

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## MUSIC DIRECTOR KWAMÉ RYAN AND THE CHARLOTTE SYMPHONY ANNOUNCE THE 2026–27 SEASON

FEATURING BEETHOVEN'S NINTH, A WORLD PREMIERE INSPIRED BY JOHN LEWIS, AND  
THE ANNUAL GALA WITH VIOLINIST JOSHUA BELL

### SEASON-LONG ARTISTIC EXPLORATION: RESILIENCE

Anchored by Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the season explores themes of heroism, transcendence, triumph over adversity, and the strength of the human spirit

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### CSO SPOTLIGHT ARTIST: LEVI TAYLOR

Season Opener: *One Foot After The Other*

WORLD PREMIERE of Newly Co-Commissioned Work

Inspired by civil rights leader John Lewis's call to make "good trouble"

Expanded Residency Includes Student Engagement and Educational Initiatives

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### ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

Gershwin's Concerto in F with Pianist Michelle Cann

U.S. Premiere of Calliope Tsoupaki's *Aurora*

Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* | Stravinsky's *Petrushka* | Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*

The Iconic Ninth Symphonies of Beethoven, Schubert, and Bruckner

The Music of Tina Turner | *Back to the Future* in Concert

**February 24, 2026 | Charlotte, NC** – The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra announced its 95th season, Music Director Kwamé Ryan's third at the artistic helm, centered on a season-spanning artistic exploration of resilience. Anchored by Beethoven's Ninth Symphony — a timeless testament to joy, unity, and triumph over adversity — the 2026–27 season brings together contemporary voices, including CSO Spotlight Artist Levi Taylor, renowned guest artists, and repertoire spanning centuries to reflect on heroism, hope, and the resilience of the human spirit, complemented by a curated exploration of the music of Ludwig van Beethoven, marking the 200th year since his death.

Highlights of the 2026–27 season include a special performance by internationally acclaimed violinist Joshua Bell at the CSO's Annual Gala; the World Premiere of a newly co-commissioned work by Spotlight Artist Levi Taylor; the U.S. premiere of Calliope Tsoupaki's *Aurora*; and beloved and monumental works of the orchestral repertoire, including Gershwin's

Concerto in F with pianist Michelle Cann, Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony, Strauss's orchestral showpiece *Ein Heldenleben*, and the iconic Ninth Symphonies of Beethoven, Schubert, and Bruckner. The season also features popular programs showcasing the Orchestra's versatility across the Pops, Movies, and Family Series, many of which are conducted by Resident Conductor Christopher James Lees, including The Music of Tina Turner, *Back to the Future* in Concert, and The Music of *Harry Potter*.

"As I look ahead to my third season with the Charlotte Symphony, I'm increasingly inspired by the artistic momentum we are building together," said Music Director Kwamé Ryan. "Many of these works speak to resilience — humanity's enduring will to challenge, overcome, and transcend. Alongside beloved works that have shaped the orchestral tradition, it is especially meaningful for me to champion new voices, including that of CSO Spotlight Artist Levi Taylor, whose music reaches beyond the conventional boundaries of 'classical' music."

"From Beethoven to Tina Turner, cinematic scores and new commissions, the 2026–27 season celebrates the full spectrum of orchestral music," said President & CEO David Fisk. "As the Charlotte Symphony marks its 95th season, we invite you to join us and experience what Maestro Ryan and your Orchestra are building right here in Charlotte."

### **THE CLASSICAL SERIES** **Presented by Bank of America**

Fresh from his recent Grammy Award win, Music Director Kwamé Ryan brings an energized and visionary approach to programming, crafting concerts that are bold and thoughtful, blending tradition with contemporary perspectives. Audiences will experience his signature style and artistry firsthand as he leads the Charlotte Symphony in six Classical Series programs and the Annual Gala. The CSO also welcomes renowned guest conductors and artists who bring their own unique perspectives to this dynamic season.

Maestro Ryan and the Charlotte Symphony will be joined by international superstar violinist Joshua Bell for the Annual Gala on November 7, 2026. The program will include Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 and Schumann's Symphony No. 4.

### **SEASON-LONG ARTISTIC EXPLORATION: RESILIENCE**

The 2026–27 season explores resilience: the human capacity to persevere, overcome adversity, and find connection and hope. Anchored by Beethoven's Ninth Symphony — a testament to joy and unity despite the composer's struggle with deafness — the Orchestra presents a rich range of works spanning centuries and perspectives.

Programs highlight heroic and transcendent stories, from Rimsky-Korsakov's musical tale of Scheherazade's perseverance to Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Journey), Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony, composed as WWII raged across Europe, and Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*, a deeply personal work that transforms grief into music of profound tenderness and fragile hope.

