

CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY

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CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY ANNOUNCES 2025-2026 SEASON Donato Cabrera, Artistic & Music Director

**Timeless Classics, Bold New Works, World-Class Soloists
and Thrilling Performances to Excite, Move, and Connect Us All**



Photo by Kristen Loken. Hi res photos available [here](#).

“Under the leadership of the irrepressible Mexican-American maestro Donato Cabrera since 2013, California Symphony takes its music seriously . . . But the educational agenda is no excuse for discounting the pleasure principle. Want to take selfies? Bring drinks to your seats? Clap when the spirit moves you? Please do! And prick up your ears for exciting new sounds! . . . Regional press is glowing” – *Air Mail*

Subscriptions available now. Single tickets go on sale in July.

CaliforniaSymphony.org

WALNUT CREEK, CA (February 6, 2025) – **California Symphony**, led by Artistic and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** and Executive Director **Lisa Dell**, announces its 2025-2026 season – featuring timeless classics, bold new works, and world-class soloists – in five thrilling programs over ten performances at Hoffman Theatre at the **Leshner Center for the Performing Arts** from September 2025 to May 2026.

Illustrating California Symphony’s signature approach to creating vibrant concerts, rich in storytelling and spanning the breadth of orchestral repertoire, this season explores evocative programmatic music including **Maurice Ravel’s *Boléro***, **Modest Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition***, and **Valentin Silvestrov’s *Stille***

Musik; the fruitful intersection of jazz and classical in music by **Jessie Montgomery**, **Friedrich Gulda**, and **George Gershwin**; the monumental symphonies of **Ludwig van Beethoven**, **Franz Schubert**, **Jean Sibelius**, and **Alexander Borodin**; the timelessness of **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** including excerpts from *Don Giovanni*; and world-class soloists in riveting concertos including pianist **Robert Thies** in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21, **Nathan Chan** in Friedrich Gulda's Cello Concerto, violinists **Jennifer Cho** and **Sam Weiser** in **Arvo Pärt's** *Tabula Rasa*, and pianist **Sofya Gulyak** in **Sergei Rachmaninoff's** Piano Concerto No. 3.

Donato Cabrera says, "What's the connection to Paris between a French, American, and Russian composer? How do composers from three different nationalities react to being subject to the tyrannical rule of another country? Why did a woodwind ensemble hold sway over Vienna's musical life for over two hundred years? Each concert is my attempt at answering questions like these, through a mixture of new works, forgotten masterpieces, and known warhorses. And to help tell these stories, I have enlisted five incredible soloists to dazzle us in works ranging from Mozart to Arvo Pärt. I'm very excited to share this season with you and I can't wait to bring these works to life with my dear colleagues in the orchestra."

Founded in 1986, **California Symphony** has been led by Donato Cabrera since 2013. Its concert season at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, California, serves a growing number of music lovers from across the Bay Area. California Symphony believes that the concert experience should be fun and inviting, and its mission is to create a welcoming, engaging, and inclusive environment for the entire community. Through this commitment to community, imaginative programming, and its support of emerging composers, California Symphony is a leader among orchestras in California and a model for regional orchestras everywhere. During the 2024-2025 season, California Symphony's season ticket revenue was the highest ever in the organization's history.

In the 2025-2026 season, California Symphony will continue to serve its community beyond the stage through its nationally recognized educational initiative **Sound Minds** and its innovative lifelong learning program **Fresh Look: The Symphony Exposed**. It will also expand its programs for vulnerable populations at **Trinity Center Walnut Creek** and continue community partnerships to reach more underserved youth throughout Contra Costa County.

California Symphony 2025-2026 Concert Schedule:

PICTURES FROM PARIS

Saturday, September 27, 2025 at 7:30pm

Sunday, September 28, 2025 at 4pm

Maurice Ravel: *Boléro* (1928)

George Gershwin: *An American in Paris* (1928)

Modest Mussorgsky: *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874; orch. by Ravel 1922)

California Symphony launches its season with a trio of evocative, orchestral showstoppers. French composer Maurice Ravel's mesmerizing *Boléro* from 1928 builds from a whisper to a triumphant climax as two beguiling melodies are shared throughout the entire orchestra in what became the composer's most famous piece. Jazz meets classical in American composer George Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, also from 1928. Gershwin described the piece as an effort to, "portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere." Gershwin and Ravel shared a musical friendship, meeting in Paris in 1926, with Gershwin later being instrumental in bringing Ravel to tour the U.S. Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky wrote *Pictures at an Exhibition* for piano in 1874 as a musical depiction of the paintings of artist Viktor Hartmann, but this version is Ravel's famous update for orchestra from 1922, which showcases his unmatched ability to use the orchestra as a palette to create rich textures and vivid imagery.

