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ASPEN MUSIC FESTIVAL AND SCHOOL ANNOUNCES 2026 SUMMER SEASON *For All*

July 1 – August 23, 2026

ASPEN, COLORADO — The Aspen Music Festival and School (AMFS) celebrates 77 years of performance and mentorship this summer, when more than 450 young artists from around the world come together, with artist-faculty and guests from the foremost orchestras and music schools nationwide, for almost 200 public events.

Season Theme “For All”



Titled “For All” in a nod to the closing words of the Pledge of Allegiance, the 2026 Festival commemorates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In celebration of this historic milestone, the season’s repertoire will include classic and contemporary works by American composers, as well as significant works celebrating the contributions of visitors and new arrivals from all over the world to the American sound, and an Aspen signature mix of both much loved and rarely performed works from the full breadth of the classical repertoire. As in previous seasons, these events will all be presented over eight weeks in Aspen’s spectacular mountain setting (July 1–Aug 23).

Opening Sunday with the Aspen Festival Orchestra kicks off the season theme with works by **Charles Ives, Aaron Copland, and John Adams**—three different generations of extraordinary American composers—led by the great American music director Robert Spano. Spano will then draw the summer to a close with **Leonard**

Bernstein's "Chichester Psalms" and Beethoven's celebratory Symphony No. 9 "Choral", whose text speaks to the idea of a brotherhood for all (Aug. 23).

Also under the direction of Spano, the Aspen Chamber Symphony will explore composer Bernstein's philosophical side with Three Meditations from *Mass*, Symphony No. 1 "Jeremiah" and Serenade after Plato's *Symposium* on an all-American program featuring violinist Robert McDuffie (July 17).

The season theme is also reflected in works written in and/or inspired by America such as Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9, "From the New World"* (Aug. 7), Varese's *Amériques* (July 26) and Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 4* (Aug. 16).

The repertoire that represents this season's theme embraces the melting pot that is the ongoing American experiment. AMFS Munroe President and CEO **Alan Fletcher** explains:

"The words of our 2026 season theme, 'For All' reflect the inspirational sentiment behind the Declaration of Independence and indeed the American experiment as a whole. The American spirit uniquely combines a passionate celebration of individual voice along with the richness of pluralism, which lends itself perfectly to an Aspen summer season."

Currently celebrating his 21st and final year at the helm of the AMFS, Fletcher will transition into the role of President Emeritus beginning January 1, 2027. Fletcher says:

"I look forward to staying close to AMFS and its community of students, faculty, staff, and Board for years to come. Every accomplishment of this great organization is the result of dedication, creativity, inspiration, and immense hard work coming from every side: the promise of the young artists, the leadership of the faculty, the remarkable work of the staff, and the visionary generosity and commitment of the Board and Aspen community."

World Premieres and Commissioned Works

Aspen boasts a long history of fostering new music through commissions, premieres, and performances. This season shines a light on new American orchestral music with the launch of the **First Symphonies Project**—championed by AMFS Music Director Robert Spano, this multi-year initiative commissions first symphonies from emerging and established American composers.

The first fruits of this new initiative will be on display Sunday, July 19 with the **world premiere of Matthew Aucoin's *Symphony No. 1***, an AMFS co-commission. Aucoin's new orchestral work also features noted mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato and will be conducted by AMFS alumnus **Cristian Măcelaru**.

Other AMFS commissioned works this season include **Sarah Kirkland Snider's** much-lauded *Hildegard* (July 31); **David Lang's** new oratorio, *the wealth of nations* (Aug. 1); **Jessie Montgomery's** Cello Concerto performed by the South African cellist **Abel Selaocoe** (Aug. 9); **Reena Esmail's** Concerto for Violin and Piano performed by **Gil Shaham** and **Orli Shaham** (Aug. 14); and **Jake Heggie's** *Earth 2.0* featuring countertenor and AMFS alumnus **Key'mon W. Murrah** on the Aspen Chamber Symphony's opening program (July 3).

