



For release: April 29, 2026

The Cleveland Orchestra announces additional community programming for fourth Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival



Newly added events feature a community dialogue on wrongful convictions, an opera-focused forum, curated museum tours, a community choral celebration, and a performance by The Cleveland Orchestra Children’s Choruses

Community partners include The City Club of Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland Public Library, Assembly for the Arts, District Gallery, Xhibition, and Ideastream Public Media

CLEVELAND — The Cleveland Orchestra has announced additional programming for the fourth edition of its annual [Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival](#), running May 15 through 24 at Severance Music Center and partner locations throughout Cleveland. This year’s festival is curated by trumpeter, composer, and eight-time Grammy-winning artist **Terence Blanchard**.

The expanded programming deepens the festival’s exploration of this year’s theme of **Courage** through community-centered events, interdisciplinary partnerships, and performances that reflect the breadth of Northeast Ohio’s artistic voices.

Newly announced events begin May 14 with a pre-festival **Community Conversation: Exploring Wrongful Convictions Through the Arts** at the Cleveland Public Library’s MLK, Jr. Branch, presented in partnership with Assembly for the Arts.

On May 15, **Opera Now: Tradition, Innovation, and the Road Ahead**, a special forum at The City Club of Cleveland, brings together Festival Curator **Terence Blanchard**, tenor **David Butt Philip**, and soprano **Adrienne Danrich** to reflect upon the future of opera as an art form. Butt Philip sings the role of Florestan in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, the centerpiece of this year's festival, and Danrich appears alongside Blanchard and Will Liverman that same evening in **The World(s) of Terence Blanchard**, the festival's genre-bending opening night.

The festival also highlights Northeast Ohio's choral community on May 16 in **United in Song! A Community Choral Celebration**, featuring the Cleveland Chamber Choir, Hudson Community Choruses, Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Chorus, and The Singing Angels.

Throughout both festival weekends, the Cleveland Museum of Art is organizing four docent-led tours curated around **The Art of Courage**. These one-hour tours invite guests to explore how artists across time and cultures have grappled with and portrayed bravery, conviction, and courage.

On May 23, The Cleveland Orchestra Children's Choruses present a free **Spring Concert** celebrating the 250th anniversary of the United States through music that reflects resilience, hope, and courage.

These additions join previously announced programming including the festival's multidisciplinary opening night with Terence Blanchard, an afternoon of poetry with spoken word artist **Tarriona "Tank" Ball**, a keynote by **Bryan Stevenson**, **The Moth Mainstage: Live from Severance**, and a new exhibition by **Halim Flowers** created in Cleveland for the festival.

The detailed program listing of festival events can be found below, and tickets are now on sale. For more information, visit clevelandorchestra.com/festival, email boxoffice@clevelandorchestra.com, or call Cleveland Orchestra Ticket Services at 216-231-1111.

Photos for the 2026 Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival are available for [download here](#).

About the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival

Expanding on The Cleveland Orchestra and Music Director **Franz Welser-Möst**'s tradition of innovative opera presentations, the Orchestra launched the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival in May 2023. The festival's inaugural edition was praised by *The New York Times* as a "compelling proof of concept" and "an ambitious achievement."

The 2026 installment, curated by **Terence Blanchard** and centered around the theme of "Courage," marks the festival's fourth edition, following "The American Dream" in 2023 (Puccini's *The Girl of the Golden West*), "Power" in 2024 (Mozart's *The Magic Flute*), and "Reconciliation" in 2025 (Janáček's *Jenůfa*).

Full Calendar Listing and Program Information

[Halim Flowers: "It Takes Courage to Love All Unconditionally"](#)

Thursday, April 9, 2026, through Sunday, May 24, 2026

**Severance Music Center
Free Festival Exhibition**

In **“It Takes Courage to Love All Unconditionally,”** celebrated artist **Halim Flowers** unveils a new body of work created in Cleveland expressly for the Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival and drawing its energy and vision from the festival’s central theme of *Courage*.

