

SEASON OPENER

Hellfighters & Heritage

September 12, 2026

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Yaniv Dinur, *Conductor*
Zlatomir Fung, *Cello*

Carlos SIMON
(b. 1986)

Hellfighters' Blues

Antonín DVOŘÁK
(1841–1904)

Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104, B. 191
Allegro
Adagio ma non troppo
Allegro moderato – Andante – Allegro vivo

INTERMISSION

Sergei RACHMANINOFF
(1873–1943)

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45
Non allegro
Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)
Lento assai – Allegro vivace

Zlatomir Fung exclusive representation: Kirshbaum Associates Inc., 307 Seventh Avenue, Suite 506,
New York, NY 10001, www.kirshbaumassociates.com

Mr. Fung performs on a circa 1735 cello by Domenico Montagnana, on loan from a generous benefactor, and the
1696 "Lord Aylesford" Strad, on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation.

His debut recording is available on the Signum Records label.

Stage flowers provided by Hilly Fields Florist



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Carlos Simon (b. 1986) was born in Washington, D. C. but grew up in Atlanta, the son of a preacher who initially forbade music other than gospel in the house. At age ten, Simon started playing for church, and later he worked as music director and keyboardist for various pop and R&B singers. A graduate of Morehouse College, he also earned a master's degree from Georgia State University and a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan, studying under composer Michael Daugherty. Simon was nominated for a 2023 Grammy for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for his album *Requiem for the Enslaved*, a tribute to 272 enslaved people sold by Georgetown University in 1838. Today Simon is an Associate Professor at Georgetown, a composer-in-residence at the Kennedy Center, and holds the inaugural composer chair for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Tonight's work, **Hellfighters' Blues**, was originally commissioned by the BBC Radio 3 and performed on the last night of Proms 2024. It incorporates elements from classical, jazz, and blues, including bent pitches and stylistic use of mutes. Simon explains the inspiration for this work at carlossimonmusic.com: "James Reese Europe (1880-1919) was considered the leading figure on the Black American music scene in New York City at the beginning of 20th century. He was known as the bandleader for the Harlem Hellfighters, the 369th Infantry Regiment made up primarily of Black Americans during World War I. The band would be the first Black Americans known for bringing Jazz to Europe in 1919. The first concert in France included a syncopated arrangement of Stars and Stripes Forever as well as the well-known ragtime piece written by W.C. Handy called Memphis Blues. To honor the legacy of James Reese

Europe and the Hellfighters, I have used the melodic material from Handy's Memphis Blues, as well the harmonic structure from the 12-bar Blues. Hellfighters' Blues features the brass with solos written in the style of those early ragtime players with jubilant blues riffs and jazz shakes. Using counterpoint in the woodwinds and strings, the piece comes to a whimsical close with the strings playing the highest notes possible followed by an answer in the percussion." [Carlos Simon]

Born near Prague in an area of the Czech Republic formerly known as Bohemia, **Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)** learned the butcher's trade of his father but also went to Prague Organ School. He played viola in a band, taught privately, and served as a church organist before Brahms took an interest in his compositions and introduced him to his own publisher. Simrock's commission and publication of Slavonic Dances (1882) garnered international recognition for Dvořák, and in 1892 he was named Director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. The last piece finished in his three years in the U.S. is the cello concerto, written during the same period as "The New World" Symphony. For many years, the preeminent Czech cellist Hanuš Wihan had asked his friend to write a concerto, but Dvořák resisted the idea until 1895. **Concerto for Cello in B minor** premiered in London in March 1896 with the composer conducting. Clarinets introduce the primary **Allegro** theme that is then taken up by the orchestra. After the rather dark opening, the secondary theme for solo horn is lyrical and nostalgic. A final rhythmic motive appears before the cellist enters and repeats the opening themes for the customary second exposition of a concerto's "double exposition." The music is often declamatory, almost like

a vocal rendering. By the end of the first movement, the stormy main theme has become noble and transcendent. The **Adagio ma non troppo** begins with a somber melody in the woodwinds, soon imitated by the soloist and later repeated as a chorale for three horns. In the middle of the movement Dvořák quotes his own song, "Leave me alone," (Op. 81, No. 1), a favorite of the composer's sister-in-law (and former flame) who was seriously ill while he was working on the concerto. After he returned to Bohemia, Josefina's death prompted him to revise the concerto's conclusion to include an additional reference to the Czech song [according to Šourek's introduction to the 1989 edition of the score]. A march in cellos and basses accompanies the horns' opening theme in the **Allegro moderato**. The folk-like main theme alternates with several contrasting sections in this rondo form. Dvořák describes the concerto's conclusion: "The finale closes gradually diminuendo, like a sigh—with reminiscences of the first and second movements—the solo dies down to *pianissimo*—then swells again and the last bars are taken up by the orchestra and the whole concludes in stormy mood."

