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THE ATLANTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA PERFORMS GERSHWIN'S *RHAPSODY IN BLUE*

Tickets go on sale today at noon

ATLANTA – The music of one of the great American composers, George Gershwin, fills Atlanta Symphony Hall this October. Jazz pianist Sullivan Fortner joins the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra to perform *Rhapsody in Blue* in a concert led by conductor Kristiina Poska on October 22 and 24.

The Orchestra kicks off this energetic program in a first half dedicated to the master of American song, George Gershwin, performing music from his opera *Porgy and Bess*. Estonian conductor Kristiina Poska, praised for her ability to yield "outstanding orchestral colour," (*El Comercio*), conducts Catfish Row: Suite from *Porgy and Bess*. Filled with folksong, banjo, and beloved melodies like "Summertime", the Catfish Row Suite tasks the Orchestra as storytellers for Gershwin's famed opera.

The second half of the program features the raging and primal "Inextinguishable" Fourth Symphony from Danish composer Carl Nielsen. Nielsen penned the term "Inextinguishable" for the Fourth Symphony for "the elemental will to live" following the horrors of World War I. Nielsen employs dueling timpani, soaring wind instruments and triumphant brass to showcase the lifeforce of the orchestra.

Pianist Sullivan Fortner, recipient of the 2026 Larry J. Bell Jazz Artist Award makes a rare symphonic appearance as soloist for *Rhapsody in Blue*. Sullivan has been praised for performing with "an ease of expression that stems from a longtime commitment to music." (*Offbeat*)

Tickets for this concert go on sale Wednesday, July 22 at 1pm. Learn more at aso.org.

CALENDAR LISTING

Rhapsody in Blue

Thursday, October 22, 2026, 8pm

Saturday, October 24, 2026, 8pm

Kristiina Poska, conductor

Sullivan Fortner, piano

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

GERSHWIN: Catfish Row: Suite from *Porgy and Bess*

GERSHWIN: *Rhapsody in Blue*

NIELSEN: Symphony No. 4, "The Inextinguishable"

It's known as "the great American opera." Since 1935, *Porgy and Bess* has rippled through American culture in the hands of artists such as Maya Angelou, Miles Davis, Janis Joplin, and Sublime. And it's no surprise — no one could write a tune like George Gershwin. Not quite jazz and not quite classical, the beguiling sounds of *Porgy*, plus the watershed *Rhapsody in Blue*, render the spirit of New York City into irresistible, toe-tapping fun.

After intermission, the orchestra drops into overdrive for Carl Nielsen's indomitable Fourth Symphony, nicknamed *The Inextinguishable*. The Orchestra welcomes the debuts of Estonian conductor Kristiina Poska and jazz pianist Sullivan Fortner.

About Sullivan Fortner

For more than a decade, Sullivan Fortner has been stretching deep-rooted talents as a pianist, composer, band leader and uncompromising individualist. The GRAMMY Award-winning artist and educator out of New Orleans received international praise as both key player and producer for his collaborative work on *The Window*, alongside Cecile McLorin Salvant, and earned a 2023 GRAMMY nomination for his provocative arrangement of "Optimistic Voices/No Love Dying" from her 2022 release *Ghost Song*.

As a solo leader he has issued *Aria* (2015), *Moments Preserved* (2018) and *Solo Game* (2024) to critical acclaim, the lattermost receiving 4-star reviews in *DownBeat* and France's *Telerama Magazine*. Slated for release in 2025, his forthcoming trio recording *Southern Nights* features Peter Washington and Marcus Gilmore.

Winner of the 2024 *DownBeat* Critics Poll for Rising Star Jazz Group: Sullivan Fortner Trio, the prolific artist has enjoyed creative associations with Wynton Marsalis, Paul Simon, Diane Reeves, Etienne Charles and John Scofield; his frequent and longtime collaborators have included Ambrose Akinmusire, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Stefon Harris, Kassa Overall, Tivon Pennicott, Peter Bernstein, Nicholas Payton, Billy Hart, Gary Bartz, Chief Adjuah and the late Roy Hargrove.

Playing solo or leading an orchestra, Fortner engages harmony and rhythmic ideas through curiosity and clarity. Coming up in New Orleans, he began playing piano at age 7, earning his Bachelor of Music from Oberlin Conservatory and Master of Music in Jazz Performance from Manhattan School of Music (MSM). A champion of mentorship,

Fortner has offered masterclasses at MSM, New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA), Purdue University, Lafayette Summer Music Workshop, Belmont University and Oberlin Conservatory where he held a faculty position and subsequently returned as visiting professor of jazz piano.

