



NEWS RELEASE | Sept. 26, 2023

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The Florida Orchestra names principal oboe and bass, opens with Holst's 'The Planets' this weekend

The orchestra welcomes nine full-time musicians for its 56th season



Mark Debski



Ryan Sujdak

ST. PETERSBURG, FL – As the new season begins, The Florida Orchestra has named **Mark Debski as principal oboe** and **Ryan Sujdak as principal bass**, filling two key positions in Florida's largest professional orchestra under the artistic leadership of Music Director Michael Francis. In total, the orchestra welcomes nine new musicians to their first full season with TFO. All have won highly competitive blind auditions that attracted nearly 200 candidates from around the nation and world.

This weekend Maestro Francis launches the premier Hough Family Foundation Masterworks series with [Holst's The Planets](#), featuring NASA images and the Percussion Collective performing

Christopher Theofanidis' *Drum Circles*. Concerts are 8 pm Saturday (Sept. 30) at the Mahaffey Theater and 7:30 pm Sunday (Oct. 1) at Ruth Eckerd Hall in TFO's 56th season. Patrons can listen to audio program notes and more on TFO's [digital program page here](#). In a bonus pay-what-you-can community event, Maestro Francis tells the story of the music with live orchestra demos at [Inside The Planets](#) at 7:30 pm Thursday (Sept. 28) at the Mahaffey Theater; generously sponsored by The Cassaly Foundation.

As principal oboe, Debski fills one of the top-tier positions in the orchestra of 70 full-time musicians and conductors. Seated in the middle of the stage, the principal oboe is often featured in major works and traditionally tunes the orchestra before the performance begins. Florida native Sujdak will be TFO's first new principal bass in nearly 50 years. He succeeds Dee Moses, who retired last season after 47 years with the orchestra.

The new musicians come from prestigious schools and varied backgrounds, including a featured cellist on NPR's *From the Top*, an accordion soloist, and a native of Cuba. In addition to Debski and Sujdak, the tenure track positions include **Victor Minke Huls**, associate principal cello; **Paul Nemeth**, associate principal bass; **David Raschella**, assistant principal/utility horn; **Matthew Melillo**, contrabassoon; **Levi Mitze-Circiumaru**, violin; **Camila Berg**, viola; and **David Bender**, cello. Highlights include:

Mark Debski, principal oboe

Originally from Pittsburgh, Mark Debski was previously principal oboe with the Richmond Symphony and was a fellow at New World Symphony in Miami Beach. He has performed with the Boston Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, New Zealand Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, The Philadelphia Orchestra and the Cleveland Orchestra. Debski began studying the oboe at age 10 and eventually went on to study with Pittsburgh Symphony members Scott Bell and Harold Smoliar. In 2017, he earned an undergraduate degree from the New England Conservatory, where he was awarded the Presser Foundation's Undergraduate Scholar Award for outstanding achievement in music. He enjoys studying languages, reading, hiking and traveling. [Click for bio](#)

Ryan Sujdak, principal bass

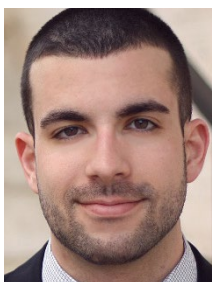
A Florida native, Ryan Sujdak grew up in Gainesville and began playing the double bass at age 16. He went on to earn degrees from the Manhattan School of Music, the Yale School of Music and the Colburn School. He has performed with the Verbier Festival Orchestra, National Repertory Orchestra, Sarasota Music Festival, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and the Shattered Glass Ensemble at the prestigious Schneider Chamber Concert Series. A passionate educator, he has maintained private studios in Florida, New York City and Connecticut. As a member of the Yale Music in Schools Initiative, he taught students in New Haven public schools while also serving as a private instructor for Yale undergraduate students and a teaching assistant for graduate theory and ear training. He enjoys running, playing board games and practicing martial arts. [Click for bio](#)

Victor Minke Huls, associate principal cello

Victor Minke Huls is a cellist, conductor and pianist. Previously, he served as principal cellist of the Amarillo Symphony (2019-23) and was a cello fellow at the New World Symphony (2021-23). He has performed with the Jacksonville Symphony, Toledo Symphony and Aspen Chamber Symphony, among many more. He completed his doctorate of musical arts degree in orchestral conducting at Northwestern University and earned dual master's degrees from the University of Michigan in cello performance and orchestral conducting. A multi-instrumentalist by hobby, he plays a variety of other genres including Irish, old time, folk, rock and jazz. He plays on a German cello made in the 1820s that he acquired from Seman Violins in Chicago. [Click for bio](#)