Contemporary voices include CSO Spotlight Artist Levi Taylor, who explores resilience through the lens of social justice and lived experience. *One Foot After The Other* reflects on what it takes to move through life's most difficult challenges, while his new work, receiving its World Premiere by the CSO, draws inspiration from civil rights leader John Lewis and his call to make "good trouble." Other modern perspectives include multi-Grammy Award-winning composer Calliope Tsoupaki's *Aurora*, which explores the journey of refugees across the Mediterranean, and Carlos Simon's *Fate Now Conquers*.

Together, these works create a conversation over time, highlighting humanity's capacity for heroism and hope in challenging times, and the transcendent power of music to give voice to those stories.

### **CSO SPOTLIGHT ARTIST: LEVI TAYLOR**

The Charlotte Symphony continues its CSO Spotlight initiative, launched by Music Director Kwamé Ryan to provide a deeper, more expansive exploration of a singular artistic voice each season. In 2026–27, the Orchestra features Emmy-nominated American composer Levi Taylor, whose work spans film and concert music.

"It is such an honor to be the CSO's Spotlight Artist for their 2026–27 season," said Levi Taylor. "When I heard the CSO perform alongside the Sphinx Virtuosi in the fall of 2024, I knew right away that I wanted to write something for this incredible Orchestra. To be featured as their Spotlight Artist, and to get to work with the city's youth, envisioning bold new music and love for community together, is an absolute dream, honor, and an immense privilege I will forever cherish."

Taylor's *One Foot After The Other* opens the Classical Series in October 2026 with Kwamé Ryan conducting. Written after his father's passing from COVID, and as a contemplation of racial disparities in society, the piece is a personal reflection on the will — and even the passion — one must invoke to move through life's most challenging and confusing moments in pursuit of something better, yet unseen.

In January 2027, the Charlotte Symphony presents the World Premiere of a work co-commissioned with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (UK) for the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the United States. Inspired by civil rights leader John Lewis's call to make "good trouble" and bell hooks's writings on love as a radical practice of resistance, Taylor's new composition explores his personal story, musical heritage, and what it means to "fight the good fight," both internally and externally, for the sake of love, joy, and freedom for all.

Taylor's role as Spotlight Artist will expand into educational and community engagement, partnering with local schools and the Charlotte Symphony Youth Orchestras to provide firsthand insight into his music and creative process, including a performance of one of his works by Youth Orchestra students during the season.

## GUEST CONDUCTORS AND SOLOISTS

- Orion Weiss performs Samuel Barber’s Piano Concerto (October 9–10, 2026)
- Violinist Bella Hristova joins the CSO for Beethoven’s Violin Concerto (November 20–21, 2026)
- Anne-Marie McDermott performs Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 (January 15–16, 2027)
- Valentina Peleggi leads the Orchestra in Prokofiev’s Symphony No. 5 and Saint-Saëns’s Cello Concerto No. 1 featuring Principal Cello Jon Lewis (February 5–6, 2027)
- Pianist Michelle Cann returns for Gershwin’s Concerto in F with Daniela Candillari conducting (March 12–13, 2027)
- Hans Graf conducts Dvořák’s Symphony No. 7 and Khachaturian’s Violin Concerto featuring Concertmaster Calin Ovidiu Lupanu (April 2–4, 2027)
- Rising Cuban-born conductor Cosette Justo Valdès leads the Orchestra in Gabriela Ortiz’s *Altar de Bronce*, featuring trumpeter Pacho Flores (April 16–17, 2027)
- Erina Yashima returns to lead the Orchestra and Charlotte Master Chorale in Poulenc’s *Gloria* (April 30–May 1, 2027)
- Piano duo Ran Dank and Soyeon Kate Lee perform Mozart’s Concerto for Two Pianos (May 21–23, 2027)

A complete listing of concerts for the 2026–27 Classical Series can be found [here](#).

## POPS AND MOVIES

The 2026–27 season of the **Sandra and Leon Levine Pops Series** opens with **The Music of Tina Turner** (October 16–17, 2026), a celebration of the Queen of Rock ‘n’ Roll featuring her legendary hits from “Proud Mary” to “What’s Love Got to Do with It.” **Holiday Pops** (December 18–20, 2026) fills the hall with festive cheer, traditional carols, and holiday favorites. Audiences can then dive into **The Heart of the Blues** (January 22–23, 2027) with songs made famous by legends like Louis Armstrong, Ma Rainey, Muddy Waters, and more. The series concludes with **The Music of Journey** (February 19–20, 2027), featuring the unforgettable rock anthems and power ballads that rocked the airwaves of the 70s and 80s.