At age fourteen, **Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**, moved alone from his home near Great Novgorod, Russia, to study at the Moscow Imperial Conservatory. At his 1892 graduation, he was a co-winner of the Gold Medal for Piano along with Josef Lhévinne and Alexander Scriabin. Early recognition came when Tchaikovsky commissioned the teenager to write a piano transcription of excerpts from *Sleeping Beauty*. When he was only nineteen, Rachmaninoff achieved great success with the famous Prelude in C-sharp minor, Op. 3, No. 2, which sold thousands of copies. He grew to hate the

piece because it was requested so often during his performance tours. When the family lost their estate and aristocratic way of life due to the 1917 Russian Revolution, Rachmaninoff, his wife, and two daughters traveled by open sled to Finland that December, taking only a few of his compositions and sketchbooks. After moving to the United States in 1918, he played forty concerts in just four-months' time. Since his primary means of supporting his family was concertizing, he completed only six compositions between 1918 and his death in 1943. **Symphonic Dances** was composed during 1940, mostly in Long Island, and dedicated to his friend Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra who premiered the work 3 January 1941. Rachmaninoff considered this to be his finest composition, and, unlike other works, he never revised it once the score was completed. It calls for a sizable orchestra, including the unusual addition of the alto saxophone featured in the second theme of the **Non allegro**. Although Rachmaninoff was known for his haunting and often melancholic themes, this first movement is energetic with a cheery rhythmic motive passed around the orchestra. From the very beginning, a regular pulse

propels the music forward, but when this motor element abates and the tempo slows down, an improvisatory solo for oboe changes the mood. A clarinet soon makes it a duet, and then the alto sax surprises us with its unique timbre. Various woodwind instruments eventually enhance the trio in one of the more unique passages in Rachmaninoff's *oeuvre*. It is surprising and exquisite. Another charming episode is the piano accompaniment of the violins' nostalgic theme before the return of the opening section of the movement. With a dotted rhythm fanfare in the brass instruments at the beginning of the second movement, the **Andante** does not immediately reveal itself as a waltz, and indeed the waltz that ensues cannot quite seem to commit to regular three-quarter time. "Tempo rubato" is written in several places in the score, suggesting a free and loose interpretation of the dance. In the last movement, **Lento assai-Allegro vivace**, the *Dies Irae*, "Day of Wrath," chant from the medieval Requiem Mass for the Dead (which Rachmaninoff hints at several times in the opening movement) is counteracted by a theme of life from a Russian Orthodox chant. The *Dies Irae* appealed to Rachmaninoff's often lugubrious

nature, and he had previously incorporated this 8-note chant in *The Isle of the Dead* and *Variations on a Theme of Paganini*. He had also used the Orthodox chant in his 1915 *All-Night Vigil*. Near the end of *Symphonic Dances*, he wrote "Alliluya" in the manuscript. A series of "alliluyas" in *Vigil* accompanies the end of the narration about Christ's resurrection. Perhaps in the *Dances* Rachmaninoff is symbolically suggesting life triumphs over death, an uncharacteristically optimistic gesture on his part. Stravinsky once described his colleague as "a six-and-a-half-foot scowl." Nevertheless, at the end of the score Rachmaninoff wrote, "I thank Thee, Lord."

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Dr. Akers has a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in Historical Musicology from Florida State University

DID YOU KNOW?

After Rachmaninoff moved to the U.S. in 1918, Steinway & Sons gave him a piano. He had a hard time assimilating but he finally became an American citizen forty-five years later, one month before his death

Guest Artist



Cellist **Zlatomir Fung** burst onto the scene as the first American in four decades (and youngest musician ever) to win First Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition Cello Division. He has since garnered accolades, critical acclaim and standing ovations at performances around the world, becoming recognized as one of the preeminent cellists of our time. Astounding audiences with his boundless virtuosity and exquisite sensitivity, the 27-year-old has already proven himself a star among the next generation of world-class musicians.

