



St. Louis Symphony

Orchestra

stéphane denève : music director

: news

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STÉPHANE DENÈVE COMMITS TO SERVE AS MUSIC DIRECTOR OF THE ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA THROUGH THE 2025/2026 SEASON

Extension highlights mission-driven collaboration and continued artistic and institutional stability for the nation's second-oldest orchestra

(March 30, 2021, St. Louis, MO) – Today, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra announced a four-year extension of Stéphane Denève’s contract as Music Director. The extended contract runs through the end of the SLSO’s 2025/2026 season, which will be Denève’s seventh as Music Director. Denève’s initial three-year contract began with the 2019/2020 season following one season as Music Director Designate. His long partnership with the SLSO began in 2003, when he led the SLSO for the first of many engagements as a guest conductor prior to his appointment as Music Director.

The announcement comes as Denève leads the SLSO in the return of live concerts with audiences at Powell Hall, the first since early November 2020.

Steven Finerty, Chair of the SLSO Board of Trustees, said, “Stéphane is the ideal partner for the SLSO. He brings a profound musicianship and a deep understanding to his role, which he infuses with great creativity, good humor, humility, and humanity. Along with President and CEO Marie-Hélène Bernard—with whom he has developed a remarkable partnership—Stéphane has helped hone the SLSO as an artistically excellent, community-minded, and financially responsible organization for years to come.”

Marie-Hélène Bernard, SLSO President and CEO, said, “In the time Stéphane has been Music Director, he has continued to build on the celebrated artistic legacy of the SLSO while advancing the next era of the orchestra. He inspires all of us with his signature joy and warmth, encourages dialogue, emphasizes education, breaks down barriers, and flexes the organization’s creative mettle. As we emerge from this challenging year and look ahead, Stéphane and I are committed to embracing the many learnings afforded to us from our patrons, community partners, and family of artists.”

Stéphane Denève, Music Director of the SLSO, said, “St. Louis is my musical home, and I am truly over the moon to deepen my relationship with this wonderful community in the years to come. Since 2003, I have felt such a special connection to this city, and to the fantastic musicians and staff of the SLSO. I look forward with great enthusiasm to making music—to inspire, to comfort, to challenge, to bring joy—and continuing to develop together with the SLSO, who are not only among the world’s most outstanding musicians, but also generous, warmhearted, and passionate individuals. As we look toward a post-pandemic future together, I am fully committed to listening to and growing with



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our community. I very much hope to make the SLSO even more diverse, inclusive, and accessible to our local and international audiences and supporters.”

Jonathan Chu and Jennifer Nitchman, Co-Chairs of the SLSO Musicians’ Council, said, “The musicians of the SLSO are thrilled to continue our collaboration with Stéphane Denève with this contract extension. We are inspired and energized by his boundless enthusiasm, optimism, and dedication to connecting with our community through powerful musical performances. It is a true joy to look forward to our future with Stéphane after the difficulties of the past year.”

Appointed the 13th SLSO Music Director in 2017 beginning with the 2019/2020 season, Denève has fully embraced St. Louis’ people, culture, and traditions, including conducting the free Forest Park concert on Art Hill, held each season as a gift to the St. Louis community. Denève has developed deep relationships and a rich collaboration with the entire SLSO family and St. Louis community, a result of his genuine warmth, openness, and superb communication.

In his first two seasons as Music Director, Denève—in close collaboration with President and CEO Marie-Hélène Bernard, artistic leadership, and SLSO musicians—has advanced the SLSO’s mission. Artistically, he draws acclaimed performances from the orchestra and its resident choruses. His deep network has attracted top artists to St. Louis, while his appointment of 10 musicians to the orchestra to date and the selection of Stephanie Childress as the SLSO’s new Assistant Conductor maintains the SLSO’s reputation as a top orchestral destination for musicians internationally.

A remarkably engaged leader on all levels, Denève continues to shape the SLSO’s long history of artistic excellence through exceptional performances that showcase the versatility and virtuosity of the orchestra’s musicians. His inaugural season’s programs juxtaposed the French repertoire for which he is a world-renowned interpreter with the SLSO’s own decades-long commitment to American music. His thoughtful programming reflects the SLSO’s command of repertoire across genre and time through fresh interpretations of core orchestral works and the commitment to elevating voices and music of today. Denève has demonstrated his commitment to new music through the commissioning and introduction of new works to the SLSO repertoire by composers including Anna Clyne, Guillaume Connesson, Stacey Garrop, Nathalie Joachim, Aaron Jay Kernis, James MacMillan, Jessie Montgomery, Kevin Puts, and many other voices of our time. In his first two seasons, he has invited pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet and violinist Nicola Benedetti for immersive artist-in-residence relationships with the SLSO and led celebrated collaborations with John Williams. Denève has also introduced a series of plans for opera and symphonic plays in concert, visual and multimedia projects, and a renewed focus on commercial recording activity.

Under Denève’s leadership, the SLSO has focused on making music accessible to all and striving to help all who engage with the SLSO feel a sincere sense of welcome and belonging. In his inaugural season, Denève facilitated the introduction of \$15 tickets to classical concerts, lowering the economic barrier to the SLSO. In addition, he launched *Stéphane Seats*, a program that has to date welcomed more than 230 students, teachers, and community partners to attend his concerts for free. He also



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oversaw the creation of SLSO *Crafted*, an innovative concert experience in collaboration with the St. Louis culinary community that welcomed new audiences to Powell Hall. In his second season as Music Director—one which was also defined by the global pandemic—his vision for the expansion of the SLSO's accessibility via media was realized with the launch of a video streaming initiative using the SLSO's newly installed high-definition robotic camera system. He conducted the first digital concert, made available for free on the orchestra's website. Since March 2020, the SLSO has reached more than 3 million people on air and online and around the world.