The exhibit is on view in the Bogomolny-Kozerefski Grand Foyer during Cleveland Orchestra performances. In addition, there are two free public open houses: May 10 from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. and May 16 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

“The works in this special exhibition explore courage as a visual language for unconditional love. When courage leads, empathy deepens, giving rise to a sense of closeness that invites viewers to move beyond fear and toward a more generous, compassionate way of being.” — Halim Flowers

Presented in partnership with **District Gallery**, the exhibition channels Flowers’s signature blend of vivid color, vulnerability, and radical hope. Extending his vision beyond the exhibition walls, Flowers is also collaborating with youth culture brand **Xhibition** to craft exclusive festival apparel inspired by the theme of *Courage*.

About Halim Flowers

Halim Flowers was born in Washington, DC, and at age 16 was sentenced to two life terms for a crime he did not commit. His story—later featured in *Kim Kardashian-West: The Justice Project* and the Emmy Award-winning *Thug Life in D.C.*—traces his transformation from incarcerated youth to celebrated artist, writer, and advocate.

While in prison, Flowers discovered poetry as a means of survival and expression; after his release in 2019 under the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act, he quickly emerged as a powerful voice for justice, sharing his work publicly within days. His artistic practice has since expanded into vibrant, Basquiat-inspired visual art now exhibited internationally.

A Halcyon Arts Lab Fellow, Echoing Green Fellow, and 2025–26 Obama Foundation Leader, Flowers has delivered a TEDx Talk, studied through Georgetown University’s Prison and Justice Initiative, and contributed to MoMA’s landmark *Marking Time* exhibition. His work continues to champion human rights and illuminate the transformative power of art.

Presented in partnership with District Gallery and Xhibition



Halim Flowers Exhibition generously sponsored by JoAnn & Robert Glick

NEWLY ADDED EVENT

Community Conversation: Exploring Wrongful Convictions Through the Arts
Thursday, May 14, 2026, at 6 p.m.

**Martin Luther King, Jr. Branch of the Cleveland Public Library
Free Event**

This two-part evening opens with a preview of the 2026 Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival and its theme of *Courage*, led by two Cleveland Orchestra staff members: Jejuana C. Brown (Senior Director of Inclusion & Community Relations) and Joan Katz Napoli (Jane B. and Eric T. Nord Senior Vice President of Education and Community Programs). Following this, a panel of local experts explore the intersection of courage, the arts, and wrongful convictions, with a specific focus on our Cleveland community.

Jeremy Johnson, *President & CEO of Assembly for the Arts, moderator*

Ayesha Bell Hardaway, *Professor of Law & Director of Case Western Reserve University's Social Justice Institute*

Karen Prasser, *Executive Director of Arts for Justice Cleveland*

Raymond Towler, *Musician and Artist*

Presented in partnership with Cleveland Public Library and Assembly for the Arts



**CLEVELAND
PUBLIC
LIBRARY**



NEWLY ADDED EVENT

[Opera Now: Tradition, Innovation, and the Road Ahead](#)

Friday, May 15, 2026, at 11:30 a.m.

The City Club of Cleveland

Ticketed Event

What does opera mean today — and what might it become? Festival Curator Terence Blanchard and singers Adrienne Danrich and David Butt Philip join The City Club of Cleveland for a wide-ranging conversation on tradition, innovation, and the future of the art form. From new creative voices to evolving audience expectations, this forum considers how opera continues to transform while retaining its emotional and artistic core.

This forum is presented in partnership with The Cleveland Orchestra's Opera Club, a group of donors who support opera and vocal programming at The Cleveland Orchestra and receive special benefits and experiences. More information [here](#).

André Gremillet, *President & CEO of The Cleveland Orchestra, moderator*

Terence Blanchard, *Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival Curator*

David Butt Philip, *tenor*

Adrienne Danrich, *soprano*

Presented in partnership with The City Club of Cleveland



THE CITY CLUB OF CLEVELAND

[The World\(s\) of Terence Blanchard](#)

Friday, May 15, 2026, at 7 p.m.

Severance Music Center, Mandel Concert Hall

Ticketed Event

Step inside **The World(s) of Terence Blanchard**, the genre-bending opening night of the 2026 Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival, curated by the visionary and versatile trumpeter and composer himself.

The evening opens with arias from his groundbreaking opera ***Fire Shut Up in My Bones***, featuring Will Liverman, Adrienne Danrich, the E-Collective, and the Turtle Island Quartet. In the second half, the stage transforms for Blanchard's electrifying ***Malcolm X Jazz Suite***, drawn from his unforgettable score for Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X* and paired with immersive projections by Blanchard's longtime collaborator **Andrew F. Scott**—a powerful, cinematic journey through sound and image.

