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YCA on Tour 2025-2026

YCA on Tour is an extraordinary and unique chamber music touring ensemble that is made up of the incredible talent of both current YCA artists and esteemed alumni from the YCA family. This unique initiative brings together the brightest emerging musicians and the seasoned veterans who have already made a significant impact in the classical music world. YCA on Tour programs offer audiences a truly remarkable musical experience; featuring ensembles of unique instrumentation playing repertoire that spans a wide range of musical styles and genres that is rarely heard on tour. Each concert is thoughtfully designed to highlight the strengths and individuality of each performer. Rather than more commonly heard ad hoc ensembles, YCA on Tour groups are established ensembles that not only plan programs multiple seasons in advance, but also rehearse and explore the repertoire intensely over an unusually long rehearsal period prior to any touring activity. This investment in the rehearsal process results in profound musical discoveries that offer audiences astoundingly high-quality performances of rarely heard works.

Following a March 2023 sneak peak of the inaugural YCA on Tour group at Merkin Hall in New York City, an ensemble of five YCA artists embarked on a twelve city tour presenting a program of works for voices, violin, cello, and piano with venues and presenters across the country including the Asheville Chamber Music Society, Clarion Concerts, Raymond F. Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, Newport Classical, Utsey Chamber Music Series at Clemson University, Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, BIG ARTS Sanibel Island, and more.

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Violist **Toby Appel** was born in Elmer, N.J and has appeared in recital and concerto performances throughout North and South America, Europe, and the Far East. He's been a member of such renowned ensembles as TASHI and the Lenox and Audubon quartets; a guest artist with the Vermeer, Manhattan, Alexander, and Dover quartets; and a frequent guest with The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and jazz artists Chick Corea and Gary Burton. His festival appearances include Mostly Mozart; Chamber Music Northwest; the Seattle Chamber Music Society; Music from Angel Fire; the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival; the Marlboro, Manchester, Colorado College Summer, and Bravo! Vail music festivals; and festivals in England, France, Korea, Germany, Italy, Finland, and Greece.

A highly versatile artist, Appel has narrated performances of Benjamin Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, Alan Ridout's *Ferdinand the Bull*, Arnold Schoenberg's *Ode to Napoleon*, Igor Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du soldat*, André Caplet's *The Masque of the Red Death*, and William Walton's *Façade*. He's also a frequent commentator for National Public Radio's Performance Today. Appel is also a frequent commentator for National Public Radio's *Performance Today* program and he has recorded on the Columbia, Musical Heritage, Delos, Desto, Opus 1, and Koch International labels.

Appel enrolled at the Curtis Institute of Music at age 13 under the guidance of violist Max Aronoff. In 1975, he was featured on a CBS television special performing works he commissioned for three violas, all of which were played by him, and in 1980, he was winner of the Young Concert Artists International Auditions. Appel is currently on the viola and chamber music faculties of The Juilliard School in New York City, where he's been teaching for more than 30 years. Other teaching positions have included professorships at the State University of New York, Carnegie Mellon University, and the Yale School of Music. He's toured for the United States Department of State and performed at the United Nations and at The White House.

Toby Appel lives in Santa Fe and New York City with his wife, Carolyn, and their dog, Morgan.

NOTE: When editing, please do not delete references to Young Concert Artists, nor special prizes.
Please do not use previously dated biographies.

12/2024

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Cellist **James Baik** has been described as an artist with “an undeniable authority,” and one possessing “a real warmth emerging in lyricism” by *Le Soir*, after his astounding performance at the 2021 Queen Elisabeth competition. First Prize Winner of the 2023 YCA Susan Wadsworth International Auditions and recipient of the Paul A. Fish Memorial Prize and the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Prize, James is a YCA Jacobs Fellow.

Highlights from recent performances include concerto performances with the Colburn Orchestra and Sir Andrew Davies, Orchestre Royal de Chambre de Wallonie, Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle, Peninsula Symphony, Pasadena Symphony, Brevard Music Center, and chamber music performances at the Ravinia Festival, Music in the Vineyards Festival, and Nevada Chamber Music Festival.

An active chamber musician, James plays as a member of the Galvin Cello Quartet. He has collaborated with Noah Bendix-Balgley, David Finckel, Wu Han, Emanuel Ax, Arnaud Sussmann, Miriam Fried, Gary Hoffman, Gilbert Kalish, Bob McDonald, and members of the Tokyo, Pacifica, and Escher String Quartets.

During the 24-25 season James will make concerto appearances with the Mobile Symphony and the Hamilton College Symphony Orchestra. Additionally, he will make recital and chamber music appearances with the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, BIG ARTS Sanibel Island, Buffalo Chamber Music Society, and Hayden's Ferry Chamber Music Series.

Raised in Houston, Texas, James' education included studies with Houston Symphony Associate Principal Christopher French and with Hans Jørgen Jensen. James holds a BM from Colburn Conservatory of Music where he studied with Clive Greensmith.

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Violinist **Risa Hokamura** came to international attention upon winning First Prize in the 2018 YCA Susan Wadsworth International Auditions at the age of seventeen and the Silver Medal at the 2018 International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, where she performed with the Indianapolis Symphony and Leonard Slatkin. Risa has performed as soloist with ECCO, Greensboro Symphony, New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic, and Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, among others. In 24-25 she will appear as soloist with Symphonicity (VA).

