

Peter Oundjian

Conductor



**Peter Oundjian, conductor
2026-2027 Biography**

Peter Oundjian is a dynamic presence in the conducting world with an international career leading preeminent orchestras in many of the world's major musical centers, from New York and Seattle to Amsterdam and Berlin.

The 2026-2027 season marks Oundjian's second season as Music Director of the Colorado Symphony. He conducts six programs including Mahler's Symphony No. 1 "Titan," Beethoven's Symphonies No. 5 and No. 9, and works by Gabriela Ortiz, Vivian Fung, and Kelly-Marie Murphy. In the 2025-2026 season, Oundjian conducted the Symphony in its debut performance at Carnegie Hall, joined onstage by legendary violinist and Oundjian's longtime friend Itzhak Perlman. As Music Director of the Colorado Music Festival (CMF), he continues to program and conduct concerts each summer that delight audiences with beloved masterpieces alongside music written by living composers.

Elsewhere in 2026-2027, Oundjian leads the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in an all-American program, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in a program of John Adams, Joan Tower, and Samuel Barber, and appears with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Louisville Orchestra. Internationally, Oundjian conducts the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in the Canadian Premiere of Joan Tower's Saxophone Concerto, and the ADDA Simfonica in Alicante, Spain.

Over the course of his 14-year tenure at the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, which concluded in 2018, he reinvigorated the orchestra with acclaimed innovative programming, artistic collaborations, extensive audience growth, national and international tours and several outstanding recordings, including Vaughan Williams's Orchestral Works, which garnered a Grammy nomination and a Juno Award. Under his leadership as Music Director, the Symphony underwent a transformation that significantly strengthened its presence in the world. He currently serves as Conductor Emeritus of the Symphony.

From 2012-2018, Oundjian served as Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, which he led on several international tours, including North America, China, and a European festival tour with performances at the Bregenz Festival and Dresden Festival, as well as in Innsbruck, Bergamo, Ljubljana, and elsewhere. His final appearance as the orchestra's Music Director was at the 2018 BBC Proms where he conducted Britten's epic *War Requiem*.

Oundjian served as Principal Guest Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra from 2005 to 2008 and Artistic Director of the Caramoor International Music Festival in New York from 1997 to 2007. He was also Music Director of the Amsterdam

Sinfonietta from 1998-2002. Throughout his career, Oundjian has appeared as guest conductor with the country's leading orchestras, including The Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Atlanta and San Francisco Symphonies, among others.

Oundjian has been a visiting professor at Yale University's School of Music since 1981, and has received honorary doctorates from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and The Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto.

JUNE 2026. AT THE REQUEST OF THE ARTIST – PLEASE DO NOT ALTER THIS

BIOGRAPHY

PLEASE DESTROY ALL PREVIOUSLY DATED MATERIALS

Peter Oundjian, Conductor **Critical Acclaim**



“Under Mr. Oundjian the orchestra has maintained its shine, but now it packs a firm punch as well.”

The New York Times

“In addition, you cannot underestimate the importance of Peter Oundjian to the success of this album. The former first violinist of the Tokyo String Quartet has become a world class conductor.”

Fanfare

“Peter Oundjian expertly conducted the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Choruses, and the Huddersfield Choral Society. This Prom was undoubtedly the most moving of the season for me.”

Sunday Times

“Every detail of all this shone out in Oundjian’s reading, and the superb playing for him of the musicians.”

The Herald

“By any account — orchestral standards, innovative programming, recording, and tours — Oundjian’s long tenure has been spectacularly successful.”

Musical Toronto

“Maestro Oundjian is still standing before them [the TSO] as their music director; the ship still afloat. How fortunate for Canada – and the World, for that matter that that is the case. It is clear that this is an ensemble of the very first level of excellence.”

Sound Word Sight

“Oundjian kept the ensemble tight, while at the same time infusing the work with a remarkable flexibility. The orchestra has to be commended for tackling contemporary music so brilliantly and one wishes they could have included the work’s first movement in the program.”

Palm Beach Daily News

“Interpretively, Oundjian doesn’t put a foot wrong, for his recording is cannily paced, scrupulously prepared, free of artifice and, ultimately, very moving.”

Gramophone

Features

Peter Oundjian

the Strad

January 29, 2026

The Strad – ‘Once a musician, always a musician’_ Itzhak Perlman and Peter Oundjian in conversation



A few weeks before their reunion on stage at Carnegie Hall with the Colorado Symphony, Itzhak Perlman and Peter Oundjian reflected on a relationship shaped over many decades. They spoke from different locations – Perlman from Florida, where he was leading this year’s edition of the Perlman Music Program, and Oundjian from his home in Connecticut – ahead of their joint [appearance on 1 February](#), which marks both the orchestra’s first performance at Carnegie Hall in nearly half a century and a return to shared music-making for two artists whose connection began in mentorship and has evolved into enduring friendship.

Oundjian, who built an international reputation as a violinist with the Tokyo String Quartet before turning to conducting, became the Colorado Symphony’s principal conductor in 2022 and has since assumed the role of music director.

