News for Hartford Symphony Orchestra Donors & Friends

HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

AUTUMN 2026

QUARTER NOTES

MEET THE CANDIDATES!

Music Director Carolyn Kuan has led the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for 16 seasons. Her artistry, dedication and passion for connecting our community through music is evident in all she does. As we celebrate her final season, we also welcome four outstanding Music Director finalists to the podium, and in this Autumn issue of Quarter Notes, we introduce you to the first two candidates you will meet this season.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH OUR MD CANDIDATES: YANIV DINUR

The second concert of our Masterworks season, October 23 - 25, 2026, will feature Music Director finalist Yaniv Dinur. Born and raised in Jerusalem, Israel, Maestro Dinur has enjoyed a busy international career and made his conducting debut at the tender age of 19 with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland. He has collaborated with renowned soloists including Pinchas Zukerman, Yefim Bronfman and Itzhak Perlman, among countless others and in 2019 he won the Sir Geroge Solti Conducting Fellow Award, the largest award for young conductors in the United States. We are excited to introduce him to you.



QN: What can you tell us about your family and early steps in music?

I am a child of immigrants, and I'm an immigrant in this country as well. My parents were both born in Romania and emigrated to Israel in the late 1960s. My father worked in computer programming, while my mother and her sister worked at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. My aunt, Olga Schachar, who taught piano there, was my first piano teacher. But my family tells me that I started music much earlier on a toy accordion. Although I don't remember it, my mom says that I would replicate any melody I heard

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HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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on the accordion, so when I was six years old, my aunt started teaching me piano. Piano became my primary instrument, but my grandmother bought me a real accordion at some point, and that stayed with me for a while as well. It's much more portable than a piano!

My aunt was a tough teacher, and although my two siblings also took music lessons, I was the only one who stuck with it. I think I pursued it because of how it made me feel. I loved the repertoire and playing it felt like I was creating something magical. I also loved the reaction of the people who heard me play. It didn't take long for me to realize that I could not live without music in my life.

QN: Were you interested in anything else besides music as a child?

Oh yes. I was quite serious about tennis (which I still love to watch) and I studied karate as a child. But when I was 12, I was accepted to the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance High-school. I became a very busy young student, and it was clear that I could not pursue music, tennis and karate. I had to pick just one – and I chose music.

QN: What experiences helped put you on the path to conducting?

I must thank my mother for that. A new conducting teacher from Russia joined the faculty of the Jerusalem Academy and it was my mother who suggested that I take a few lessons with him. Since she worked in the school and knew all the teachers, she thought it would be interesting for me to try. I followed her suggestion and immediately loved conducting. I



Yaniv, conducting from the piano.

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loved orchestral music, of course, and there was something in me that responded to the idea of leading and working with a big group of musicians. From that moment on, I was determined to pursue a path in conducting.

QN: What was your first breakthrough in your career?

In the summer of 2000, when I was 19, I went to Ireland for a conducting masterclass. At the end of the program, I was invited back to conduct a full concert with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland.

QN: Tell us more about how your conducting career was shaped.

Shortly after my trip to Ireland, I was invited to conduct the Israel Camerata. It was a big deal, because I was very young, and the Camerata was the best chamber orchestra in Israel. It was an incredible experience. When I was 23, I won the Yuri Ahronovich Prize at the Aviv Competition, which is a conducting competition in Israel, and part of the prize was conducting concerts in Portugal and Italy. This opened the door to many conducting invitations from various European orchestras. I loved working in Italy and began to learn Italian so that I could conduct the rehearsals in Italian.

I also attended the Young Artist Program in Ottawa, Canada, which was directed by Pinchas Zukerman and funded by the National Arts Centre of Canada. The conducting teacher there was Kenneth Kiesler, who was teaching at the University of Michigan. I realized that Ken was special and decided to move to the United States to pursue my doctorate degree in conducting at the University of Michigan with him.

QN: In the course of your career, did you have some negative experiences that could have derailed you?

Of course! Who in the arts has not had a door closed? Sometimes, there's an arts administrator at an orchestra or organization who really likes your work, and when they leave, the door closes along with them. I recall struggles with people who didn't believe in my abilities, or who tried to discourage me by telling me

I was not as good as someone else. In any of the arts, it's important to remember that "no" is just part of the journey, and you only need one "yes" to make all the difference.

QN: Tell us about your wife and children.

My wife's name is Christina, and we've been married for 9 years. We have two children, our daughters Josephine (7) and Alexandra (5). Christina is a stay-at-home mom and a writer/editor who also loves music. She played flute in high school. Our older daughter has already started violin lessons, and our younger one is now asking for piano lessons.

QN: Where is your home base?

About 10 years ago, I became assistant conductor of the Milwaukee Symphony and we moved to Milwaukee, with no idea how long we would stay. I ended up working for the MSO for eight years. Both of our daughters were born during that time, and we felt we had built a community here. So, after I finished my tenure, we decided to stay. The MSO still invites me to come back as a guest conductor, which is wonderful.

QN: It must be hard to find time to connect with the family in Israel.

That is true. My parents, brother and sister live in Tel Aviv, and we hadn't been able to visit for three years. But then I got invited to conduct the Israel Camerata again when they were on tour last season. It was special to work with the first orchestra I ever conducted there, and I had also really missed the food, the coffee, the sun, the Mediterranean Sea, and my family and friends.

