



The overhead speakers at Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park, here hosting “Sunday in the Park with Lyric’s Rising Stars” in 2021, are the focus of the upcoming Sonic Pavilion.
ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

2026 FALL ARTS CLASSICAL MUSIC AND JAZZ

From CSO to Jazz Showcase, music is back in business



Hannah Edgar

We’re so back, baby. I don’t want to jinx it. Frankly, I shouldn’t even think it. But the sold-out shows, long queues and thicket-dense outdoor crowds all summer seem to confirm, anecdotally, that live music and in-person experiences are surging to recent heights.

The question remains, as ever, whether less commercially viable genres — in other words, the ones on this list — can surf the same waves. But promising developments are afoot. Klaus Mäkelä, the Chicago Symphony’s future music director, seems to be the audience magnet the organization hoped he’d be, his Ravinia appearances filling the Pavilion. Meanwhile, a new jazz club just opened in Evanston.

My personal picks among the fall bounty:

MUSIC YOU CAN’T SEE

Wander the Millennium Park lawn in September, and you may notice unusual sounds coming from the lattice speakers, each a little different from the other. Welcome to Sonic Pavilion, an annual festival that commissions new works bespoke to Jay Pritzker Pavilion’s 24-channel speaker array. Organized by local nonprofit Experimental Sound Studio, this year’s Sonic Pavilion muses on America250, sourcing sounds from steelworkers in Pittsburgh, an Appalachian fiddle convention, and Chicago itself.

Sonic Pavilion Festival runs 1 to 4 p.m. Sept. 12 and 13; then 5 to 8 p.m. Sept. 14 at Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park, 201 E. Randolph St.; free, more at ess.org/sonic-pavilion.

BOLD VOICES

Now in his 20th year as artistic director of Bella Voce, Andrew Lewis has built the early and contemporary music choir into one of the city’s finest ensembles of any stripe. It marks the milestone with a slate of 21st-century works Lewis has led over the course of his tenure, including Bella Voce co-commission “How to fold the wind,” by award-winning composer Caroline Shaw. Among the offerings is “Bone Cathedral” by the Chicago-based Matthew Recio; originally to be premiered at Carnegie Hall in 2020, Bella Voce gives a belated premiere here.



Trumpeter Marquis Hill plays in 2021 at the Jazz Showcase in Chicago, where he returns for a residency this winter.
CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

“How to Fold the Wind” is 7:30 p.m. Sept. 19 at St. Chrysostom’s Church, 1424 N. Dearborn St., and 2:30 p.m. Sept. 20 at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, 939 Hinman Ave. in Evanston; tickets \$35-\$70 at bellavoice.org.

MÄKELÄPALOOZA

Now a year out from officially assuming the Chicago Symphony mantle, Klaus Mäkelä has a characteristically ambitious fall residency in store. Jean Sibelius’s final, fleeting Symphony No. 7 and Dmitri Shostakovich’s long-suppressed Symphony No. 4 share a bill (Sept. 24-26), while Gustav Mahler’s existential Symphony No. 9 occupies a program on its own the following week (Oct. 1-4). The real grab-bag is Mäkelä’s Oct. 8 and 9 programs, headlined by William Walton’s oratorio “Belshazzar’s Feast” and completing the Stravinsky/Ballets Russes trilogy with “Petrushka”; an abbreviated version leads the CSO’s Symphony Ball on Oct. 10.

Sept. 24 to Oct. 10 with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Symphony Center, 220 S. Michigan Ave.; \$49-\$345 at cso.org.

JAZZ FESTIVALS GALORE

Chicago Jazz Festival is just the beginning. Later this month, Englewood Jazz Festival takes over Hamilton Park, featuring a reprise of founder Ernest Dawkins’ long-form composition inspired by Fannie Lou Hamer. (It premiered as part of the citywide International Jazz Day festivities earlier this year.) It’s followed in close order by the Hyde Park Jazz Festival, turning 20 this year and welcoming headliners like pianist Emmet Cohen, saxophonist Joshua Redman



Klaus Mäkelä conducts the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 2022. SHANNA MADISON/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

and Chicago-based saxophonist Greg Ward, whose octet will premiere a festival commission. Performing at both are Maggie and Africa Brown, who carry the torch for their father, activist and singer-songwriter Oscar Brown, Jr.; like Miles and Trane, he would have been 100 this year.

Englewood Jazz Festival runs Sept. 17-19 at Hamilton Park and Cultural Center, 513 W. 72nd St.; free admission; full lineup at englewoodjazzfestival.org. Hyde Park Jazz Festival runs Sept. 26-27 at various locations in Hyde Park; free with suggested \$10 donation; full lineup at hydeparkjazzfestival.org.