The connection between the two musicians began when Oundjian was growing up in south London and heard Perlman play live for the first time as a boy – an experience he has often described as transformative. Formal study followed several years later, and what began as a mentor–student relationship gradually evolved into a friendship grounded in shared musical values. Over time, their paths have



intersected at key moments through teaching, collaboration and parallel careers. The Carnegie Hall programme surveys the breadth of Perlman's artistry while also reflecting the Colorado Symphony's artistic profile under Oundjian's leadership. Their conversation with US correspondent Thomas May unfolded with easy humour and an unforced warmth as they reflected on music, teaching and trust.

Peter, this story begins with you as a youngster in London. You've described the first time you heard Itzhak play – in the Franck Sonata – as a revelation. When you look back on that experience now, what stays with you?

Peter Oundjian: There are moments for all of us that feel like a reawakening – a sudden understanding of the power of music. I felt that when Itzhak came on stage and began to play that evening. We were all entranced, but it was that first phrase of the Franck that felt especially magical and otherworldly. It's hard to imagine a world in which that music didn't exist.

Listening to those opening phrases, it was as if Itzhak was playing his violin and everyone in the hall was singing with it. I remember thinking: if I could ever do anything half as good as that, I would be happy. I went backstage to meet him – he was probably 22 by then; I was 12.

Itzhak Perlman: Now that I'm 80, my next recital in Sarasota will include the Franck Sonata. So clearly, everything has changed. *[laughter]*

After that initial epiphany, did you become obsessed with every recording Itzhak released?

Peter Oundjian: Absolutely. These were the days of the great LPs – beautiful objects in themselves. More importantly, Itzhak

impressed upon me the importance of practising. He says it to everyone, seeming to be joking – 'Remember to practise' – but it's not just a line. It's the most important advice there is. None of us gets anywhere without it. We have some colleagues who used to pretend they never practised, but that's rubbish.

Itzhak Perlman: The older I get, the more I realise how much practising helps. It really does. You've got to keep the old fingers going – it sounds funny, but it's true.

Itzhak, looking back on your role as a mentor, what strikes you as having changed over the years – and what has remained constant?

Itzhak Perlman: With my wife Toby, I started the Perlman Music Program more than 30 years ago, working with exceptionally gifted young string players. What hasn't changed is how valuable teaching is to an artist.

I love seeing students grow over time – say they start at 13, then look back at 18 and recognise the progress they've made. What matters most to me is when they say the experience changed their life. That means more than being able to say 'now I'm a terrific fiddle player'.

Peter, I'm sure that you must have experienced some of our alums in the orchestras that you've conducted?

Peter Oundjian: Absolutely. In fact, the last two violin appointments we made at the Colorado Symphony – principal second and assistant concertmaster – were both PMP graduates.

At some point your relationship moved beyond teacher and student and became a friendship. Do either of you remember when that shift happened?

Itzhak Perlman *[mock serious]*: Peter, you answer that. I don't think it ever happened.

Peter Oundjian: In 2003, when I had just been appointed music director of the Toronto Symphony, Itzhak came to play the Mozart G major Concerto. We were staying at the same hotel, on the eighth floor. At three in the morning, the fire alarm went off. Incredibly, there was no lift, so I ran to his room and asked whether I should carry him downstairs or investigate.

He told me to first find out what was happening. It turned out to be a false alarm,



and when I rushed back up – imagining him in a panic – he greeted me with a fantastically funny joke. Somewhere in that moment, the relationship shifted.

Another time, years later, I had foolishly agreed to play the Bach Double Concerto with him and found my hand in terrible shape. I thought I had made the most terrible mistake. I remember calling Itzhak while I was on a long drive, in real despair. He spent maybe 45 minutes on the phone with me, calmly talking me through it, saying, ‘Let’s think about this carefully. I think you can do it’.

It was 45 minutes of the most beautiful, calming advice. That was real mentorship. By then I was maybe 55 years old – and he was still my teacher. Once a teacher, always a teacher.

Itzhak Perlman: By the way, I sent you a bill for that phone call. You never paid it.

[laughter]

Peter Oundjian: I’ll settle it after the Dvořák Romance – depending on how it goes.

Itzhak, how does Peter’s chamber music background influence the way you make music together?

Itzhak Perlman: Chamber music involves so many things that are essential for making music – breathing, listening and feeling that whatever you do, there is some sort of unity with another person, or a group. That’s why playing with Peter has always been a cinch. I don’t have to worry about anything. I know he’s going to be with me, because we basically speak the same way.

Peter, when you moved from the Tokyo String Quartet to the podium, how did what you learnt from Itzhak guide that transformation?

Peter Oundjian: Probably the most important thing I learnt from the podium

was how powerful words are. You can offend people very quickly, but you can also bring people’s energy together if you do it well.

Having observed the way Itzhak chooses his words – whether when teaching, giving masterclasses, or even when speaking to an orchestra – was enormously instructive. Although I should say that Itzhak does that very rarely. Some soloists talk directly to the orchestra; Itzhak will almost always whisper a request to me instead.

Even so, the choice of words in those moments was an inspiration to me, because it showed how you can demand the highest level while speaking in a way that conveys real respect for the players. That was something extremely useful for me.