QN: What's on your playlist and what styles of music do you like?

I am usually listening to something I am either working on or about to start working on. In addition to conducting, I am an active performing pianist, so practicing is constant and necessary. I really enjoy performing chamber music. Three years ago, I started the Milwaukee Chamber Music Festival, and I often play piano with musicians from the Milwaukee Symphony.



Yaniv and his family

Because music is so much a part of my daily life, I have found that I don't often listen to music "just for fun." If I am taking a break from classical music, I find that what I need is silence. But I do love other music, especially Broadway musicals and movie scores. While I was the resident conductor of the Milwaukee Symphony, I had the chance to conduct quite a lot of films that were shown with the orchestra in live performances. I truly enjoyed conducting the music of John Williams including Star Wars, ET, Jurassic Park, and Home Alone. One of my favorites was the film "How to Train Your Dragon." The music by John Powell is difficult, surprisingly complex and challenging but also fun for everyone who plays it.

QN: Favorite composer for piano?

Easy. Chopin and Rachmaninoff.

QN: Do you have any musical wishes?

Yes! I would love to conduct the music of Wicked! It's a brilliant score.

QN: Did you ever consider a career other than music?

I think I would have been a writer. I still love writing and have written several short stories in Hebrew. But you can't just do the work when "inspiration" strikes. You must set aside time every day to just do that work and unfortunately, I often find I lack the time to dedicate to writing, or the patience to sit still long enough! While I am not a composer, and was never really interested in composing, I have always loved arranging music and creating the harmonies and textures to bring a simple melody line to life.

QN: Do you have any hobbies?

I love to read. I am currently reading several books at the same time, so I'm stretched thin. It is not always the case, but there is so much I want to read that I've found myself reading a biography of Toscanini, an incredibly funny book by László Krasznahorkai called Herschel 07769 that is written in one continuous sentence(!), a

book in Hebrew called 738 Days by Yehuda Cohen, and a book about Gustav Mahler by Bruno Walter. And I enjoy making pizza from scratch because I like getting my hands messy with dough.

QN: What do you do to relax?

I watch action shows on TV. The more intense and stressful the show is, the more I relax. There is so much information going through your head when you conduct that this is a great way for me to turn off my brain. But on the other hand, I am not good at vacationing because I always want to be doing something. I'm terrible at doing nothing; I just cannot sit on a beach, for example. But I love taking long walks.



Yaniv, food lover!

QN: Tell us something surprising about you that we probably wouldn't guess.

I am an excellent mimic! Seriously, I can imitate people I meet and doing this used to drive my friends crazy. I've gotten very good at mimicking people vocally and incorporating their mannerisms. I've done this since I was a teenager, and I love that people find it so entertaining.

QN: Finally, what purpose do orchestras have in the 21st century?

We thought technology and social media would bring us together, but it did precisely the opposite. Today, we live in a world where people are even more isolated. People are glued to screens even when they are with friends and family at restaurants. It's sad to think about what we've lost in our ability to communicate and connect with each other. But orchestras do the opposite.

A symphony orchestra performance brings us together and the music we play connects us to the composers who faced struggles that were not very different from the challenges of today. Human emotion continues in each of us, and music helps us channel and process those emotions. This is something artificial intelligence cannot duplicate. AI cannot recreate people who play instruments. It cannot recreate live music, and there is something completely magical about the shared communal experience of live music. We cannot see, touch or taste the music, yet music can evoke our emotions, making us laugh or cry and everything in between. We still don't really understand why music can trigger such deep feelings. This is why attending a concert with a live orchestra is so special. No matter what technology can do, the communal experience is something that cannot be replicated by any other medium.

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UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH OUR MD CANDIDATES: JONATHAN TAYLOR RUSH

The third concert of our Masterworks season, November 20 – 22, 2026, will feature Music Director finalist Jonathan Taylor Rush. Born and raised in Windsor, Connecticut, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra was Jonathan's first "home" orchestra, and Jonathan has already served as guest conductor for the HSO. Since his graduation from the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, he has enjoyed a busy career as a guest conductor with the Minnesota Orchestra, the Detroit Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and most recently, the Cleveland Orchestra in partnership with guest artist Jon Batiste. In the 26/27 season, he will conduct the San Francisco Symphony, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Cincinnati POPS, the Omaha Symphony, and the North Carolina Symphony. We are thrilled to introduce him to you.



Jonathan with Jon Batiste in performance with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra

QN: Can you share your musical journey and how your family shaped your career choice?

Music was always going to be part of my life. Both of my parents are amateur musicians who sing in the church where my father is a pastor, and my mother always played piano for church. There is not one memory from childhood that doesn't include music. Every event in our home invariably included singing around the piano while my mom played, and this included our extended family as well, such as aunts, uncles and cousins. We listened to every style of music in our house, from classic rock to jazz and everything in between.

QN: We know you have two sisters who are also in the arts. What can you tell us about your siblings?

I am the middle child with two wonderful siblings. My older sister, Kymberli Joye, is a professional singer, a gospel artist, who was a semi-finalist on Season 15 of the Voice. My younger sister, Kayla, is an actress in musical theater, who is always on stage. It is amazing that all three of us chose careers in the arts.

QN: Three siblings in the arts! We imagine your parents must have been supportive.

