



**St. Louis Symphony  
Orchestra**

stéphane denève : music director

news

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

[January 11, 2022]

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**ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND MUSIC DIRECTOR STÉPHANE DENÈVE BEGIN 2023 WITH WORLD PREMIERES OF SLSO-COMMISSIONED WORKS BY JAMES LEE III AND KEVIN PUTS, BOTH WITH DEEP LOCAL CONNECTIONS**

**The SLSO gives the world premiere of St. Louis native Kevin Puts’ Concerto for Orchestra, which draws inspiration from “Hymn for the Hurting” by Amanda Gorman, on January 21-22; program also includes the first SLSO performances of Detlev Glanert’s *Weites Land (Open Land)* and Johannes Brahms’ Piano Concerto No. 1 with Hélène Grimaud**

**On January 28-29, Denève and the orchestra give the world premiere of James Lee III’s *Visions of Cahokia*, inspired by Midwest indigenous civilization and the Cahokia Mounds, a UNESCO World Heritage Site; program also includes Jean Sibelius’ Symphony No. 2 and Leonard Bernstein’s *Serenade (after Plato’s Symposium)* with violinist James Ehnes**

**(January 11, 2022, St. Louis, MO)** – The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra will give the world premieres of two works commissioned by the orchestra this January, led by Music Director Stéphane Denève. The new pieces were written for the SLSO by composers with deep ties to the orchestra: Kevin Puts and James Lee III.

**Stéphane Denève, SLSO Music Director**, said, “I am extremely excited to share with our audiences two new works from two composers I adore. They both have a singular voice, and the accessible and deeply moving music they create will have a long-lasting place in the repertoire. Our wonderful orchestra has enjoyed getting to know the music of Kevin and James over the past few years and I am delighted to offer to our St. Louis music lovers the first hearing of this important new music, written for and with our orchestra and myself in mind and therefore creating meaningful connections to our community!”

The commissions of Puts’ Concerto for Orchestra and Lee’s *Visions of Cahokia* advances Denève’s and the SLSO’s priority on music of today, realized through regular commissioning projects and the St. Louis Symphony: Live at the Pulitzer series. That series—a nearly two-decade partnership with the Pulitzer Arts Foundation—presents chamber music by bold composers of today, many of whom are introduced to St. Louis audiences through the series.

**World Premiere of Kevin Puts’ Concerto for Orchestra**

On January 21-22, Denève leads the SLSO in the world premiere of the Concerto for Orchestra by Kevin Puts—St. Louis native and winner of the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Music for his debut opera *Silent Night*. Puts’ Concerto for Orchestra draws inspiration from the poem “Hymn for the Hurting” by



Amanda Gorman, a former National Youth Poet Laureate and noted speaker at the inauguration of President Biden. Gorman's poem was written in response to the deadly shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, in May 2022. The SLSO commission of Concerto for Orchestra is the third SLSO-commissioned work by Puts in Denève's tenure following *Virelai*, the first work performed by the SLSO under Denève's tenure as Music Director in September 2019. And in February 2020, the orchestra gave its first performances of *Silent Night Elegy*, a suite from Puts' award-winning opera, *Silent Night*. The world premiere of Concerto for Orchestra comes on the heels of the premiere of Puts' newest opera, *The Hours*, by the Metropolitan Opera in November 2022. The program begins with the SLSO premiere of Detlev Glanert's *Weites Land (Open Land)*, a melodically robust piece that is heavily influenced by Johannes Brahms' Fourth Symphony. This is the second SLSO program that Denève has led featuring the work of both Glanert—whom Denève champions as a foremost German composer of today—and Brahms; the first was a January 2022 concert with Glanert's *Brahms-Fantasia* and Brahms' First Symphony. The concert will close as Hélène Grimaud joins the SLSO for Johannes Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1. A longtime collaborator of Denève's, Grimaud makes her return to the SLSO after 20 years, performing the same piece that earned her rave reviews in her SLSO debut.

