THE SAINT PAUL
CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

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Announcing Three Sandbox World Premieres in the 2026/27 Season

Three composers develop and premiere new works with the SPCO

- **Jon Deak:** Concerto for Contrabass, *Under A Spell* (world premiere: Nov 13–14, 2026)
- **Gabriela Lena Frank:** *Ballad of John James Audubon and the Runaway: An American Tragedy Ignored and Retold* (world premiere: Feb 19–21, 2027)
- **Chen Yi:** Oboe Concerto, *Melodies from Home* (world premiere: May 21–22, 2027)

SAINT PAUL, MN, NOVEMBER 2, 2026 — In the 2026/27 season, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) celebrates five years of its Sandbox Composer Residency program. First launched in the 2022/23 season, Sandbox gives composers the opportunity to develop new pieces in close collaboration with SPCO musicians over the course of multiple seasons. In this alternative to the industry's traditional commission process, in which an ensemble hires a composer to write and deliver a single composition, the Sandbox model fosters lasting relationships with composers while giving them the time and flexibility as artists to experiment. These residencies allow the SPCO to rehearse works-in-progress years in advance of each world premiere, where composers continue developing the composition through orchestra feedback in a collaborative workshop process.

In its fifth season since launching Sandbox, the SPCO will feature three Sandbox composers-in-residence and their world premiere performances, including two concertos written for SPCO musicians and one premiere that was postponed from the 2025/26 season.

- **Zachary Cohen Premieres Deak's Bass Concerto (Nov 13–14, 2026)**
  Written for SPCO Principal Bass Zachary Cohen, **Jon Deak**'s *Under A Spell* is a double bass concerto that takes the form of a modern folktale. Drawing on the tropes and elements of traditional folktales, Deak collaborated with Bill Gordh, a storyteller/songwriter and frequent creative partner, to develop their own folktale that offers commentary on the current political landscape. As a longtime educator, Deak draws inspiration from the next generation of young artists who speak out against injustice, and he has dedicated much of his life to fostering a love of music and composition in young students, including through the New York Philharmonic's Very Young Composers program that he founded in 1995. As a bassist himself who, for many years, was the Associate Principal of the New York Philharmonic, Deak wrote *Under A Spell* for Cohen, whom he credits as the source of a number of editorial suggestions during the workshop process. Through five movements, the work uses a narrative as its structure.

- **Frank's Sandbox Premiere with Mei-Ann Chen (Feb 19–21, 2027)**
  Inspired by the poet and birder J. Drew Lanham's essay "What Do We Do About John James Audubon?" published in *Audubon Magazine*, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer **Gabriela Lena Frank**'s newest work for baritone and chamber orchestra reflects on the idea of complicated legacies. In the composition, *Ballad of John James Audubon and the Runaway: An American Tragedy Ignored and Retold*, Frank and Lanham ruminate on the legacy of the French American writer and ornithologist who inspired the modern conservation movement, particularly Audubon's

participation in American slavery. Lanham's writings — through his essay and libretto — and Frank's composition respond to the lack of humanity Audubon displayed through his story, "The Runaway," in which he returns to slavery a young Black family that he encounters in a Louisiana swamp. Through four movements, Frank's *Ballad* retells the story of "The Runaway" in the context of personal heritage, entangled histories, and a reckoning with complicity.

- **Cassie Pilgrim Premieres Chen Yi's Oboe Concerto (May 21–22, 2027)**
  Having bonded over a shared cultural heritage rooted in southern China, SPCO Principal Oboe Cassie Pilgrim gave the world premiere of composer Chen Yi's Elegy for Solo Oboe — a mournful response to the ongoing pandemic that we livestreamed from an empty hall. In *Melodies from Home*, her newest oboe concerto written for Pilgrim, Chen Yi returns to the universal exploration of family and culture, of connection and nostalgia.

ABOUT SANDBOX COMPOSER RESIDENCIES

The SPCO Sandbox is a new kind of composer residency program which aims to build a community of curiosity and exploration around new music by inviting composers to develop new works in a collaborative process with the orchestra over the course of a season. The idea of placing a composer at the creative center of an orchestra is not new. Indeed, it is this very arrangement that proved such fertile creative ground for composer Franz Joseph Haydn, who famously said of his time embedded with the Esterházy court orchestra that: "As head of an orchestra, I could try things out, observe what creates a good effect and what weakens it, and thus revise, make additions or cuts, take risks. I was cut off from the world, nobody in my vicinity could upset my self-confidence … I had no choice but to become original."

In the 2026/27 season, the SPCO premieres the works of three Sandbox composers-in-residence, including Jon Deak, Gabriela Lena Frank and Chen Yi.

Past Sandbox composers-in-residence include Valerie Coleman (2024/25 season), Clarice Assad (2023/24 season) and Viet Cuong (2022/23 season).

FUNDERS

SPCO Sandbox Composer Residencies are made possible with generous project support from: Amphion Foundation, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University, David and Karen Olson Family Foundation, Justus and Elizabeth Schlichting, Nara Fund, New Music USA. Chen Yi's Sandbox Composer Residency is also supported by the Chinese Heritage Foundation. Learn more at thespco.org/sandbox.

Under A Spell was commissioned by Linda Hoeschler and Peter Blyberg for Zach Cohen, Principal Bass, and The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra in honor of the artistry and artistic leadership of Kyu-Young Kim.

Ballad of John James Audubon and the Runaway: An American Tragedy Ignored and Retold was commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation, Library of Congress and The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra with support from Justus and Elizabeth Schlichting. We are deeply grateful for a generous bequest from The Robinson Family that helped make this performance possible.

Melodies from Home was commissioned for The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and Cassie Pilgrim, Principal Oboe, Sewell Family Chair, in honor of Gloria Sewell and her extraordinary support of the arts, by Linda Hoeschler and Peter Blyberg.

TICKETS

Tickets start at $20 for adults and are free for children and students of all ages. Tickets can be purchased through Patron Services by calling 651.291.1144 Monday–Friday 12–5pm and Saturday 11am–3pm or thespco.org.

ABOUT THE SAINT PAUL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Founded in 1959, the Grammy Award-winning Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) is renowned for its artistic excellence, remarkable versatility of musical styles and adventurous programming. SPCO concerts are primarily musician-led and include a broad range of repertoire, from Baroque works to new music, in close collaboration with a dynamic roster of internationally acclaimed Artistic Partners. Through a distinctive musician-led artistic model, SPCO musicians lead and develop the orchestra's programming, determine members and choose artistic collaborators.

In its commitment to making music accessible to everyone, the SPCO presents concerts in a variety of venues across the Twin Cities each year while offering the most affordable ticket prices of any professional orchestra in the United States.

MISSION OF THE SAINT PAUL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Our mission is to sustain a world-class chamber orchestra at the highest standards of artistic excellence that enriches the Twin Cities community by sharing dynamic, distinctive and engaging performances. We are actively committed to accessibility and intentional inclusivity in all aspects of our work and continually strive to provide all people in our community with opportunities to connect with the music we perform.

PHOTOS

Access photos of The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra here. Click on each thumbnail to download images.

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