I am thankful for my family every day. Our parents encouraged each of us to pursue our dreams. My parents never pushed any of us in a particular direction. They always trusted each of their children to make good decisions. We were raised to be kind, gentle, caring, and independent in our career choices. Clearly, it worked.

QN: What experiences helped put you on the path to conducting?

From the time I was a small boy watching Looney Tunes cartoons, I was fascinated with conducting. I loved cartoons, but what I really loved was the amazing soundtrack. At the time, I had no idea that classical music was being played, or that this was an orchestra. I was simply fascinated by the big sound. There was one cartoon that featured Bugs Bunny as a

conductor, and I believed that if Bugs could conduct, so could I. I would mimic anything I saw Bugs do; I went into my room, blasted the music, and conducted with anything that looked like a baton including chopsticks and my mom's knitting needles. But I was somewhat shy to admit any of this and kept it mostly to myself. I didn't realize that conducting was possible. By the time I was studying music in college I knew all the conducting patterns just from practicing so much on my own.

QN: You grew up singing with the church, but did you play instruments also?

Oh yes. I started violin in first grade (and in fact, studied with Fran Bard, an HSO musician), but violin didn't "click" for me, so I stopped in third grade. In fourth grade, we were allowed to select a band instrument, and since a family friend played saxophone, I chose sax so I could be just like George. I started on alto sax but played alto and tenor saxophone continually through my senior year in college. But my primary instrument was the piano. I could play almost anything I heard so I began to play piano in church (just like my mom) and in school. One day in Windsor high school, our choir teacher played a Chopin Polonaise for us, and when she heard me duplicate what she had just played, almost note for note, she encouraged me to study piano seriously. Thanks to her influence and belief in me, I started formal piano lessons in my junior year of high school, and my college auditions were on piano.

QN: Tell us more about how your conducting career was shaped.

I was determined to pursue a career in music and was accepted at Ohio State University. I opted for a degree in music education because there wasn't an undergraduate degree for conducting. I knew music education classes would include courses in conducting, and since I always loved interacting with children, I felt this course of study would serve me well. At the end of my sophomore year, a departing senior at Ohio State who knew of my interest in conducting asked if I could take over as music director of a group he had started for non-music majors. As a junior, I was responsible for managing and conducting the group. I was music director for two years and the videos of me conducting were used for my graduate applications. I also attended a summer conducting program at Eastman.



Jonathan at the podium

I applied to Eastman, Yale and Peabody for graduate school, and was invited to audition at Peabody where I studied with Marin Alsop who was then Music Director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Everything I learned and the connections I made were all because of Marin.

QN: This journey sounds amazingly positive. Did you have some negative experiences that could have derailed you?

Absolutely yes. In any career in the arts, you will hear "no" much more than you hear a yes, so it's always important to stay focused and positive. In my first two years at college, I talked to my teachers in my effort to figure out how to pursue a conducting career. The response from each of them was very discouraging. They told me that someone who looked like me (a Black man) would never be able to make a career as a

"I could play almost anything I heard so I began to play piano in church and in school. One day our choir teacher played a Chopin Polonaise for us, and when she heard me duplicate what she had just played, she encouraged me to study piano seriously.

conductor and that I shouldn't waste my time. It was truly disheartening. A few years later, when I was studying at Peabody in Baltimore with Maestro Marin Alsop, I learned that she was told the same thing early in her career, because she's a woman in a "man's world", but we all know how that turned out! While those teachers discouraged me, it made me more determined to find a way. In fact, during the summer after my sophomore year, I pursued a summer internship with the Hartford Symphony, because I wanted to learn all that I could about the inner workings of an orchestra, including administration and production. The great friends I made at the HSO have continued to the present time.

digital formats. Marin opted to not conduct the digital series that was being planned for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, so I was invited to take on that role. That opportunity made me the assistant conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

Everyone in the arts must remember that you can't focus on "no" because a "no" in one place can lead to a "yes" in another. It's important to stay positive.



Jonathan in a rare moment of relaxation

"I hope that I can be the difference for another child who looks like me, or who might face any kind of challenge, because having one person who believes in you makes all the difference."

It can be hard to accept a "no" and I've had my share. After I graduated from Peabody, I received a fellowship with the Chicago Sinfonietta as assistant conductor. My first concert was in October of 2019, with another scheduled for March of 2020, which of course, never happened because of the pandemic. But in February of 2020, an artistic planner at the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra asked if I would conduct a community concert. We performed an unforgettable and uplifting Beethoven 7th and I received very positive feedback from everyone including the musicians. I knew it was just a "one time event" but that opportunity opened a door. When the entire world shut down in March of 2020, orchestras turned to

QN: What is important to you as a conductor, from a leadership perspective?

I want to inspire others. I hope to be "Bugs Bunny" for some other child who has dreams. I want to encourage the next generation to believe in themselves, because I am living proof that dreams do come true and you can make a path for yourself if you work hard. I hope that I can be the difference for another child who looks like me, or who might face any kind of challenge, because having one person who believes in you makes all the difference. I am also invested in advocating for all under-represented voices, whether composers, artists, musicians or conductors, because it's important that we consistently find new ways to support one another and encourage the broadest possible participation in the world of music and orchestras.

QN: Tell us about your wife and children.

