



**St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra**

stéphane denève : music director



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**STÉPHANE DENÈVE AND THE ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ANNOUNCE SEVEN  
NEW FULL-TIME MUSICIANS**

**(September 17, 2019, St. Louis, MO)** – The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Stéphane Denève are pleased to announce the appointment of seven new full-time musicians as the SLSO begins its 2019/2020 season:

**Michael Casimir, viola**, joins the SLSO full-time following a one-year appointment as a replacement musician during the 2018-19 season. A graduate of the Juilliard School and The Curtis Music Institute, he was awarded second place in the 2015 and 2011 International Sphinx Competitions, and was the winner of the grand prize at the Hudson Valley Philharmonic Competition in 2013. In addition to classical music, Casimir likes to explore other genres. He is the newest member of The 442s; he recorded for the “Lion King” (2019) soundtrack; and has composed the music for a mobile game.

**Andrew Francois, viola**, an Illinois native, was in the inaugural class of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Resident Fellows program. He has also played in and served as principal with the Verbier Festival Orchestra, the Spoleto Festival Orchestra, and the New World Symphony Orchestra. He is a graduate of Illinois State University and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. In his spare time, Francois enjoys playing tennis and practicing yoga.

**Leonid Plashinov-Johnson, viola**, is a 2019 graduate of the New England Conservatory. He is also a laureate of multiple competitions, most recently the Primrose International Viola Competition and the NEC Concerto Competition. He has performed as a soloist with orchestras including the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the NEC Philharmonic Orchestra, the Harlow Symphony Orchestra, the Sofia Chamber Orchestra, and the AIMS Festival Orchestra

**Jennifer Humphreys, cello**, was most recently a cellist in the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. She has also held positions with the Atlanta and Charlotte Symphony Orchestras. Humphreys spends her summers performing at the Grand Teton Music Festival and the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music. While in Dallas, she served as Adjunct Faculty at Texas Christian University. In addition to teaching and performing chamber music, she enjoys cycling, cooking, gardening, and yoga.

**Aleck Belcher, double bass**, is a recent graduate of the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Belcher recently performed with orchestras at the Pacific Music Festival throughout Japan and at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California. He has also performed as a substitute bassist with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, his hometown orchestra. He looks forward to further developing his musicianship with the SLSO and getting involved with the St. Louis community to



promote music education

**Brendan Fitzgerald, double bass**, comes to St. Louis after two seasons with the Seattle Symphony. A San Diego native, he is a graduate of Northwestern University. He attended the Aspen Music Festival in 2016 and 2017 as a fellowship recipient, performing alongside members of the Pittsburgh, Dallas, St. Louis, and San Francisco symphonies. He is excited to begin work with Stéphane Denève and the rest of his SLSO colleagues, as well as enjoy the finest barbecue in the country.

**Derek Fenstermacher, Principal Tuba**, has been a member of the SLSO since January 2019. A native of Huntsville, Alabama, Fenstermacher began playing the tuba at age 14 and by 19, he was a featured soloist with the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra. He received a B.M. from the University of Alabama studying with Demondrae Thurman and James Michael Dunn. He has since held positions with the orchestras in Chattanooga, New Jersey, and Albany. He has also performed extensively with the New York Philharmonic, Cincinnati Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Mariinsky Theater Orchestra, Nashville Symphony Orchestra, the New World Symphony, Charlotte Symphony, Houston Ballet Orchestra, and Alabama Symphony.

#### **About the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra**

Celebrated as one of today's most exciting and enduring orchestras, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra is the second-oldest orchestra in the country, marking its 140th year with the 2019/2020 season and its first with Music Director Stéphane Denève. Widely considered one of the world's finest orchestras, the SLSO maintains its commitment to artistic excellence, educational impact, and community connections – all in service to its mission of enriching lives through the power of music.

In addition to its regular concert performances at Powell Hall, which has been the permanent home of the SLSO for more than 50 years, the orchestra is an integral part of the diverse and vibrant St. Louis community, presenting dozens of free education and community programs and performances throughout the region each year. It has an ongoing commitment to championing music of our time, through commissions, a collaboration with the Mizzou New Music Initiative, and its popular St. Louis Symphony Live at the Pulitzer. The SLSO also serves as the resident orchestra for Opera Theatre Saint Louis, with the upcoming season marking the 43rd year of this unique partnership.

The Grammy Award-winning SLSO's impact beyond the St. Louis region is realized through weekly Saturday night concert broadcasts on St. Louis Public Radio, acclaimed recordings, and regular touring activity. A sought-after artistic partner by preeminent musicians and composers from across the globe, as well as by local and national organizations, the SLSO enjoys a long history of robust and enduring artistic collaborations that have developed and deepened over the years.

Today, the SLSO builds on the institution's current momentum on all fronts, including artistic, financial, audience growth, and community impact, and looks toward the future with Stéphane Denève. For more information, visit [slo.org](http://slo.org).

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