

THE SAINT PAUL
CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

For Immediate Release

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**Finnish violinist Pekka Kuusisto to become the SPCO's
newest Artistic Partner**

Kuusisto's tenure will begin in the 2016-17 season, and he will perform with SPCO during the 2015-16 season for a weekend of concerts next April.

"Pekka Kuusisto's rare gift is to become rather than perform the music he plays." – *The Guardian*

"Mr. Kuusisto's passionate rendition of the work's Chaconne proved arresting; his idiosyncratic style stopped short of indulgent with unpredictable twists of tempo, phrasing and dynamics. During his no-holds-barred playing, there were many broken bow hairs, which danced over his instrument like gossamer insect legs." – *Vivien Schweitzer, The New York Times*

"If you've encountered an uncomfortably aristocratic air at some classical music concerts you've attended, be assured that violinist Pekka Kuusisto seems intent upon doing away with that." – *Rob Hubbard, Pioneer Press*

"His breathless tempo in the finale left both orchestra...and audience pleasantly warm. I went home singing....he is not so much a violinist as a musician who happens to play the violin." – *Larry Fuchsberg, Star Tribune*

SAINT PAUL, MN, April 28, 2015 – The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) announces today that internationally celebrated Finnish violinist Pekka Kuusisto has been named the orchestra's newest Artistic Partner. Kuusisto will begin his tenure in the 2016-17 season where he will be joining current Artistic Partners Jeremy Denk, Martin Fröst, Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Thomas Zehetmair. The SPCO is the first major American orchestra to engage Kuusisto as an artistic leader.

Pekka Kuusisto is internationally renowned as both soloist and director, and for his fresh approach to classical repertoire. An advocate of new music, Kuusisto regularly works with

contemporary composers such as Nico Muhly, Thomas Adès and Bryce Dessner. He frequently directs ensembles from the violin, including the Mahler, Australian, and Irish Chamber orchestras in addition to the SPCO. His recent chamber music partners include Iiro Rantala, Anne Sofie von Otter, Kimmo Pohjonen, Nicolas Altstaedt and Kuusisto's traditional music group, *The Luomu Players*.

Although his Artistic Partnership with the SPCO will not officially start until September 2016, Kuusisto will lead the orchestra next season (April 2-3, 2016) in a program that interweaves contemporary works by a diverse selection of living composers during the first half, and movements from Haydn's Symphony No. 88 with Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 in the second half. Kuusisto's most recent Twin Cities appearance for the Schubert Club included a recital of Bach with the accordionist Dermot Dunne at the new Ordway Concert Hall, and a mixed program of solo violin work with juggler Jay Gilligan at Aria in Minneapolis.

Kuusisto's *Theme and Variations* project, recently showcased in Saint Paul, combines different art forms within one concert program - dance, electronics and light installations, gastronomy and film all feature alongside performances of standard and contemporary repertoire. The REDDRESS "pocket concerts" (a subset of *Theme and Variations*) are a great example of his boundary-defying approach to classical music: in collaboration with Korean designer, Aamu Song, performers and audience alike actually inhabit a gigantic red dress during the performance, creating an immersive and shared audience experience. SPCO audiences can expect the same kind of unorthodox re-examination of our core repertoire, as well as collaborations and new concert formats which push the boundaries of classical music and the traditional concert experience.

Kyu-Young Kim, the SPCO's senior director of artistic planning and principal second violinist, looks forward to the musical exploration this partnership will bring to the SPCO. "We are thrilled to welcome Pekka Kuusisto as our newest Artistic Partner. Pekka has been delighting SPCO audiences for the past seven years with the freshness of his interpretations of our core repertoire and the pure, infectious joy of his music making. Whether he is soloing on a Mozart Violin Concerto, leading a Haydn Symphony, or simultaneously whistling and playing Finnish folk tunes for a club2030 happy hour after an SPCO concert, Pekka always opens our ears to new possibilities. I know his Artistic Partnership will be a great adventure, both for our players and for our audiences."

About becoming an Artistic Partner, Kuusisto said, "One might ask if there aren't enough Finns in Minnesota already, but fortunately for me, the SPCO doesn't seem to think so. I've already had some ecstatic times with them, and the opportunity to explore possible (and maybe also impossible) new ways of working and performing with the orchestra gives me reindeer-bumps. My fellow Artistic Partners are a family of some of the most inspiring musicians around, the new hall at Ordway is a dream, and the SPCO is on fire. Good times!"

Kuusisto has received great acclaim from audiences and critics alike during his Twin Cities performances. *Star Tribune* music critic Randy Beard reported on Kuusisto's March 2015 performance at the Ordway Concert Hall, stating "Kuusisto is clearly a risk taker and in this case, he was eminently successful. This collaboration represented an inventive reimagining of the classical sound and offered the opportunity to hear this music afresh. The freewheeling program offered a novel way to structure a recital, thinking outside the usual box...Kuusisto himself provided much of the energy of the event...He was clearly having a rollicking good time and his mood was contagious...he is a true virtuoso, playing with expressive flair and control...Kuusisto demonstrated mastery as a classical violinist and as a fiddler, a different skill set...the ear-catching thrills kept the audience enthralled."

