

THE SAINT PAUL  
**CHAMBER**  
ORCHESTRA

**For Immediate Release**

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## **Violinist Maureen Nelson and violist Sifei Cheng join the SPCO as permanent members**

**SAINT PAUL, MN, JUNE 21, 2016** – The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) announces today that violinist Maureen Nelson and violist Sifei Cheng have been named the orchestra’s newest permanent members.

SPCO Artistic Director and Principal Violin Kyu-Young Kim reflected on the orchestra’s auditioning process: “As we hire the next generation of players for the SPCO, we have been very intentional and specific about the qualities that we are looking for in our members. We have included language in our job descriptions for musicians which is quite radical for an orchestra. We seek musicians with advanced chamber music skills who are passionate about the music we play and collaborative in how they approach their work, who will be invested in the evolution of the ensemble, and will actively participate in our efforts to engage the community in the most meaningful ways.”

Kim continued, “To be true to our goals in hiring, we have had very extensive trial periods for finalists for these positions. Both Maureen Nelson and Sifei Cheng—besides playing terrific auditions to win the unanimous votes of their respective audition committees—played numerous trial weeks as guests spanning a broad range of SPCO repertoire, and we knew the musical chemistry with these players was just right and that their personal qualities would add greatly to the ensemble.”

A native of Pennsylvania, **Maureen Nelson** first came to the attention of the orchestra during a 2008.09 season residency with the SPCO as a part of the Grammy-nominated Enso String Quartet. Since then, she has kept a busy touring schedule, with engagements across the United States and abroad, and has led the quartet to top prizes at several major competitions, including the Concert Artists Guild International Competition, the Banff International String Quartet Competition, the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, and Chamber Music Yellow Springs. As a winner of the Greenfield Competition, Maureen appeared as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1990, and has since enjoyed international success as a chamber musician, soloist and orchestral player. She was concertmaster of the Detmolder

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Kammerorchester and has been a member of the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra since 2010. She has appeared frequently for Musiqa, the Houston-based new music series, at which she has premiered many works. Maureen is also a recipient of an NFAA/Arts award, and was an arts finalist in the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program. Nelson returned to the SPCO as a Guest Musician for the 2015.16 season this past fall, and was unanimously chosen by the musician-comprised auditions committee to become a permanent member of the violin section.

Regarding her appointment with the orchestra, Nelson said, "I've loved and admired the SPCO since I was a kid, so I'm beyond thrilled to be a part of this incredible group! Having played in a string quartet now for 17 years, the foundation of my musical life has been based on trust, spontaneity and intimacy. One of the things that excites me, that I find so special about playing with this orchestra, is exploring the wider palette of sounds, yet still keeping the flexibility and intimacy of chamber music. I think this is a fantastic time for the SPCO; the energy and commitment I feel with them on stage is palpable and exhilarating."

Nelson will be featured as solo violinist for Dvořák's Romance in F for Violin and Orchestra in SPCO performances April 21-30, 2017, and can be seen in rotating positions in the first and second violins throughout the coming season.

Born in Taiwan and raised in California, violist **Sifei Cheng** has performed as a substitute musician with the SPCO for many years. He joined the Minnesota Orchestra in 1995, and has served as Principal Viola of the Charleston Symphony, New World Symphony, and the Pacific Music Festival Orchestra. He has led sections under Michael Tilson Thomas, Alexander Schneider, Eiji Oue and Christoph Eschenbach. As a chamber music performer, Sifei has played in the Ravinia Festival, Caramoor Music Festival, Taos Chamber Music Festival, Pacific Music Festival and the New York String Seminar. Some of his past coaches include Michael Tree, Samuel Rhodes, Miriam Fried, Paul Biss, Alan de Veritch, the Tokyo String Quartet, and the American String Quartet. He has collaborated in chamber music with artists such as Joshua Bell, Pamela Frank, Alicia de Larrocha and the Shanghai String Quartet. Sifei holds a degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and studied at the Juilliard School in New York. His past teachers include Karen Tuttle, Michael Tree and William Kennedy.

Regarding his appointment with the orchestra, Cheng said, "I'm excited to be joining the SPCO family this fall. For many years I've played in the great Minnesota Orchestra under Osmo's leadership, but the opportunity to now work with more great artists across the river is a chance I can't pass up. Being in a chamber setting will allow me to tackle new repertoire and build upon my chamber music background. I look forward to it and am honored to add my name to the illustrious list of musicians of the SPCO, both past and present."

Cheng will be featured in small ensembles throughout the season as part of the SPCO's Chamber Music Series. Performances will include Wynton Marsalis's String Quartet No. 1, *At the Octoroon Balls* (November 10-13, 2016), Duruflé's Prelude, Recitative and Variations for Flute, Viola and Piano (December 2-4, 2016), and Mendelssohn's Quintet in A and Octet in E-flat (February 16-19, 2017). Cheng can also be heard in rotating viola positions throughout the season.