A highly-sought improviser, Fortner has performed at Snug Harbor, New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts, Sweet Lorraine's and The Jazz Playhouse in New Orleans, and Jazz at Lincoln Center, Jazz Standard and Smalls Jazz Club in New York City. He's appeared at Newport, Monterey, Discover, Tri-C and Gillmore Keyboard jazz festivals. In 2019, Fortner brought his band to the historic Village Vanguard for a week-long engagement he would reprise in 2020 as a virtual performance during lockdown. His notable studio contributions include work on Etienne Charles's *Kaiso* (Culture Shock, 2011), Donald Harrison's *Quantum Leap* (FOMP, 2010), and Theo Croker's *The Fundamentals* (Left Sided Music, 2007).

Fortner's artistry preserves the tradition and evolves the sound. He seeks connections among different musical styles that are at once deeply soulful and wildly inventive. Both his works and his insights have been featured in culture drivers from *The New York Times* to *The Root*. Further accolades include the 2015 Cole Porter Fellowship awarded by the American Pianists Association, Leonore Annenberg Arts Fellowship, the 2016 Lincoln Center Award for Emerging Artists, the prestigious Shifting Foundation Grant in 2020 for artistic career development and the 2024 Western Jazz Presenters grant, which allowed him to tour the west coast with his trio.

About Kristiina Poska

Acclaimed for her artistry and versatility, Kristiina Poska stands among the most sought-after conductors on today's international music scene. She serves as Music Director of the Orchestre Français des Jeunes since 2025, and as Principal Guest Conductor of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra since the 2021/22 season. Previously, she held the position of Chief Conductor of the Flanders Symphony Orchestra from 2019/20 through 2024/25.

This season, Poska debuts with Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Essen Philharmonic, Sinfonia Varsovia, Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. She also returns to the Orchestre National de Metz, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and Minnesota Orchestra. Her final performance as Chief Conductor of the Flanders Symphony Orchestra will feature Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 and Mahler's Symphony No. 4. As Music Director of the Orchestre Français des Jeunes, she leads two European tours, with performances

at the Opéra de Dijon, BOZAR Brussels, and Philharmonie de Paris, including a special concert for the Biennale des Quatuors à cordes.

Recent highlights include her debuts with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Colorado Symphony Orchestra in North America; Orquesta Nacional de España, Orquesta Sinfónica de Euskadi, and Orquesta Sinfónica de Bilbao in Spain; the Swedish and Norwegian Radio Symphony Orchestras in Scandinavia; as well as the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Montpellier, Lahti Symphony, Grazer Philharmoniker, and NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo. She has also appeared with the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, Royal Concertgebouworkest, Oslo Philharmonic, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, and Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, among many others. Additional collaborations include the hr-Sinfonieorchester, Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Die Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich.

Equally prolific in the operatic repertoire, Poska's current season features a return to the Norwegian National Opera with Barrie Kosky's production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Her recent operatic engagements include her debut at the Opéra de Dijon conducting Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Strauss's *Metamorphosen* (directed by Dominique Pitoiset), a return to Staatsoper Berlin for Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, *Così fan tutte* in productions at both the Norwegian National Opera and Royal Danish Theatre, Puccini's *La bohème* (directed by Robert Carsen) at Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, *Carmen* at Staatsoper Stuttgart, and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at Sächsische Staatsoper Dresden (Semperoper). She has also worked with Komische Oper Berlin, Royal Swedish Opera, English National Opera, Finnish National Opera, Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, and Volksoper Vienna, among others.

Poska's musical foundation was shaped at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theater in Tallinn, where she studied choral conducting, and at Berlin's Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, where she honed her orchestral conducting skills. Her remarkable talent was recognized early through her finalist placements at the prestigious Donatella Flick LSO Competition (2010) and the Malko Competition (May 2012), where she was also awarded the Audience Prize. In April 2013, she won the esteemed German Conductors' Prize.

Her previous appointments include Chief Conductor of the Flanders Symphony Orchestra (2019/20–2024/25), Principal Conductor of Cappella Academica (2006–2011), Kapellmeister at Komische Oper Berlin (2012–2016), and Music Director for Theater Basel (2019/20). With the Flanders Symphony Orchestra, Poska continues her recording of the complete Beethoven symphony cycle for the Fuga Libera label.

About the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Under the leadership of Music Director Nathalie Stutzmann, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO) offers live performances, media initiatives, and learning programs that unite, educate and enrich our community through the engaging and transformative power of orchestral music experiences. The ASO engages the diverse international community of our city, bringing people together in harmony—including our youngest citizens, with extensive opportunities for youth and families to experience the power of live orchestra music.

The Orchestra's range and depth are featured in more than 150 concerts each year, including the flagship Delta Classical Series, Movies in Concert, Family Concerts, Coca-Cola Holiday series, and many community and education concerts. In addition, the ASO presents many vibrant, wide-ranging events and artists through its Delta Atlanta Symphony Hall Live presentations. The ASO also performs regularly with the ASO Chorus, originally founded by Robert Shaw, and currently under the direction of Norman Mackenzie. The Chorus is featured on nine of the ASO's 27 GRAMMY® Award-winning recordings.

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