



Stravinsky's Firebird, Alisa Weilerstein Plays Dvořák

MATTHIAS PINTSCHER, MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR
ALISA WEILERSTEIN, CELLO

September 13-15, 2024

Helzberg Hall,
Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts



**KANSAS CITY
SYMPHONY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Program
- 2 About Matthias Pintscher, music director and conductor
- 3 About Alisa Weilerstein, cello
- 5 Unsuk Chin, *subito con forza*
- 6 Antonín Dvořák, Concerto in B Minor for Cello and Orchestra, op. 104
- 8 Igor Stravinsky, *The Firebird*
- 10 On Stage
- 11 About the Kansas City Symphony
- 12 Orchestra Roster
- 14 New Orchestra Members
- 16 Board of Directors
- 17 Staff
- 18 Symphony Society Contributors
- 23 Foundations and Organizations
- 25 Corporate Contributors

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Stravinsky's Firebird, Alisa Weilerstein Plays Dvořák

Friday and Saturday, September 13-14, 2024 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, September 15, 2024 at 2 p.m.

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

MATTHIAS PINTSCHER, MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR
ALISA WEILERSTEIN, CELLO

UNSUK CHIN

subito con forza

ANTONÍN DVORÁK

Concerto in B Minor for Cello and
Orchestra, op. 104, B. 191

I. Allegro

II. Adagio ma non troppo

III. Finale: Allegro moderato

Alisa Weilerstein, *cello*

Intermission

IGOR STRAVINSKY

The Firebird

(original 1910 version, complete ballet)



Matthias Pintscher

MUSIC DIRECTOR
AND CONDUCTOR

Matthias Pintscher is the newly appointed music director of the Kansas City Symphony, beginning with the 2024/25 season. He has just concluded a successful decade-long tenure as the music director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain, the iconic Parisian contemporary ensemble founded by Pierre Boulez and winner of the 2022 Polar Prize. During his stewardship, Pintscher led this most adventurous institution in the creation of dozens of world premieres by cutting-edge composers from all over the world and took the ensemble on tours around the globe — to Asia and North America and throughout Europe to all the major festivals and concert halls.

The 2023/24 season was Pintscher's fourth year as Creative Partner at the Cincinnati Symphony, where he conducted a new work by intí figgis-vizueta, as well as an immersive video concert of Olivier Messiaen's *Des Canyons aux étoiles*. He also toured with the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie where he is artist-in-residence. As guest conductor, he returned to the RAI Milano Musica, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, NDR Hamburg, Indianapolis

Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Barcelona Symphony, Lahti Symphony, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, La Scala and Berlin's Boulez Ensemble. Pintscher has conducted several opera productions for the Berliner Staatsoper, Wiener Staatsoper and Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. He returned to the Berliner Staatsoper in 2024 for Beat Furrer's *Violetter Schnee*.

Pintscher is also well-known as a composer, and his works appear frequently on the programs of major symphony orchestras throughout the world. In August 2021, he was the focus of the Suntory Hall Summer Festival — a weeklong celebration of his works with the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra as well as a residency by the Ensemble Intercontemporain with symphonic and chamber music performances. His third violin concerto, *Assonanza*, written for Leila Josefowicz, premiered in January 2022 with the Cincinnati Symphony.

Alisa Weilerstein

CELLO

Alisa Weilerstein is one of the foremost cellists of our time. Known for her consummate artistry, emotional investment, and rare interpretive depth, she was recognized with a MacArthur “genius grant” Fellowship in 2011. Today her career is truly global in scope, taking her to the most prestigious international venues for solo recitals, chamber concerts and concerto collaborations.

With her multi-season solo cello project, *Fragments*, Weilerstein aims to reimagine the concert experience. Comprising six programs, the series sees her weave together the 36 movements of Bach’s solo cello suites with 27 new commissions in a multisensory production by Elkhannah Pulitzer. In the 2024/25 season, she premieres *Fragments 3* in San Diego, gives the New York premieres of *Fragments 2* and *3* at Carnegie Hall, and performs the complete cycle at Charleston’s Spoleto Festival USA.