### **World Premiere of James Lee III's *Visions of Cahokia***

The January 28-29 concerts open with the world premiere of James Lee III's *Visions of Cahokia*, an SLSO commission led by Denève. Lee took inspiration from a visit to Cahokia Mounds, the ancient ruins of the most sophisticated native civilization north of Mexico located across the Mississippi River from St. Louis near present-day Collinsville, Illinois. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Cahokia Mounds includes the remains of about 80 man-made mounds and is considered one of the most important archaeological sites in North America. At the height of the Mississippian civilization in 1100 AD, Cahokia was more populous than contemporaneous London. The SLSO's performances of *Visions of Cahokia* will be the fourth work of Lee's that has been performed by the SLSO in the past two seasons, all led by Denève. The SLSO will record the world premiere performances for use in an online-based education program to be made available worldwide. Also in the program, James Ehnes, an SLSO recording partner, returns to Powell Hall to perform one of Leonard Bernstein's most lyrical works, *Serenade (after Plato's Symposium)*. The final piece on the program is Jean Sibelius' Symphony No. 2, filled with the influence of Beethoven and described by Sibelius as "a confession of the soul."

Saturday night classical concerts will be broadcast live on 90.7 FM KWMU St. Louis Public Radio, Classic 107.3, and online ([stlpr.org](http://stlpr.org)). The SLSO's 143rd season runs through June 2023.

### **Concert listings**

**Saturday, January 21, 2023, 8:00pm CST**

**Sunday, January 22, 2023, 3:00pm CST**

Stéphane Denève, conductor

Hélène Grimaud, piano



**Detlev GLANERT**  
**Kevin PUTS**  
**Johannes BRAHMS**

*Weites Land (Open Land)* (First SLSO performance)  
Concerto for Orchestra (World premiere | SLSO commission)\*  
Piano Concerto No. 1

*\*Commissioned by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, with the generous support of Joseph and Bette Hirsch and Jeff and Deborah Pierce.*

**Saturday, January 28, 2023, 8:00pm CST**

**Sunday, January 29, 2023, 3:00pm CST**

Stéphane Denève, conductor  
James Ehnes, violin

**James LEE III**  
**Leonard BERNSTEIN**  
**Jean SIBELIUS**

*Visions of Cahokia* (World premiere | SLSO commission)  
Serenade (after Plato's *Symposium*)  
Symphony No. 2

#### [About James Lee III](#)

James Lee III, born 1975 in St. Joseph, Michigan cites as his major composition teachers Michael Daugherty, William Bolcom, Bright Sheng, Betsy Jolas, Susan Botti, Erik Santos and James Aikman. He graduated with a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Michigan in 2005.

#### [About Kevin Puts](#)

Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts has established himself as one of America's leading composers, gaining international acclaim for his "plush, propulsive" music (*The New York Times*), and described by *Opera News* as "a master polystylist."

#### [About James Ehnes](#)

James Ehnes has established himself as one of the most sought-after violinists on the international stage. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism and an unfaltering musicality, Ehnes is a favourite guest of many of the world's most respected conductors.

#### [About Hélène Grimaud](#)

A Renaissance woman, Hélène Grimaud is not just a deeply passionate and committed musical artist whose pianistic accomplishments play a central role in her life. She is a woman with multiple talents that extend far beyond the instrument she plays with such poetic expression and peerless technical control.

#### [About the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra](#)

Celebrated as a leading American orchestra, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra is the second-oldest orchestra in the country, marking its 143rd year with the 2022/2023 season and its fourth with [Music Director Stéphane Denève](#). The SLSO maintains its commitment to artistic excellence, educational



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impact, and community collaborations, honoring its mission of enriching lives through the power of music.

The SLSO serves as a convener of individuals, creators, and ideas, and is committed to building community through compelling and inclusive musical experiences. As it continues its longstanding focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and access, the SLSO embraces its strengths as a responsive, nimble organization, while investing in partnerships locally and elevating its presence globally. For more information, visit [slo.org](https://slo.org).

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