This season features a residency with **Principal Guest Composer Caroline Shaw**. In addition to mentoring the composition students, leading masterclasses, and engaging with the AMFS community, Shaw's works will

be featured on three programs: the **Aspen Conducting Academy Orchestra** performs *The Observatory* (July 22); pianist **Emanuel Ax** plays her Entr'acte for string ensemble on an otherwise all-Mozart program (July 25); and AMFS alumnus **Teddy Abrams** will conduct her outdoor, site-specific *Brush on the Meadows Campus* (July 30).

As in previous seasons, fresh music is interwoven throughout the Aspen summer. Led by **Timothy Weiss**, the **Aspen Contemporary Ensemble** performs works by prominent living composers and classics of the 20th century. This season the ensemble will focus its efforts on American composers including two world premieres by Donald Crockett and Jesse Jones.

Festival Orchestra Highlights



The **Aspen Festival Orchestra** performs eight programs this summer. AMFS Music Director **Robert Spano** leads its opening and closing concerts that lean into the season's theme "For All," with an all-American opening program that features Copland's Third Symphony and soprano **Renée Fleming** and baritone **Thomas Hampson** singing selections from **John Adams' Nixon in China** (July 5).

Other highlights of the Festival Orchestra repertoire include **Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5** conducted by

Rafael Payare (July 12); **Varèse's** massive work, *Amériques*, led by **Dima Slobodeniouk** (July 26); **Gershwin's** *Piano Concerto in F* with **Jean-Yves Thibaudet** at the piano conducted by **Robert Spano** (Aug. 2); and **Mahler's Symphony No. 1** conducted by **Stéphane Denève**, music director of the St. Louis Symphony and artistic director of the New World Symphony (Aug. 9).

Aspen Opera Theater and VocalARTS Program

The Aspen Opera Theater and VocalARTS (AOTVA) program, under the co-artistic direction of **Renée Fleming** and **Patrick Summers**, launched in Aspen in summer 2021 and continues to thrive. Applications continue to increase year-over-year, with a 12% increase in 2026 from 2025 alone.

The program offers a complete training protocol for young singers building careers in the opera and classical music industry. **Myra Huang** leads a world class team of music and language coaches. Artist Fellows participate in two productions led by distinguished conductors and directors, an **Opera Benefit gala evening** (July 7), weekly opera scenes classes and song recitals, events in private homes, and composer-artist collaborations with members of the Susan and Ford Schumann Center for Composition Studies.

Dame Jane Glover will conduct two fully-staged performances of **Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream** in Aspen's historic Wheeler Opera House (July 20, 22) with direction by **Simon Godwin**—artistic director of the Shakespeare Theatre Company and associated director of the National Theatre of London—and starring countertenor Anthony Roth Costanzo as Oberon. Glover's affinity for Britten's work stems from a deep

personal connection—she first met the composer when she was sixteen years old and he became a mentor and guiding influence for her as she grew into her illustrious career.

Aspen Contemporary Ensemble director **Timothy Weiss** will lead a performance of **Sarah Kirkland Snider's *Hildegard*** in Harris Concert Hall (July 31). An AMFS co-commissioned work with vocal roles for eight singers, *Hildegard* is a work of operatic historical fiction about twelfth-century German Benedictine abbess/polymath St. Hildegard von Bingen. Snider's first opera, *Hildegard* recently premiered with the L.A. Opera garnering rave reviews with *The New York Times* calling it “gorgeously mesmerizing.”

The opera season concludes with a semi-staged production of **Mozart's *The Magic Flute*** in the Klein Music Tent conducted by **Patrick Summers** with direction by **Paola Suozzi**, executive stage director at The Metropolitan Opera (Aug. 21).

