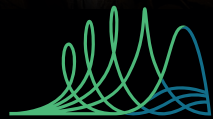


# Rhapsody in Blue and Dvořák's "New World" Symphony



**FRIDAY, JUNE 19**  
**SATURDAY, JUNE 20**  
**SUNDAY, JUNE 21**

**PETER OUNDJIAN, GUEST CONDUCTOR**  
**MICHELLE CANN, PIANO**



**KANSAS CITY  
SYMPHONY**

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

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# Rhapsody in Blue and Dvořák's "New World" Symphony

Friday, June 19, 2026 at 8 p.m.

Saturday, June 20, 2026 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, June 21, 2026 at 2 p.m.

**PETER OUNDJIAN**, GUEST CONDUCTOR

**MICHELLE CANN**, PIANO

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts



**JOAN TOWER**

Suite from Concerto for Orchestra

**FLORENCE PRICE**

Concerto in D Minor in One Movement for  
Piano and Orchestra  
Michelle Cann, piano

**GEORGE GERSHWIN/  
arr. Ferde Grofé**

*Rhapsody in Blue*  
Michelle Cann, piano

Intermission

**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK**

Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, op. 95,  
B. 178, "From the New World"  
I. Adagio — Allegro molto  
II. Largo  
III. Molto vivace  
IV. Allegro con fuoco

# Peter Oundjian

GUEST CONDUCTOR

**P**eter Oundjian has been privileged to share his love of music with audiences for over five decades. He served as music director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra from 2004 to 2018, as well as music director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra from 2012 to 2018.



Born in Toronto and raised in Surrey, England, Oundjian grew up performing frequently as a violinist and choral singer, highlighted by three recordings under the baton of Benjamin Britten. In 1975, at the encouragement of Pinchas Zukerman, Oundjian entered the Juilliard School, where he studied violin with Ivan Galamian, Itzhak Perlman and Dorothy DeLay as well as conducting. In 1981, he joined the Tokyo String Quartet as the first violinist. Over the next 14 years, the group performed in concert halls and festivals in every corner of the world, and recorded over 35 albums, several of which received Grammy® nominations. In 1995, Oundjian was forced to step away from the violin, having developed focal dystonia in his left hand. At the age of 39, Oundjian turned his focus to reigniting his former passion for conducting.

Oundjian has appeared at some of the great annual gatherings of music and music-lovers: the BBC Proms, the Edinburgh Festival, the Prague Spring Festival, and the Philadelphia Orchestra's Mozart Festival, for which he was Artistic Director from 2003 to 2005. He has also made numerous appearances through his career with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony and Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Baltimore, Atlanta, Chicago and Boston symphony orchestras. On the global circuit, he has performed with the Sydney Symphony, Japan's NHK Symphony Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, l'Orchestre philharmonique de Radio France, l'Orchestre de Paris, Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, l'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and Zürich Tonhalle.

In 2016, Oundjian was appointed Principal Conductor of the Yale Philharmonia. He earned the university's Sanford Medal for distinguished service to music in 2013, and also holds an honorary doctorate from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

# Michelle Cann

PIANO

ABOUT

**L**auded as “exquisite” by the Philadelphia Inquirer and “a pianist of sterling artistry” by Gramophone, Grammy® Award-winning pianist Michelle Cann is one of the most sought-after artists of her generation. Recent engagements include appearances with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra and Orquestra Sinfônica Municipal de São Paulo. She is a recipient of the Sphinx Medal of Excellence and the Andrew Wolf Chamber Music Award and she served as the inaugural Christel DeHaan Artistic Partner of the American Piano Awards.



Highlights of Cann’s 2025/26 season include appearances with the Colorado Symphony, New Jersey Symphony and Kansas City Symphony, as well as Ireland’s National Symphony Orchestra. She also performs the world premiere of a new piano concerto by Valerie Coleman with the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C.

Recognized as a leading interpreter of the piano music of Florence Price, Cann performed the New York City premiere of Price’s Piano Concerto in One Movement with the Dream Unfinished Orchestra in July 2016 and the Philadelphia premiere with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin in February 2021. Her recording of the concerto with the New York Youth Symphony won a Grammy Award in 2023 for Best Orchestral Performance. She also won a Grammy Award in 2025 for “Beyond the Years: Unpublished Songs of Florence Price,” recorded with soprano Karen Slack.

