

Saint-Saëns' First Cello Concerto and Strauss

FRIDAY, MARCH 13
SATURDAY, MARCH 14
SUNDAY, MARCH 15

SAMUEL LEE, GUEST CONDUCTOR
SANTIAGO CAÑÓN-VALENCIA, CELLO

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts



KANSAS CITY
SYMPHONY

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Saint-Saëns’ First Cello Concerto and Strauss

Friday, March 13, 2026 at 8 p.m.
Saturday, March 14, 2026 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, March 15, 2026 at 2 p.m.

SAMUEL LEE, GUEST CONDUCTOR
SANTIAGO CAÑÓN-VALENCIA, CELLO

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

KAIJA SAARIAHO *Du cristal* (From Crystal)

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS Concerto No. 1 in A Minor for Cello
and Orchestra, op. 33
Allegro non troppo — Allegretto con moto —
Allegro non troppo
Santiago Cañón-Valencia, cello

Intermission

RICHARD STRAUSS *Also sprach Zarathustra*
(Thus spake Zarathustra), op. 30
Sonnenaufgang (Sunrise)
Von den Hinterweltlern
(Of the Forest-Dwellers)
Von der großen Sehnsucht
(Of the Great Longing)
Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften
(Of Joys and Passions)
Das Grablied (The Song of the Grave)
Von der Wissenschaft
(Of Science and Learning)
Der Genesende (The Convalescent)
Das Tanzlied (The Dance-Song)
Nachtwandlerlied
(Song of the Night Wanderer)

Samuel Lee

GUEST CONDUCTOR

Samuel Lee is the winner of the Malko Competition for Young Conductors 2024. Previously, he was awarded first prize at the BMI International Conducting Competition in Bucharest and the International Conducting Competition in Taipei. At the end of the 2024/25 season, he completed his tenure as Associate Conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony.



Lee's 2025/26 season includes his conducting debuts with the Iceland Symphony, Tonkünstler Orchestra, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Malmö Symphony Orchestra, Turku Philharmonic, Kansas City Symphony, Norwegian Radio Orchestra, Bodensee Philharmonic and Teatro Carlo Felice di Genova as well as his returns to the Cincinnati Symphony and Stuttgarter Philharmoniker. He returns as well to the Korean National Symphony Orchestra, where he leads a tour to Japan's Tokyo Opera City and NHK Hall in Osaka. He also makes his first appearances with the Orquesta Ciudad de Granada and Arctic Philharmonic as soloist and conductor.

Amongst the orchestras Lee has conducted are the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Bamberger Symphoniker, Hamburger Camerata at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Leipziger Symphonieorchester at the Gewandhaus, Symphoniker Hamburg, Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra, Frankfurt State Orchestra, Brandenburg Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Bucharest Symphony Orchestra, Arad Philharmonic Orchestra, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, KBS Symphony Orchestra and SAC Festival Orchestra.

An avid promoter of contemporary music, Lee has conducted premieres by Bryce Dessner, Giuseppe Gallo-Balma and Marc Migó. He was also a conducting fellow with the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in 2021 and 2022.

As a violist, Lee has performed as a soloist with orchestras such as the Baden-Baden Philharmonic, Münchener Kammerorchester, Bodensee Philharmonic, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, KBS Symphony and Korean National Symphony, as well as at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Music Festival.

Santiago Cañón-Valencia

CELLO

Colombian cellist Santiago Cañón-Valencia is a prolific soloist, composer, commissioner, recording artist, painter and photographer. A 2022 BBC New Generation Artist, he was born in Bogotá in 1995 and made his debut with the Orquesta Filarmónica de Bogotá at age 6 before going on to win the Silver Medal at the 2019 XVI International Tchaikovsky Competition, the 2018 Starker Foundation Award, Third Prize at the 2017 Queen Elisabeth International Competition and First Prize at the Carlos Prieto International Cello Competition, among many other accolades.