The AMFS is pleased to announce that the Denver-based **Kantorei** will return to Aspen this summer as Choral Ensemble in Residence, performing on several programs during the season: opening the Festival Orchestra season with John Adams's *Nixon in China* (July 5); in David Lang's *the wealth of nations* with the Aspen Chamber Symphony (Aug. 1); Mozart's *The Magic Flute* with the Aspen Opera Theater and VocalARTS program (Aug. 21); and the closing Sunday performance with the Aspen Festival Orchestra in Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Aug. 23). Comprised of volunteer singers under the direction of Artistic Director Joel M. Rinsema, Kantorei are frequent guests at the AMFS, most recently performing in last season's world premiere of *Siddhartha, She*.

Special Events



Global sensation and distinguished AMFS alumna **Yuja Wang** makes her long-awaited return to Aspen for two performances, appearing first with the dynamic Latin-Caribbean jazz collective **People of Earth**—for an electrifying new collaboration in Aspen's Harris Concert Hall (July 29). Longtime friends since their days at the Curtis Institute of Music, Wang and **Gabriel Globus-Hoenich**—People of Earth's founder and percussionist—reunite to explore the vibrant rhythms and colors of Afro-Latin and Caribbean music through bold new arrangements and original compositions. Yang will also join the **Aspen Chamber Symphony** to perform Barber's *Piano Concerto* with conductor **Teddy Abrams** (Aug. 1).

The AMFS's fruitful collaborations with Theatre Aspen continue this summer with two performances of a musical to-be-announced conducted by Broadway mainstay **Andy Einhorn** (July 13, July 14).

The legendary American classical pianist **Emanuel Ax** comes to Aspen to perform a special Mozart-focused evening conducted by longtime friend **Robert Spano** in Harris Concert Hall. The evening features Mozart's Overture to *La Clemenza di Tito*, and Piano Concertos No. 17 and No. 25, alongside Caroline Shaw's *Entr'acte* (July 25).

In other notable season recitals, mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato presents a special evening with Aspen Opera Theatre and Vocal Arts Co-Artistic Director **Patrick Summers** at the piano in Harris Concert Hall (July 15). AMFS artist-faculty and bass sensation **Edgar Meyer** returns to Harris Concert Hall for what promises to be a virtuosic, genre-bending journey (Aug. 18).

The Aspen Spirit: Guest Artists, Alumni, and Debuts

The AMFS is a place artists return to in a spirit of deep affection and to give back. Former students like **Joyce Yang**, **Alisa Weilerstein**, and **Teddy Abrams** return as headlining artists and then also visit with their teachers. They return to play unusual repertoire, experiment with their own new works, or, like alumna **Renée Fleming**, to join the faculty or to design and lead their own programs.

They join other visiting artists who enjoy connecting with young, vibrant musicians in the cusp of their careers, or who got an early career break in Aspen and now never miss a summer. Performers showcased before their careers took off include **Inon Barnatan** and **Augustin Hadelich**. They both continue to come more than a decade later, now as friends, with their families and pets.

Aspen represents ideas and musicianship at their best, and in uniquely personal and authentic ways. There are no metaphorical barriers at the Festival. After performing, artists often slip into the audience for their concert's second half; they walk the streets casually, dropping bills in the instrument cases of busking students.

AMFS alumni returning to perform, direct, and teach this summer are **Joyce Yang** (July 1), **Key'mon Murrah** (July 3), **James Gaffigan** (July 3) **Renée Fleming** (July 5), **Alisa Weilerstein** (July 9, July 12), **Robert McDuffie** (July 9, 17), **Edgar Meyer** (July 18), **Cristian Măcelaru** (July 19), **James Conlon** (July 24), **Sharon Isbin** (Aug 19), **Yuja Wang** (July 29, Aug. 1), **Teddy Abrams** (Aug. 1), **Leonard Slatkin** (Aug. 7) and **Ryan McKinny** (Aug. 23).

Alumnus **Gil Shaham**, a frequent returning guest to the AMFS stages, brings an ambitious project to Aspen this summer: performances of the complete catalog of Beethoven Violin Sonatas. He will perform these with pianist **Akira Eguchi** over three evenings in Harris Concert Hall (Aug. 6, Aug. 8, Aug. 11). Additionally, he is joined by his sister, pianist and fellow AMFS alum **Orli Shaham** for the AMFS co-commissioned Concerto for Violin and Piano by **Reena Esmail**, performed with the Aspen Chamber Symphony led by **David Robertson** (Aug 14).