Highlights of the 2026–2027 season include his Hollywood Bowl debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, opening the Utah Symphony's season with Elgar's Cello Concerto under Delyana Lazarova, a return to the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Christian Macelaru performing Shostakovich Cello Concerto No. 1, and the world premiere of a new work by Lawrence Osborn with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Additional orchestral engagements include a return to the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra under Yaniv Dinur and debuts with the Oregon Symphony under Mario

Venzago and the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, and performances with the Asheville Symphony and Cape Symphony. He undertakes a residency at the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center featuring performances of Elgar's Cello Concerto and solo Bach suites, tours Japan with the Kyushu Symphony Orchestra and Osaka Symphony Orchestra, and Music@Menlo. Recital appearances include performances for String Theory at the Hunter in Chattanooga and his recital debut at San Francisco Symphony's Davies Hall with pianist Chaeyoung Park, where he presents a program ranging from Chopin and Nadia Boulanger to his own composition for solo cello.

Zlatomir Fung is also increasingly active as a composer. During the 2026–2027 season, violinist Julian Rhee will premiere a new solo violin work by Fung at Merkin Hall in New York, while Fung will premiere his own new works for solo cello in recital and for cello and string orchestra with the New York Classical Players. In April 2026, he performed his Seven Intervallic Etudes for Solo Cello at the UWyoming Cello Festival. He was also commissioned by the Cello Teaching Repertoire Consortium to compose A Sailor's Day Off, a pedagogical suite for cello and piano, which he will perform at Wigmore Hall in 2027. His composition Fantasy on Jenůfa, featured on his debut album Fantasies, was hailed by The Arts Desk as "a triumph" that "deserves to be a repertoire standard."

Last season's highlights include a recital at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, appearances at Wigmore Hall, Aspen Music Festival, Ravinia Festival, and La Jolla Music Society, and performances with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Nashville Symphony, Pacific Symphony, Sarasota Orchestra, Sacramento Philharmonic, Reno Philharmonic, Albany Symphony, Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Belgrade Philharmonic, Guiyang Symphony Orchestra, and at Korea's Pohang International Music Festival. Other notable recent appearances include performances with the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lille, and BBC Philharmonic, as well as the Baltimore, Dallas, Detroit, Seattle, Milwaukee, Utah, Rochester, and Kansas City Symphonies. He has performed at major festivals including Ravinia, Blossom, Aspen, Bravo! Vail, and Grant Park in the United States, and Verbier, Dresden, Leoš Janáček International, Tsinandali, and the Cello Biënnale Amsterdam in Europe.

In addition to demonstrating a mastery of the canon with his impeccable technique, Fung brings exceptional insight to contemporary repertoire, championing composers such as Unsuk Chin, Katherine Balch, and Anna Clyne. In 2023, with the Dallas Symphony under the baton of Gemma New, Fung gave the world premiere of Katherine Balch's whisper concerto to great acclaim as the dedicatee of the work; he gave its UK premiere in February 2024 with the BBC Philharmonic, conducted by Joshua Weilerstein.

Fung has received many distinguished prizes and awards, including the 2017 Young Concert Artists International Auditions and a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2022. As a participant in WQXR's Artist Propulsion Lab, he wrote The Elves and the Cello Maker, a radio play in which he also performed. Fung has been featured on NPR's Performance Today and appeared six times on NPR's From the Top. Fung joined the faculty of his alma mater, The Juilliard School, in 2024 as one of the youngest members of the faculty.

Fung performs on a circa 1735 cello by Domenico Montagnana, on loan from a generous benefactor, and the 1696 "Lord Aylesford" Strad, on loan from the Sasakawa Music Foundation (formerly the Nippon Music Foundation).

Of Bulgarian and Chinese heritage, Zlatomir Fung was born into a family of mathematicians and began playing cello at age three. Fung studied at The Juilliard School under the tutelage of Richard Aaron and Timothy Eddy, where he was a recipient of the Kovner Fellowship. Outside of music, his interests include chess, cinema, and creative writing. Fung also shares touring updates and instructional videos for cellists with an online community of more than 26,000 followers on Instagram at @zfungcello.