



**ILLINOIS PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA’S MAESTRO
NAMED “CONDUCTOR OF THE YEAR” BY THE
ILLINOIS COUNCIL OF ORCHESTRAS**
IPO Gibb Music Director Stilian Kirov takes top honor

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Park Forest, IL – Maestro Stilian Kirov, Gibb Music Director of Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra, has been named 2026 Conductor of the Year (Professional) by the Illinois Council of Orchestras.

“I am deeply honored to be named Conductor of the Year by the Illinois Council of Orchestras,” exudes a proud Kirov. *“This recognition truly belongs to the extraordinary musicians, staff, and supporters of the Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra, whose passion, commitment, and artistry inspire me every day.*

“I am incredibly grateful to be part of such a dedicated and vibrant musical community, and I look forward to continuing our shared journey of bringing meaningful music to our audiences.”

This is the first such award for Maestro Kirov and only the second time an IPO Maestro has won the title, with Carmon DeLeone scoring the inaugural ICO accolade 41 years ago (1985). In past years, Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra and its affiliates have taken home top ICO honors as Professional Orchestra of the Year (1991, 2010, 2020), Executive Director of the Year (Christina Salerno / 2022), Volunteer of the Year (Mary Moutvic / Honorable Mention 2021) and Guild of the Year (Friends of the IPO / 2016).

“The Illinois Council of Orchestras’ recognition of Maestro Stilian Kirov as Conductor of the Year powerfully affirms his visionary artistic leadership and unwavering commitment to expanding access to orchestral music throughout the Chicago Southland, states IPO Executive Director Christina Salerno. “We are extraordinarily fortunate to have a music director whose creativity, energy, and collaborative spirit continue to elevate every aspect of our work across a wide spectrum of partnerships, both on and off the podium. Stilian consistently leads IPO to new heights, and we are proud to have him as an integral part of our artistic community.”

Each year, the Illinois Council of Orchestras recognizes excellence in the field of music performance and for support of musical organizations. An awards panel including judges from the Illinois Council of Orchestras Board of Directors and from independent arts organizations reviews nominations representing orchestras, youth orchestras, and chamber ensembles throughout Illinois.



For a complete list of 2026 Winners, [CLICK HERE](#) or visit ILcouncilOrchestras.org

ABOUT THE ILLINOIS COUNCIL OF ORCHESTRAS

The Illinois Council of Orchestras (ICO) vision is a supported, vibrant, diverse, and connected Orchestral network throughout Illinois and the Midwest that uses music to help their communities thrive. Since 1974, the ICO has served as the statewide advocacy and service organization for the orchestral community in Illinois.

The Illinois Council of Orchestras: advocates for and promotes the development and success of Illinois orchestras and to respond to their needs, promotes an exchange of ideas and resources among members, provides a system of communication to meet mutual needs and concerns, encourage financial support for orchestras from all possible sources, and sponsors educational conferences, workshops, and other activities for the betterment of member orchestras.

The Illinois Council of Orchestras serves over 130 organizations and their 1,000 plus board, staff and musician members. ICO's members are comprised of professional, academic, youth, and community-based orchestras, choruses, and festivals in Illinois and across the Midwest. ICO is governed by a 15-member Board of Directors who hail from arts organizations all over the state of Illinois. ICO's headquarters are in Chicago. For more information visit ILCouncilOrchestras.org.

ABOUT ILLINOIS PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The 2025/26 concert season marks the 48th for Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra, the three-time Illinois Council of Orchestras "Professional Orchestra of the Year." Under the leadership of Gibb Music Director Stilian Kirov and Executive Director Christina Salerno, the mission of IPO is to utilize the universal expression of music to create profound, inspiring and personal connections between the people and communities of Chicago's Southland.

During the 2025/26 season, IPO will perform several classical concerts at their home venue, the state-of-the-art, 1,100 seat Ozinga Chapel at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL, while continuing to strengthen a partnership with the Center for Performing Arts at Governors State University for one concert. In addition to live orchestral concerts, IPO presents a myriad of educational youth offerings each year via its educational arm - The Marilyn Tannebaum Youth Music Education Institute. IPO also performs an annual summer chamber series, IPO Summer @ Olympia Fields Country Club.

From its community orchestra roots in Park Forest, the 69-member orchestra has grown into a critically acclaimed professional regional orchestra. Illinois Philharmonic Orchestra is supported in part by the Center for Performing Arts at Governors State University, Ozinga Foundation, Gerhard Manufacturing and Design, Michuda Construction, Old National Bank, and the Illinois Arts Council. For more information, visit ipomusic.org.

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