This year's returning artists include **Leonidas Kavakos** (July 8, July 10), **David Robertson** (July 9), **Inon Barnatan** (July 9, July 11), **Nicholas McGegan** (July 10), **Rafael Payare** (July 12), **Augustin Hadelich** (July 16, July 19), **Dame Jane Glover** (July 20, July 22), **Daniil Trifonov** (July 23, July 26), **Dima Slobodeniouk** (July 26), **Stéphane Denève** (Aug 9), and **Alexander Malofeev** (Aug 16).

Pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet makes his anticipated return to Aspen with a recital of Debussy's complete Preludes in Harris Concert Hall (July 21), as well as Gershwin's Piano Concerto in F with the Aspen Festival Orchestra led by Robert Spano (Aug. 2).

Those making AMFS debuts this summer are violinist **María Dueñas** in recital with pianist Eric Lu performing Schubert, Mozart, and Brahms (July 22); pianist **Angel Stanislav Wang** in a solo recital of Granados, Liszt, Debussy, and Stravinsky (July 28); soprano **Erin Morley** in recital with returning guest, tenor **Lawrence Brownlee** in a program highlighting the golden age of Bel Canto singing (Aug. 4); countertenor **Anthony Roth Costanzo** as Oberon in **Britten's A Midsummer Night's Dream** (July 20, July 22); and conductor **Delyana Lazarova** leading the Aspen Festival Orchestra in a program of Barber, Rachmaninoff, and Shostakovich (Aug. 16).

Munroe President and CEO Alan Fletcher's Final Summer

Alan Fletcher will become President Emeritus on January 1, 2027, following an extraordinary 21-year tenure as President and CEO. A leader with integrity and dedication, Fletcher oversaw the full redevelopment of the



105,000-square-foot Bucksbaum Campus; created the new opera training program under Renée Fleming and Patrick Summers; brought Robert Spano on as Music Director; stewarded the institution through the COVID pandemic; supported significant expansion of education programs in area schools; and shaped both the training program and artistry of the AMFS at premier levels for twenty years. In the great tradition of administrator-composers, he did all this while continuing his composition work and having many works premiered on stages around the world. This composition work will remain top of mind in the near future, as Fletcher will be writing his First Symphony as part of the AMFS's First Symphonies project.

Fletcher leaves the institution in superb artistic and financial circumstances and poised for further excellence, which the Board of Trustees will honor by naming him president emeritus. In his final months in the role of President and CEO, Fletcher is continuing his efforts to bolster an extremely ambitious fundraising campaign to support the institution's educational and artistic success, "ensuring we stay both committed to excellence in our unique mission, and committed to financial stability and responsibility," he says.

AMFS Board Chair Alexandra Munroe illuminates, "Alan is a respected and beloved friend to the Aspen community, and a paragon of our founding philosophy of The Aspen Idea. We are pleased to announce that the Board of Trustees will name Alan as President Emeritus in 2027 – the first such honor in the institution's history. This is a challenging responsibility -- but also an exciting opportunity. We look forward to working with the AMFS and Aspen community as we usher in the next era of our Festival and School's joyous mission."

ABOUT THE ASPEN MUSIC FESTIVAL AND SCHOOL

The AMFS is the United States' premier classical music center for performance and education, presenting more than 400 musical events during its eight-week summer season in Aspen. Under the leadership of President and CEO Alan Fletcher and Music Director Robert Spano, the organization draws top classical musicians from around the world for a rich combination of performances of orchestral works, opera, chamber music, recitals, contemporary music, works by new or previously unrecognized voices, popular genres, family events, and talks, competitions, and classes.

More than 450 music students from 40 U.S. states and 40 countries come each summer to play in four orchestras, sing, conduct, compose and study with more than 100 artist-faculty members who come from the orchestras of Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Dallas, the Metropolitan Orchestra, and the leading conservatories and music schools like The Juilliard School, The Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, and The Colburn School. Students represent the field's best talent; many have already begun their professional careers, and others are on the cusp.