A celebrated chamber musician, Cann has collaborated with leading artists including the Catalyst, Dover, and Juilliard string quartets, Imani Winds, violinists Timothy and Nikki Chooi, soprano Karen Slack and mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges. She regularly performs duo piano repertoire with her sister, pianist Kimberly Cann, as the Cann Duo.

Cann holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in piano performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she studied with Paul Schenly and Daniel Shapiro, and an Artist’s Diploma from the Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Robert McDonald. She joined the Curtis piano faculty in 2020 as the inaugural Eleanor Sokoloff Chair in Piano Studies. She is also on the piano faculty of the Manhattan School of Music.

# Suite from Concerto for Orchestra (2025)



## JOAN TOWER (b. 1938)

15 MINUTES

*2 piccolos, 3 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, castanets, cymbals, glockenspiel, sleigh bells, snare drum, tam-tam, tambourine, temple blocks, tenor drum, triangle, vibraphone, wind chimes, wood blocks, xylophone, harp, piano and strings.*

Joan Tower is a celebrated American composer and pianist and a trailblazer for female composers in the second half of the 20th century. Her original Concerto for Orchestra was co-commissioned by the St. Louis Symphony, Chicago Symphony and New York Philharmonic and written in 1991. It is a single-movement work set in two large sections. Tower writes:

In every sense, Concerto for Orchestra is my biggest work to date. It's the first piece purely for orchestra I've written since *Silver Ladders* in 1986, but it follows three solo concertos — for clarinet, flute, and violin — and reflects that experience, enabling me to take more risks between soloists and orchestra. Whereas *Silver Ladders* highlighted four solo instruments, here not only solos, but duos, trios, and other combinations of instruments form structural, timbral, and emotive elements of the piece. As in all my music, I am working here on motivating the structure, trying to be sensitive to how an idea reacts to or results from the previous ideas in the strongest and most natural way — a lesson I've learned from studying the music of Beethoven. Although technically demanding, the virtuoso sections are an integral part of the music, resulting from accumulated energy, rather than being designed purely as display elements. I thus resisted the title Concerto for Orchestra (with its connotations of Bartók, Lutosławski, and Husa), and named the work only after the composing was completed, and even then reluctantly.

**“The virtuoso sections are an integral part of the music, resulting from accumulated energy, rather than being designed purely as display elements.” — Joan Tower**

The Suite is a shortened version of the concerto — not in the typical sense of a suite (with separate movements excerpted from a larger work) but in the simpler sense of an abridgment. It was commissioned by the Yale Philharmonia and conductor Peter Oundjian, our guest conductor today, and was premiered on January 27, 2025 at Carnegie Hall in New York City. The suite reduces the concerto to about half of its original length but retains its color, contrast and virtuosity.

— *AJ Harbison*

## **Congratulations to our Kansas City Symphony Musicians!**

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Elena Lence Talley – Principal Music Librarian

# Concerto in D Minor in One Movement for Piano and Orchestra (1934)

## FLORENCE PRICE (1887–1953)

19 MINUTES

*Solo piano, flute, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, suspended cymbal and strings.*



### THE STORY

Like Joan Tower in the second half of the 20th century, Florence Price was a trailblazing composer and performer in the century's first half. She once wrote, "I have two handicaps — those of sex and race." Despite the obstacles she faced, she became the first female African American composer to be performed by a major U.S. orchestra and achieve national recognition.

Price composed her only piano concerto in 1934 and premiered it, performing the solo part herself, at the commencement of the Chicago Music College that same year. It became one of her most popular works, being performed during her lifetime by the Women's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago, the Michigan Works Progress Administration Orchestra and the Chicago Symphony, among others. Following Price's death, however, the concerto's full score and orchestral parts were lost, and her music as a whole faded into obscurity.

Price had a summer home in St. Anne, Illinois that she used for composing. After her death her daughter inherited it, but she died in 1975 and the house fell into disrepair. In 2009 it was purchased by new owners; during renovations, a treasure trove of Price's music was discovered in it, including dozens of scores and parts that were previously thought lost. Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* commented, "Not only did Price fail to enter the canon; a large quantity of her music came perilously close to obliteration. That run-down house in St. Anne is a potent symbol of how a country can forget its cultural history." The concerto's orchestral parts were among the papers discovered in the

## Florence Price was the first female African American composer to be performed by a major U.S. orchestra and achieve national recognition.

house, and composer Trevor Weston used them to reconstruct the full original score.