Itzhak Perlman: What you just described is also a way of behaving. Even one on one, when you’re teaching a student, how you choose your words matters. You can criticise, but you do it in such a way that you involve the student in the process of learning rather than just criticising them.

Toby always says that when something goes wrong, don’t blame the player – blame the teacher. Because obviously the teacher said something that wasn’t quite translatable, so you have to redo it. I still do that now. When something isn’t quite right, I always describe what the student did.

For example, you don’t say, ‘That’s boring’. You say, ‘It sounds very relaxed. I wonder if you can put a little more energy into it, so that it has a different character’. That way, nothing you say is negative – it’s constructive.

As a conductor, it’s the same thing. Orchestra members are very smart and can smell when something is right, and they can smell it when there’s even a hint of arrogance.

There are still things about conducting that are mysterious to me. How is it possible for three or four conductors to give exactly the same downbeat and get a completely different sound from the orchestra?

Peter Oundjian: You’re completely right, it is astonishing.

How did you decide on this Carnegie Hall programme, which brings together strands from Itzhak’s career and from Peter’s work with the Colorado Symphony?

Itzhak Perlman: I consider this to be a fun programme. Part of it is almost like a

recital with orchestra – with the exception of the Dvořák Romance, which is usually played just with orchestra and which I've always loved. It's nice that there are orchestral arrangements of the Kreisler recital pieces, so we can have a wonderful time.

Of course, *Schindler's List* has become my signature piece, and there's also the John Williams's arrangement of a Carlos Gardel tango from the film *Scent of a Woman*. That's a lot of fun too.

Peter, you're also conducting the New York premiere of John Adams's *Frenzy* and *Pictures at an Exhibition*. What does it mean to place those works alongside Itzhak's repertoire?

Peter Oundjian: I've recorded a lot of John's pieces – he's a good friend – and he described *Frenzy* to me as a kind of mini-symphony in one movement. It's absolutely brilliant, right at the top level of his work, and a phenomenal showpiece for an orchestra that plays contemporary music fearlessly.

Pictures at an Exhibition offers a different kind of magic. The music is so beautiful, and the colours of Ravel give an orchestra enormous scope for expression and pacing. I'm always fascinated by the fact that the original paintings were so small – everyone imagines the Great Gate of Kiev as monumental, but the original piece that inspired Mussorgsky is a tiny sketch. What Mussorgsky and then Ravel made of that exhibition is extraordinary.

Itzhak, when you watch Peter on the podium, do you sense the violinist still shaping the music?

Itzhak Perlman: When we play together, Peter knows the direction of certain phrases, where they lead. Most of the time, he probably knows the pieces himself and has played them on the violin. That takes away

all the worry and keeps the fun of making music – breathing together, going in the same direction, being on the same wavelength. There's always that sense that we're going to move forward together and just have a good time.

After everything you've shared over the years – music, friendship, teaching, and life beyond the concert hall – what still makes you curious about one another as artists?

Peter Oundjian: I would point to two things. First, that Itzhak, in his early to mid-20s, made a conscious choice to be a mentor. At a time when he already had an unbelievable career and could have gone anywhere and played whatever he wanted, he chose instead to teach – not just a couple of students, but a whole class at Brooklyn College. My admiration for that generosity, and for that commitment to passing on a God-given talent to others, is profound. I find it hugely inspiring.

And when Itzhak plays, it's always poetry. There's always a reason for what he's doing. He never uses the music to display his talent – he's a vehicle for the power, spirituality and beauty of the music. That's something I've always tried to live up to.

Itzhak Perlman: Well, I agree with everything you said wholeheartedly. [*chuckling*]

But seriously, I'm always amazed by the transition you made from chamber music to conducting. For me it's very simple: once a musician, always a musician. It doesn't matter what you do – the relationship to music stays the same. I tell my students that we're lucky to make a living doing something we love so deeply.

Whenever I play with Peter, I can always feel that familiarity with what music can do. You're not fighting the music, you're enveloping it with knowledge, love and spirituality. It's just wonderful.

Peter Oundjian

musicalamerica WORLDWIDE

September 10, 2024

Oundjian on the Up and Up at Colorado Symphony

By Nicholas Beard



The Colorado Symphony has announced the elevation of Peter Oundjian to the post of music director. The Canadian American maestro, currently serving as the orchestra's principal conductor, will embark on a new four-year contract with the 2025-26 season.

"For many years, it has been my great pleasure to work with the extraordinary musicians of the Colorado Symphony, first as a frequent guest conductor and most recently as their principal conductor," said Oundjian. "This new chapter is a thrilling opportunity to deepen our connection with our community, innovate, and reach new artistic heights as an orchestra. I look forward to building on our shared successes and bringing dynamic and inspiring performances to Colorado audiences in the years to come."

Oundjian, who became principal conductor ahead of the 2022-23 season, oversaw their recovery from the pandemic. A tenacious fundraiser, he's attracted artists like Yo-Yo Ma and Itzhak Perlman to engage in special projects in Denver.