About the appointment, SPCO President Bruce Coppock said, "In seeking Artistic Partners for the SPCO, we look for artists who are not only talented performers, but who also have the capacity to inspire our audiences and musicians alike. Pekka Kuusisto is an amazingly poetic and imaginative musician who clearly fits the bill. He dares to explore new repertoire and new ways of presentation, but his music-making is always grounded in exquisite violin playing. His powers of communication and his innate ability to convey a deeply personal point of view make his performances transcendent, regardless of what he is playing. His performances over the years with the SPCO have been electrifying and we are thrilled to welcome him to our already dynamic group of Artistic Partners."

PHOTOS

[Link to Hi-Res photos \(.zip file\)](#)

PERFORMANCE VIDEOS

Fagerlund : [Violin Concerto \(Part 1\)](#) / [\(Part 2\)](#)

Traditional: ['Piupali Paupali' \(Finnish folk song\)](#)

Radial Night: [Performance with Mahler Chamber Orchestra, dancers, jugglers and more](#)

Interview: [Kuusisto discusses performance interpretation with composer Owen Pallett](#)

ABOUT PEKKA KUUSISTO

"A violinist whose rare gift is to become, rather than perform, the music he plays" (*The Guardian*), Pekka Kuusisto is internationally renowned as both soloist and director, and for his fresh approach to the repertoire. An advocate of new music, Kuusisto regularly works with composers such as Nico Muhly and Thomas Adès. He gave the world premiere of Sebastian Fagerlund's Violin Concerto and his recording of the work with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Hannu Lintu was released on BIS in March 2015.

The 2014/15 season includes debuts with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, MDR Sinfonieorchester Leipzig and Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia. He

also directs The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen on a tour of South America. Recent orchestral engagements include the Cincinnati, Singapore, City of Birmingham, Finnish Radio and Toronto Symphony orchestras; the Philharmonia and Royal Stockholm and Oslo Philharmonic orchestras; and Washington's National Symphony Orchestra.

Collaborating with performers across the artistic spectrum, this season Kuusisto joins forces with dancers Kaari Martin (flamenco) and Minna Tervamäki (ballet) and pianist Heini Kärkkäinen for a choreographed interpretation of Sibelius' Violin Concerto, to be performed at the 2015 Dresdner Musikfestspiele. With the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Thomas Dausgaard, Kuusisto has also devised a project for the 150th anniversary of Sibelius' birth, presenting the composer's works alongside traditional songs and poems from Karelia.

Kuusisto regularly directs ensembles from the violin, including the Mahler, Saint Paul, Australian, and Irish Chamber orchestras. His recent chamber partners include Iiro Rantala, Anne Sofie von Otter, Kimmo Pohjonen, Nicolas Altstaedt and Kuusisto's traditional music group, The Luomu Players.

Pekka Kuusisto is Artistic Director of 'Our Festival', based in Sibelius' home town, which was named Festival of the Year by Finland Festivals in 2011 and later awarded the State of Finland Music Prize for its innovative programming. This season he presents two projects which were originally developed at Our Festival in his debut appearance at The Schubert Club in Minnesota.

Kuusisto has enjoyed a number of prestigious residencies, including the Aldeburgh Festival and the Robeco Zomerconcerten of Amsterdam's Concertgebouw. He is a previous 'Junge Wilde' artist at the Konzerthaus Dortmund.

His most recent CD on BIS features Sebastian Fagerlund's Violin Concerto with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Other recordings include CDs on Ondine such as Lindberg's Violin Concerto with the Tapiola Sinfonietta (where he was Artistic Partner 2006-2013), Rautavaara's complete works for violin and piano with Paavali Jumppanen and works by Paganini with guitarist Ismo Eskelinen. He has also recorded 'Subterraneo' featuring Finnish tango works with Iiro Rantala (Liverace) and 'Kiestinki', an album written and performed with Finnish singer Paula Vesala, about the experience of Finnish women on the front line during World War II (KHY Suomen Musiikki).

In 2013, Pekka Kuusisto was the recipient of the Nordic Council Music Prize, with the adjudicators describing him as "a violinist in the absolute elite".

He plays a Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin of 1752 kindly loaned by the Finnish Cultural Foundation.

ABOUT THE SAINT PAUL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, now in its 56th season, is widely regarded as one of the finest chamber orchestras in the world. In collaboration with a group of artistic partners, the virtuoso musicians present more than 130 concerts and educational programs each year, and are regularly heard on public radio's *Performance Today* which reaches 1.3 million listeners each week on 289 stations, and *SymphonyCast* reaching 250,000 listeners each week on 143 stations nationwide. The SPCO has released 67 recordings, commissioned 142 new works, and performed the world premiere of 49 additional compositions. The SPCO has earned the distinction of 17 ASCAP awards for adventurous programming. Renowned for its artistic excellence and remarkable versatility of musical styles, the SPCO tours nationally and internationally, including performances in premier venues in Europe, Asia and South America. Launched in 1994, the SPCO's award-winning CONNECT education program reaches over 5,000 students and teachers annually in 12 Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools. For more information, visit www.thespco.org.

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