Weilerstein regularly appears alongside preeminent conductors with the world’s major orchestras. Versatile across the cello repertoire’s full breadth, she is a leading exponent of its greatest classics and an ardent proponent of contemporary music, who has premiered important new concertos by Pascal Dusapin, Matthias Pintscher and Joan Tower. In 2024/25, she brings to life three more concertos, premiering Thomas Larcher’s with the

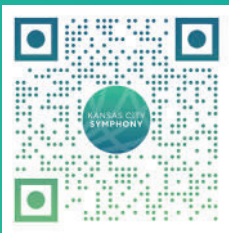
New York Philharmonic and Bavarian Radio Symphony, Richard Blackford’s with the Czech Philharmonic and Gabriela Ortiz’s with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Her other 2024/25 highlights include season-opening concerts with the San Diego and Kansas City symphonies as well as returns to the Berlin Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras.

As an authority on Bach’s music for unaccompanied cello, in spring 2020 Weilerstein released a best-selling recording of his solo suites for Pentatone, streamed them in her innovative *#36DaysOfBach* project, and deconstructed his beloved G-major prelude in a Vox.com video, now viewed more than 2.2 million times. Her discography also includes chart-topping albums and the winner of BBC Music’s Recording of the Year award.

Diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at nine years old, Weilerstein is a staunch advocate for the T1D community. She lives with her husband, Venezuelan conductor Rafael Payare, and their two young children.



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Unsuk Chin (b. 1961)

subito con forza (suddenly with force)
(2020)

5 minutes

2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons,
2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, crotales,
cymbals, 2 gongs, guiro, marimba,
4 snare drums, tam-tam, tambourine,
triangle, tubular bells, vibraphone, whip,
xylophone, piano and strings.

THE STORY

Unsuk Chin was born in South Korea in 1961 and won multiple international composition awards in her early 20s. She moved to Germany to study with György Ligeti in the 1980s, and since 1988 has been based in Berlin.

Chin wrote *subito con forza* in 2020 on a commission from BBC Radio 3, the Kölner Philharmonie concert hall in Cologne, Germany and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (based at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, where we performed on our European tour last month!). The commission was part of the “non bthvn projekt,” which sought to celebrate Beethoven’s 250th birthday that year not by playing his works but by commissioning contemporary composers to write music responding to his. Allusions to Beethoven’s music were allowed, but no direct quotations or paraphrases.

Chin says of Beethoven’s music, “What particularly appeals to me are the enormous contrasts: from volcanic eruptions to extreme serenity.” Her tribute makes effective use of these kinds of contrasts as well.

THE MUSIC

The opening is marked “Allegro con brio” (fast, with fire), the same marking as the opening of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. The piece begins suddenly with a powerful 3-octave C in the strings, sounding very Beethovenian, followed immediately by the very un-Beethovenian sound of rapidly played clusters of chromatic notes in the piano, vibraphone and marimba. Hushed strings in tremolos (very fast bowing) crescendo to a passage of strings playing fragments of melodies that could be from Beethoven but are all mixed up. Timpani and piano feature in the following sections. After a sudden pause, the horns and trumpets begin playing the famous rhythm of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony (da da da DUM), but on just one note. Other sections join in on the obsessive note, sometimes getting louder and faster, sometimes framed by quiet chords in the strings. After the repetitions reach a fever pitch, the last chord in the piece is approached in a unique way: with the strings initially divided into 23 dissonant parts, each line slowly glissandos (slides) until it reaches a note in the C minor chord, which finally fades away into silence.

— AJ Harbison



Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Concerto in B Minor for Cello and Orchestra, op. 104, B. 191
(1894-95)

40 minutes

Solo piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle and strings.

THE STORY

Composing a concerto for a solo cello with orchestra has always been tricky. The cello doesn't have the volume to compete with the full orchestra, as the piano does, nor does it have the range to soar above the full orchestra, as the violin does. Czech composer Antonín Dvořák felt this way, and it contributed to his lifelong reluctance to compose one. He was finally convinced by hearing a cello concerto by fellow composer Victor Herbert. Herbert's effective use of the high range of the cello and his use of three trombones inspired Dvořák to give it a try. (It also inspired Dvořák's inclusion of three

trombones in his own score, as well as the key of B minor.)