In his new role, it is expected that Oundjian will play a more in-depth role in artistic planning. "Peter's exceptional artistry, visionary leadership, and deep commitment to our musicians and community have been evident throughout his tenure as principal conductor," said President & CEO Mark Cantrell.

"His promotion marks an exciting new era for our orchestra. We look forward to the innovative and inspiring performances that Peter will undoubtedly bring, and we are confident that his leadership will continue to elevate the Colorado Symphony to new artistic heights."

Born in Toronto and educated in England, Oundjian studied violin at London's Royal College of Music. Continuing his studies at the Juilliard School with Ivan Galamian, Itzhak Perlman, and Dorothy DeLay, he also minored in conducting. After spending 14 years as first violinist of the Tokyo String Quartet, his international conducting career took off.



Oundjian with the Colorado Symphony



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High-profile appointments have included 14 years as music director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra where he was credited with reimagining the TSO's programming and building its international profile through tours to Europe and the U.S. A series of recordings won them a Grammy nomination in 2018 and a Juno award in 2019. During his six years as music director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, he was recognized for the kind of collaborative programming that it is hoped he will bring to Denver.

"Since 2022, [Peter's] remarkable musicality, dedication, and vision as our principal conductor have profoundly impacted our orchestra," said Chief Artistic Officer Anthony Pierce. "Elevating Peter to music director acknowledges his exceptional leadership and the deep connection he has fostered with our musicians and audiences across Colorado."

In 2019, Oundjian presented his first season as music director of the Colorado Music Festival in Boulder where he's credited with innovative programming, new commissioning, and generally raising the festival's profile. It's a role in which he intends to continue alongside his commitments to the symphony in Denver.

Peter Oundjian

THE DENVER POST

June 30, 2024

In Boulder, moving classical forward

Music director Peter Oundjian is driving Colorado Music Festival into the future; season begins July 5
By Ray Mark Rinaldi



This week's opening of the 2024 Colorado Music Festival comes with the announcement that music director Peter Oundjian has signed a new, five-year contract, extending a collaboration with the Boulder-based concert presenter that dates back to 2018. It is very big news indeed; perhaps historic.

Remember that Oundjian is also the principal conductor with the Colorado Symphony in Denver where he takes up the baton for key performances and helps guide the programs that the ensemble plays over the course of its entire season. The maestro has been there full-time since 2022 and it is, by nearly all accounts, such a happy

relationship that he is likely to remain there for years to come.

Oundjian's deep involvement with two of the top three classical entities in the state (let's say the third is the Aspen Music Festival, artistically speaking), and over such a long period of time, makes it hard to imagine another individual who will have more personal influence over classical music in Colorado in the first half of the 21st century.

Of course, anything can happen in show business, but Oundjian is building a legacy here that will be hard to match. He is up to it.



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Oundjian is an international figure. He was born in Toronto and raised in Surrey, England, and started his career as a teenager playing concerts across Europe. He studied at the Juilliard School in New York and gained wide fame during his 14-year gig playing violin with the globe-trotting Tokyo String Quartet.

Then, facing an injury to his left hand, he made an unexpected pivot to conducting. Most famously, he helmed the Toronto Symphony Orchestra for 14 years, part of a podium career that has had him working with top-level orchestras across several continents.

He still does those duties far and wide, but he is also now a Coloradan. He lives here and works these two key jobs, and if that does not make him one of us, consider this: He suffered significant injuries to his ribcage last winter due to a skiing accident. He has earned his Colorado badge.

“It’s dangerous sometimes, but it’s lovable,” Oundjian, 68, said in an interview last week. Oundjian is a busy guy, but he insists his patchwork conducting career makes sense and that his dual roles in Colorado are complementary.

The Colorado Symphony tends to program in a way that is traditional and formal and built for mass consumption. Boettcher Concert Hall, where it mainly performs, has 2,700 seats and the orchestra aims to fill them as much as possible over the course of the three-day weekend concert lineups that make up its major offerings.

That orchestra programs classical music more than 38 weeks a year, and Oundjian gets plenty of help with the artistic work.

“We have fabulous collaborations, and I can bring in, you know, Marin occasionally, or Andrew, or Jeff, and all my friends,” he said. He is referring to Marin Alsop, Jeffrey Kahane and Andrew Litton; all three are past conductors in Denver and longtime associates of Oundjian.

Oundjian conducts a greater percentage of shows in Boulder, but the setting is more intimate and the season just five weeks long, so he gets to play at a different level. During his time there, the fest’s standing has improved considerably and it has developed a signature style of presenting and commissioning work that has fewer commercial pressures.

“I think it’s become the symbol of the festival that we focus very much on keeping a balance between music of yesterday, but also very much the 21st century,” he said.

One good example this season is the July 21 premiere of a commissioned concerto written by of-the-moment composer Gabriela Lena Frank. It is the rare concerto to feature a string quartet in the “soloist” position. Boulder’s Grammy-winning Takács Quartet will be featured.

The evening’s titles also include Florence Price’s 1951 “Adoration,” arranged for strings, and Joan Tower’s 1991 Concerto for Orchestra. That means the show centers around three female composers and pieces that are generally unfamiliar to audiences. Tower, who is 85, will be in attendance at the concert, held at Chautauqua Auditorium.