Chelsey and I met through our mutual church connections. Our church has a national convention in Greensboro, North Carolina, and we met as children when my family traveled to Greensboro each year for that convention. We were always good friends and eventually, the relationship evolved into a romantic one. We were married in December of 2021. We have two children, our daughter Aria, age three and our son Zane, who will be two in November. Chelsey is a childbirth educator and doula, so she has her hands full between work and



Jonathan and family

the children, especially since my job requires so much travel. I could not have a better partner.

QN: What's on your playlist and what styles of music do you like?

I enjoy ALL music. Right now, I'm listening to an arrangement that Jon Batiste did of Beethoven's Fifth called Fifth Symphony in Congo Square, which is being arranged for orchestra. Jon Batiste - 5th Symphony In Congo Square (Official Music Video) - YouTube. And I love the music of the composer Carlos Simon. I listen to gospel music but also new age jazz and composers such as Margaret Bonds, Julia Perry and Jessie Montgomery. I'm also a fan of the "big" sound composers, such as Shostakovich, Stravinsky and Prokofiev.

QN: Did you ever consider a career other than music?

While conducting was always my dream career, at one time I toyed with the idea of becoming a dentist! Or, I might have gone into some form of teaching in music, since education remains a passion.

QN: Any hobbies?

Cooking! One of my favorite dishes is baked salmon with shrimp, spinach and cherry tomatoes.

QN: What do you do to relax?

With music taking up such a large part of my life, when I need to relax I need quiet. I put on noise-canceling headphones and play calm meditation music and focus on breathing. I love to read, but more often I will just close my eyes and breathe. It's something I do before and after a performance because adrenaline can really unbalance you.

QN: Tell us something surprising about you that we probably wouldn't guess.

I'm a licensed minister! I guess it's not that much of a surprise, since my dad is a pastor, but I do hope to be ordained at some point. My church background has always been a huge source of strength and helped me learn music, public speaking and build confidence. I can trace all of that to a strong and supportive church community.

QN: Finally, what purpose do orchestras serve in the 21st century?

As humans, we need live music. We live in a world that's hurting and people in pain are looking for purpose. People feel divided and disconnected. But the one place where we are united is in the concert space. When we listen to a live orchestra, we are all experiencing the same thing simultaneously and while everyone's reactions may be unique to them, we unite in that moment despite our differences. Music doesn't ask anything of us except to recognize our own humanity, and an orchestra allows us to hear a sound world that doesn't depend on words, which liberates us to just feel. In a world that is becoming so complex, hearing a live symphony orchestra perform is the one place where we can be emotional and human together.

"I could play almost anything I heard so I began to play piano in church and in school. One day our choir teacher played a Chopin Polonaise for us, and when she heard me duplicate what she had just played, she encouraged me to study piano seriously.

HOST SPOTLIGHT

HSO Hosts:

The unsung heroes behind the music

Every year, for every concert, HSO host families help make the music possible. Without hosts who welcome musicians to their home, we would be missing between 15 to 20 musicians from our concert stage at any given performance.

A musician's life is consumed with travel. A LOT of travel. Orchestral musicians throughout the country often hold multiple positions with different symphonies, requiring travel to multiple states. In addition, many juggle performing with a teaching career. The constant work-related travel by car, trains and planes is exhausting, demanding and even dangerous, and exhausted musicians have had accidents trying to drive while tired.

Just over ten years ago, the HSO wanted to create a home and a sense of community for every musician who performs with the Hartford Symphony. Our solution was the creation of HSO's Musician Host Program, a unique program to help musicians feel welcomed and protected when they perform with our orchestra. Safe housing means not traveling long distances late at night. It means being rested, focused and performing at the highest level. But best of all, for hosts and musicians alike, it means the formation of new and lasting friendships.

Each host that opens their homes and their hearts is rewarded with new experiences, new friends, and a never-before behind the scenes look at the life of an orchestra musician. In addition, we offer hosts a pair of complimentary tickets to selected performances, from Masterworks to Sunday Serenades, to our summer Talcott Mountain Music Festival.

This past season, HSO hosts collectively absorbed more than 200 separate hosting stays for our musicians, amounting to a total of 775 separate hosting "nights." Sometimes a stay is just a single overnight, while other times a stay can be five or six nights, the length of the rehearsal and performance period of a Masterworks concert.

From HSO "fellows" (younger pre-career musicians who are part of the HSO music community) to "subs" (who routinely perform when a rostered musician is unable to do so), to rostered players, many of our musicians are based outside of CT, but proudly travel to CT to perform with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra. It may surprise you to learn that roughly a quarter of HSO's rostered musicians routinely require a hosting stay. That group includes 5 HSO section principals, 2 assistant principals, 13 section string players, our bass trombone and bass clarinet, as well as our assistant conductor, Adam Kerry Boyles. This past season, 38 musicians used the hosting program on a regular basis.

Does the hosting program make a difference to them? Absolutely. Here's what our musicians have to say.



"Being from out of town, getting to stay with a host family means I have a home base, but it's more than that. It feels as though I have another home and more family as I get to develop close friendships with my hosts. I feel like a part of Hartford, not just part of the orchestra."

Amy Butler,
HSO Principal Cello



"The HSO brings together great players but many, like me, don't live locally. To be able to stay with a host and get good rest throughout a strenuous week helps me perform at my best, and I know ever musician involved in the host program feels the same. Getting to know the members of the community is extraordinary. Concerts don't happen without an audience, and because of hosting, I know many of the audience members. At every concert, I'm playing for my friends, and that special relationship keeps audiences coming back for more."