Our piano soloist today, Michelle Cann, has played the first performances of the concerto in numerous places, including New York City with the Dream Unfinished Orchestra and Philadelphia with the Philadelphia Orchestra. This weekend marks its first performances in Kansas City.

### THE MUSIC

As the title states, the concerto is cast in one movement, though it has three distinct sections. It opens with a slow introduction in which brass and wind instruments trade phrases back and forth, followed immediately by the solo piano's cadenza. The main theme of the section, with its minor pentatonic scale, draws inspiration from African American spirituals. The slow middle section changes keys from D minor to D major and features a lovely lyrical melody. The piano is the undisputed star here, carrying most of the melodic material itself or in an extended duet with the oboe. Some of the chords in the middle have jazz-inspired chromatic alterations. The section ends on a placid D major chord, and a short transition leads to the final section. This section is modeled on the Juba, an African American dance that originated with enslaved people on plantations in the American South; it features syncopated rhythms and an irrepressibly cheery spirit. After just a few short minutes of this section, with ever-increasing speed, the concerto ends triumphantly in a major key.

— *AJ Harbison*

# *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924)

**GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898–1937)**

15 MINUTES

*Solo piano, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, gong, snare drum, triangle, 2 alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, banjo and strings.*



## **THE STORY**

One of the most famous works of all time for piano and orchestra came to be through somewhat shady means. Paul Whiteman, a very successful jazz bandleader, wanted to organize a concert demonstrating jazz's sophistication, which he called "An Experiment in Modern Music." He asked George Gershwin, a young composer rapidly rising in popularity, to write a concerto that would fuse the worlds of jazz and classical music. Gershwin was composing a Broadway show at the time and was noncommittal with Whiteman.

On January 3, 1924, though, Gershwin's brother Ira brought to his attention an article in the New York Tribune, which said, "George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto" for Whiteman's concert, which was to be held February 12. Surprised by this, Gershwin contacted Whiteman, who cajoled him into writing the piece by promising that it would be orchestrated for his band by Ferde Grofé.

Gershwin wrote feverishly and delivered score pages to Grofé daily so that the orchestration could keep pace with the composition. At the first performance, some of the piano solo parts were not even written out and Gershwin, who was the soloist, had to nod his head to Whiteman at points to cue the band to come back in.

At that first performance, attendees included composers Sergei Rachmaninoff, Igor Stravinsky and John Philip Sousa; violinists Jascha Heifetz, Fritz Kreisler and Mischa Elman; and conductors

## The word “rhapsody” comes from a Greek word referring to multiple songs sewn or stitched together, and in musical terms it refers to a free-form structure not conforming to any traditional framework.

Leopold Stokowski, Walter Damrosch and Willem Mengelberg. Critical reception of the piece was mixed — one review of the premiere called it “derivative,” “stale” and “inexpressive.” Leonard Bernstein (writing later) called it “not a composition at all” but “a string of separate paragraphs stuck together with a thin paste of flour and water.” But with the audience it was an immediate smashing success. (In fairness to Bernstein, it should be noted that he admitted he loved the piece nevertheless, despite its compositional flaws.)

While Grofé wrote the original orchestration for Whiteman’s jazz band, the Rhapsody is best known in his 1942 full-orchestra version that we are playing today. Even the orchestra version, though, uses three saxophones and a banjo.

### THE MUSIC

The word “rhapsody” comes from a Greek word referring to multiple songs sewn or stitched together, and in musical terms it refers to a free-form structure not conforming to any traditional framework. Gershwin introduces most of his themes in the early part of the piece and brings back individual melodies or riffs in flashes of inspiration (Bernstein’s “separate paragraphs”). This episodic feel creates a sense of spontaneity and makes it easily enjoyable. The improvisational quality of some passages (in some performances the soloist does improvise), the toe-tapping syncopation and the blues scales throughout have made the Rhapsody an audience favorite since the very beginning.

