



## NEWS RELEASE | Sept. 19, 2022

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# The Florida Orchestra welcomes 8 new musicians

ST. PETERSBURG, FL – The Florida Orchestra will welcome eight musicians to their first full season with TFO this month. All have won highly competitive blind auditions that attracted candidates from around the nation and the world for full-time positions in Florida’s largest professional orchestra, under the artistic leadership of Music Director Michael Francis.

Tenure track positions include **Yefim Romanov**, first assistant concertmaster; **Natalie Yu**, assistant principal second violin; **Chi Lee**, associate principal viola; **Matthew Eeuwes**, assistant principal viola; **Sebastian Stefanovic**, viola; **Yoni Draiblate**, cello; **Ansel Norris**, associate principal/utility trumpet; and **Ben Hauser**, second trumpet.

In addition, six musicians will join TFO this fall in one-year positions: **Russell Hoffman**, acting assistant principal oboe; **Jacob Thonis**, acting assistant principal bassoon; **Valerie Ankeney**, acting assistant principal/utility horn; **Nicole Haywood**, bassoon/contrabassoon; **Jonas Benson**, viola; and **Troy Chang**, cello.

The Florida Orchestra employs 68 full-time professional musicians who live, work and give back to the Tampa Bay community. Highlights of the eight new musicians:

### Yefim Romanov, first assistant concertmaster



Violinist Yefim Romanov joins TFO for his first full season as first assistant concertmaster in the 2022-23 season. A native of Kazakhstan, he previously was rotating concertmaster of the New World Symphony and has degrees from Yale University, Indiana University and University of Florida. During his summers, Romanov has been a fellow at the Spoleto Music Festival USA, the Bowdoin International Music Festival, Colorado College Music Festival and Banff Music Festival. ([Click for bio](#))

### Natalie Yu, assistant principal second violin



Natalie Yu joins TFO for her first full season as assistant principal second violin in the 2022-23 season. She made her solo debut with the Oregon Symphony in 2005 at the age of 11, and has since had a thriving career as a concert artist and orchestral musician. Yu holds an artist’s diploma and bachelor’s of music from the Colburn Conservatory of Music as well as a master’s of music from Rice University. ([Click for bio](#))

**Chi Lee, associate principal viola**



Chi Lee joins TFO for her first full season as associate principal viola in the 2022-23 season. Born in Taiwan, Lee received her bachelor's degree from the Manhattan School of Music, her master's degree from Rice University, and is a doctor of musical arts candidate at the University of Maryland. Her performances in international festivals include the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival in Germany, the Britten-Pears Young Artists Programme and Asian Youth Orchestra, touring Japan and China. ([Click for bio](#))

**Matthew Eeuwes, assistant principal viola**



Matthew Eeuwes joins TFO as assistant principal viola in the 2022-23 season. Hailing from Canada, Matthew is a graduate from Eastman School of Music in both viola and violin and previously served as section violist in the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. ([Click for bio](#))

**Sebastian Stefanovic, viola**



Violist Sebastian Stefanovic joins TFO in the 2022-23 season. He is a Baltimore native who earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Rice University's Shepherd School while studying with Ivo-Jan van der Werff. He is also a passionate advocate for new music and has commissioned, premiered and recorded a variety of solo and ensemble works. ([Click for bio](#))

**Yoni Draiblate, cello**



Israeli-born cellist Yoni Draiblate joins TFO in the 2022-23 season. He has toured the United States, Europe and South America with orchestras and has appeared on prestigious stages such as Carnegie Hall in New York, Royal Albert Hall in London, Teatro Colon in Argentina and the Philharmonie Berlin. ([Click for bio](#))

**Ansel Norris, associate principal/utility trumpet**



Ansel Norris joins TFO for his first full season as associate principal/utility trumpet in the 2022-23 season. His sound has been heard on NPR's Performance Today, From the Top, and on Medici.tv, as the first-ever American prizewinner in the International Tchaikovsky Competition's Brass division. He was twice named first prize in the National Trumpet Competition USA. Norris is a member of the band Gravity the Architect, which combines acoustic instruments with modern pop textures and beats. ([Click for bio](#))

**Ben Hauser, second trumpet**



Ben Hauser joins TFO as second trumpet in the 2022-23 season. Previously, he was principal trumpet of the Arkansas Symphony and the York Symphony in Pennsylvania. From 2017-2021 he performed ceremonies, concerts, national tours and educational clinics as a member of the US Navy Band and Brass Quintet. ([Click for bio](#))

TFO will perform more than 100 concerts this season in venues throughout Tampa Bay, including a wide range of classical, popular and family-friendly music. [Maestro Francis](#) launches the season with TFO's [55<sup>th</sup> Celebration](#) benefit concert featuring Itzhak Perlman on Oct. 1 at the Mahaffey Theater. The following weekend, Oct. 7-9, the Hough Family Foundation Masterworks series debuts with Carl Orff's epic [Carmina Burana](#), kicking off the classical series that ranges from [Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4](#) to [Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2](#) and much more. The Raymond James Pops series includes blockbusters such as [Harry Potter vs Star Wars](#), [Holiday Pops](#), and the Beatles' iconic [Abbey Road](#) album. All tickets are on sale now at [FloridaOrchestra.org](#).

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**[About The Florida Orchestra](#)**

*The Florida Orchestra (TFO) is recognized as Tampa Bay's leading performing arts institution, the largest professional orchestra in Florida, and one of the most vibrant and innovative orchestras in America. It celebrates its 55<sup>th</sup> season in 2022-23. Under the leadership of Music Director Michael Francis, TFO performs series of classical, popular, and morning coffee concerts in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater, as well as free Pops in the Park concerts. The orchestra is dedicated to connecting to the community both in-person and virtually, with family and youth concerts and other educational programs. For tickets and information: [FloridaOrchestra.org](#). The Florida Orchestra is a non-profit 501(c)3 EIN: 59-1223691 CH#1830. To learn more how you can support the power of music in building community, contact: [sweymouth@floridaorchestra.org](mailto:sweymouth@floridaorchestra.org) To donate now: [FloridaOrchestra.org/donate](#)*

**Covid-19 Warning**

*An inherent risk of exposure to the novel coronavirus/Covid-19 exists in any public place where people are present. Covid-19 is a highly contagious disease that may result in personal injury, severe illness and death. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, senior citizens and persons with underlying medical conditions are especially vulnerable. Please visit the CDC's website for its current guidance on people at increased risk for severe illness and other people who should take extra precautions. By attending a performance of The Florida Orchestra, you voluntarily assume all risks related to exposure to Covid-19. Please help keep each other safe.*