Sangwon Lee, HSO Principal Clarinet

Through hosting, I've been introduced to supremely wonderful HSO fans who have graciously opened their homes to us – the musicians – and permitted us to share a glimpse into their interesting lives. The friendships formed with my hosts are priceless. What a difference this program has made for the musicians who travel to play with the Hartford Symphony. It has created a true sense of belonging in Hartford and in the HSO family. My thanks to ALL involved!

Brian Diehl, HSO Principal Trombone





"As an out-of-towner, I would be too difficult to perform with the HSO if I had to bear the responsibility of finding housing. Beyond the obvious support provided by hosts, it's a delight to connect and reconnect with people. Now, after six years of playing with the symphony, each time I stay with a host it feels like I'm visiting family! It brings me immense relaxation and joy to engage in conversations about music and life with the hosts."

Paul Cho, bass clarinet

"Traveling can be exhausting and having hosts who make us feel so welcome at home makes a huge difference. I love making music with the HSO, and it means so much to have the support and kindness of our hosts along the way. I'm very grateful to be a part of it."

Jamie Andrusyak, violin

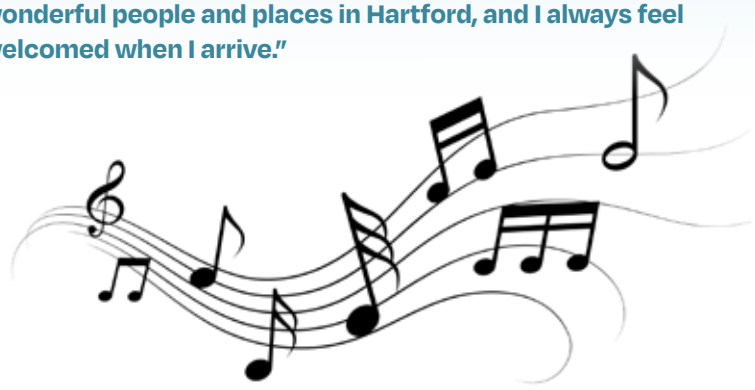




Yukiko Kuhara and her hosts, Jerry & Nancy Lemega.

Very often, hosts and musicians develop special relationships which is exactly what violinist Yukiko Kuhara now enjoys with Jerry & Nancy Lemega. In Yukiko's own words:

"This past spring, one of my host families, Nancy and Jerry, drove to Montreal for my graduate recital, and it's hard to express what that has meant to me. Being part of this program has made a big difference in my life. I am not originally from Hartford, and I did not grow up or go to school there, but this host program has truly made Hartford feel like a hometown to me. Since my own family is in Japan, having host families in Hartford has made me feel like I have a second family here. I've been introduced me to so many wonderful people and places in Hartford, and I always feel welcomed when I arrive."



We make hosting EASY!

What does it take to be a host? All have one thing in common: the desire to become friends with musicians. We do require that hosts have an extra private bedroom in their home with a separate private bathroom. If you have the space and delight in meeting new people and expanding your horizons, you fit the definition of a perfect HSO host.

Hosting does NOT require that you commit to a specific timeframe, because we respect the fluctuating schedules and personal needs of our hosts. Are you a winter snowbird? Not a problem – we'll put hosting on hold and circle back when you are ready. Concerned that hosting might interfere with family or vacation plans? Conflicts are never an issue: you host ONLY when it is convenient for YOU.

We are always looking for new hosts,

especially those in the Hartford area. You can help keep the music playing! Just contact Ruth Sovronsky, former Director of Development and current Development Consultant, and she'll be happy to explain how it works. **Her cell phone is 516-448-6549 or she can be reached at rsovronsky@hartfordsymphony.org.**

A NEW DONOR EVENT
COFFEE WITH MUSICIANS!



The HSO development team is constantly in search of different ways to offer donors exciting new ways of engaging with the music – and with our musicians. New in the 2026-27 season is Coffee with a Musician, which creates the opportunity for a limited number of donors to mingle with musicians in an unscripted and casual environment.

Our first Coffee with a Musician, Open House, will take place on October 13, 2026, from 9 – 10:30 am, at the wonderful BeanZ & Co. Café in Avon, and will feature two musicians: Assistant Principal Trumpet John Charles Thomas and our new Principal Flute Elizabeth McCormack.

The mission of BeanZ & Co. is to employ an inclusive workforce of individuals with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to reduce high unemployment rates and foster a community where everyone belongs. The Café, which operates as a nonprofit, works to build an inclusive workplace where everyone belongs, creating a welcoming gathering space for staff, customers and partners. The HSO is proud to partner with BeanZ & Co. and if you haven't stopped in for a meal, we hope to encourage you to do so. They have a wonderful bakery, and serve breakfast, lunch, coffee, in addition to an extensive catering service. BeanZ & Co. was formed by Kim & Scott Morrison (who also own and operate The New England Pasta Company, located in the same space as BeanZ & Co., Avon) and their long-term friends, Noelle & Tim Alix. Both families have children with IDD (Meg and Cate are both now adults with Downs Syndrome) and were determined to change the statistic that roughly 80% of those with IDD are unemployed or underemployed. With the opening of a second BeanZ & Co. location in New Britain at the Hospital of Central Connecticut, it is clear that their mission is succeeding.