During the 2025/26 season, Cañón-Valencia takes on an international schedule including solo recitals in Spain and Portugal, a performance with the Macedonian Philharmonic and a seat on the jury for the Budapest International Cello Competition. In the United States, he performs with the Kansas City Symphony, Montgomery Symphony Orchestra, Grand Rapids Symphony and Camerata Pacifica. He also appears in recitals with pianist Victor Asuncion in Stanford and La Jolla, California. His Latin American schedule brings him to the Puerto Rico Symphony, the Festival de Música de Morelia in Mexico and the Cartagena Music Festival in Colombia.



Cañón-Valencia's solo career has taken him worldwide, with multiple world and regional premieres. In 2025/26, he premieres Amparo Angel's Cello Concerto at the Morelia Festival in Mexico. Previously, he performed world premieres including Carlos Andrés Mejía's cello concerto *Aurora* at Colombia's Pereira Music Fest, Jorge Pinzón's cello concerto *Rapsodia a los 4 Elementos* at the Cartagena International Music Festival and Carlos Izcaray's commissioned cello concerto *Stringmaster* with the Alabama Symphony Orchestra.

In 2024, Cañón-Valencia released his debut single on Deutsche Grammophon, a recording of Arvo Pärt's *Frates* with pianist Naoko Sonoda. Two additional singles will follow. He has recorded four additional complete albums, the most recent being "Ascenso on Sono Luminus" (2022).

Cañón-Valencia has been sponsored by the Mayra & Edmundo Esquenazi Scholarship through the Salvi Foundation since 2011.

Learn more at www.santiagocanonvalencia.com.

Du cristal (From Crystal) (1990)



KAIJA SAARIAHO (1952–2023)

17 MINUTES

4 piccolos, 4 flutes, 3 alto flutes, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, crotales, glockenspiel, gong, marimba, roto toms, tam-tam, tom toms, triangle, tubular

bells, vibraphone, xylophone, harp, piano, synthesizer and strings.

In 1989 Kaija Saariaho found herself in the unusual position of receiving two commissions for large orchestral pieces to fulfill within as many years, without having written a large-scale orchestral work before (her *Verblendungen* of 1982 had been scored for large chamber orchestra). Not daunted by such a task, she decided to link the two works together so that they would form an orchestral diptych totaling some thirty-eight minutes of music entitled *Du cristal ...à la fumée* ('From Crystal ...Into Smoke'). Thus the last sound of *Du cristal* — a cello trill played sul ponticello — becomes retrospectively the first sound of its successor, ... *à la fumée*, which features solo parts for cello and amplified alto flute in addition to large orchestra. Saariaho has commented that "to my way of thinking, *Du cristal ... à la fumée* is a single work, two facets of the same image, but both fully drawn in, living and independent;" so the pieces may either be played together or on their own. ...

None of Saariaho's major works to date is without some kind of electronic element, and the presence of the synthesizer is significant in the light of Saariaho's remark that she tends to the orchestra itself "as if it was a huge synthesizer." ...

The harmonic character of *Du cristal* is especially focused and clearly defined as the work is dominated by the bell-chord with which it opens. During the first seven minutes, this chord is slowly and methodically dissected: all its internal components are highlighted as its orchestration is progressively shaded and softened, although the basic character of the chord remains essentially unchanged. There

The presence of the synthesizer is significant in the light of Saariaho's remark that she tends to the orchestra itself "as if it was a huge synthesizer."

follows an eruption of some violence which breaks up the harmonic continuity of the music; a dialogue ensues between onslaughts of unpitched percussion and further bell sounds from tuned percussion and synthesizer. After this the texture thins somewhat and the rate of harmonic change increases; melodic tissues briefly emerge on the violins and the woodwinds. The increased rate of change precipitates the principal climax of the work, again featuring untuned percussion prominently: chaotic, irregular rhythms gradually merge into a hammeringly regular series of ostinatos for the full orchestra — the simplest and clearest music in the piece — and out of these the sound spectrum is gradually narrowed until a single note (a unison A-flat) is heard. As this fades into filigree passages for solo strings, the music drifts closer to the harmonic world of the opening, and the original chord is itself twice restated; far from subsiding, however, the music suddenly veers back to the hammering ostinato of the climax — as if the form of the whole piece thus far had been telescoped into some two minutes. Only now can the music progress to the coda, underpinned by a series of wave-like crescendos on bass drum and synthesizer as the textures dwindle to a single cello trill.