Dvořák navigated the pitfalls of the cello being lost in the orchestra's sound by lightly scoring around the cello solos, while also using the cello in an accompanying role for solos by other instruments in the orchestra. When he showed the work to his friend Hanuš Wihan, a great Czech cellist, Wihan proposed numerous changes, including two cadenzas that would feature the cello in a more flashy, virtuosic role. But Dvořák was committed to his vision of the concerto as more of a

dialogue than an opportunity for the cello to show off, and he only accepted a few minor changes. He wrote to his publisher, “[You must] promise me that no one — not even my friend Wihan — shall make any alteration in it without my knowledge and permission ... Its form shall be as I have felt it and thought it out.”

THE MUSIC

The clarinets introduce the theme at the very beginning of the piece. It is developed and played fortissimo (very loud) and grandioso (grandly) before subsiding into a lyrical theme played first by a solo horn that also grows to a fortissimo statement. A short transition featuring the strings finally

leads to the solo cello’s entrance. The opening theme recurs throughout the movement in various alterations, and also comes back at the end of the concerto. While the cello has singing melodies, there are also some flashy passages featuring double- and triple-stops (playing on two and three strings at a time) as well as playing in the instrument’s extreme high register.

The second movement is mostly slow, soft and lyrical, punctuated by outbursts from the orchestra. Near the end there is a cadenza-like passage, very lightly accompanied by a handful of wind instruments, that features a technique where the cellist plays a melody on the higher strings, stopping the notes with the fingers of their left hand, while using a free finger or two on the same hand to pluck the lower, open strings. The main theme of the third movement, continually recurring in various adaptations, is a fanfare-like melody that is distantly related to the main theme of the first. A few minutes before the end, the lively movement takes an unexpected turn and becomes quiet and reflective, giving a tender treatment to the fanfare melody. But in the final bars there is a frenzied crescendo that finishes the concerto on a triumphant note.

— *AJ Harbison*

ALISA WEILERSTEIN





Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

The Firebird (1909-1910)

44 minutes

2 piccolos, 3 flutes, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 2 contrabassoons, 5 horns, 4 Wagner tubas, 6 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, chimes, cymbals, glockenspiel, tam-tam, tambourine, triangle, xylophone, 3 harps, piano, celesta and strings.

THE STORY

Born into a wealthy Russian family, Sergei Diaghilev seemed destined for a career in the civil service but his association with artists, musicians and intellectuals led him to Paris in the early 20th century. A natural impresario, he organized exhibits and concert series dedicated to Russian art and music. Audiences were enthusiastic and Diaghilev next produced a ballet season in 1909, using dancers from the Saint Petersburg Imperial Ballet during their summer holiday. The repertoire included some works by Chopin, and Diaghilev commissioned orchestral arrangements from Igor Stravinsky, then an unknown composer in his mid-20s. The arrangements were successful but not especially notable.

As Diaghilev made plans for the 1910 season of the newly named Ballets Russes, he leaned into the lucrative niche of works based on Russian folklore and cast about in search of a composer for the task. His first choice, Nikolai Tcherepnin, wrote some sketches but soon withdrew from the project. Next in line was Anatoli Liadov, who was rather cavalier about deadlines. When the lack of progress became evident, Diaghilev approached Alexander Glazunov who declined the commission. There is some indication that Diaghilev may have contacted Nikolai Sokolov before frantically turning to Stravinsky in desperation. Stravinsky posed a risk as a relatively untried composer but Diaghilev had no choice. Stravinsky embraced the challenge and wrote quickly, starting in

THE FIREBIRD SYNOPSIS

The Firebird combines various characters and tales from Russian folklore into a narrative about Prince Ivan Tsarevich, the evil King Kashchei and a Firebird. Prince Ivan is wandering the gardens of Kashchei when he captures a Firebird, which pleads for its release. Ivan spares the Firebird upon receipt of one of its magical tail feathers. The prince continues his excursion and comes across 13 princesses held under enchantment by Kashchei. As they dance a *khоровод* or round dance, Ivan is drawn to one particular princess and she to him. The princesses are called back to the palace and Kashchei captures Ivan. Just before Kashchei finishes the spell turning the prince to stone, Ivan uses the feather to summon the Firebird. Using its powers, the Firebird causes the evil Kashchei and his minions to dance feverishly until all collapse, sleeping to a lullaby. The Firebird tells Ivan the secret of Kashchei's power: a magic egg. As Kashchei awakens, Ivan smashes the egg, the enchantment is broken, and the prince and princess are married, living happily ever after.



November 1909 and completing the ballet in May 1910.