Check your mailboxes for the invitation and be sure to respond to Deb Shulansky (dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org) if you haven't already. The event is invitation only, and to encourage intimate conversations, attendance will be limited to the first 20 to RSVP.



DE COM POSED

James Reese Europe

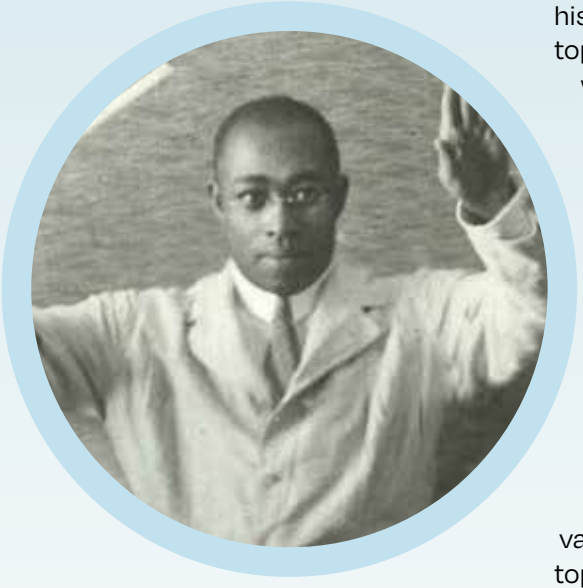
Famed pianist Eubie Blake, in a tribute to American composer and bandleader James Reese Europe, said:

"He was our benefactor and inspiration. Even more, he was the Martin Luther King of music."

With compositions and orchestrations that showed endless innovation, Europe paved the way for other Black musicians by forming the first union for Black musicians, conducting the first all-Black Symphony Orchestra in a performance at Carnegie Hall, and leading the first all-Black orchestra in recordings with Victor records, first time in history that a major record label contracted with a Black musician and an all-Black orchestra. His remarkable story, as a musician and soldier in World War I, demands attention.

James Reese Europe was the fourth of five children born to Lorraine Saxon and Henry Jefferson Europe in Mobile, Alabama, on February 22, 1881. While Lorraine's family had been free for several generations, Henry was not emancipated from slavery until the end of the Civil War. Determined to care for his family, Henry worked in a variety of occupations including teacher, barber and newspaper reporter. Henry's loyalty to the Republican party earned him a clerkship in the Post Office in mid-1872. Lorraine, a homemaker, played the piano and provided the first music lessons for each of her five children, John, Minnie, Ida, James, and Mary. Europe's father, Henry, was a self-taught musician who could "play just about everything that would emit a sound." From his devoted parents, Europe learned piano, violin, banjo and mandolin.

In 1889, Henry accepted a new position with the US Postal Service and moved his family from Mobile to a rowhouse in Washington, D.C., just a few doors from the residence of



James Reese Europe

John Philip Sousa, the renowned conductor and composer of the U.S. Marine Corps Band. Sousa encouraged his band members to take on pupils who showed a gift for music. Two of the Europe children, James and Mary, were fortunate to have Enrico Hurley, Sousa's assistant conductor, as their music teacher. In 1894, when he was 14, Europe entered a citywide composition competition and came in second; his younger sister Mary took the top prize. Europe also studied violin with Joseph Douglass, grandson of renowned abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

In 1900, Europe's older brother John relocated to New York City, where he quickly found work as a professional pianist. During this era, theaters in New York provided employment for hundreds of Black musicians and entertainers. The many vaudeville and variety shows hired top Black talent each season. One enormously successful musical comedy, *In Dahomey,* by Black composers Bert Williams and George Walker, was such a hit that it transferred to London's Shaftsbury Theatre for several months, even playing a command performance at Buckingham Palace. The lively music scene, and the opportunity to find work was attractive and in 1904, after the death of his father, Europe followed his older brother to New York City.

To find work, Europe frequented The Marshall Hotel at 127-129 West 53rd



James Reese Europe and The Clef Club Symphony Orchestra

Street, just south of the San Juan Hill district that ultimately became the site of New York's Lincoln Center. The wonderful cuisine and entertainment at The Marshall attracted both Black and white actors, musicians and composers, and the bar was routinely packed with entertainers waiting for calls, as producers knew they could always find dancers, musicians and singers available for hire. Those who frequented the hotel included luminaries such as Bob Cole, Billy Johnson, Bert Williams, George Walker and the Johnson brothers (J. Rosamond and James Weldon), who wrote *Lift Every Voice and Sing.* One introduction led to another, and at The Marshall James met John Love, secretary to Rodman Wanamaker, of the wealthy Philadelphia department store family. Europe was hired to provide a string quartet for Rodman's three-day party in Atlantic City, and Rodman was so impressed with the result that steady work soon followed. Other wealthy families insisted on music provided by James Reese Europe, who was invariably the entertainment at parties and society events for the Goulds, the Astors and the Vanderbilts, among others. For several years, Europe was in such high demand that he booked two or three events every evening.