Oundjian, who has been pushing the composer’s work internationally, has confidence the local crowds will show up. “This seems to me to be a part of the country where there’s a rapidly increasing interest in the arts,” he said. “The audiences are just so responsive.”

This year’s fest will also feature two versions of “Scheherazade.” The first is the well-known Rimsky-Korsakov piece, set for July 25. The other is the lesser-appreciated take by Maurice Ravel, set for Aug. 4. It is the kind of daring duplication that challenges the box office but delights music fans by giving them a deeper understanding of the source material.

Oundjian has taken the adventurous step of programming a tribute to two composers on the same night. The July 14 concert celebrates Bruckner’s 200th birthday and Schoenberg’s 150th birthday.

Bruckner’s 19th-century romanticism and Schoenberg’s 20th-century dissonance could not be more different. Oundjian believes the program, despite its variety, will be “deeply spiritual and extraordinarily beautiful.”

And it might only be possible at a place like the Colorado Music Festival, where a bit of adventurous music curation, conceived and conducted by a music director on a mission, can make for a unique Sunday night of entertainment.

“This is just so odd and unusual, I wanted to give it a try,” said Oundjian. “But, I can’t imagine anyone will regret having come to it.”

Peter Oundjian



PERSON PLACE THING

WITH RANDY COHEN

October 19, 2024

507: Peter Oundjian

By Randy Cohen



This conductor, the music director of the Colorado Music Festival, loved his boyhood summers in Spain. "It was a beautiful place to practice undisturbed and a fantastic place to play soccer, because soccer was my great love, violin and soccer. And then we discovered water skiing." Mozart, same way: violin, soccer, water skiing. The making of a musician.



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Reviews

Peter Oundjian

the Strad

April 17, 2026

Itzhak Perlman (violin) Colorado Symphony Orchestra/Peter Oundjian

By Leah Hollingsworth



The month of February opened in New York City with a memorable concert at Carnegie Hall: Itzhak Perlman performing a ‘violin recital with orchestra’ (his own words) with the Colorado Symphony conducted by Peter Oundjian. Once the first violinist of the Tokyo Quartet, Oundjian studied with Perlman before focal dystonia ended his playing career. Since becoming a conductor, he has shared the stage with Perlman around the globe, the warmth and generosity of their friendship evident in both performances and their friendly banter.

After the New York premiere of John Adams’s *Frenzy*, wonderfully executed with tight ensemble and energetic string playing by the Colorado Symphony, Perlman joined for Dvořák’s *Romance*, which was performed with tremendous grace. Perlman was clearly enjoying himself in the three Kreisler pieces too. The Theme from the film *Schindler’s List* – by John Williams and originally performed by Perlman – had a real depth of beauty, and impossibly straight bowing. Gardel’s lively *Tango*, *Por una Cabeza* for violin and orchestra closed Perlman’s time on stage – and anything that Perlman might have been lacking in chops at this point in his career, he more than made up for with charisma and generosity.

The concert concluded with a dramatic performance of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, featuring sensitive woodwind playing, a luscious string sound and beautiful brass chorales.

Peter Oundjian



The American South's voice for Classical Music

June 8, 2025

Atlanta Symphony wraps season with Shostakovich's sardonic spark, Mahler's symphonic sweep

By Mark Gresham

In a season finale befitting its stature, the **Atlanta Symphony Orchestra** closed its 2024–25 subscription series June 5 and 7 at Symphony Hall under guest conductor **Peter Oundjian**, delivering a program that juxtaposed Shostakovich's sardonic brilliance with the vastness of Mahler's *Symphony No. 7*. It was a lengthy concert.

Given the *Seventh Symphony's* total 77-minute duration, it could have stood alone as the entire program without intermission. But we got a much better, more delightfully engaging concert with the inclusion of Shostakovich.

From the first notes of the evening's opening work, Dmitri Shostakovich's *Concerto No. 1 for Piano, Trumpet, and Strings, Op. 35*, the ensemble displayed characteristic agility and humor. Pianist **Inon Barnatan**, a favorite of Atlanta audiences, dazzled with virtuosic clarity, weaving through the concerto's rapid-fire keyboard passages with both precision and playful inflection. His timing and tone complemented the understated wit inherent to Shostakovich's score. **Michael Tiscione**, acting principal/associate principal trumpet of the ASO, matched Barnatan's flair in trademark trumpet flourishes, their interaction filled with exuberant energy. The string orchestra held taut, supplying tight-knit accompaniment amidst the concerto's relentless punch lines. The performance captured the composer's intended "snarky and rapid-fire" character.

Despite its modest forces and roughly 20-minute runtime, Shostakovich's *Concerto*

No. 1 feels larger than life. Written when the composer was just 26, the piece brims with mischievous subversion, blurring the boundaries between concerto and satire, vaudeville and virtuosity. The second movement's lyrical depth offered a surprising wellspring of sincerity amid the surrounding irreverence, with Barnatan giving its broad, singing lines a fluid, almost vocal quality. Meanwhile, the finale erupted in full ironic display, quoting Beethoven's "Rage Over a Lost Penny" amongst other pieces and tossing musical jokes like confetti. Oundjian wisely kept textures lean, allowing the soloists' interplay to remain central and avoiding the temptation to overplay its theatricality.