The AMFS is deeply committed to community and many events are free. Seating outside the Music Tent on the David Karetzky Music Lawn and in the Kaye Music Garden is always free. Regular livestreams are free anywhere in the world. The AMFS also runs popular music programs in-school and after-school at most schools in Colorado's Roaring Fork Valley.

Renowned alumni include violinists Joshua Bell, Sarah Chang, Midori, Gil Shaham, and Robert McDuffie; pianists Joyce Yang, Orli Shaham, Conrad Tao, Yuja Wang, and Wu Han; conductors Marin Alsop, James Conlon, Leonard Slatkin and Joshua Weilerstein; composers William Bolcom, Philip Glass, David Lang, Augusta Read Thomas, Bright Sheng and Joan Tower; singers Isabel Leonard, Jamie Barton, Sasha Cooke, Danielle de Niese, Renée Fleming, Dawn Upshaw and Tamara Wilson; cellist Alisa Weilerstein; guitarist Sharon Isbin; bassist Edgar Meyer; and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

The Aspen Story

The Aspen Music Festival and School started as a bold dream in June 1949, when Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke, with others from the University of Chicago, organized an event that brought leaders, artists, thinkers, and dreamers to the remote, dusty ex-mining mountain town of Aspen to discuss big ideas and naturally, listen to music that touched the soul. Their vision for the 1949 Goethe Bicentennial Convocation and Music Festival was to heal, hope and reach for the best in humanity in response to the devastation following World War II. More than 2,000 people made the trek to attend, as reported in *The New York Times*.

Participants included novelist Thornton Wilder, Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset, Italian literature professor Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, Israeli theologian Martin Buber, and doctor, humanitarian, and music scholar Albert Schweitzer on his first and only trip to the United States. Musicians included pianist Arthur Rubinstein, Dmitri Mitropolous, and the entire Minnesota Symphony Orchestra.

The experience was both profound and joyful, and the following year, the musicians returned. They brought their students, their ideals, and their hiking boots. Walter Paepcke asked singer Mack Harrell (father of cellist Lynn Harrell) to form a school. And like that, an annual music festival and school was born.

Over seven decades, Aspen's magic has been in this combination of seasoned professionals and youth as colleagues and co-inspiring forces. Musicians don't just come to Aspen to perform, they come to connect with other musicians, mentor and be mentored, find their best selves, and share it authentically. Aspen students fill every corner of the music world today—performing in orchestras, as soloists, singing, composing, conducting and teaching. Alumni include conductors Leonard Slatkin and James Conlon, violinists Gil Shaham and Midori, cellist Alisa Weilerstein, bassist Edgar Meyer. Even former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice took a turn in Aspen before giving up piano for politics.

From the beginning, Aspen has had the feeling of a “retreat,” a place to create and experiment, a tradition that is continued today. In 1950, Igor Stravinsky conducted his own works in the Music Tent, paving the way for so many composers to visit, study, and teach in Aspen, including Darius Milhaud, who led the contemporary music charge in Aspen from 1952-1968, Aaron Copland, Elliot Carter, Virgil Thomson, George Crumb, Jacob Druckman, William Schuman, Olivier Messiaen, Peter Maxwell Davies, David Lang, David del Tredici, Philip Glass, Peter Schickele, and more recently, Augusta Read Thomas, George Tsontakis, Christopher Rouse, Rufus Wainwright, Kaija Saariaho, Missy Mazzoli, Anthony Davis, John Luther Adams, and Nico Muhly.

Today Aspen continues to create, educate, and inspire. In 2026, more than 450 students will participate in orchestra, opera, chamber music, piano studies, classical guitar, composition, and conducting studies. It is the largest summer training program of its caliber—larger than all its peers combined.

Event and Ticket Information

The full summer schedule will be released February 3. Tickets go on sale to the public in April.

Online: aspenmusicfestival.com

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