Perhaps influenced by his childhood exposure to Sousa, Europe aspired to be more than a performer, and he began to study all phases of music including theory, harmony and conducting. He was so immersed in his studies that one night at the Brevoort Hotel in New York, he propped a book of his lessons on the piano so that he could study while playing the engagement. In 1906, the Johnson Brothers hired Europe to conduct a musical comedy called *The Shoo-Fly Regiment,* a story about an active-duty Black soldier in a romantic involvement. The storyline was a breakthrough from the minstrelsy that had dominated American stages and presented a positive story about the Black soldiers who had fought with Teddy Roosevelt at Cuba's San Juan Hill. Europe's collaboration with the Johnson Brothers continued in their next project, *The Red Moon.*

In 1908, together with famed composer George Walker, Europe became a founding member of The Frogs, a fraternal organization of Black producers and entertainers, determined to change the way Black individuals were depicted on stage. Two years later, Europe founded The Clef Club, which served not only as a booking agency for Black musicians, but as a union for Black musicians to demand equitable salaries, higher musical standards and better treatment from white employers. Europe maintained a strict dress code for his musicians, and quickly formed the Clef Club Symphony Orchestra, an unconventional grouping of mandolins (in place of first and second violins), as well as violins, banjos, guitars, cellos, drums and timpani. The group expanded to include an organ, two flutes, two clarinets and ten pianos performing music from written scores that Europe provided. The 100-man orchestra developed a reputation for excellence, and were invited to play at Carnegie Hall on May 2, 1912, the first time that an all-Black ensemble had ever performed at that venue. The program included secular and religious music, traditional and modern, as well as vocal and instrumental repertoire. It was so successful that Carnegie Hall invited the orchestra back for a second performance.

When the internationally acclaimed ballroom dance team of Irene and Vernon Castle heard of Europe's success, they invited him to collaborate with them. While Black musicians had previously played for white dancers, the wider visibility of the Castles and Europe's orchestra had a profound impact on opportunities for Black musicians. When the Castles and wealthy



Europe and the 369th Regiment Band performing for patients in France during WWI

benefactors opened a dance school, Europe's Society Orchestra became the "in-house" orchestra. When the Castles opened Sans Souci, their nightclub on 42nd Street, Europe's musicians performed in that establishment as well.

Starting on December 29, 1913 Europe and his orchestra made a series of recordings for Victor Records, the first time in history that a major record label entered into a contract with a Black musician and an all-Black orchestra.

Europe resigned from the Clef Club to create a new organization, the Tempo Club. During 1914 and 1915, Europe continued to perform widely with the Castles and enjoyed broad success. Owing to the popularity of his orchestras and the excellence of his musicians, Europe eventually pressured New York's white-led American Federation of Labor (AFL) musicians union to accept Black members. Though this certainly did not end the practice of unequal pay and less than ideal working conditions for Black musicians, it did offer greater work opportunities for Black musicians who were in increasing demand throughout New York City. By the summer of 1915, no less than 15 Europe-organized groups were performing at theaters and private parties up and down the East Coast. Two of the famous musicians who worked with Europe included Noble Sissle, an American composer, bandleader and lyricist, known for the Broadway musical *Shuffle Along,* and ragtime pianist Eubie Blake, one of the pioneers of African American musical theater. With the onset of World War I in 1916, and as motion pictures drew crowds away from concert stages, many Black musicians found themselves out of work.

At about this time, New York State Governor Charles Whitman was persuaded to revive a three-year old directive to form a Black regiment, and the 15th New York Infantry Regiment came into being. When Europe learned of the new all-Black regiment he immediately enlisted: "I have been in New York for 16 years and there has never been such an organization of Negro men that will bring together all classes of men for a common good."

Unfortunately, few others enlisted in the regiment, but when it was learned that Europe was among those who had signed up, he was asked to organize a regimental band as part of the unit. Europe wanted to be a soldier, not a bandleader, but he agreed to organize the band if the Colonel in charge of the regiment (a young NY district attorney named William Hayward) could raise $10,000 to entice the very best musicians to join. To Europe's surprise, Hayward raised the funds, and Europe immediately began to recruit his musician friends from across the



The Clef Club Band in 1914



Sheet music for Castle House Rag, 1914

country. On June 22, 1917, just after the United States declared war on Germany, more than 4,000 people crowded into the Manhattan Casino, a popular spot in Harlem, for the band's gala performance by an all-Black orchestra.

After a racially charged training stay at Camp Wadsworth in South Carolina, the 15th Regiment was sent across the Atlantic to the Western Front. To their humiliation and despite their military training, the highly trained soldiers were relegated to work as common laborers. It was not until representatives from the YMCA's National War Work Council heard the musicians perform that Europe's band was instantly assigned to play for troops across war-ravaged France. Almost none of the audience had heard ragtime music, and Europe's band enjoyed wild success. They performed for the populace and for war-weary soldiers, fresh from the trenches. The band traveled more than 2,000 miles and performed in over 25 cities.



James Reese Europe



USS Stockholm with the Harlem Hellfighters

As the regiment awaited their orders to fight, it became clear that the white soldiers of the U.S. Army would not fight alongside their Black compatriots. The regiment was finally assigned to the French Fourth Army, and the 15th regiment was renamed the 369th. The Black regiment, under the command of the French Army, was now on its way to the front. The surprised German soldiers who faced them called the 369th "Hellfighters" (Höllenkämpfer), owing to their fierce fighting and unparalleled bravery. The regiment became known as The Harlem Hellfighters. The 369th spent an astonishing 191 continuous days in the trenches, more time in combat than any other American unit and the members were awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French government for their valor.