After intermission came Mahler's towering *Symphony No. 7*, subtitled "Song of the Night." Oundjian marshaled a large orchestra with structural authority and tonal energy that had more edge than anticipated. The opening movement folded darkness and drama into a brooding tapestry. The three inner movements—the "Nachtmusiken" framing the "Scherzo"—were painted in distinct *chiaroscuro*. With its rapid rhythms and stark contrasts, the "Scherzo" movement in the center spun into eerie carnival energy before subsiding. The "Rondo-Finale" thundered with rhythmic propulsion, brilliant brass, and percussion leading to a raucous, celebratory conclusion where the final fanfares landed with splash and radiance: a night made day. Musically, they felt less like triumph and more as exultation earned. Oundjian paced it with



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urgent momentum yet refrained from overwhelming the long-range structure—a hallmark of effective Mahler interpretation. Atlanta’s choice of Mahler’s *Seventh* as its season curtain call aligns with a broader pattern: several major Southern orchestras ended their 2024–25 seasons with a Mahler symphony. Among them are [Houston](#) (*No. 3*), [Dallas](#) (*No. 2*), and Nashville (*No. 8*). But of all Mahler symphonies, the *Seventh* is often overlooked due to its scale and complexity. Yet as one of the least performed of his symphonies, it leaves a lasting impression due to its eerie thematic depth.

Season finales are often about spectacle. Here, Oundjian and the ASO achieved both spectacle and introspection, delivering a performance that held true to the *Seventh*’s paradoxes: profound and playful, obscure and illuminating. It was an evening that reminded audiences why this Mahler symphony—despite its comparative rarity—is a vital part of the repertoire

Peter Oundjian



March 16, 2025

Peter Oundjian bridges the centuries in Seattle

By Erica Miner



[Peter Oundjian](#) is familiar to Seattle Symphony audiences for his masterful conducting, but he also is known internationally as an outstanding violinist, professor of music and artistic advisor. His inventive program last weekend represented three youthful elements: one of Mozart's most sublime piano concertos performed by prodigious talent, [Jan Lisiecki](#); a new work by up-and-coming American composer Brian Raphael Nabors; and Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*. The program was creative, though overly long.

Nabors found inspiration for his 18-minute *Upon Daybreak* in Maya Angelou's poem, *A Brave, Startling Truth*. Co-commissioned by the Berkeley, Detroit, Seattle Symphony orchestras and the Boston Landmarks Orchestra, the harmonically colorful, socially relevant work represents the composer's vision of the natural world. Joyful vibrations interspersed with melodic interest depict his unflinching optimism and hopes for the dawn of a new day of peacemaking.

Starting with driving rhythms, the piece moves forward energetically, with brief interludes of slower, intriguing sounds emitting from pizzicati and harmonics in the strings. The well-played string solos in the

following episode, marked by tension, add color and texture, transitioning to a spirited final section that evokes the urgency heard in the beginning. Oundjian brought out the buoyancy and upbeat spirit of the work with his snappy gestures and made the most of the individual contributions from the relatively small ensemble, with an exceptionally active percussion section and French horns playing in the "up" position.

Lisiecki's interpretations and technique speak to a maturity beyond his age. His approach to Mozart's *Piano Concerto no. 22 in E flat major*, K.482, combined an impeccable technical expertise with the vocalicity of *Le nozze di Figaro*, written shortly after this concerto.

In the first movement, Lisiecki played with the care, delicacy and religiosity one hopes for in Mozart: exacting, yet emotional. His technical fluency made his performance seem effortless, but not easy. The melancholy *Andante* came off as boldly expressive but not overdramatic. The final *Allegro* sparkled with wit and incisiveness. Lisiecki's cadenzas throughout went beyond technical expertise to an almost heavenly level. Oundjian's engaging personality came across as he emphasized the joyous nature of the piece.

More than a century after its revolutionary premiere in 1913, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, assessed by its first audience as "a blasphemous attempt to destroy music as an art", remains controversial yet representative of early 20th-century sensibilities. The work presents an opportunity for conductors to demonstrate their technical proficiency and ability to

keep an ensemble together throughout the extreme rhythmic changes and dynamic intensities. Oundjian used his outstanding precision to achieve a transparency that is rare in this dense orchestration, though he

seemed less comfortable in this piece than in the previous two. The orchestra displayed the ever-increasing virtuosity that continues to impress.



February 10, 2025

Augustin Hadelich and Yale Philharmonia perform a stirring Britten Violin Concerto

By Daniele Sahr



The range of offerings at Carnegie Hall is proof of how vibrant the world of music is, and nothing says that more than hearing a university orchestra with its young and dedicated upcoming professionals. In January, the Yale Philharmonia returned to Carnegie Hall for the first time in fifteen years. Under the direction of Peter Oundjian, the ensemble filled the stage not only in number but with a masterful sound that unfolded with a dedication to signature interpretations and support for the soloists.

