



**St. Louis Symphony
Orchestra**
stéphane denève : music director



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[February 4, 2021]

Contacts: St. Louis Symphony Orchestra: Eric Dundon ericd@slo.org, 314-286-4134
National/International : Nikki Scandalios nikki@scandaliospr.com, 704-340-4094

**ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CELEBRATES KEVIN MCBETH'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY AS
IN UNISON CHORUS DIRECTOR**

**February 7 broadcast of IN UNISON Chorus' *Lift Every Voice* concert on Nine PBS marks milestone
with McBeth leading world premiere of Isaac Cates' "It's Working"**

(February 4, 2021, St. Louis, MO) – The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra is celebrating its remarkable 10-year partnership with Kevin McBeth, Director of the St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON Chorus, a pioneering resident SLSO chorus that specializes in the interpretation, performance, and preservation of the music of African American and African cultures. The 26-year-old chorus—a 120+-voice ensemble formed in 1994 and featured multiple times each season—is part of the SLSO's IN UNISON program, a multi-pronged effort to connect the orchestra with the St. Louis region through partnerships with African American churches, a mentorship program for young musicians, and an academic support arm.

Over the past decade, McBeth has led the IN UNISON Chorus in a wide range of repertoire, from traditional African American spirituals and sacred music, to secular tunes and covers of popular songs, and has broadened the chorus repertoire to include new works by Isaac Cates and Rollo Dilworth. The IN UNISON Chorus will also premiere a new piece for chorus and orchestra by Haitian American composer and flutist Nathalie Joachim in the 2021/2022 classical season, under the direction of Music Director Stéphane Denève.

Appointed in late 2010 to succeed IN UNISON Chorus founding director Dr. Robert Ray, McBeth leads the chorus in three performances each season and supports an array of SLSO activities, from orchestral concerts and Live At Powell Hall performances to community and education programs. In honor of McBeth's milestone and the IN UNISON Chorus, the SLSO and its media partners will share performances by McBeth and the chorus over the coming weeks.

Marie-Hélène Bernard, President and CEO of the SLSO, said, "We are immensely proud of Kevin and his extraordinary contributions to making the IN UNISON Chorus a cornerstone of our SLSO family. As we honor Kevin, we celebrate his generous spirit and our IN UNISON Chorus' lasting impact on our stage and throughout our community. Every corner of our institution has been deeply touched by Kevin's talent and dedication, and we look forward to our continued artistic partnership and friendship."

Michelle Byrd, Manager of the St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON Chorus, said, "Under Kevin's leadership, the IN UNISON Chorus has seen tremendous artistic growth. Kevin's emphasis on



programming diverse works means IN UNISON Chorus concerts attract and retain a varied and loyal audience. He also excels at recruiting and retaining singers of diverse ages, backgrounds, and experience levels. He has positioned the chorus on an amazing path for the future.”

Kevin McBeth, Director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra IN UNISON Chorus, said, “The initial thrill of making music on the stage at Powell Hall is still with me ten years later. The IN UNISON Chorus rises to every challenge and the members are passionate about the music we offer. It is a great privilege and honor to work with such gifted musicians!”

McBeth directs the IN UNISON Chorus in three performances each season: the annual Gospel Christmas concert in December and the *Lift Every Voice: Celebrating Black History Month* concert in February, both with the SLSO; and a free community concert of choral music each spring.