— *Julian Anderson*

Concerto No. 1 in A Minor for Cello and Orchestra, op. 33 (1872)

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS
(1835-1921)

19 MINUTES

*Solo cello, 2 flutes, 2 oboes,
2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns,
2 trumpets, timpani and strings.*

THE STORY

The French composer, pianist, organist, conductor and teacher Camille Saint-Saëns was a child prodigy. He had perfect pitch and picked out tunes on the piano at 2 years old and started composing at 3. His public debut concert was given when he was 10; the program included piano concertos by Mozart and Beethoven. Music critic Harold C. Schonberg wrote of him, "He was the most remarkable child prodigy in history, and that includes Mozart." Fellow French composer Hector Berlioz famously said of him, "He knows everything, but lacks inexperience."



In the 1860s and early 1870s Saint-Saëns was starting to become known as a composer. His first cello concerto was composed in 1872 and dedicated to Auguste Tolbecque, whose family was closely connected to the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire (Conservatory Concert Society) in Paris. The Société premiered the concerto in January 1873 with Tolbecque as the soloist. The piece's success continued Saint-Saëns' rise to fame and recognition as one of France's most important composers.

“Here, for once, is a violoncello concerto in which the solo instrument displays every register without the slightest difficulty in penetrating the orchestra.”

— Donald Francis Tovey

THE MUSIC

Music scholar Donald Francis Tovey wrote of the First Cello Concerto, “Here, for once, is a violoncello concerto in which the solo instrument displays every register without the slightest difficulty in penetrating the orchestra.” The cello has neither the power and volume of the piano nor the high range of the violin, which allow them to be heard above the orchestra. The genius of Saint-Saëns’ concerto is its orchestration, with the orchestra supporting the cello but always letting it shine through.

Saint-Saëns composed the concerto in one continuous movement but three distinct sections, thus creating an organic, unified piece that still follows the traditional fast-slow-fast concerto pattern. The first section begins with just a single chord from the orchestra followed by the cello’s entrance. This part has no fewer than four main themes, the first three introduced by the cello and the fourth by the full string section. After the first and third are brought back, the music slows to a halt. Muted violins and violas begin the second section with a dance one writer has described as “a minuet on tiptoe,” which the cello and the winds join. This section includes a short cadenza for the cello, finishing with a string of trills. A slow passage for the cello alone leads into the final section, which transitions quickly from the B-flat major of the second section to the A minor of the first. The first and fourth themes from the beginning return, along with several new themes, with many difficult passages for the cello. In the last minute, the key shifts suddenly to A major, and grows from a quietly meandering line in the cello to a loud, chipper ending.

— *AJ Harbison*

Also sprach Zarathustra **(Thus spake Zarathustra),** **op. 30 (1896)**

RICHARD STRAUSS
(1864-1949)

33 MINUTES

2 piccolos, 3 flutes, 3 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 tubas, timpani, bass drum, chimes, cymbals, glockenspiel, triangle, 2 harps, organ and strings.

THE STORY

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote and published “Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None” between 1883 and 1885. It is often described as a philosophical novel, because it follows the protagonist’s story while also discussing philosophical topics (which may be Nietzsche’s own beliefs, or simply topics he discusses without revealing what he believes about them). Nietzsche said after completing the novel, “Where does this ‘Zarathustra’ really belong? Almost, I think, among the symphonies.” Gustav Mahler, who set a poem from the book in his Third Symphony, said, “‘Zarathustra’ was born completely from the spirit of music, and is even ‘symphonically constructed.’” But the full realization of the book’s symphonic potential came through Richard Strauss.

