

LAKES AREA MUSIC FESTIVAL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LAKES AREA MUSIC FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES ITS 2026 SEASON: PASSION

July 31–August 23, 2026 | Brainerd, MN

Brainerd, MN (January 27, 2026) – The Lakes Area Music Festival (LAMF) is proud to unveil its 2026 season, *PASSION*, bringing world-class orchestra, opera, and chamber music to central Minnesota from July 31 to August 23, 2026.

LAMF’s 18th season explores the many forms passion can take—from the intimacy of chamber music and the thrill of symphonic dance to the raw, combustible drama of opera. Audiences will experience music forged in friendship and devotion with Brahms and the Schumanns; moonlit longing in Schoenberg’s *Transfigured Night*; the fiery rhythms of flamenco and Bizet’s *Carmen*, starring internationally acclaimed soprano Julia Bullock; and a sweeping symphonic finale featuring Carlos Simon’s *Four Black American Dances*, Debussy’s *Ibéria*, and Stravinsky’s kaleidoscopic *Petrushka*. The season also includes a family-friendly outdoor celebration of America’s 250th birthday and special events that bring artists and audiences together in unforgettable ways.

“We chose *PASSION* as this season’s theme because it lies at the heart of everything we do,” said Scott Lykins, Artistic & Executive Director. “Passion fuels great artistry, but it also connects us—to one another, to our community, and to the stories that shape us. Whether it’s the seductive intensity of *Carmen*, the radiant lyricism of Haydn and Strauss, or the rhythmic brilliance of Stravinsky and Carlos Simon, this season invites audiences to feel deeply and experience music that moves both the heart and the imagination.”

“Each year, my summer home is Brainerd, where the LAMF community reminds me why we make music together,” said Christian Reif, Music Director. “As artists, we seek to build spaces rooted in compassion, understanding, and connection—and in this moment, that work feels more vital than ever. I’m grateful to be part of a community that lives those values.”

The Lakes Area Music Festival is Minnesota’s summer home for world-class opera, orchestra, and chamber music. Celebrating its 18th anniversary season, more than 200 artists from the nation’s top orchestras and opera companies will present 60 concert, education, and community outreach activities this July and August. Under the leadership of Executive and Artistic Director Scott Lykins, Artistic Director John Taylor Ward, and Music Director Christian Reif, LAMF continues its meteoric rise as one of the nation’s fastest-growing classical music organizations. The festival’s hallmark is its vibrant community of internationally acclaimed musicians who return each summer.

LAMF partners with the Minnesota Orchestra for ticketing services. Tickets are available online at minnesotaorchestra.org/LakesAreaMusic and by phone by calling the Minnesota Orchestra Box Office at 612-371-5656 (Tuesday–Friday, 10am–5pm).

2026 Festival Season

MAINSTAGE CONCERTS

ORCHESTRA

Brahms & The Schumanns

Sunday, August 2 at 3 p.m.
Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts

Hungarian Rhapsodies by Johannes Brahms
Piano Concerto in A minor by Clara Schumann
Symphony No. 2 by Robert Schumann

Christian Reif, conductor

Music forged in friendship and passion. The relationships between Robert and Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms were intimate and complicated—and they shaped the trajectory of classical music forever. In an exploration of friendship and inspiration, Brahms' fiery *Hungarian Rhapsodies* are followed by Clara Schumann's tender Piano Concerto with Robert Schumann's soaring Symphony No. 2 capping off this trio of musical genius.

CHAMBER MUSIC

Lovers In The Night

Wednesday, August 5 at 7:30pm
Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts

7 Canciones populares españolas (7 Popular Spanish Songs) by Manuel de Falla
Escena andaluza (Andalusian Scene) Joaquín Turina
Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night) by Arnold Schoenberg

Thalea String Quartet

Passion beneath the stars. Experience the scintillating rhythms of Manuel de Falla's 7 Popular Spanish Songs and the sensual moonlit serenity of *Andalusian Scene* by Joaquín Turina. Then, LAMF's beloved Thalea String Quartet joins forces with special guests for Arnold Schoenberg's spellbinding *Transfigured Night*, a work that traces a furtive moonlight walk between two young lovers.

AMPHITHEATER

Celebrating 250

Saturday, August 8 at 7:30 p.m.
Mississippi Landing Amphitheater at Lyman P. White Park

Music of America. Join us outdoors at the amphitheater for this family-friendly celebration of American music. This concert featuring the full LAMF Symphony Orchestra will celebrate America's 250th birthday with beloved classics like John Philip Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever* and Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. It also spotlights powerful new voices shaping America's next 250 years, like Jessie Montgomery's rousing *Banner*.

OPERA

Carmen

Friday, August 14 at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, August 16 at 3 p.m.

Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts

Music by Georges Bizet

Libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy

Lisenka Heijboer Castañon, stage director

Christian Reif, conductor

Julia Bullock, Carmen

Paul Appleby, Don José

Evan Hughes, Escamillo

Katerina Burton, Micaëla

Passion that burns too hot. The season's ultimate thrill, Bizet's *Carmen* erupts with raw emotion and intoxicating drama. International sensation Julia Bullock makes her electrifying role debut as the free-spirited heroine whose charisma captivates everyone around her—especially a young soldier whose infatuation turns perilous. Fueled by unforgettable melodies and rhythms that simmer and surge, this is opera at its most seductive, volatile, and utterly unmissable.

SPECIAL EVENT

Zorongo Flamenco

Saturday, August 15 at 7:30 p.m.

Tornstrom Auditorium

Born of fire, rhythm, and raw emotion, flamenco is music that wears its heart on its sleeve. Driving guitar lines, percussive footwork, and anguished cries give voice to love and loss, longing, and defiance. Rooted in the same Spanish soil that inspired Bizet's *Carmen*, flamenco embodies the fierce independence and sensuality of the opera's unforgettable heroine.

This special evening presents Minnesota's Zorongo Flamenco Dance Theatre, one of the few American companies presenting both traditional and theatrical flamenco. Zorongo creates bold, socially relevant performances that bring the power and virtuosity of the art form to life while cultivating community through education and outreach.

At the heart of the ensemble are guitarists Ross Fellrath and Ben Abrahamson. Both have studied throughout Spain with flamenco masters, absorbing the regional styles and rhythms that define the genre.

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Haydn's Passion Symphony

Wednesday, August 19 at 7:30 p.m.
Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts

Symphony No. 49 "La Passione" by Franz Joseph Haydn
Horn Concerto No. 2 by Richard Strauss
Sinfonietta by Francis Poulenc

Christian Reif, conductor

Lyricism meets virtuosity. Dramatic energy and radiant lyricism shape this vibrant program. Haydn's *La Passione* sets the stage with brooding intensity before giving way to the expressive virtuosity of festival favorite Daniel Hawkins in Strauss's luxurious Horn Concerto No. 2. The program comes to a brilliant close with Poulenc's dazzling Sinfonietta. Each work sparkles with wit, charm, and irresistible melody.

SYMPHONY FINALE

Dances of Passion

Saturday, August 22 at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, August 23 at 3 p.m.
Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts

Four Black American Dances by Carlos Simon
'Ibéria' from *Images* by Claude Debussy
Petrushka (1947) by Igor Stravinsky

Christian Reif, conductor

Rhythms ignite in color. Celebrate the season with a symphonic feast of rhythm, color, and energy. The dynamic pulse of Carlos Simon's *Four Black American Dances* leads to vivid, sun-drenched landscapes and shimmering Spanish textures in Claude Debussy's *Ibéria*. Our season finale then culminates in Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, a kaleidoscopic ballet score that animates a mischievous puppet, a dazzling Russian fairground, and an irresistible surge of rhythmic brilliance.

PRESEASON EVENTS

Thalea String Quartet

The Thalea String Quartet returns as Artists in Residence, bringing energetic and innovative programs to venues throughout the Lakes Area—from parks and churches to senior centers and the county jail. Catch them on our July PRELUDE SERIES tour of central Minnesota communities.

Cabaret

Saturday, July 18 at 7:30 p.m.
Grand View Lodge, Nisswa

Sunday, July 19 at 7:30 p.m.
The Ripple Center, Aitkin

Experience one of the Lake Area's most elegant evenings out! Whether at the historic Aitkin Ripple Center—where Vaudeville acts graced the stage a century ago—or in the timeless charm of the Norway Center at Grand View Lodge, you'll be captivated by performances from our renowned international opera cast and talented Resident Artists. Let life be your cabaret!

SPECIAL EVENTS

Summer Solstice

Sunday, June 21 at 6 p.m.
The Pavilion at Madden's Resort

Enjoy the longest sunset of the year lakeside at Madden's with the Lakes Area Music Festival. Summer Solstice is a celebration of great food and music. This annual fundraiser—complete with raffles and auctions—benefits our youth education programs.

Gala: Pas de Deux

Friday, July 31 at 6 p.m.
Gichi-ziibi Center for the Arts

In ballet, a *pas de deux*—literally “a dance for two”—is an intimate duet, a shared expression of trust, tension, and passion. At our season-opening gala, that idea expands: orchestra and audience, tradition and celebration, all moving together as one. Our Symphony Orchestra is joined by dancers from American Ballet Theatre to set the floor in motion with dance music spanning classical ballet to sweeping ballroom waltzes, sultry tangos, and more; each piece pulsing with the season's theme of passion. This unforgettable night is also our largest fundraiser of the year, fueling the artistry and community that define LAMF.

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