## **PHOTOS**

[Link to photos of Maureen Nelson \(via dropbox\)](#)

[Link to photo of Sifei Cheng \(via dropbox\)](#)

## **ABOUT MAUREEN NELSON**

Maureen Nelson is a founding member and first violinist of the Grammy-nominated Enso String Quartet, which originated at Yale University in 1999, while she was at Yale earning her master's degree. She keeps a busy touring schedule, with engagements across the United States and abroad, and has led the quartet to top prizes at several major competitions, including the Concert Artists Guild International Competition, the Banff International String Quartet Competition, the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, and Chamber Music Yellow Springs. As a winner of the Greenfield Competition, Maureen appeared as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1990, and has since enjoyed international success as a chamber musician, soloist and orchestral player. She was concertmaster of the Detmolder Kammerorchester and has been a member of the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra since 2010. She has appeared frequently for Musiq, the Houston-based new music series, at which she has premiered many works. Maureen is also a recipient of an NFAA/Arts award, and was an arts finalist in the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program. A native of Pennsylvania, Maureen was enrolled in Temple University's Center for Gifted Young Musicians at the age of twelve, and began attending the Curtis Institute of Music shortly thereafter. Her teachers include Shmuel Ashkenasi, Jascha Brodsky, and Yumi Ninomiya Scott. Maureen has participated in music festivals around the world, including Evian, Sarasota, SummerFest La Jolla, Festival d'Aix en Provence, Festival de Inverno Campos do Jordão (Brazil), Prussia Cove, Pacific Music (Japan), Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), and St. Bart's Music Festivals. She is a former faculty member of Boston University's Tanglewood Institute, a former adjunct professor at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, and is currently on the faculty of the Adult Chamber Music Camp at the Interlochen Arts Academy. She has performed live on numerous radio stations, including Australia's ABC, Canada's CBC, SiriusXM, New York's WQXR, and for National Public Radio's Performance Today.

## **ABOUT SIFEI CHENG**

Born in Taiwan and raised in California, violist Sifei Cheng joined the Minnesota Orchestra in 1995. He has served as Principal Viola of the Charleston Symphony, New World Symphony, and the Pacific Music Festival Orchestra. He has led sections under Michael Tilson Thomas, Alexander Schneider, Eiji Oue and Christoph Eschenbach. As a chamber music performer, Sifei has played in the Ravinia Festival, Caramoor Music Festival, Taos Chamber Music Festival, Pacific Music Festival and the New York String Seminar. Some of his past coaches include Michael Tree, Samuel Rhodes, Miriam Fried, Paul Biss, Alan de Veritch, the Tokyo String Quartet, and the American String Quartet. He has collaborated in chamber music with artists such as Joshua Bell, Pamela Frank, Alicia de Larrocha and the Shanghai String Quartet. Sifei holds a degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and studied at the Juilliard School in New York. His past teachers include Karen Tuttle, Michael Tree and William Kennedy.

## **ABOUT THE SAINT PAUL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**

Renowned for its artistic excellence, remarkable versatility of musical styles and adventurous programming, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, is widely regarded as one of the finest chamber orchestras in the world. Entering its 58th season in September 2016, the SPCO has recently undergone transformational change, with the opening of their new home, the Ordway Concert Hall, the addition of a new generation of players, and significant changes in the scope of its artistic aspirations and profile. The SPCO is primarily an unconducted ensemble that performs a broad range of repertoire from Baroque to new music and works in close collaboration with a diverse series of Artistic Partners. The orchestra's current Artistic Partners are Jonathan Cohen, Jeremy Denk, Martin Fröst, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Pekka Kuusisto and Thomas Zehetmair. Past Artistic Partners include Roberto Abbado, Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Douglas Boyd, Joshua Bell, Nicholas McGegan, Stephen Prutsman, Dawn Upshaw and Christian Zacharias.

The virtuoso musicians of the SPCO present more than 130 concerts and educational programs each year, and are regularly heard on public radio programs which reach 1.2 million listeners each week on 289 stations. Additionally, the SPCO reaches more than 200,000 listeners annually through its free online Listening Library. The SPCO has released 67 recordings, commissioned 146 new works, and tours nationally and internationally, including performances in premier venues in Europe, Asia and South America. Recent engagements in Berkeley, CA, New York's Carnegie Hall, the Ojai Festival, and tours to Scandinavia and Central and Eastern Europe were met with great critical acclaim.

The SPCO is nationally recognized for its commitment to broad community accessibility, its innovative audience outreach efforts, and its educational and family programming. Regular subscription series are performed in a variety of different venues across the Twin Cities metropolitan area each season, a unique commitment to geographic accessibility for a major orchestra. The SPCO offers the most affordable tickets of any major orchestra in the United States, with over 50 percent of tickets available for \$12 or less. The orchestra also recently launched an innovative new ticket membership model in which members pay \$5 per month to attend unlimited concerts. The SPCO's award-winning CONNECT education program reaches over 5,000 students and teachers annually in 12 Minneapolis and Saint Paul public schools, and its Target® Free Family Music program provides engaging and educational experiences for thousands of Twin Cities children and families each year. The SPCO's Liquid Music Series (named "Best of Classical" by *The New York Times*) creates a space for innovative new projects and iconoclastic artists in unique presentation formats and invites adventurous audiences to discover the new and the fascinating within the flourishing landscape of contemporary chamber music.

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