Denève remains a central partner to the SLSO through the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, engaging with patrons through regular appearances in monthly *Lunch & Learn* panel discussions, coaching music educators through online workshops, and immersing himself in SLSO outreach events, including SLSO *On the Go* concerts in the community and performing on piano as part of the *Songs of America* digital series.

Denève has embraced the full SLSO family. In his inaugural season, he led exceptional performances in collaboration with the St. Louis Symphony Chorus in concerts, including revelatory performances of masterworks including Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 2. He is a champion of the St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON Chorus, including programming this pioneering ensemble in its first classical season performances in more than 10 years. These upcoming performances will feature an SLSO commission by Grammy-nominated musician Nathalie Joachim. He also regularly nurtures the young musicians of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra in rehearsals and side-by-side performances with the SLSO.

Stéphane Denève, Music Director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra

Stéphane Denève is Music Director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and the Brussels Philharmonic, and recently concluded his six-year tenure as Principal Guest Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra. He is also Director of the Brussels Philharmonic's Centre for Future Orchestral Repertoire (CffOR). He previously served as Chief Conductor of Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra (SWR) and Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Recognized internationally for the exceptional quality of his performances and programming, he regularly appears at major concert venues with the world's greatest orchestras and soloists. He has a special affinity for the music of his native France and is a passionate advocate for music of the 21st century.

Recent and upcoming engagements include appearances with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony, Orchestra Sinfonica dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Vienna Symphony, DSO Berlin, Orchestre National de France, Czech Philharmonic, and NHK Symphony. In 2020 he conducted the Nobel Prize Concert with the Stockholm Philharmonic. In North America he made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2012 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with whom he has appeared several times both in Boston and at Tanglewood, and he regularly conducts The Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, The Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San



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Francisco Symphony and Toronto Symphony. He is also a popular guest at many of the U.S. summer music festivals, including Bravo! Vail, Saratoga Performing Arts Center, the Hollywood Bowl, Blossom Music Festival, Festival Napa Valley, Grand Teton Music Festival, and Music Academy of the West.

He enjoys close relationships with many of the world's leading solo artists, including Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Yo-Yo Ma, Nikolaj Znaider, James Ehnes, Leif Ove Andsnes, Leonidas Kavakos, Nicholas Angelich, Lang Lang, Frank Peter Zimmermann, Gil Shaham, Emanuel Ax, Renaud and Gautier Capuçon, Lars Vogt, Nikolai Lugansky, Paul Lewis, Joshua Bell, Hilary Hahn, and Augustin Hadelich.

In the field of opera, Stéphane Denève led a new production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and Netherlands Opera at the 2019 Holland Festival. Elsewhere, he has led productions at the Royal Opera House, Glyndebourne Festival, La Scala, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Saito Kinen Festival, Gran Teatro de Liceu, La Monnaie, Deutsche Oper Am Rhein, and at the Opéra National de Paris.

As a recording artist, he has won critical acclaim for his recordings of the works of Poulenc, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel, Franck, and Connexion. He is a triple winner of the Diapason d'Or of the Year, has been shortlisted for Gramophone's Artist of the Year Award, and has won the prize for symphonic music at the International Classical Music Awards. His most recent releases include a live recording of Arthur Honegger's *Jeanne d'arc au bûcher* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and two discs of the works of Guillaume Connexion with the Brussels Philharmonic (the first of which was awarded the Diapason d'Or de l'année, Caecilia Award, and Classica Magazine's CHOC of the Year).

A graduate and prize-winner of the Paris Conservatoire, Stéphane Denève worked closely in his early career with Sir Georg Solti, Georges Prêtre and Seiji Ozawa. A gifted communicator and educator, he is committed to inspiring the next generation of musicians and listeners and has worked regularly with young people in programs such as those of the Tanglewood Music Center, New World Symphony, the Colburn School, the European Union Youth Orchestra, and the Music Academy of the West.

For further information, please visit soso.org/Deneve and stephanedeneve.com.

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 141st year with the 2020/2021 season and its second 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.

The SLSO musical family also includes two resident choruses: the St. Louis Symphony Chorus, founded in 1976; and the St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON Chorus, an ensemble founded in 1994 and focused



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on the music of African American and African cultures. The SLSO family also includes the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, founded by Conductor Laureate Leonard Slatkin in 1970.

The dynamic partnership with Stéphane Denève is seen through his visionary storytelling, which is at the heart of the SLSO's artistic profile and has resulted in stronger connections with artists, as well as the elevation of the SLSO's role as music education leader. 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 presents *St. Louis Symphony: Live at the Pulitzer*, a collaboration with the Pulitzer Arts Foundation centered on music of today. The SLSO also serves as the resident orchestra for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

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. The SLSO is also growing a digital presence that helps make music accessible to all.

This expanding content portfolio includes digital concerts filmed at Powell Hall on the SLSO's new high-definition camera system, videos series such as *Songs of America*, virtual Lunch & Learn events, and a robust online education program platform that features curriculum materials, the Instrument Playground Online, and SoundLab—a four-part video series for teachers, students, and families to create music and engage in the science of sound.

Since the arrival of Marie-Hélène Bernard as President and CEO in 2015, the SLSO has realigned its mission to making music more accessible, while fostering a culture of radical welcome and belonging for all. Building on current momentum, the SLSO serves as a convener of individuals, creators, and ideas, and is committed to building community through compelling and inclusive musical experiences. Having sharpened its longstanding focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and access, the SLSO embraces its strengths as a responsive, nimble organization while invigorating partnerships locally and elevating its presence globally. For more information, visit sls.org.

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