The transitory nature of a university orchestra – concertmaster, stand partners and section leaders change from year to year – requires a unique blend of steadfast and flexible leadership, and Oundjian offers exactly that. He inspires, and he draws on the strengths of this inherently short-lived relationship. With a solidarity in the works and an accessible style of interpretation, Oundjian clearly ignites a passionate dialogue with the musicians.

The freshness of the Yale Philharmonia's energy permeated the evening. Oundjian

made a bull's-eye decision on how to best pair a work with the ensemble by starting with Joan Tower's *Suite from Concerto for Orchestra*. Long-time friends, Oundjian received Tower's blessing to condense the suite to a shorter ten minutes, which not only gave it an opening spot on the concert program but was an act of homage to this twentieth-century canonical work. The shortened version of Tower's *Concerto for Orchestra* sustained the work's breadth and gravitas but still captured the orchestral sequencing and deliberate hustle of unfolding structures in her signature landscape.

Britten's Violin Concerto graced the evening as another nod towards youthfulness in music: Britten was 25 when he wrote this piece marked by emotion and questions about the meaning of grief. Violinist Augustin Hadelich unpacked the work's density by making sense of contrasting motifs and themes with brilliance and technical prowess. His approach freed the listener to experience this unconventional concerto's thematic meaning and curious constructs. Hadelich's refreshing style suited the intentions of the Yale Philharmonia and ushered in the kind of soloist playing that is much needed in concert halls today.

Hadelich proved to be a most generous soloist, for he returned after thunderous applause to play a pre-intermission encore: the *Andante* from Bach's Sonata in A major. Balanced and lyrical with perfect pauses in the phrasing, it was not only a heartfelt



gesture but a musical necessity that provided the audience with some balm after unpacking Britten's earnest, angst-ridden piece.

To close the evening, Oundjian chose a crowd-pleaser that resonated with the theme of youthful creativity – Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, written in the composer's twenties. This theatrical work showcased the Yale Philharmonia's exuberance and range. From the elegant to the macabre, string sections both swooned in song and frightened with gutsy verve and,

in the third movement, the oboist played a mellifluous line from the Carnegie balcony in response to the English horn on the stage which pulled awed gasps from the audience. Maestro Oundjian has placed himself in the role of ambassador to youth and leader of cross-generational collaboration, similar to what Pierre Boulez did in the latter half of his career. There is much to admire in directors and leading musicians who foster relationships across generations, and Yale Philharmonia's performance with Oundjian and Hadelich was testament to that.

Peter Oundjian

ClassicalSource

January 27, 2025

Yale Philharmonia at Carnegie Hall – Peter Oundjian conducts John Tower and *Symphonie fantastique* – Augustin Hadelich plays Britten's Violin Concerto

By Susan Stempleski



Thirteen years after their last visit to Carnegie Hall, and for the first time ever under conductor Peter Oundjian, the Yale Philharmonia returned with a varied program featuring Yale School of Music faculty violinist Augustin Hadelich performing alongside the 114-member student ensemble. The evening opened with the world premiere of the conductor's 12-minute reduction of Joan Tower's 1991 Concerto for Orchestra. The condensed version retains many elements of the half-hour original, most notably its contrasting colors, virtuosic interplay among soloists and individual sections, and suspenseful sense of urgency. Oundjian elicited a rhythmically tight, highly spirited performance, inviting the composer to the stage at the end.

Benjamin Britten's somber Violin Concerto dates from 1938-39, when Britain was under threat from Germany. However, it was not World War II but the Spanish Civil War that inspired the composition. Britten, a fervent pacifist, was deeply shaken by that conflict, which took the lives of some of his friends,

and the work can be viewed as a requiem for those who died. Hadelich and the orchestra's passionately eloquent and powerful performance, brought that message home.

With wide ranging dynamics, seamless segues between ardent elegiac passages and agonizing ruminations, Hadelich effortlessly navigated the many technical hurdles found in the music while maintaining purity of tone. After dispatching the delicate high-register passages of the lyrical first movement with extraordinary grace, he powered through the scherzo-like second with energy to spare, often bowing with his right hand while plucking strings with his left. A heartrending extended solo cadenza connected the central and final movements; the long and poignant passacaglia finale, building to a climatic conclusion.

Oundjian and the Philharmonia musicians provided the soloist with nuanced, highly responsive support throughout, adding depth to the musical texture without overshadowing his playing. As an encore, an evocative account of the Andante from Bach's Solo Violin Sonata No.2 in A minor (BWV 1003).

After intermission came a highly dramatic interpretation of Berlioz's epic *Symphonie fantastique*. Oundjian maintained unusually tight control throughout, clearly conveying the narrative flow and drawing bright, characterful playing from the eager, attentive players. Starting with the soaring violin and flute statement of the *idée fixe* theme in the opening *movement*, the orchestra vividly captured the mood of each

movement – the dreamlike longing of the first, the gaiety of the ball scene, the pastoral calm of the third, the chilling feeling of the fourth, and finally, the unsettling chaos of the Witches' Sabbath finale where the music was most intense.