This year also welcomes a new entry to the jazz-fest genre. Perhaps you’ve already stumbled upon the Red Line Jazz Festival by accident. Organized by Mandala South Asian Performing Arts since late May, free performances have taken over various CTA stops and public parks. There’s more to come. The Windy City Ramblers, the beloved second-line brass band, will post up at the Red Line’s southern terminus on Sept. 10 and Oct. 1, and the festival culminates in an evening concert curated by guitarist Fareed Haque,

also the Mandala artist-in-residence.

Red Line Jazz Festival will be 7:30 p.m. Oct. 16 at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph St.; tickets \$20-\$117 at harristheaterchicago.org.

PEAK QUARTETS

Nova Linea Musica continues to ascend as a first-call chamber music presenter in the city. The series hosts two can’t-misses in its usual downtown digs at Guarneri Hall, both premiering new commissions: leading contemporary champions JACK Quartet and the fast-ascending, competition-sweeping Poiesis Quartet.

“JACK Quartet: Sonare and Celare” is 6:30 p.m. Sept. 30; “Poiesis Quartet: In the Listening” will be 6:30 p.m. Nov. 18; both at Guarneri Hall, 11 E. Adams St.; tickets \$50 at novalineamusica.org.

AN ARCHIVAL DISCOVERY YOU CAN HEAR

During the America250 season, most classical presenters hung for low-hanging fruit: Copland, Bernstein. Gems of the 19th century and earlier were largely overlooked —

though, to be fair, one has to go digging for some of them. Clarinetist Graeme Steele Johnson did exactly that several years ago when, by happenstance, he discovered that the Library of Congress had preserved an oddly scored 1897 octet by German-American composer Charles Martin Loeffler. Johnson has since recorded and toured the piece, at turns shimmering and Brahmsian.

“Loeffler’s Rediscovered Octet” will be performed 7:30 p.m. Oct. 9 at the Performance Hall of the University of Chicago’s Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, 915 E. 60th St.; tickets \$47 at chicagopresents.uchicago.edu.

BACK WHERE IT BEGAN

After incorporating in 1965, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) established its first headquarters at 700 E. Oakwood Blvd. in Bronzeville, a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed hub of artist apartments and studios. (Composer Florence Price was living in the building when she died in 1953.) Today, the building houses Northeastern Illinois University’s Carruthers Center for Inner City Studies, but for a weekend in October, it becomes AACM’s stomping grounds again when the august organization launches the inaugural Ubuntu Festival. The to-be-annual tradition is named for a Bantu word that describes community-based thinking — apt for an institution that set the mold for musical collectives everywhere.

Ubuntu Festival runs 5 to 9 p.m. Oct. 22-24 at the Carruthers Center for

Inner City Studies, 700 E. Oakwood Blvd.; day passes \$48 at aacmchicago.org.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ORIGINAL

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco was one of many Jewish composers who fled Europe and landed in Hollywood, where talents they once flexed in the concert hall were enlisted for the silver screen. Unfortunately, that means much of his non-film music remains overlooked, including his 1962 operatic adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s “The Importance of Being Earnest.” Chicago Opera Theater gives it a worthy revival, full of the cheek and wit of Wilde’s original. A complementary recital of Wilde adaptations across opera and song precedes the staging in October.

“The Importance of Being Earnest” will be 7:30 p.m. Dec. 2, then 3 p.m. Dec. 5 and 6; tickets \$50-\$100. “Discovery Concert: On the Wilde Side” is 3 p.m. Oct. 18; tickets \$50; both at the Studebaker Theater at the Fine Arts Building, 410 S. Michigan Ave; chicagooperatheater.org.

HORN OF MANY TALENTS

Tim Higgins is revered among brass players on two fronts: as principal trombonist of the Chicago Symphony, and as a prolific composer and arranger for the instrument family. (His arrangements of music by 16th-century composer Giovanni Gabrieli will also be performed on the “Belshazzar’s Feast” CSO program highlighted earlier on this list.) As part of a concert inspired by early music, Higgins’ orchestra colleagues in the Civitas Ensemble play his work, including his 2015 piece “Altemusik.”

“Civitas Ensemble’s Winter Concert” will be 3 p.m. Dec. 6 at Nichols Concert Hall, 1490 Chicago Ave. in Evanston; \$30 plus a pay-what-you-wish option at civitasensemble.org.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Chicago forged and in-demand everywhere, trumpeter Marquis Hill has already tilted homeward to oversee the Green Mill’s recently revitalized late-night jams. This year, he also holds down the Jazz Showcase between Christmas and New Year’s, mercifully plugging a barren stretch of the arts calendar.

Marquis Hill at the Jazz Showcase, nightly Dec. 24 to Jan. 3, 2027; more at jazz-showcase.com.

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