

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 25, 2023

2023–24 Season Promotion and New Musician

**The Philadelphia Orchestra and Music and Artistic Director
Yannick Nézet-Séguin Name Joseph Conyers Principal Bass
and Welcome Second Violin Willa Finck**

**Conyers Becomes First Black Principal Instrumentalist
in the Orchestra's History**

(*Philadelphia*, September 25, 2023)—Music and Artistic Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin and The Philadelphia Orchestra are pleased to announce the promotion of **Joseph Conyers** to principal bass (Carole and Emilio Gravagno Chair) beginning immediately, and the addition of **Willa Finck** to the second violin section beginning in the 2023–24 season.

Conyers joined the Orchestra in 2010 as assistant principal bass (Mark and Tobey Dichter Chair) and served as acting associate principal bass beginning in 2017. His new appointment makes him the first Black principal instrumentalist in Philadelphia Orchestra history.

“Joseph embodies what it means to be a 21st-century musician, both on- and offstage. He is someone whom we have always been proud to count as a member of the Orchestra, and who always had a leadership role, so we are overjoyed to have him now as a principal. I personally look forward to continuing to foster even greater artistic heights with him,” said Music and Artistic Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin. “In addition, we are delighted to welcome Willa to our second violin section and look forward to her contributions for many years to come.”

Citizen musician, entrepreneur, and youth advocate, **Joseph Conyers** has spent the whole of his career as a multi-faceted 21st-century artist whose innovative work in music education and access has been recognized internationally. Awards for his many celebrated initiatives include the Sphinx Organization's Medal of Excellence (2019), the organization's most prestigious recognition; the Theodore L. Kesselman Award from the New York Youth Symphony (2019); the C. Hartman Kuhn Award (2018), The Philadelphia Orchestra's highest honor bestowed upon a musician of the ensemble; and Musical America's 30 Top Professionals—Innovators, Independent Thinkers, and Entrepreneurs (2018). In 2015 he was the inaugural recipient of the 2015 Young Alumni Award from his alma mater, the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with Harold Robinson, former principal bass of The Philadelphia Orchestra, and Edgar Meyer. In 2021 Conyers's broad-ranging career was featured on an episode of Jim Cotter's *Articulate* on PBS, which featured his work as founder and vision advisor of Project 440, an organization that

helps young people use their interest in music to forge new pathways for themselves and ignite change in their communities.

A 2004 Sphinx Laureate, Conyers has been a bass soloist with numerous orchestras and has for several years been an artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He serves as music director of Philadelphia's historic All-City Orchestra, which for over 70 years has showcased the top high school musicians in the School District of Philadelphia. Additionally, he was named director of artistic development for the prestigious Boston University Tanglewood Institute in 2020. One of his newest initiatives is as artistic director and founder of the newly formed Dubhe, a collective of some of the most influential chamber and orchestral musicians in the world with the goal of creating performances centered on authentic community connection, inclusivity, and lasting impact. A frequent guest clinician and public speaker presenting from coast to coast, Joseph recently partnered with Yumi Kendall, assistant principal cello (Elaine Woo Camarda and A. Morris Williams, Jr., Chair), in a podcast entitled Tacet No More—a landing pad for positive discussions about classical music. He is also a sought-after pedagogue with former students in orchestras in both North America and Europe. He currently serves on the double bass faculty of the Juilliard School. He performs on the “Zimmerman/Gladstone” 1802 Vincenzo Panormo bass, which he has affectionately named “Norma.”

Prior to her appointment with The Philadelphia Orchestra, **Willa Finck** was a member of the first violin section of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra from 2017 to 2023. She earned her bachelor's degree and a performer's certificate from the esteemed Eastman School of Music in 2018, studying with Mikhail Kopelman. In the summers she has participated in the Verbier Festival in Switzerland, at times serving as associate concertmaster and principal second violin of the Verbier Festival Orchestra.

In addition to Willa's classical career, the North Carolina native grew up playing Celtic and old-time music with her family. For over a decade she played with her father, sister, and friend in the Celtic group the Forget-Me-Nots, which performed across western North Carolina and released an album of all original music in 2010. She is a founding member of Copper Hill, a Rochester folk band formed in 2017 and in 2019 released an impromptu solo album entitled *Ask Me Why* with collaborators Sterling Cozza and Nathan Kay. She plays a 2020 violin made by her father, David Finck.

[About The Philadelphia Orchestra](#)

[About Yannick Nézet-Séguin](#)

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