

TAKING FLIGHT

BEGINNING WITH A TRIBUTE TO LINDBERGH,
THE ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY EXPRESSES THE SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS.

BY EDDIE SILVA



David Robertson

DILIP VISHWANAT

Begin with a new beginning. The St. Louis Symphony's 2016-17 season, its 137th, starts with the turn of a propeller, a steep rise into uncluttered skies, and a lonely, perilous journey that changed how people lived, thought, and dreamed. Charles Lindbergh's silvery craft was christened *The Spirit of St. Louis*, and pilot and aircraft made their historic flight together across the Atlantic 90 years ago. The name "Spirit of St. Louis" also reflects upon the daring and innovation of a few St. Louisans early in the 20th century. It also speaks to St. Louis now, near the beginning of a new century amidst a whirlwind of innovation that turns more swiftly than a propeller. The St. Louis Symphony, Music Director David Robertson has remarked often, embodies that spirit: innovative, daring, risk-taking, enduring, agile, resourceful—give it an engine and a pair of wings and you'll see Paris by morning.

Kurt Weill's *The Flight of Lindbergh* opens the 2016-17 season (September 16-17). Described as a "radio cantata," it is one of the early collaborations between Weill and Bertolt Brecht, who created the classic *The Threepenny Opera* as well as other distinctive Brecht/Weill productions. KMOX's Charlie Brennan provides the radio expertise as narrator of *The Flight of Lindbergh*. This 1929 work, written in the flush of inspiration that followed Lindbergh's

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LUKE RATRAY



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achievement, will feel fresh, new, and innovative in 2016.

In the age of Beethoven, the piano was going through significant innovations of its own, becoming a much sturdier, agile, and expansive instrument, kind of like Lindbergh's plane. Beethoven took advantage of these changes with intense zeal, probably leaving a school of exasperated piano tuners in his wake. In season 2016-17, the St. Louis Symphony performs all five of Beethoven's transformative works, each one redefining what a piano concerto was and what it could be. The soloists include Yefim Bronfman (No. 3, September 24-25), Orli Shaham (No. 4, October 21-23), Stephen Hough, (No. 5, November 25-27), and new comers Rafał Blechacz (No. 2,

January 20-21) and Steven Osborne, (No. 1, March 10-11).

The St. Louis Symphony returns to Carnegie Hall to help celebrate the 70th birthday of America's premiere living composer, and a close friend of the orchestra, John Adams. David Robertson and the St. Louis Symphony and Chorus, under the direction of Amy Kaiser, return to America's most prestigious concert hall to perform *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* on March 31, 2017. As with Adams's nativity oratorio, *El Niño*, which the Symphony and Chorus performed in 2008, the composer takes an alternative view of the Christ tale, exploring the female relationships in Jesus's life. The "other Mary," Magdalene, is sung by the luminous mezzo-soprano Kelley O'Connor, for whom Adams wrote the part.

For those who recall the fantastic images created by Webster University students for the 2015 Thanksgiving weekend production of *Peter and the Wolf*, the first weekend in December offers the second collaboration between Webster artists and the St. Louis Symphony in performances of *The Nutcracker*. Tchaikovsky's classic has been inspiring artists since its premiere at St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre in 1892. It will be a treat to see how the young artists will re-imagine the work for 21st century St. Louis. With the orchestra performing Act II of the ballet, this leaves room for the music of Borodin, *Prince Igor* Overture, and a Violin Suite from two other great Tchaikovsky ballets, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*, with St. Louis Symphony Concertmaster David Halen as soloist and former Symphony Resident Conductor and Youth Orchestra Director Ward Stare returning to Powell Hall.

To conclude the 2014-15 season, the Symphony gave audiences a phenomenal concert production of Verdi's *Aida*. The audience response to *Aida*, as well as the concert production of Britten's *Benjamin Grimes*, prompted the Symphony to end 2016-17 with another grand operatic work, Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*. David Robertson conducts, again with the St. Louis

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Symphony Chorus and an ensemble of internationally acclaimed vocalists led by Alan Held, singing the role of the tormented sailor. A visual component is being considered for these shows (May 4 & 6), but Wagner's music alone is suggestively cinematic. The Dutchman is condemned to a life at sea until he finds a true love.

Lindbergh must avoid the waves, the Dutchman tries to escape them—so a concert season neatly bookends.

Other highlights throughout the season: the mesmerizing soloist Leila Josefowicz returns to perform John Adams's Violin Concerto. Josefowicz played Adams's violin symphony, *Scheherazade.2*, with the orchestra last month. Both works will be part of a Nonesuch recording for future release. The last Robertson/St. Louis Symphony/Adams/Nonesuch collaboration produced the Grammy Award-winning *City Noir*.

Pianist Jeremy Denk has not performed with the Symphony since 2011. This intelligent and insightful artist returns to perform Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23, K. 488, with Jun Märkl conducting (October 28-29). Another pianist for whom audiences have been awaiting is the captivating Russian artist Olga Kern, who last performed at Powell Hall in 2011. She plays Barber's

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Piano Concerto, with Leonard Slatkin conducting a program that features the American repertoire that made the Slatkin years with the Symphony so outstanding. Copland's *Billy the Kid* Suite, selections from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, plus a new work composed by the orchestra's Conductor Laureate make this a thoroughly entertaining program (November 11-13). Kirill Gerstein returns to reprise his performance of the original jazz band version of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, plus the popular composer's Concerto in F, with Robertson conducting (April 7-9).

Violinist Gil Shaham returns to perform a signature work for him and for the St. Louis Symphony, Korngold's Violin Concerto, which received its world premiere in St. Louis, with Vladimir Golschmann conducting Jascha Heifetz and the orchestra, in 1947. Shaham joins his brother-in-law Robertson center stage (January 13-15). The young Austrian phenom Augustin Hadelich will dazzle Symphony musicians and audiences alike when he takes on the demanding Brahms Violin Concerto, with Robertson conducting (April 29-30).

Robertson leads the orchestra through 12 weeks in the upcoming season, plus the trip to Carnegie Hall. The Music Director came to St. Louis with some idea of what the "Spirit of St. Louis" means. He's since given additional meaning to the phrase, making music that matters for St. Louis, inspiring new beginnings season after season.

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