Paul Nemeth, associate principal bass

Born in Syracuse, NY, Paul Nemeth grew up in Princeton, NJ, and studied at The Juilliard School, Yale University and Northwestern University, where he received his doctor of musical arts degree. He has performed with the National Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, among many more. He was part of The Orchestra Now (TON) at Bard College, where he regularly performed in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He lives in St. Petersburg with his wife and their guinea pigs and enjoys traveling and exploring the outdoors. He is passionate about researching historical literature written for the double bass and has edited a number of works written for the double bass. [Click for bio](#)

David Raschella, assistant principal/utility horn

David Raschella, a native of central New York, completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees in music performance from The Juilliard School and Rice University. In 2015, he was selected as a member of the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, under Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas, where he performed for nearly three seasons. He has performed frequently with the Houston Symphony, including as an acting member for half of the 2022-2023 season. He has played guest principal with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and Utah Symphony. During summers, he has performed with the Lakes Area Music Festival and Sun Valley Festival Orchestra. He enjoys playing golf, fishing and watching his hometown Syracuse Orange basketball team. [Click for bio](#)

Matthew Melillo, contrabassoon

Matthew Melillo holds bachelor's and master's degrees in bassoon performance from Northwestern University. He has performed in Switzerland and Germany as a member of the Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra, and in Colorado with the National Repertory Orchestra. He grew up in New Jersey and has been playing in orchestras since age 11. He credits much of his early musical growth to the New Jersey Youth Symphony, Interlochen Center for the Arts, the Boston University Tanglewood Institute and Juilliard Precollege. Somewhat of a multi-instrumentalist, he also plays the piano, harpsichord and accordion, and was featured as an accordion soloist with the National Repertory Orchestra in 2023. Always looking to learn new skills, his dream instruments include the hurdy-gurdy, theorbo and heckelphone. He enjoys cooking, breadmaking, sewing, leatherworking, painting miniatures and 3D printing/modeling. [Click for bio](#)

continued

Levi Mitze-Circiumaru, violin



A Florida native, Levi Mitze-Circiumaru's musical journey started with and was nurtured by Florida Orchestra musicians. Taking up the violin at age 8, he has learned from TFO Concertmaster Jeffrey Multer, former TFO Concertmaster Amy Schwartz Moretti and many other TFO musicians through the Pinellas Youth Orchestra and Tampa Metropolitan Youth Orchestra. Joining his musician wife, Teodora, in her Romanian homeland, he performed with The National Symphony Orchestra of Romania, Romanian Radio Chamber Orchestra, Romanian Royal Chamber Orchestra and State Philharmonic of Sibiu. He has a master's of teaching with a specialty in secondary mathematics from the University of Mississippi, and taught students from overwhelmingly disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds for several years in Mississippi. For TFO's 2022-23 season, he served as assistant principal second violinist under a 1-year appointment. [Click for bio](#)

Camila Berg, viola



Originally from Havana, Cuba, Camila Berg previously played with the Sarasota Orchestra and was a fellow in the New World Symphony in Miami Beach. In 2018, she was principal violist of the Costa Rican National Symphony Orchestra for three years after spending a year in Japan as a fellow in the Hyogo Performing Arts Center Program. She has won second place in the Sphinx Orchestra Partners Auditions, Excerpt Competition. She started playing violin about age 8, and added the viola at age 18. She attended Escuela Nacional de Arte and Instituto Superior de Arte, both in Cuba. She enjoys inline skating, traveling and spending time with her family. [Click for bio](#)

David Bender, cello



David Bender received his bachelor's and master's degrees from The Juilliard School. Originally from Nashville, Tenn., he began studying the cello at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music at age 5. In 2016, he was selected to be part of Carnegie Hall's National Youth Orchestra of the USA, where he performed throughout Europe under the baton of Valery Gergiev. In 2017, he was featured on NPR's *From the Top*, hosted by Christopher O'Riley. A recipient of the Gluck Community Fellowship, he engaged in musical outreach to various hospitals, nursing homes and cancer treatment centers throughout New York City. He plays on a contemporary cello made by Peter Goodfellow, generously on loan from the Virtu Foundation. [Click for bio](#)

[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. This is its 56th season. Under the leadership of Music Director Michael Francis, TFO performs series of classical, popular, and morning 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, including family and youth concerts and other educational programs. For tickets and information: FloridaOrchestra.org. The Florida Orchestra is a non-profit 501(c)3 that has earned a perfect 100% score and [Four-Star Rating from Charity Navigator](#); EIN: 59-1223691 CH#1830. To learn more how you can support the power of music in building community, contact: sweymouth@floridaorchestra.org To donate now: FloridaOrchestra.org/donate