To mark McBeth’s anniversary and celebrate the IN UNISON Chorus, the SLSO is providing free access to several performances, including:

- **Sunday, February 7, 5:00pm CDT:** A rebroadcast of the annual *Lift Every Voice: Celebrating Black History Month* concert from 2019 on Nine PBS with McBeth leading the SLSO, IN UNISON Chorus, and guest artists, vocalists Jermaine Smith and Denise Thimes, including the world premiere of Isaac Cates’ “It’s Working.” Nine PBS will also post this rebroadcast [on its website](#) to stream for a limited time.
- **Saturday, February 20, 8:00pm CDT, 90.7 KMWU St. Louis Public Radio:** A rebroadcast of the October 2009 concert featuring the classical season debut of the IN UNISON Chorus, singing Rollo Dilworth’s *Freedom’s Plow* and Michael Tippett’s *A Child of Our Time* in collaboration with the St. Louis Symphony Chorus and then-Music Director David Robertson. [Listen online](#) for 30 days after this radio broadcast.
- **Available for 30 days from February 27-March 27:** The February 2011 *Lift Every Voice* concert, McBeth’s first as IN UNISON Chorus Director, produced by Nine PBS—available on the [orchestra’s website](#).

Since his first concert on February 18, 2011, McBeth has led dozens of concerts and collaborated with many guest artists, including acclaimed vocalists Oleta Adams, Patti Austin, Kennedy Holmes, Marlissa Hudson, Wintley Phipps, and Denise Thimes; ensembles including a cappella groups Take 6 and Ambassadors of Harmony; and instrumentalists including jazz trumpeter Byron Stripling.

IN UNISON Chorus concerts regularly draw capacity audiences to Powell Hall. Under McBeth’s leadership, IN UNISON Chorus members have performed twice at the annual SLSO concert in Forest Park. IN UNISON Chorus singers also joined members of the St. Louis Symphony Chorus at Carnegie Hall for performances of Benjamin Britten’s opera *Peter Grimes* in 2013 with then-Music Director David Robertson. The chorus also performed at the Urban League National Conference, held in St. Louis in 2017. McBeth has led the IN UNISON Chorus in a wide range of repertoire, from traditional African American spirituals and sacred music, to secular tunes and covers of popular songs. Broadening the repertoire of the chorus, McBeth has introduced foreign language compositions,

leading the chorus in works sung in Swahili and Latin.

McBeth also leads orchestral and special performances throughout the year. He has been on the podium for collaborations with several high-profile guest artists, including the R&B/jazz singer Ledisi, Broadway stars Leslie Odom, Jr., and Sutton Foster, and recording artists Boyz II Men and Amos Lee. He also conducted collaborative concerts of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra and its alumni in honor of the YO's 50th anniversary in 2020, and the Joining Forces program—a free community concert where SLSO musicians share the stage with area military musicians. In the community, McBeth has led the orchestra in performances under the Gateway Arch at Fair St. Louis and at Manchester United Methodist Church, where he also serves as Director of Music and Worship.

From 2011-2019, McBeth also directed the Holiday Festival Chorus, a unique ensemble of young singers from across the St. Louis region that performed with the SLSO at its annual Holiday Celebration concerts. McBeth also engages with the SLSO's educational programming and has led Tiny Tunes concerts with hundreds of Pre-K students on stage at Powell Hall.

McBeth is the second director of the IN UNISON Chorus. Robert Ray directed the chorus from its founding in 1994 through 2010. In 2019, the chorus celebrated its 25th anniversary. Chorus members represent a variety of backgrounds, careers, and experience levels. Some come from IN UNISON partner church congregations. Since its inception, the IN UNISON Chorus has been supported by Bayer Fund.

Calendar listings

The SLSO is celebrating McBeth and the IN UNISON Chorus with several broadcasts in the coming weeks.

Sunday, February 7, 2021, 5:00pm CDT

Nine PBS (Channel 9)

This concert was originally held on February 22, 2019.

This concert will be available to stream for a limited time on the Nine PBS website following the rebroadcast.

