



**Detroit Symphony Orchestra Releases
New Recording of Wynton Marsalis's
*Blues Symphony***

**Led by DSO Music Director Jader Bignamini in
His Commercial Recording Debut, Marsalis's
Seven-Movement Work Gives a Symphonic
Identity to the Form and Feeling of the Blues**

Out March 14, 2025 on PENTATONE

**Press-Only EPK (PW – Marsalis): [https://bit.ly/
MarsalisBluesSymphony](https://bit.ly/MarsalisBluesSymphony)**

Physical Review Copies Available Upon Request

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City Breaks”

**“nothing less than a grand tour of American history through music... an ear-catching American
showpiece” – *Financial Times***

**Detroit, MI (February 4, 2025) – On Friday, March 14, 2025, the [Detroit Symphony Orchestra](#) and Music
Director [Jader Bignamini](#) release a new recording of Pulitzer Prize and GRAMMY®-winning trumpeter,
bandleader, and composer [Wynton Marsalis's](#) epic [Blues Symphony](#) (2009) on **PENTATONE**.**

The seven-movement symphony was over a decade in the making and is now regarded as one of Marsalis's
most innovative and expansive compositions, representing the scope of America's musical heritage.
Movement V. “Big City Breaks” is now available as an **[Instant Gratification Track](#)** and Movement I. “Born in
Hope” will be released on **February 21, 2025**.

Marsalis shares, “The Blues Symphony is a seven-movement work that gives a symphonic identity to the
form and feeling of the blues. It utilizes regional and stylistic particulars of the idiom's language and form to
convey the basic point of view of the blues as music: ‘Life hands you hard times.’ When you cry, holler, and
shout to release those hard times; when you tease, cajole, and play to diminish them; and when you dance
and find a common community through groove, better times will be found. The more profound the pain, the
deeper the groove.”

He continues, “I believe there is an organic and real connection between all Western orchestra traditions
regardless of instrumentation, and that the symphonic orchestra can and will traditions regardless of
instrumentation, and that the symphonic orchestra can and will swing, play the blues, feature melodic
improvisation, and execute the more virtuosic aspects of jazz and American vernacular music with absolute
authenticity.”

Jader Bignamini, marking his debut commercial recording and first as Music Director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, America's fourth-oldest, adds, "This dynamic and challenging work captures the breadth of American music and can be appreciated from both the orchestral and jazz worlds. I believe it brings together the two souls of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and speaks to the musical legacy of the city of Detroit and our home, Orchestra Hall."

In conjunction with the release of *Blues Symphony*, the DSO is also pressing a limited vinyl edition of the work through Detroit's Third Man Records. This non-commercial release will feature a cover by Detroit artist Judy Bowman commissioned by the DSO and be available exclusively to supporters of the orchestra's new Gold Record Collective, which will raise funds to support future recording projects and record releases by the DSO. For more information, visit dso.org/grc.

Blues Symphony is intended to further the legacy of Gershwin, James P. Johnson, Bernstein, John Lewis, and others who were determined to infuse the innovations of jazz into the vocabulary of the symphonic orchestra. The work was commissioned by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in 2009 and received its New York premiere by the American Composers Orchestra in 2015.

The first movement "Born in Hope" is an evocation of the American Revolution and the birth of the possibility of the blues. Many different voices slowly differentiate themselves into an identifiable melodic theme based on "Yankee Doodle Dandy" to exemplify E Pluribus Unum – from many, one – ending in a ragtime march.

The symphony continues with movement two, "Swimming in Sorrow," influenced by the Afro-American parlor music of the 19th century, gospel and church music, New Orleans funeral marches, and swing violin stylings of masters like Claude Williams and Stéphane Grappelli, concluding with a repeated blues cry on the English horn above a sustained trumpet note, evoking Dvorak's 9th Symphony "From the New World."

The third movement "Reconstruction Rag" begins in the world of circus waltzes and parlor music – New Orleans circa 1890 – infused with the sound of a train, symbolizing freedom. Once the train pulls into the station, a long coda based on Jelly Roll Morton's King Porter Stomp ultimately stomps to a halt with a New Orleans-cymbal-choke tag.

The fourth movement "Southwestern Shakedown" begins with the free call and response of the Devotional opening of the Afro-American Baptist Church, later turning into a Saturday night straight-up dance shuffle, the most flexible and enduring American rhythm. Marsalis describes it as "our version of an African 6/8 clave that all countries in the Americas have interpreted in their own way."

