



For photo and video assets from the sensory-friendly concerts, visit <http://bit.ly/2NqhDZJ>

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**ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA PRESENTS SENSORY-FRIENDLY EDUCATION CONCERTS
FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AT JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER**

**November 6 concerts welcomed more than 800 from Special School District, St. Louis
Public, private and parochial schools to experience Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf***

(November 7, 2019, St. Louis, MO) – On Wednesday, November 6, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra performed two unique concerts for students and staff of the Special School District of St. Louis County and other schools for individuals with a range a special needs. The SLSO's Sensory-Friendly Education Concerts, performed at and in partnership with the St. Louis Jewish Community Center, presented the timeless classic *Peter and the Wolf* to hundreds of children and their accompanying teachers and school staff.

The SLSO regularly hosted concerts for children with special needs in the 1980s and early '90s. Students with various disabilities generally have fewer opportunities to engage with the arts than their peers. The SLSO worked closely with Paula Berner, a retired special education/music teacher from Special School District, to provide a concert experience in a sensory-friendly environment that is welcoming and judgment-free.

Marie-Hélène Bernard, SLSO President and CEO, said, "The SLSO was honored to bring these concerts to students and their teachers and caretakers. Seeing the joy in the eyes of students is a striking reminder of the unifying power of music. It touches the heart and soul of everyone."

As the orchestra depicted characters like a bird, duck, cat, and wolf through music, students clapped along, eyes glowing and smiles beaming at hearing a live orchestra, many for the first time.

Greg Heaney, a music teacher at Southview School in Crestwood, said, "This was an opportunity for my students to come and enjoy the arts in the moment. It gave them the opportunity to hear the beauty of music and an experience that enriched their lives right now."

Heaney's students include those with physical disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and other disabilities. At the sensory-friendly concerts, students could stand, clap, and vocalize without judgment. The SLSO provided stress balls in the form of a wolf for each child as a self-regulating device during the concert, in addition to providing break rooms for students who became over-stimulated.



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stéphane denève : music director



SLSO musicians, staff, and volunteers from both the SLSO and the Jewish Book Festival received advance training in preparation for these inclusive concerts.

Bobby Norfolk, an Emmy Award-winning speaker and storyteller, provided entertaining and engaging narration to *Peter and the Wolf*, with an American Sign Language interpreter telling the story alongside Norfolk.

At the conclusion of the concert, the orchestra received an enthusiastic round of applause from the students and staff. Heaney said his students looked forward to the concert and listened to the music of *Peter and the Wolf* in advance. He thanked the SLSO for the special experience of a sensory-friendly education concert and the opportunity it provided for community-based instruction.

“My students are given the opportunity to enjoy the performance without taking away from the experience for anyone else,” Heaney said.

The SLSO sensory-friendly concerts were presented by PNC Bank and in partnership with the St. Louis Jewish Community Center, sponsored by St. Louis Children’s Hospital, and supported by the Dana Brown Charitable Trust and Booksource. The sensory-friendly concerts are part of the SLSO’s longstanding and robust education programs. In its most recent season, the orchestra reached 50,000 students in almost 500 schools through in-school visits and concerts at Powell Hall. The orchestra, under Music Director Stéphane Denève’s leadership, has committed to making all education concerts free by the 2020/2021 season.

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



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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.

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