The host of diabolical sounds – the eerie *col legno* strings, the tolling of the off-stage bells, the ominous 'Dies irae', and the frantic fugue – all delivered with precise ensemble playing, brought the compelling performance and the evening to a fiery end.

Peter Oundjian



Atlanta's voice for classical and post-classical music

October 28, 2023

“The Elements” and Bruch highlight Joshua Bell’s dazzling performance with the Atlanta Symphony and Oundjian

By Mark Gresham



One or two times in a given season, the **Atlanta Symphony Orchestra** presents a classical “special” concert, a one-night-only event typically featuring a super-star performer guaranteed to sell out—big names like violinist Itzhak Perlman, cellist Yo-Yo Ma or, in the case of this past Wednesday night at Symphony Hall, violinist **Joshua Bell**.

Guest conductor **Peter Oundjian**, an excellent choice for this occasion, led the orchestra with Bell as soloist in what—quite unsurprisingly—was a splendid performance all around.

But let’s take things out of program order, jumping to the entry of the featured star of the evening, Joshua Bell, as soloist in Max Bruch’s *Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26*

Bell’s performance was nearly impeccable, surpassing even Itzhak Perlman’s performance with the ASO in a May 2022 “special” with conductor Nicola Luisotti, according to one listener at intermission. And I concur.

But quite curiously, this *Concerto* seems to get played all-too-frequently on the ASO stage: Before Perlman, in January 2021 violinist Randall Goosby played it with the ASO led by conductor Gemma New, filmed in a mid-pandemic live-streamed concert. Step back one more year to March 2020, with Yoel Levi conducting the ASO, when Pinchas Zukerman played it, substituting for Itzhak Perlman, who cancelled due to travel concerns over the COVID-19 coronavirus. (The same day as the concert, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a pandemic.)

So why the Bruch Concerto yet again? That question looms larger in light of the music that followed intermission, when Bell returned to the stage to solo again to play three “selections” from his commissioning project, *The Elements*.

The brilliant star violinist presented excerpts from *The Elements* in this concert with the ASO and Oundjian. He commissioned the composition from five leading well-known American composers in 2019-23: **Jake Heggie, Jennifer Higdon, Edgar Meyer, Jessie Montgomery, and Kevin Putz**. The result was a set of short pieces, each about six to eight minutes in length, devoted to the five Aristotelian classical elements: “earth,” “water,” “fire,” “air,” and “ether” (or in this musical realization, “space”). Each composer wrote and dedicated an individual movement to an element, with a return of “Earth” in a reprise and finale.

What we got on Wednesday night was only three of the movements: “Earth,” “Water,” and “Fire.”

It began with “Earth” by Kevin Putz, played with simultaneous longing and confidence radiating from Bell’s 1713 Gibson ex-Huberman Stradivarius violin.

“Water” by Edgar Meyer seemed to most closely evoke titular associations, with brisk, fluid runs in the solo violin over the orchestra’s sonic rapids and waterfalls.

“Fire” by Jake Heggie initially burst forth in sparks, then a smoldering heat developed into a lively blazing fire. It was an exciting piece from beginning to end, and Bell was visibly having a good time.

What was exceptionally noticeable about this programming of these “selections,” however, especially given the ASO’s conspicuous efforts at DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), the two “elements” left out were those where the music was composed by women: “Air” by Jennifer Higdon, who spent her childhood years growing up in Atlanta, and “Space” by Jessie Montgomery (which reputedly poses the violin soloist as the Sun and groups in the orchestra as planets orbiting around it).

Which brings the previous question again to mind: Why program the Bruch *Violin Concerto* and just the three “selections” when we could have heard the entire of *The Elements* instead, as did the audiences in Hamburg, Germany, in the September 1 world premiere with the NDR Elbphilharmonie and conductor Alan Gilbert, and New Yorkers at the end of September with the New York Philharmonic and conductor Jaap van Zweden at Lincoln Center’s David Geffen Hall?

Did those making the programming decisions seriously think Atlantans would not show up if Bell played a complete new work he commissioned? Or is it that Bruch has somehow become an “obligation” for any “special concert” featuring a violinist? The former may have been partly true back in the 20th century; the latter is an absolutely wrong-headed way to think about programming (which is not the same issue as Bell’s superb performance of the Bruch).

Bell’s appearance within the program was bookended by more extremely familiar repertoire, both so familiar that both were most recently played in the ASO’s outdoor “Parks” concert at Piedmont Park’s Oak Hill on September 30: Bedřich Smetana’s “Vltava” (“The Moldau”) from *Má vlast*, which opened Wednesday’s special, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Capriccio espagnol, Op. 31*, which closed the concert. Oundjian brought out the best in the orchestra in both of these popular works.

Oundjian is a well-respected conductor who repeatedly appears as a guest with the ASO, most recently leading the orchestra in its 2022/23 season-opening concert in September 2022. (Although it was Nathalie Stutzmann’s debut season as music director, she did not conduct the opening concert.) Other recent appearances on the ASO podium include May 2021 and March 2019. The thought does come to mind: Were circumstances not as they currently are at the ASO, Oundjian would make a really outstanding music director. Ah, but a little late.