During rehearsals, Diaghilev famously remarked about Stravinsky, "Mark him well. He is a man on the eve of celebrity." With choreography by Michel Fokine, *The Firebird* premiered to critical acclaim on June 25, 1910, and Diaghilev's prediction proved true. Talk immediately turned to a sequel. *Pétrouchka* and *The Rite of Spring* soon followed, sealing Stravinsky's place in the ranks of revolutionary composers.

Given *The Firebird's* popularity, it is unsurprising that Stravinsky immediately excerpted a suite from the ballet in 1911. Practicality intervened and he completed a revision of the suite in 1919, adjusting the instrumentation to align more closely with standard orchestral forces rather than the luxuriously large ensemble at his disposal with Ballets Russes. He made another revised version in 1945, ostensibly to correct the excesses of his youth but also with a canny eye toward securing copyright protection and royalties.

THE MUSIC

From its ominous sotto voce opening to the glorious cascading chords at the end, *The Firebird* works its magic through Stravinsky's incredible prowess at manipulating orchestral color learned from his teacher, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Certainly attuned to the Parisian zeitgeist, Stravinsky displays his affinity for the atmospheric sounds of Debussy, Ravel, Satie and others but transmutes them through his

STRAVINSKY continued

own unique lens. The opulence of the very large orchestra used for the original ballet is a luscious indulgence compared to the reduced ensemble size of the more familiar suites. In addition, the greater expanse of time allows for more richly developed thematic material and exploration of timbres — think of it as the director’s cut of a film. While choreographer Michel Fokine may have insisted that the music be composed to suit the dance rather than the other way around, Stravinsky’s score reflects no musical compromise.

In keeping with the folkloric nature of the tale, Stravinsky included two folksongs in the ballet, both excerpted from a compilation

of Russian folk songs made by Rimsky-Korsakov. “In the Garden” served as the basis for the princesses’ *khorovod* or round dance, and “By the Gate a Pine Tree Swayed” provided the heroic melody for the glorious finale. Throughout the ballet, Stravinsky’s depiction of humans is characterized by a folksong-like approach while the supernatural dimension is evoked largely through chromatic gestures. The melodies are inviting and the rhythms are vibrant but it is the kaleidoscopic tone colors that linger in memory after the last note fades.

— Eric T. Williams

On Stage

Imagine sitting on the Helzberg Hall stage with a world-renowned guest artist and our musicians as they perform chamber music. You’re only a few feet away from the action! Music Director Matthias Pintscher invites you to On Stage, a special experience where the music, musicians and audience come together. Enjoy a premium cocktail and wine reception when you arrive, then prepare yourself for the ultimate immersive concert created just for you — filled with artistry and adrenaline. Only 100 tickets per performance are offered, so secure your tickets.

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Thursday, January 16, 2025 at 8 p.m.
Emmanuel Pahud, flute

Thursday, January 23, 2025 at 8 p.m.
Conrad Tao, piano

Thursday, April 3, 2025 at 8 p.m.
Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano

Visit [kcsymphony.org](https://www.kcsymphony.org) for tickets.





KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY

In only its 42nd 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 welcomes 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 are an international dynamic force — all living, working, teaching and playing in Kansas City. 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 Symphony every season, including brilliant classical musicians, popular singer/songwriters, rock bands and other creative performers. The Symphony also accompanies a wide range of fan-favorite films, playing the soundtrack live as the movie is 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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WELCOME TO NEW ORCHESTRA MEMBERS



AARON YOU-XIN LI, VIOLIN

A native of Tainan, Taiwan, Aaron You-Xin Li was most recently a violin fellow in the New World Symphony where he performed as concertmaster under the

baton of Michael Tilson Thomas and principal second violin under Stéphane Denève. He earned his master's degree from Indiana University as a student of Grigory Kalinovsky and his bachelor's degree from Taipei National University of Arts.

Aaron has participated in numerous music festivals, serving as concertmaster and associate concertmaster at the Spoleto Music Festival and performing at the Sarasota Music Festival, Dragonfly International Music Festival, Casalmaggiore Music Festival, Walnut Hill Music Festival and National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra youth summer music festival. During his time at Music Academy of the West, he was chosen for the String Quartet Seminar and won a spot in the Keston Music Academy Exchange Program to play with the London Symphony Orchestra.