NEWLY ANNOUNCED CHORAL GROUPS

[United in Song! A Community Choral Celebration](#)

Saturday, May 16, 2026, at 1 p.m.

Severance Music Center, Mandel Concert Hall

Free Event, Tickets Required

Join us for an afternoon of joyous vocal performances at Severance Music Center representing the rich diversity of the Greater Cleveland choral community. The event is hosted by nationally acclaimed baritone and retired Akron Public School District teacher **Brian Keith Johnson**.

Cleveland Chamber Choir

Gregory Ristow, *artistic director*

The Cleveland Chamber Choir provides audiences with exceptional performances of diverse repertoire, emphasizing the works of composers historically excluded from the concert hall. Since its founding in 2015, the choir has won acclaim for its inclusive programming, for partnering with community charities, its pedagogical program, and for its free concerts that ensure everyone can hear world-class professional choral singing. Under the leadership of artistic director Gregory Ristow, all the ensemble's members are professional singers who currently reside in Northeast Ohio.

Hudson Community Choruses Adult Chorus

Jon C. Peterson, *artistic director*

Founded in 1988, the Hudson Community Choruses enrich the cultural life of Hudson and the surrounding region through exceptional choral performance and music education. Under the leadership of Jon C. Peterson, the organization comprises three ensembles spanning more than 150 singers from second grade through adult and representing 20 communities. Supported by a dedicated board and

committed volunteers, the Hudson Community Choruses continue to cultivate a thriving, inclusive community of singers united by a shared passion for choral music.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Chamber Chorus

Dr. William Henry Caldwell, *music director*

Steven Weems, *conductor*

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Chorus is a volunteer community chorus assembled each year since 1989. Bringing together singers from across Northeast Ohio, the Chorus lifts its collective voices in affirmation of Dr. King’s vision of justice, peace, and harmony. In addition to its performance during The Cleveland Orchestra’s annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Concert, the ensemble has sung at Tri-C’s Creative Arts Academy and at Cleveland Cavaliers and Guardians games.

The Singing Angels

Jim Koenig, *music director*

The Singing Angels is one of Cleveland’s most treasured performing arts organizations. Founded in 1964 by William C. Boehm, their mission is to encourage, foster, and cultivate positive youth development, guided by the motto “Make Music, Make Friends, Make a Difference.” The group’s remarkable history includes concerts in the United States and 38 countries abroad, TV broadcasts, and performances for popes and presidents. In May 2026, The Singing Angels celebrate their 62nd anniversary of inspiring audiences and helping shape the citizens and leaders of tomorrow.

Support for United in Song! is generously provided by Mrs. Jayne M. Zborowsky

NEWLY ADDED EVENTS

[Docent Tours: The Art of Courage](#)

Saturday, May 16, 2026, at 2 p.m.

Sunday, May 17, 2026, at 2 p.m.

Saturday, May 23, 2026, at 2 p.m.

Sunday, May 24, 2026, at 2 p.m.

Cleveland Museum of Art

Free Tours, Tickets Required

In conjunction with The Cleveland Orchestra’s 2026 Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival, join an hour-long, docent-guided tour at the Cleveland Museum of Art that reflects on the theme of *Courage*. Inspired by the festival’s exploration of Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio*, this tour invites visitors to consider how artists across time and cultures have grappled with and portrayed bravery, conviction, and courage.

Presented in partnership with the Cleveland Museum of Art



[Beethoven's Fidelio](#)

Saturday, May 16, 2026, at 7 p.m.

Thursday, May 21, 2026, at 7 p.m.

Sunday, May 24, 2026, at 3 p.m.

Severance Music Center, Mandel Concert Hall

Ticketed Event

The Cleveland Orchestra

Franz Welser-Möst, *conductor*

Sara Jakubiak, *soprano* (Leonore)

David Butt Philip, *tenor* (Florestan)

Tomasz Konieczny, *bass-baritone* (Don Pizarro)

Martin Summer, *bass* (Rocco)

Dashon Burton, *bass-baritone* (Don Fernando)

Ashley Emerson, *soprano* (Marzelline)

Owen McCausland, *tenor* (Jaquino)

The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus

BEETHOVEN *Fidelio*

Franz Welser-Möst lifts The Cleveland Orchestra and Chorus and an all-star cast of soloists to the life-affirming heights of Beethoven's only opera, a testament to courage and human nobility. Motivated by a desire for justice during a time of European turmoil, *Fidelio* decries corruption and sounds a clarion call for freedom in a riveting story that asks the question: How far would you go to save someone you love?