Risa made her NYC debut at Merkin Hall and her Washington, D.C. debut at The Kennedy Center. She has performed chamber music at Music@Menlo, and been featured in recital with Ithaca College, Buffalo Chamber Music Society, and The Morgan Library & Museum. In 24-25 she will appear with YCA on Tour at Chamber Music Lehigh Valley and BIG ARTS Sanibel.

A native of Japan, Risa studied at the Tokyo College of Music as the Honorary Scholarship student of Koichiro Harada, Mayuko Kamio, and Machie Oguri. She continues her studies at the Manhattan School of Music as the Full Scholarship student under the tutelage of Koichiro Harada and Lucie Robert, and additional studies with Cho-Liang Lin. She is also a recipient of scholarships from the Ezoe Memorial Foundation and the Rohm Music Foundation. Risa Hokamura is represented in Japan by Kajimoto.

Risa plays the 1715 “Joachim” Stradivarius violin on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation and 1734 “Ames-Totenberg” Stradivarius violin on loan from Ryuji Ueno and Rare Violins In Consortium, Artists and Benefactors Collaborative.

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Hailed as “grippingly precise and gleaming” by the San Francisco Classical Voice, violinist **Oliver Neubauer** is the First Prize winner of the 2023 Susan Wadsworth Young Concert Artists International Auditions and is managed worldwide by Young Concert Artists as a YCA Jacobs Fellow. Oliver is a current student of Mihaela Martin at the Kronberg Academy and a graduate of the Juilliard School where he studied with Li Lin, Itzhak Perlman, and Donald Weilerstein, and was a recipient of the Kovner Fellowship.

Oliver has performed as soloist with numerous orchestras, including the National Repertory Orchestra, the Sound Symphony Orchestra, the Symphony of Westchester, the Springfield Symphony, and the Juilliard AXIOM Ensemble. He has captured top prizes in the Hellam Competition, ArsClassica International Competition, National YoungArts Competition, and received the Prix de l’APCAV at the Verbier Festival. Oliver has appeared at festivals including the Marlboro Music Festival, Verbier Academy, Kronberg Masterclasses, Music@Menlo, and Chamber Music Northwest.

Highlights of Oliver’s upcoming season include his YCA Recital Debuts at Merkin Hall and the Kennedy Center’s Terrace Theater as well as concerto debuts with the Delaware Symphony and the Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle. He will also be making his recital debut in Carnegie’s Weill Hall as recipient of the Juilliard School’s 2024 Gershen Cohen Award. Oliver performs on the 1727 “Milstein” Guarneri Del Gesù violin (one of four violins Nathan Milstein played during his lifetime), thanks to the extraordinary generosity of the Ryuji Ueno Foundation and Rare Violins in Consortium, Artists and Benefactors Collaborative.

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The music-making of young Australian cellist **Benett Tsai** has been described as “electrifying...flawless freshness” (Süddeutsche Zeitung) and “charismatic, heartfelt playing full of fluid intensity” (Sydney Arts Guide). Profiled as one of the thirty “next generation young musicians making their mark” by Limelight Magazine, he gained attention at the 2022 Grand Prix Emanuel Feuermann, where he received both Third Prize and the Special Prize for Best Haydn Concerto as the youngest participant. He recently joined the storied roster of Young Concert Artists after winning the 2023 YCA Susan Wadsworth International Auditions in New York. As an inaugural YCA Jacobs Fellow, he is the recipient of The Stern Young Artist Award from the Linda and Isaac Stern Foundation and holds the Anne & George Popkin Cello Chair.

Since his mainstage debut at thirteen, Benett has performed actively as a solo artist and chamber musician. He has appeared with orchestras such as the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Sinfonia Lahti, Kammerphilharmonie Metamorphosen Berlin, Canberra Symphony Orchestra, and the Australian Chamber Orchestra Academy. In recitals, he has been presented at venues like the Shanghai Oriental Arts Center, Berliner Philharmonie, City Recital Hall in Sydney, Helsinki Music Centre, and Melbourne Recital Centre. Notably, he was featured in the 2020 documentary *The Way Forward*, collaborating with pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

In the 24-25 season, Benett will perform with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra and Umberto Clerici, the Maryland Symphony Orchestra and Anchorage Symphony Orchestra with Elizabeth Schulze, and the Kennett Symphony with Michael Hall. He will also give debut recitals at The Kennedy Center (Washington, D.C.) and Kaufman Music Center (New York), appear at Carnegie Hall for the YCA Season Finale, and perform on a nationwide tour of Australia with Kathryn Selby & Friends. Recent highlights include Shostakovich’s First Cello Concerto with the Colburn Orchestra and Esa-Pekka Salonen at The Soraya and appearances at the Verbier Festival Academy.

Born in 2003, Benett began playing the cello at five under the guidance of his uncle and teacher, Thomas Tsai. He is currently an undergraduate student of Clive Greensmith at the Colburn School in Los Angeles.

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