated by the flute, is as familiar as any melody in music, yet how many of us could accurately sing it from memory, precisely following its unpredictable, sinuous curves and recalling the ever-fresh sequence of long and short notes. Certainly the second tune, a free and supple melody introduced by the high bassoon, has an elusive, almost improvisatory quality.

Ravel proceeds with his exercise, stating the first tune twice, then the second one twice, and so on back and forth, each time adding new instruments not just to effect a gradual crescendo, but to create an astonishing range of orchestral colors. Just before the end, Ravel's patience suddenly wears out, and he makes a sudden swerve from a steady diet of C major into E major, upsetting the entire structure and toppling his cards with the sweep of a hand.

—Phillip Huscher, program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

About the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

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 tenth music director from 2010 until 2023, became Music Director Emeritus for Life at the beginning of the 2023-24 Season.

The history of the ensemble began in 1889, when Theodore Thomas, the leading conductor in America and a recognized music pioneer, was invited by Chicago businessman Charles Norman Fay to establish a symphony orchestra. Thomas's aim to build a permanent orchestra of the highest quality was realized at the first concerts in October 1891 in the Auditorium Theatre. Thomas served as music director until his death in January 1905, just three weeks after the dedication of Orchestra Hall, the Orchestra's permanent home designed by Daniel Burnham.

The CSO's other distinguished music directors include Frederick Stock, Désiré Defauw, Artur Rodzinski, Rafael Kubelík, Fritz Reiner, Jean Martinon, Sir Georg Solti, Daniel Barenboim, and Riccardo Muti. In April 2024, Klaus Mäkelä was named the Orchestra's eleventh music director, and he will begin an initial five-year tenure as Zell Music Director with the 2027-28 Season. Mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato is the CSO Artist-in-Residence for the 2025-26 Season.

The musicians of the CSO command a vast repertoire and annually perform more than 150 concerts, most at Symphony Center in Chicago, and, since 1936, at the Ravinia Festival in the summer. The CSO also tours nationally and internationally. Since its first tour to Canada in 1892, the Orchestra has performed in 30 countries on five continents in 65 international tours.

Patrons around the globe enjoy weekly radio broadcasts of CSO concerts and recordings via the WFMT Radio Network and online at 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, which includes the following entities. The Chicago Symphony Chorus, founded in 1957, is the country's largest professional chorus. Founded 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.

Thousands of patrons, volunteers, and donors—corporations, foundations, government agencies, and individuals—support the CSOA each year. The CSO's music director position is endowed in perpetuity by a generous gift from Zell Family Foundation. The Negaunee Foundation provides generous support in perpetuity for the work of the Negaunee Music Institute.

About the Conductor Riccardo Muti

Born in Naples, Italy, Riccardo Muti is one of the preeminent conductors of our day. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's distinguished tenth music director from 2010 until 2023, Muti became the Music Director Emeritus for Life beginning with the 2023-24 Season.

His leadership has been distinguished by the strength of his artistic partnership with the Orchestra; his dedication to performing great works of the past and present, including eighteen world premieres to date; the enthusiastic reception he and the CSO have received on national and international tours; and twelve recordings on the CSO Resound label, with four Grammy awards among them.

Before becoming the CSO's music director, Muti had more than forty years of experience at the helm of Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (1968–1980), the Philharmonia Orchestra (1972–1982), the Philadelphia Orchestra (1980–1992), and Teatro alla Scala (1986–2005).

Herbert von Karajan invited him to conduct at the Salzburg Festival in Austria in 1971. Muti has maintained a close relationship with the summer festival and its great orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic, for over fifty years. He has received the distinguished Golden Ring and the Otto Nicolai Gold Medal from the Philharmonic for his outstanding artistic contributions to the orchestra. He has also received a silver medal from the Salzburg Mozarteum and the Golden Johann Strauss Award by the Johann Strauss Society of Vienna. He is an honorary member of Vienna's Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, the Vienna Hofmusikkapelle, the Vienna Philharmonic, and the Vienna State Opera. In 2021, he received the highest civilian honor from the Austrian government, the Great Golden Decoration of Honor.

Muti has received innumerable international honors. He is a Cavaliere di Gran Croce of the Italian Republic, Knight Commander of the British Empire, Commander of the French Legion of Honor, Knight of the Grand Cross First Class of the Order of Saint Gregory the Great, and a recipient of the German Verdienstkreuz. Muti has also received Israel's Wolf Prize for the Arts, Sweden's Birgit Nilsson Prize, Spain's Prince of Asturias Award, Ukraine's State Award, Japan's Praemium Imperiale and Order of the Rising Sun Gold and Silver Star, as well as the gold medal from Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the "Presidente della Repubblica" award from the Italian government. Muti has also received more than twenty honorary degrees from universities worldwide. Last December, during a special concert at the Vatican, Pope Leo XIV presented Muti with the Prize of the Ratzinger Foundation for his immense artistic contributions.

Riccardo Muti's vast catalog of recordings, numbering in the hundreds, ranges from the traditional symphonic and operatic repertoires to contemporary works. Passionate about teaching young musicians, Muti founded the Luigi Cherubini Youth Orchestra in 2004 and the Riccardo Muti Italian Opera Academy in 2015. Through *Le vie dell'Amicizia* (The roads of friendship), a project of the Ravenna Festival in Italy, he has conducted in many of the world's most troubled areas in order to bring attention to civic and social issues.

The label RMMUSIC is responsible for Riccardo Muti's recordings.

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The Louise H. Benton Wagner chair is currently unoccupied.
The Chicago Symphony Orchestra string sections utilize revolving seating. Players behind the first desk (first two desks in the violins) change seats systematically every two weeks and are listed alphabetically. Section percussionists also are listed alphabetically.

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Annual donations to the Mondavi Center directly support our operating budget and are an essential source of revenue. Please join us in thanking our loyal donors whose philanthropic support ensures our future ability to bring great artists and speakers to our region and to provide nationally recognized arts education programs for students and teachers.

For more information on supporting the Mondavi Center, visit MondaviArts.org or call 530.752.0563. *This list reflects all gifts received as of November 4, 2025.*

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