The Cleveland Orchestra's production of *Fidelio* is generously sponsored by Jan R. Lewis.

Sara Jakubiak's performance is generously sponsored by Ms. Cathy Lincoln

Miloš Repický, *Repetituer*, is generously sponsored by Dr. Michael Frank and Patricia A.* Snyder

Ashley Emerson's performance is generously sponsored by Jane Haylor and Mel Berger

Owen McCausland's performance is generously sponsored by James and Marguerite Rigby

The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus' performance in Beethoven's *Fidelio* is generously sponsored by Michael Hudson in memory of Susan Benningfield Hudson a former vocal coach and accompanist for the COC under the direction of Robert Page

[Courage and Poetry: An Evening with Tank Ball](#)

Sunday, May 17, 2026, at 4 p.m.

Severance Music Center, Reinberger Chamber Hall

Ticketed Event

Tarriona “Tank” Ball brings her spellbinding blend of spoken word and poetry to the festival with a performance that digs deep into the meaning of courage: how we claim it, carry it, and reshape the world with it. Known for her fierce lyricism and emotional clarity, Tank won her first GRAMMY® in 2025 for Best Spoken Word Poetry Album with her band, Tank and the Bangas.

For this special event, she is joined by fellow Grammy-winning composer, trumpeter, and this year’s Festival Curator **Terence Blanchard**, whose music adds depth and dimension to her storytelling. Together, they create an unforgettable evening where courage becomes a shared, intimate experience of voice, rhythm, and imagination.

[Bryan Stevenson on Courage](#)

Monday, May 18, 2026, at 7 p.m.

Severance Music Center, Mandel Concert Hall

Ticketed Event

Bryan Stevenson on Courage brings one of America’s most powerful moral voices to the Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival stage. In this keynote address, acclaimed civil rights leader, bestselling author of *Just Mercy*, and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative **Bryan Stevenson** reflects on the meaning of courage: how we confront injustice, stay proximate to suffering, and choose to hope in the face of overwhelming odds.

Stevenson’s address will be followed by a spoken word performance by Festival Artist Halim Flowers and a moderated Q&A with Festival Curator Terence Blanchard. The event offers an extraordinary opportunity to hear directly from a visionary changemaker whose work continues to shape our national conversation on justice and humanity.

Sponsored by: KeyBank



Presented in partnership with The City Club of Cleveland



THE CITY CLUB OF CLEVELAND

[The Moth Mainstage: Live from Severance](#)

Tuesday, May 19, 2026, at 7 p.m.

Severance Music Center, Mandel Concert Hall

Ticketed Event

Following its sold-out Cleveland debut last year, **The Moth Mainstage** returns to Severance Music Center for a night of live storytelling and unforgettable personal journeys. In this two-part program, punctuated with musical interludes, five extraordinary storytellers share true stories inspired by the festival theme of

Courage. Through tales of risk and resilience, of stepping into the unknown, and of finding courage amid fear, this quintessential Moth experience offers an evening of intimate connection and shared humanity.

“When it comes to engaging and brilliant storytelling, The Moth never disappoints. Moth performances are the go-to for anyone who has ever wanted to hear the best of the art of storytelling.” — Forbes

Presented in partnership with Ideastream Public Media



[Hero's Song](#)

Friday, May 22, 2026, at 7:30 p.m.

Severance Music Center, Mandel Concert Hall

Ticketed Event

The Cleveland Orchestra
Franz Welser-Möst, *conductor*
Leila Josefowicz, *violin*
Trina Struble, *harp*

ADOLPHUS HAILSTORK *Epitaph for a Man Who Dreamed*

BACEWICZ *Symphony No. 4*

JÜRI REINVERE *Concerto for Violin, Harp, and Orchestra (World Premiere; TCO Commission)*

DVOŘÁK *Hero's Song*

The fourth annual Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival wraps up as **Franz Welser-Möst** leads The Cleveland Orchestra in Dvořák's *Hero's Song*, a symphony in miniature that bears the composer's distinctive style and irrepressible Bohemian spirit. **Jüri Reinvere's** *Concerto for Violin, Harp, and Orchestra* receive its world premiere with virtuoso violinist **Leila Josefowicz** and TCO's own Principal Harp **Trina Struble** alongside Bacewicz's stormy Fourth Symphony and Adolphus Hailstork's moving elegy for Martin Luther King, Jr.

