



# Cellist Yo-Yo Ma brings a full house to its feet in Miller Auditorium

For 100 years, the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra has been making music for the community. Its sold-out June 2 concert featuring renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma was a triumph.

BY KATHY JENNINGS • GENERAL • JUNE 11, 2025





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Mark Bugnaski for the KSO - The eye contact between Yo-Yo Ma and Maestro Julian Kuert



When Maestro Julian Kuerti and Yo-Yo Ma walked onto the stage at Miller Auditorium arm in arm, it was obvious there was a longtime connection there.

Kuerti was a toddler when he first met the renowned cellist. Yo-Yo Ma knew Julian's father, pianist Anton Kuerti. Including the most recent performance in Kalamazoo, Maestro Kuerti and Yo-Yo Ma have shared the stage four times.

The sold-out June 2 event — 3,200 tickets were snapped up — was a triumph for the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra musically and from a sense of community standpoint, as those who appreciate such music received a demonstration of just how artistically rich Kalamazoo is.



Mark Bugnaski for the KSO

Maestro Julian Kuerti and the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra in concert at Miller Auditorium.

With four movements, Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85, featuring Ma, was the culmination of an evening of beloved pieces, including Overture to A

Midsummer Night's Dream, Op. 21, by Felix Mendelssohn and Mozart's final symphony, "Jupiter," Symphony No. 41 in C.

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The interplay between the cellist and the maestro in the Elgar was captivating as was Ma's seeming delight in the performance. His eye contact with Kuerti and also with other musicians not only cued them but somehow brought the crowd into the music. His apparent joy in the moment was contagious.

Earlier in the evening, Maestro Kuerti seemed to almost dance through each piece as his dramatic flourishes brought out the best in each section of the orchestra.



Mark Bugnaski for the KSO

Jessica Mallow Gulley and Lynn Chen-Zhang before a fullhouse at Miller Auditorium in anticipation of Yo-Yo Ma's appearance. Lynn spoke of her first encounter with Yo-Yo Ma's music in line at Starbuck's.

The audience's unceasing applause brought Ma back to the stage for an encore, "Song of the Birds," a Catalan folks song that is also a call for peace. In a reflection after his performance, Ma talked to the audience about the positive aspects of the community that he had learned about in his short visit here, from the Kalamazoo Promise to the Kalamazoo Public Library, programs that the community can take pride in.

This is the second time in recent memory that Ma has performed to a sold-out Miller Auditorium, having last performed here on Thursday, April 28, 2011.

After the concert, KSO officials reported that the 2024/2025 season was an incredible one for the Kalamazoo Symphony.

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The KSO's Sydney Schless says, "From The Music of John Williams, Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, and Yo-Yo Ma with the Kalamazoo Symphony, to our first-ever Symphonic Beats: Celebrating Hip Hop Culture concert with Dr. Kandace 'DC' Lavender, we've connected with more people throughout our community than in nearly a decade – and we are so proud of that."

The Symphony recently announced its upcoming [2025-26 concert season](#). It will include highlights like pianist Emanuel Ax, Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker, Bernstein's West Side Story, and Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl Live in Concert.

The June 2 appearance of Yo-Yo Ma was made possible in part by three major underwriters – the Larry and Shannon Bell Donor Advised Fund, Diane Robertson, and Zhang Financial.



Mark Bugnaski for the KSO  
Yo-Yo Ma gestures to the crowd of the sold-out performance at Miller Auditorium.

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