— *Eric T. Williams and AJ Harbison*

# Symphony No. 9 in E Minor [old No. 5], op. 95, B. 178, “From the New World” (1893)

**ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)**

39 MINUTES

*Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn,  
2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets,  
3 trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, triangle  
and strings.*



## **THE STORY**

In 1891, the Czech composer, conductor and pedagogue Antonín Dvořák took the position of professor of composition at the Prague Conservatory. The following year, he received an invitation to become the director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City, with an annual salary of \$15,000 (\$540,000 today) — 25 times his salary in Prague. He accepted and spent the next three years in the United States.

In addition to his teaching and conducting at the conservatory, Dvořák spent a great deal of time researching American music. He felt strongly that American composers could find their own national style by looking to the music of Native Americans and African Americans. He wrote:

I am now convinced that the future music of this country must be founded upon [African American spirituals] ... They are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them ... [In them] I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music. They are heartbreaking, tender, passionate, melancholy, solemn, religious, bold, merry, gay, gracious or what you will. It is music that suits itself to any mood or purpose. There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot find a thematic source here.

In 1892, the New York Philharmonic commissioned Dvořák to write

# Dvořák was one of the greatest melodists in the history of music, and the Ninth Symphony could be his Exhibit A.

a symphony, which became what we know as his “New World Symphony.” Dvořák drew inspiration not only from Native American and African American music but also from the landscapes he saw, especially the wide-open prairies he experienced on a trip to Iowa in the summer of 1893. The symphony’s premiere in December 1893 was an unqualified triumph, and after its publication it immediately became a staple of conductors and orchestras around the world.

## THE MUSIC

Dvořák was one of the greatest melodists in the history of music, and the Ninth Symphony could be his Exhibit A. Much ink has been spilled debating how many of his themes are “American” and in what ways, but there’s no question that they are some of the most inspired he ever wrote and there is no lack of them throughout the work.

The first movement has a slow introduction leading into the standard first-movement tempo of allegro (fast and lively). This movement has three primary themes: one introduced by horns at the start of the allegro, a folk-sounding melody played first by flute and oboe, and a third introduced by a solo flute that is derived from the spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” The second movement begins with a haunting sequence of chords that provide an improbably smooth transition from the E minor of the first movement to the distant key of D-flat major. Once established there, Dvořák employs the English horn to sing one of the most beautiful melodies ever penned. Despite its ubiquity in popular culture today and its overuse in movie soundtracks and even TV commercials, Dvořák’s original hushed setting of it in this movement is still magic.

The third movement is a scherzo, inspired, according to the composer, by a poetic description of the dance at a Native American wedding feast. Ironically, this movement is the most characteristically Czech, with the rhythm derived from Czech folk songs. The fourth-movement finale begins with the repeated alternation of two notes — inspiration for John Williams’ “Jaws” theme — leading to a bold melody in the horns and trumpets. Much of the movement deals with themes from earlier in the symphony. At the end, the main themes of the first and fourth movements are combined in a triumphant major-key finish.

— *AJ Harbison*

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***Presented by the Symphony League  
to benefit the Kansas City Symphony***

# Kansas City Symphony

**In** only its 44th season, the Kansas City Symphony has already become one of America's most vibrant major orchestras and has gained national and international recognition. With the 2024/25 season, the Symphony welcomed conductor and composer Matthias Pintscher as its new music director. Pintscher regularly conducts many of the world's best orchestras and opera companies and ranks as one of the world's foremost composers of orchestral music.

Continually creating live music experiences in Helzberg Hall, located in the prestigious Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, the Symphony serves Kansas City's metro population of more than 2.2 million people as well as welcoming visitors from around the globe. The Symphony's 80 full-time musicians from around the world bring a diverse and dynamic range of musical experiences to our audiences in both orchestral and chamber music formats each season. In addition to concerts in Helzberg Hall, Symphony musicians perform throughout the region on our portable stage, the Mobile Music Box. The Symphony also serves as the orchestra for the Kansas City Ballet and the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, adding to the rich cultural experiences that these organizations offer to the community.

Top international soloists perform with the Kansas City Symphony every season, including brilliant classical musicians, popular singer/songwriters, rock bands and other creative performers. The Symphony also performs live soundtracks for a variety of fan-favorite films, with the movie projected on a giant screen above the stage.

Music connects us; it has the unique ability to draw us closer to our inner selves and also closer to one another, transcending our differences. Every Kansas City Symphony concert will take you on an emotional journey — a journey that's deeply personal but also a journey that we all experience together as one.

**We're happy you are here. We are *your* Kansas City Symphony.**

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