Movement five, "Big City Breaks," invokes the sonic landscape of Manhattan using breaks and stop-time effects inspired by percussion techniques from the bebop drums of Max Roach, to the claves of Latin jazz, to the brass and percussion of Third Stream jazz. Traffic sounds and the everyday fadeout of 5 o'clock eases into a softer, angelic side of the city... but the chanting brass and repeating bass tell us: it's still the asphalt jungle.

"Danzon y Mambo, Choro y Samba," movement six, begins with the feel of New Orleans/Cuban concert music and a male-female dialogue between violin and cello. Marsalis explains, "An interlude of woodwinds

leads into a Charanga-inflected flute solo in honor of Alberto Soccaras from Cuba who played the first jazz flute solo in 1927. Mr. Soccaras was an ear training teacher of mine in 1979-80, and I had no idea who he was.”

The symphony closes with “Dialogue In Democracy,” the only piece of music Marsalis has ever written on the trumpet. He recorded himself playing a typical improvisation on a very fast tempo blues form and spread it out across the bottom and top of the orchestra. The composer shares, “The lines are obtuse, chromatic and polyrhythmic, yet still the blues. It is a dialogue between the low and high voices that ends up in a shouting then screaming match. After reaching the climactic point, which serves also as the resolution of the argument, we reprise a patchwork quilt of moments from the preceding dialogue alternating between high and low voices. It is business as usual. We have to communicate with one another. The orchestra ascends to a final very brief break, and with one final grand statement of the very first theme, the Blues Symphony is done.”

The DSO’s distinguished history of recordings—many led by its renowned music directors—spans nearly a century, beginning with the orchestra’s first 78 rpm singles with Ossip Gabrilowitsch released on the Victrola label in 1928. A steady recording output has continued since then, with highlights including more than 20 releases with Paul Paray for Mercury’s *Living Presence* series, and 27 under the baton of Neeme Järvi, mostly on the Chandos label. In the 1970s, the DSO took part in the historic Black Composers Series for Columbia Records led by its then-Associate Conductor Paul Freeman and later made several acclaimed recordings with Antal Doráti for the Decca label. More recently, under the direction of Leonard Slatkin, the DSO recorded music by Rachmaninoff, Copland, and John Williams for the Naxos label, earning its first GRAMMY® nomination in 2017 for Copland’s Third Symphony / *Three Latin American Sketches*.

Marsalis: Blues Symphony Tracklist

Wynton Marsalis (b. 1961) – *Blues Symphony* (2009)

1. I. Born in Hope [7:41]
2. II. Swimming in Sorrow [13:09]
3. III. Reconstruction Rag [10:04]
4. IV. Southwestern Shakedown [8:08]
5. V. Big City Breaks [4:29]
6. VI. Danzon y Mambo, Choro y Samba [11:23]
7. VII. Dialogue In Democracy [6:32]

TT: 01:01:26

Detroit Symphony Orchestra
Jader Bignamini, Conductor

Executive Producer: Erik Rönmark (Detroit Symphony Orchestra) & Sean Hickey (PENTATONE)

Audio Recording & Post-Production: Soundmirror, Boston

Recording Producer: Blanton Alspaugh (Soundmirror)

Recording Engineer, Mixing & Mastering: Mark Donahue (Soundmirror)

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About the Detroit Symphony Orchestra

The acclaimed **Detroit Symphony Orchestra** is known for trailblazing performances, collaborations with the world's foremost musical artists, and a deep connection to its city. Led by Music Director Jader Bignamini since 2020, the DSO makes its home at the historic Orchestra Hall within the Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, offering a robust performance schedule that features classical, pops, jazz, and family concerts, plus community performances. Enrico Lopez-Yañez was named Principal Pops Conductor in 2023, trumpeter and composer Terence Blanchard serves as the orchestra's Fred A. Erb Jazz Creative Director Chair, and Tabita Berglund began her tenure as Principal Guest Conductor in the 2024–25 season. A dedication to broadcast innovation and technology began in 1922, when the DSO became the first orchestra in the world to present a live radio broadcast of a concert and continues today with the groundbreaking Live from Orchestra Hall series of free webcasts.

Since its first school concerts a century ago, and particularly since the founding of the Civic Youth Ensembles in 1970, the DSO has been a national leader in bringing the benefits of music education to students, teachers, and families in Detroit and surrounding communities. The DSO remains committed to expanding its participation in the growth and well-being of Detroit through programs like its Detroit Neighborhood Initiative—cultural events co-created with community partners and residents—and Detroit Harmony, a promise to provide an instrument and instruction to any student in the city who wants to learn. With unwavering support from the people of Detroit, the DSO actively pursues a mission to impact lives through the power of unforgettable musical experiences.