Trina Struble's performance is generously supported by The Jean, Harry, and Brenda Fuchs Family Foundation

NEWLY ADDED EVENT

[The Cleveland Orchestra Children's Choruses Spring Concert](#)

Saturday, May 23, 2026, at 4 p.m.

Severance Music Center, Mandel Concert Hall

Free Event

Join The Cleveland Orchestra Children's Choruses for a musical celebration of the 250th anniversary of the United States. This program will highlight the power of American music to shape and tell our story. From the hopeful promise of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," to the joyful confidence of "Feeling

Good,” these songs reflect the resilience, creativity, and courage to dream that define the American spirit.

The Cleveland Orchestra Children’s Preparatory Chorus

Jacob Young, *director*

The Cleveland Orchestra Children’s Preparatory Chorus was formed in 2005 by Dr. Ann Usher to establish a foundation of vocal technique, musical literacy, and musicianship through quality children’s choral literature. Members of the Preparatory Chorus strengthen their vocal production and choral performance skills and learn sight-reading using movable “do” solfège and Kodály/ Curwen hand signs. Students also develop leadership skills that will help them strengthen the other choirs in which they participate. The Preparatory Chorus typically gives two performances each season, once in the winter and once in the spring.

The Cleveland Orchestra Children’s Chorus

Jennifer Rozsa, *director*

The Cleveland Orchestra Children’s Chorus was formed in the spring of 1967 under the direction of Jane Barker Casey to provide a high-quality choral group for the many orchestral works written for children’s voices, and to offer choral training to school children in the Cleveland area. Their first performance was Britten’s *Spring Symphony* with Robert Shaw conducting. Today, the Children’s Chorus performs annually with The Cleveland Orchestra and The Cleveland Orchestra Chorus at Severance Music Center. Recent seasons have also seen performances with the Cleveland Pops Orchestra, Akron Symphony Orchestra, and The Cleveland Orchestra Youth Chorus.

All programs and artists are subject to change.

Support for The Cleveland Orchestra Youth and Children’s Choruses is provided by:

Wesley Family Foundation

The Edward and Ruth Wilkof Foundation

Friends of The Cleveland Orchestra

With Gratitude

The Cleveland Orchestra’s 2026 Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival is supported by a historic grant from the **Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation**.

The Cleveland Orchestra’s production of *Fidelio* is generously sponsored by Jan R. Lewis.

The Cleveland Orchestra thanks the following donors and members of the Opera Club for their support of the 2026 Mandel Opera & Humanities Festival:

Paul M. Angell Family Foundation

Ms. Viia R. Beechler

Mel Berger and Jane Haylor

Mitchell and Caroline Borrow

David and Julie Borsani, in memory of Marissa I. Borsani

Drs. Wuu-Shung and Amy Chuang

Ted and Donna Connolly

Tamara Durn
Richard C. and Lisa Fedorovich
Dagmar and Frederick Fellowes
Dr. Michael Frank and Patricia A.* Snyder
JoAnn and Robert Glick
Iris and Tom Harvie
Malcolm and Vivian Henoch
Michael Hudson in memory of Susan Hudson
Robert and Linda Jenkins
Karmendot Fund
KeyBank
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Ms. Cathy Lincoln
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Loretta J. Mester and George J. Mailath
Deborah L. Neale
Mr. and Mrs. Forrest A. Norman III
Mr. and Mrs. John Olejko
Mr. David A. Osage and Ms. Claudia C. Woods
Peter M. Pdegimas, in memory of Beverly A. Pdegimas
James and Marguerite Rigby
Mr. D. Keith* and Mrs. Margaret B. Robinson
Richard B. and Cheryl A. Schmitz
Ms. Beverly J. Schneider
Astri Seidenfeld
Katie and Michael* Shames
Drs. Charles Kent Smith and Patricia Moore Smith
Kathryn and Duncan Stuart
Ms. Linda L. Wilmot
Anonymous

*in memoriam

List as of April 2026

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