Strauss was interested in philosophy throughout his life and was an avid reader of Nietzsche’s works. At different times he gave different answers when asked about the connection between his music and the novel. At the very least, though, he was inspired by the sections of the book that he took as the titles for his nine-section tone poem.



“Where does this ‘Zarathustra’ really belong? Almost, I think, among the symphonies.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche

After the premiere performance, Strauss said: “I did not intend to write philosophical music or portray Nietzsche’s great work musically. I meant rather to convey in music an idea of the evolution of the human race from its origin, through the various phases of development, religious as well as scientific, up to Nietzsche’s idea of the Übermensch [“overman”].”

THE MUSIC

The opening section of the piece, sometimes called “Introduction” and sometimes called “Sunrise,” is most famous for being used as the title music for Stanley Kubrick’s film “2001: A Space Odyssey.” (Fun fact: The composer Alex North had composed a full soundtrack for the film, but Kubrick ended up ditching North’s score in favor of using classical music throughout. You can see the opening title with North’s music on YouTube; it’s still epic, but not Strauss epic.) The three notes of the trumpet fanfare — C, G, C — become a motif for nature that recurs throughout the piece.

The second section is the religious phase of development, depicting the naivete (to Nietzsche) of those who seek consolation in thoughts of an afterlife. The cellos and basses begin the section and also introduce a theme in B minor that becomes the motif for humanity; this is answered immediately by the horns playing the Gregorian chant of the “Credo in unum Deum” — “I believe in one God”. Following a passage for organ and divided strings, a hushed statement of the humanity motif ushers in “Of the Great Longing,” which appears much later in the novel but fits Strauss’ purpose here of communicating humanity’s yearning to develop beyond ignorance and superstition. “Of Joys and Passions” connects human emotion and passion with nature through



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***Also sprach Zarathustra* Program Notes (cont.)**

the “nature” key of C minor, while “The Song of the Grave” returns to the humanity motif in the character of a dirge. “Of Science and Learning” is a fugue, a complex musical form in imitation with strict rules (and hence the perfect musical analogue for science — Chopin once said “The fugue is like pure logic in music”). The subject or theme of the fugue is built from the nature motif going up, the humanity motif going down, and then a succession of other notes so that the full subject uses all 12 notes of the chromatic scale. “The Convalescent” layers the fugue subject and other themes together with a rush to a fortississimo (very very loud) C major chord for the full orchestra, followed by a pregnant pause and further development of multiple melodic ideas.

The “Dance-Song” takes the form of a waltz, and I cannot help but quote Herbert Glass’ program note on the work here: “Some pro-Strauss critics have cited this as the composer’s glorification of the Life Force, while detractors point to it as an example of his wretched taste. In all likelihood, it is at once indicative of Richard Strauss’ affection for another (unrelated) Strauss: Johann, the Waltz King, and Richard’s sense of humor, which included not taking himself nearly as seriously as his listeners did.” The climax of the waltz leads to a bell pealing twelve times, bringing us to the final section, the “Song of the Night Wanderer.” As the bell peals, more quietly each time, the music settles into C major (for nature) — only to slip suddenly into B major (for humanity) for the brief coda. At the end, the winds, harp and high strings quietly reiterate a B major chord; but underneath, the cellos and basses pluck the C-G-C nature motif, and the harmony remains unresolved, symbolizing perhaps the fundamental incompatibility of humanity and nature. The low strings have the final notes by themselves, returning to the same low C on which the piece began. This could be a musical representation of Nietzsche’s idea of eternal recurrence, or (or maybe and) a statement that despite all of humankind’s longings, joys and passions, science, dances and songs, nature remains through it all.

— *AJ Harbison*

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Friday, April 10 at 8 p.m.

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Matthias Pintscher,
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Julian Kaplan, trumpet
Evan Hughes, baritone
Amit Rahav, narrator
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A Midsummer Night's Dream



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Thursday, March 26 at 7 p.m.

Jason Seber, guest conductor
Stephen Beus, piano

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