The Charlotte Symphony’s **Movie Series** brings blockbuster films to life with unforgettable scores performed live, while each full-length movie is shown on the big screen. Audiences can travel through time with *Back to the Future* (October 2–3, 2026), experience the holiday mischief of *Dr. Seuss’s How the Grinch Stole Christmas* (November 27–28, 2026), feel the need for speed with *Top Gun: Maverick* (March 5–6, 2027), and journey to the Pride Lands with Disney’s original animated feature *The Lion King* (April 23–24, 2027).

## FAMILY AND EDUCATION

The Charlotte Symphony believes that music plays a vital role in lifelong learning and is committed to nurturing a passion for orchestral music in Charlotte through diverse educational programming and excellent instruction.

The 2026–27 season **Family Series** includes four one-hour concerts designed for children 4–9 years old. Each event features pre-concert hands-on activities, storytelling, and musical games in the lobby of the Knight Theater. This season includes **The Music of Harry Potter** (October 17, 2026), **Holiday Pops** (December 19, 2026), **The Blues on Parade** (January 23, 2027), and **Dan Brown’s Wild Symphony** (February 20, 2027), based on the popular book *Wild Symphony* by #1 *New York Times* best-selling author Dan Brown.

The Charlotte Symphony continues to offer **Pre-Concert Talks** before every Classical concert — free of charge for ticketholders. Conductors and artists lead a discussion about the evening’s repertoire and composers, allowing concertgoers to feel more connected to the in-concert experience. Learn more [here](#).

The Charlotte Symphony’s four **Youth Orchestras** — the Youth Symphony, Camerata, Philharmonic, and Ensemble — offer extraordinary music education to the youth of Charlotte. The ensembles are inclusive, diverse, and accessible to all students, regardless of financial resources. Guided by professional conductors and Charlotte Symphony musicians, students develop their skills in a supportive environment, building lasting friendships through music. With regular performances at venues across the city, including the Belk and Knight Theaters, students also enjoy special access to the Symphony’s Music Director Kwamé Ryan and internationally acclaimed guest artists. Learn more [here](#).

**Project Harmony**, a tuition-free, after-school music program, continues in the 2026–27 season. A powerful program serving students and families from Title I schools and under-resourced Charlotte communities, Project Harmony provides free instruments and ensemble music training to its students. Together with Arts+, the CSO serves students grades 2–5 in four Charlotte community-based sites in the Montclaire, West Sugar Creek, West Boulevard, and Winterfield neighborhoods. Learn more [here](#).

## IN THE COMMUNITY

**CSO Roadshow** returns in the 2026–27 season with ten performances bringing live symphonic music directly into neighborhoods across the region. Performed on the Charlotte Symphony’s mobile stage — wrapped in vibrant artwork by local creative Rosalia Torres-Weiner — this traveling concert series offers free performances that celebrate and reflect the unique character of each community. Developed in partnership with the City of Charlotte, with guidance from the Corridors of Opportunity initiative, CSO Roadshow continues to expand access to orchestral music throughout the city. Concert details to be announced at a later date.

The Charlotte Symphony’s popular **On Tap** series, presented by EY, offers an intimate orchestral experience within the laid-back environment of a neighborhood brewery. Details for the 2026–27 On Tap series to be announced at a later date.

**Summer Pops** returns in June 2027 with four concerts celebrating its 44th year. Summer Pops concerts have become an iconic summer experience in the community, bringing together tens of thousands of residents to share food, music, and fireworks under the stars with family and friends. Concert details to be announced at a later date.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

A complete listing of concerts for the Charlotte Symphony's 2026–27 season can be found [here](#).

Subscriptions for the Classical, Pops, Family, and Movie series go on sale Tuesday, February 24, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. Individual tickets for all performances will go on sale to the public later this summer. For more information visit [charlottesymphony.org](http://charlottesymphony.org).

### **About the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra**

The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra (CSO) is one of the premier music organizations in the Southeastern United States and the oldest continuously operating symphony orchestra in the Carolinas. As Charlotte's most active performing arts group, the CSO presents around 175 concerts each season, reaching more than 160,000 music lovers. The CSO is committed to its mission of igniting the human spirit through the passion and unifying power of live symphonic music. Led by Grammy Award-winning Music Director Kwamé Ryan, the CSO employs 65 professional full-time orchestra musicians, fosters four youth orchestras, and offers significant educational support aimed at serving the under-resourced areas of our community. Founded in 1932, the Charlotte Symphony plays a leading cultural role in the Charlotte area and serves the community as a civic leader, reflecting and uniting our region through the transformative power of live music.

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### ALL PROGRAMS AND ARTISTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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The Classical Series is presented by **Bank of America**

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The Pops Series is presented by **Sandra and Leon Levine**

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The On Tap Series is presented by **EY**

*Hi-res photography is available in the Charlotte Symphony's [photo gallery](#)  
or by contacting Deirdre Roddin at [droddin@charlottesymphony.org](mailto:droddin@charlottesymphony.org)*