Kevin McBeth, conductor

Harry Cecil, conductor

Denise Thimes, vocals

Jermaine Smith, vocals

Patricia Land, vocals

Jennifer Kelley, vocals

Julius WILLIAMS

The Legacy, Overture of African American Spirituals

Rollo DILWORTH

Freedom's Plow

George GERSHWIN

"It Ain't Necessarily So" from Porgy and Bess



George GERSHWIN	“There’s a Boat That’s Leaving Soon” from <i>Porgy and Bess</i>
TRADITIONAL	“Every Time I Feel the Spirit”
Stephen FLAHERTY	“Make Them Hear You”
Billy TAYLOR	“I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free”
Isaac CATES	“It’s Working” (World Premiere performance)
J. Rosamund JOHNSON	“Lift Every Voice and Sing”
Robert RAY	<i>Gospel Mass</i>

Saturday, February 20, 2021, 8:00pm CDT

90.7 KWMU St. Louis Public Radio

This concert was originally held on October 23, 2009.

This concert will be available to stream for a limited time on slo.org following the rebroadcast.

David Robertson, conductor

Measha Brueggergosman, soprano

Kate Lindsey, mezzo-soprano

Paul Groves, tenor

Jubilant Sykes, baritone

St. Louis Symphony Chorus | Amy Kaiser, Director

Members of the IN UNISON Chorus

Charles IVES	<i>The Unanswered Question</i>
Samuel BARBER	<i>Adagio for Strings</i>
Rollo DILWORTH	<i>Freedom’s Plow</i>
Michael TIPPETT	<i>A Child of Our Time</i>

Available to stream from February 27-March 27

This concert was originally held on February 18, 2011.

Kevin McBeth, conductor

Patrice Jackson, cello

John WILLIAMS	<i>Liberty Fanfare</i>
Randall THOMPSON	“The God Who Gave Us Life” from <i>The Testament of Freedom</i>
TRADITIONAL	“Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”
Camille SAINT-SAËNS	Allegro non troppo from Cello Concerto No. 1
TRADITIONAL	“Deep River”
TRADITIONAL	“Peace Like a River”
TRADITIONAL	“Keep Your Lamps!”



J. Rosamund JOHNSON	“Lift Every Voice and Sing”
Scott JOPLIN	<i>The Entertainer</i>
TRADITIONAL	“Goin’ Up to Glory”
TRADITIONAL	“Hush! Somebody’s Callin’ My Name”
TRADITIONAL	“Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”
Karl JENKINS	Benedictus from <i>The Armed Man: A Mass for Peace</i>
TRADITIONAL	“We Shall Overcome”
Rollo DILWORTH	<i>Freedom’s Plow</i>

About the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra

Celebrated as one of today’s most exciting and enduring orchestras, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra is the second-oldest orchestra in the country, marking its 141st year with the 2020/2021 season and its second with [Music Director Stéphane Denève](#). Widely considered one of the world’s finest orchestras, the SLSO maintains its commitment to artistic excellence, educational impact, and community connections—all in service to its mission of enriching lives through the power of music.

The SLSO musical family also includes two resident choruses: the St. Louis Symphony Chorus, founded in 1976; and the St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON Chorus, an ensemble founded in 1994 and focused on the music of African American and African cultures. The SLSO family also includes the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, founded by Conductor Laureate Leonard Slatkin in 1970.

In addition to its regular concert performances at Powell Hall, which has been the permanent home of the SLSO for more than 50 years, the orchestra is an integral part of the diverse and vibrant St. Louis community, presenting dozens of free education and community programs and performances throughout the region each year. It presents *St. Louis Symphony: Live at the Pulitzer*, a collaboration with the Pulitzer Arts Foundation focused on music of today. The SLSO also serves as the resident orchestra for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, with the upcoming 2021 festival season marking the 44th year of the partnership.

The Grammy Award-winning SLSO’s impact beyond the St. Louis region is realized through weekly Saturday night concert broadcasts on St. Louis Public Radio, acclaimed recordings, and regular touring activity. A sought-after artistic partner by preeminent musicians and composers from across the globe, as well as by local and national organizations, the SLSO enjoys a long history of robust and enduring artistic collaborations that have developed and deepened over the years.

Today, the SLSO builds on the institution’s current momentum on all fronts, including artistic, financial, audience growth, and community impact, and looks toward the future with Stéphane Denève. For more information, visit slo.org.

#