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Minnesota to be first U.S. orchestra to play in Cuba since diplomatic thaw

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Feb 12 (Reuters) - The Minnesota Orchestra will play Beethoven in [Cuba](#) this spring, becoming the first U.S. orchestra to perform there since the United States and Cuba agreed to restore diplomatic relations.

The orchestra will perform two concerts on the communist-ruled island on May 15 and 16 as part of the 19th annual International Cubadisco Festival, the Minneapolis-based orchestra said in a statement on Thursday.

The Minneapolis Symphony, the orchestra's predecessor, had previously done tours to Havana in 1929 and 1930.

In addition to Beethoven's Choral Fantasy with the Cuban National Choir and Cuban pianist Frank Fernandez, the orchestra will perform Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, Eroica, which was also performed in the 1929 visit.

"We are humbled to be a part of the exciting process of re-establishing America's cultural ties with the nation of Cuba," Concertmaster Erin Keefe said in a statement. "This tour represents a unique chance to bring two cultures together through music, and we could not be more grateful for the opportunity."

Other U.S. orchestras have visited Cuba during the last five decades of communist rule, including the Milwaukee Symphony during the 1990s, said Minnesota Orchestra spokeswoman Gwen Pappas. But this would be the first orchestra visit since U.S. President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro announced the beginning of the process of normalizing relations in December. (Reporting by [Mary Wisniewski](#) in Chicago; Editing by Mohammad Zargham)