About Jader Bignamini

Jader Bignamini was introduced as the 18th music director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in January 2020, commencing with the 2020–21 season. His infectious passion and artistic excellence set the tone for the seasons ahead, creating extraordinary music and establishing a close relationship with the orchestra. During his tenure in Detroit, Bignamini has collaborated with such artists as Branford Marsalis, Hilary Hahn, Daniil Trifonov, Yuja Wang, Yo-Yo Ma, and Alisa Weilerstein, as well as composers Michael Abels and Carlos Simon, and conducted major symphonic works by Beethoven, Brahms, Mahler, and Strauss, plus Leonard Bernstein, Duke Ellington, Florence Price, and Margaret Bonds. A jazz aficionado, he has immersed himself in Detroit's rich jazz culture and the influences of American music. In 2023, the DSO extended Bignamini's contract for a second five-year term, through 2031.

A native of Crema, Italy, Bignamini studied at the Piacenza Music Conservatory and began his career as a clarinetist with Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano, later serving as the group's resident conductor. Captivated by the works of legends like Mahler and Tchaikovsky, Bignamini explored their complexity and power, puzzling out each instrument's role in creating a larger-than-life sound. In the years since, Bignamini has conducted

some of the world's most acclaimed orchestras and opera companies in venues across the globe including working with Riccardo Chailly on concerts of Mahler's Eighth Symphony in 2013 and his concert debut at La Scala in 2015 for the opening season of La Sinfonica di Milano.

Recent highlights include debuts with Opera de Paris, Deutsche Opera Berlin, Accademia di Santa Cecilia Orchestra, Washington's National Symphony Orchestra, and the Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Milwaukee, and Minnesota symphonies; The Cleveland Orchestra at the Blossom Festival; and at the Grand Teton Festival. He has also appeared with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and London Philharmonic; with the Metropolitan Opera, Canadian Opera Company, Vienna State Opera, Dutch National Opera, and Bayerische Staatsoper; in Montpellier for the Festival de Radio France; and had return engagements with Oper Frankfurt and Santa Fe Opera. In Italy, Bignamini has conducted numerous operas at Arena of Verona, Rome's Teatro dell'Opera, Teatro Massimo in Palermo, the Verdi Festival in Parma, Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro, and La Fenice in Venice.

Bignamini also has a great career in Asia, including Japan where he has conducted the Osaka Philharmonic, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo, the Sendai Philharmonic Orchestra, the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra, and opera productions of Andrea Chenier at NHK and La Traviata by Sofia Coppola with costumes by Valentino in Tokyo and on tour with Rome's Teatro dell'Opera that is available on Blu-ray.

One of Bignamini's greatest passions is working with the next generation of musicians, and during the summer he is a regular guest of the Interlochen Center for the Arts with the DSO and of the Asian Youth Orchestra, leading tours featuring the most talented young musicians from Asia.

About Wynton Marsalis

Wynton Marsalis is a world-renowned trumpeter, bandleader, composer, and a leading advocate of American culture. Marsalis was born to a musical family in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1961. He began performing jazz and classical trumpet music from an early age. In 1980, upon moving to New York to attend The Juilliard School, Marsalis launched his career performing as a member of the legendary Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers.

In the four and a half decades since, he has rekindled widespread international interest in jazz through performances, educational initiatives, books, curricula, and public advocacy. Between his 1982 debut and the present, Marsalis has released 129 recordings and composed hundreds of original pieces for symphony orchestra, jazz big band, and a variety of chamber music configurations. He has performed in 858 cities and 65 countries across the globe to date.

Marsalis is the recipient of 41 honorary degrees, countless awards, and was appointed a UN Messenger of Peace (2001). He has been bestowed some of the world's highest government honors for the arts: The National Medal of Arts (USA, 2005), a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur (France, 2009), The National Humanities Medal (USA, 2016), and the Praemium Imperiale for Music (Japan, 2023).

Marsalis presently serves as Managing and Artistic Director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, Director of Jazz Studies at The Juilliard School, and President of The Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation. He continues

to inspire new generations of musicians and audiences through his performances, recordings, compositions, and educational initiatives. Learn more at www.wyntonmarsalis.org.