ALEJANDRO LOMBO, FLUTE AND PICCOLO

Alejandro Lombo was previously the principal flute of Symphony in C and has performed regularly with the Philadelphia Orchestra

since 2019. Most recently, he went on the Philadelphia Orchestra's 2023 European tour, performing in Luxembourg, Paris, Hamburg and Baden-Baden under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin. In the summer of 2023, Alejandro performed with the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra at Lincoln Center under the direction of Louis Langrée and attended the Music Academy of the West, where he won the Keston

Music Academy Exchange competition and subsequently performed with the London Symphony Orchestra. He also has performed with the Detroit Symphony, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Milwaukee Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony and Festival Orchestra of Lincoln Center (formerly Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra) among others.

Alejandro studied with Jeffrey Khaner at the Juilliard School, where he earned his master's degree, and at the Curtis Institute of Music, where he earned his bachelor's degree.

AYRTON PISCO, VIOLIN

A native of Brasília, Brazil, Ayrton Pisco holds degrees from Yale University, the University of Southern California and San Diego State University. He has also been a fellow with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and New World Symphony. He has participated in several music festivals including Tanglewood, Aspen, Sarasota, Bayreuth (Germany) and Sapporo (Japan). His principal teachers include Ani Kavafian, Margaret Batjer, Pei-Chun Tsai and his father, Ayrton Macedo Pisco.

A seasoned orchestra musician, Ayrton has performed with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, San Diego Symphony and New Haven Symphony. Concert engagements have taken him across North and South America, Europe and Asia. In addition to classical music, Ayrton also enjoys performing in genres such as jazz, tango, bossa nova, choro, mariachi and others.



HYOJOON PARK, TRUMPET

Originally from Toronto, Canada, trumpeter Hyojoon Park joins the Kansas City Symphony for the 2024/25 season. He also performs regularly as a substitute musician with the Kansas City Chamber Orchestra and has performed with the New World Symphony, Omaha Symphony, Orchestra Iowa and Symphony of Northwest Arkansas. Additionally, he is a member of Michigan's world-renowned Brass Band of Battle Creek.

Hyojoon holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the UMKC Conservatory, a master's degree from Michigan State University and a bachelor's degree from McGill University. He has studied with Keith Benjamin, Justin Emerich, Christopher Smith and Andrew Dunn.



SALLY KIM, CELLO

Sally Kim was born in South Korea and moved to New Zealand at 6. She earned a doctorate from the University of Miami, where she studied under Ross Harbaugh. While there, Sally served as a teaching assistant and was honored as a Henry Mancini Fellow. She also holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Auckland and a master's degree from the New England Conservatory of Music. Her cello teachers include James Tennant, Edith Salzman and Paul Katz. She previously performed with the Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra and made

her solo debut with the St. Matthews Orchestra at 14.

As a dedicated music ambassador, Sally has toured Asia performing in China, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines and Timor-Leste. Concert engagements and festivals have also taken her to the United Kingdom and several European countries.



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Matthias Pintscher Welcomes Gil Shaham

Friday and Saturday, October 4-5 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, October 6 at 2 p.m.

Matthias Pintscher, music director and conductor
Gil Shaham, violin



Alexander Zemlinsky Sinfonietta
Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra
Felix Mendelssohn Symphony No. 3 in A Minor, "Scottish"

Mozart's Requiem

Friday, November 1 at 8 p.m. (Symphonic Piazza)
Saturday, November 2 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, November 3 at 2 p.m.

Bernard Labadie, guest conductor
Liv Redpath, soprano
Avery Amereau, mezzo-soprano
Andrew Haji, tenor
Neal Davies, bass-baritone
Kansas City Symphony Chorus, Charles Bruffy, chorus director



Franz Schubert Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Requiem ★

Strauss' Alpine Symphony, with Chopin

Friday, November 22 at 8 p.m. (Symphonic Piazza)
Saturday, November 23 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, November 24 at 2 p.m.

Matthias Pintscher, music director and conductor
Yunchan Lim, piano



Carlos Simon *Warmth from Other Suns* for String Orchestra
Frédéric Chopin Concerto No. 2 in F Minor for Piano and Orchestra ★
Richard Strauss *An Alpine Symphony* ★

★ Selections will be played during Friday night Symphonic Piazza performances