Europe was eventually sent to Paris to rejoin the band, and once again Europe and his musicians were an instant success. At the Tuileries Gardens, the Harlem Hellfighters joined some of the greatest military bands in the world and performed for 50,000 people. On their return to the United States, Europe decided to keep his band together and added more musicians. He was firmly convinced that they "won over France" because they were "playing music which was ours and not a pale imitation of others." His dream was to use the band's popularity to create a National Negro Symphony Orchestra. In 1919 Europe organized a barnstorming tour for the band from New York to St. Louis, then back to Boston and Harlem. Before leaving on tour, the



Europe (left) and his band aboard ship on return to the US in 1919.

band cut a record for Pathé, including two compositions that Europe had written while overseas. The recording included *Memphis Blues* by the noted composer W.C. Handy, one of Europe's great friends.

On May 9, 1919, as the group rehearsed for their last concert of the tour at Mechanics Hall in Boston, Europe criticized the playing of his main drummer, Herbert Wright. As Europe left the rehearsal stage and headed to a dressing room, Wright followed and attacked Europe with a penknife. In a backhand blow, Wright struck Europe in the neck, nicking his carotid artery. Believing it was a minor cut, Europe instructed Noble Sissle to lead the band while an ambulance brought Europe to a hospital. The injury proved fatal, as doctors were unable to stop the bleeding. Europe died on My 9, 1919, and with him died his dream of a National Negro Symphony Orchestra. Wright was convicted of manslaughter and served eight years in the Massachusetts State Prison.

On the day of Europe's funeral in New York City, an honor guard of musicians was followed by "six automobiles carrying flowers sent by The Frogs, The Clef Club, and countless others" to accompany the flag-draped coffin as it travelled from Harlem down Seventh Avenue to St. Mark's Episcopal Church on West 53rd Street. It was walking distance for residents from San Juan Hill, who poured into the streets to pay their respects. Europe was later buried at Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors as a bugler played Taps.

After his death, many musicians believed James Reese Europe would have been the musical and influential equivalent of Duke Ellington, had his life not been cut short. Musician Eubie Blake opined that Europe belonged in the same class as Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr. noting:

"Before Europe, Negro musicians were just like wandering minstrels. Play in a saloon and pass the hat and that's it. But Jim Europe changed all that. He made a profession for us out of music. All of that we owe to Jim."



Europe and his band on their return to the U.S.

If you're interested in learning more about James Reese Europe, we suggest the following:

To learn more about the life of James Reese Europe, enjoy these two videos: James Reese Europe — The Black Bandleader Who Brought Jazz #jazz #WWI #Black #history #music.

The Forgotten Music Legend Who Changed Jazz Forever: James Reese Europe.

Another short video tells the story of James Reese Europe: The Harlem Hellfighter Who Changed Music Forever: A Tribute to 1st. Lt. James Reese Europe.

From Lincoln Center, in collaboration with the Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture, please enjoy this conversation about James Reese Europe and the cultural legacy of the San Juan Hill neighborhood: James Reese Europe: Latin Jazz and the Harlem Hell Fighters Band (1900–1920).

To hear some of Europe's music, enjoy these piano versions of his music:

Balling' the Jack: Ballin' the Jack by Chris Smith & James Reese Europe (1914).

Castle's Half and Half: Castles' Half and Half by James Reese Europe & Ford T. Dabney (1914).

The *Castle House Rag*: Castle House Rag by James Reese Europe (1914).

The Castle Perfect Trot: Castle Perfect Trot by James Reese Europe & Ford T. Dabney (1914).

The Castle Walk: The Castle Walk by James Reese Europe & Ford T. Dabney (1914).

What about the Harlem Hellfighters who fought so bravely in WWI? How were they treated upon their return home? Here are some videos to help you explore more:

A full-length movie about the Harlem Hellfighters may be viewed here: The Harlem Hellfighters' Great War (2017) | FULL MOVIE | History Documentary.

A great documentary is on Netflix, featuring the story of the Harlem Hellfighters and James Reese Europe: Watch The Harlem Hellfighters | Netflix.

The story of the Harlem Hellfighters and James Reese Europe's engagement during World War I: The WW1 regiment that brought ragtime to France.

More about the Harlem Hellfighters: Harlem Hell Fighters: Heroes Betrayed by Their Own Country.

The History Channel's video is at this link: The Harlem Hellfighters | History.

With an appearance by General Colin Powell, this brief documentary film tells the story of the Harlem Hellfighters during World War I, and what happened upon their return to the US at the end of the war: Hellfighters: Harlem's Heroes of World War One | Historical Documentary | Lucasfilm.

Lastly, this video further explores the harsh reception that greeted the 369th Regiment upon their return to the USA: Heroes in France, Victims at Home #shorts #history #blackhistory #americanhistory #historyfacts.

Source Materials:

James Reese Europe | Facts, Biography, & Harlem Hellfighters | Britannica

James Reese Europe: America's Jazz Ambassador – Rediscovering Black History

How Harlem Hellfighter James Reese Europe Became a Ragtime Legend

James Reese Europe | Jazz Composer / conductor – Biography, Albums & More | All About Jazz

Remembering James Reese Europe: The Jazz Lieutenant who died at the age of 38 On May 9TH, 1919.

James Reese Europe | Library of Congress

Hear the Sounds of James Reese Europe, the Musician Who Brought Jazz to France | Unframed
Lincoln Center

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