BEETHOVEN'S EROICA

Saturday, November 15, 2025 at 7:30pm

Sunday, November 16, 2025 at 4pm

Jessie Montgomery: *Overture* (2022)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 21 (1785)
Robert Thies, piano
Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 3 (*Eroica*) (1804)

California Symphony's November concerts feature music that celebrates the triumph of the human spirit. Full of rich harmonies, GRAMMY-winning composer Jessie Montgomery's *Overture* from 2022 blends elements of jazz, American classical music, and Baroque rhythms. Nicknamed the *Elvira Madigan* concerto because of its use in the 1967 Swedish film, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 features one of classical music's most famous and serene melodies, performed by Robert Thies, praised by the *Los Angeles Times* as, "A pianist of unerring warm-toned refinement, revealing judicious glimmers of power." Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 – the *Eroica* Symphony – changed the game for symphonic music: A bold and powerful celebration of struggle, triumph, and humanity, it is where Beethoven truly began to push boundaries, introducing the emotional depth and drama that later culminated in the grandeur of the Ninth.

SCHUBERT IN VIENNA

Saturday, January 24, 2026 at 7:30pm

Sunday, January 25, 2026 at 4pm

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Excerpts from *Don Giovanni* (1787)
Friedrich Gulda: Cello Concerto (1980)
Nathan Chan, cello
Franz Schubert: Symphony No. 9 (*The Great*) (1824-26)

California Symphony's first concerts of 2026 feature a genre-blending program that showcases the wind and brass instruments of the orchestra, moving from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's classical elegance to Friedrich Gulda's jazz-inspired Cello Concerto. The concerts begin with excerpts from Mozart's brilliantly witty and melody-filled opera *Don Giovanni* in an arrangement for the *Harmoniemusik* of Mozart's day, when bands of wind players would roam the streets of Vienna to promote coming attractions. Friedrich Gulda's Cello Concerto, performed by Bay Area native Nathan Chan, is a fusion of jazz, rock, and European folk dance performed with a big band brass section, electric guitar, bass, and drum set. Franz Schubert's Symphony No. 9 – aptly known as *The Great* – is a grand and majestic journey through soaring melodies and lively folk rhythms, almost all of which are first introduced by the woodwind and brass sections.

NORTHERN LIGHTS

Saturday, March 21, 2026 at 7:30pm

Sunday, March 22, 2026 at 4pm

Valentin Silvestrov: *Stille Musik* (*Quiet Music*) (2002)
Arvo Pärt: *Tabula Rasa* (1977)
Jennifer Cho and Sam Weiser, violins
Jean Sibelius: Symphony No. 2 (1901-02)

California Symphony's March concerts feature contemplative and calming music by Northern and Eastern European composers spanning the last century. Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov's *Stille Musik* from 2002 sets a calm and reflective tone with gentle melodies that take listeners on a meditative journey, away from the noise of everyday life. California Symphony all-stars Concertmaster Jennifer Cho and Assistant Concertmaster Sam Weiser are featured in Estonian composer Arvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa*, a minimalistic, melodic conversation between two violins, in a dramatic, modern masterpiece from 1977 that is deeply moving and powerful. Stirring and uplifting, Finnish composer Jean Sibelius's Symphony No. 2, written at the turn of the last century, captures the breathtaking beauty of the Nordic landscape and evokes a sense of fearless optimism. Its sweeping melodies and bold themes make it a powerful celebration of resilience and triumph.

HEROIC RACHMANINOFF

Saturday, May 9, 2026 at 7:30pm

Sunday, May 10, 2026 at 4pm

Saad Haddad: World Premiere

Sergei Rachmaninoff: Piano Concerto No. 3 (1909)

Sofya Gulyak, piano

Alexander Borodin: Symphony No. 2 (1869-76)

California Symphony's season finale concerts feature Rachmaninoff's dazzling piano concerto, Borodin's dramatic symphony, and a world premiere. The performances include the third and final commission for the California Symphony by Resident Composer Saad Haddad, whose music explores the relationship between the West and the East and has been praised by *The New York Times* for "achiev[ing] a remarkable fusion of idioms." Sofya Gulyak, First Prize winner of the 2009 Leeds International Piano Competition, takes on one of the most celebrated and challenging concertos ever written – Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 – often called the "Mount Everest" of piano concertos for its legendary degree of difficulty. The concerts conclude with Alexander Borodin's Symphony No. 2, composed intermittently between 1869 and 1876 due to the demands of the composer's primary career as a chemist and physician. The work is filled with dramatic energy and rich melodies inspired by Russian folklore – a bold and heroic sound that combines mighty rhythms with rich orchestral textures.

Concert Details:

Location for All Performances: Hofmann Theatre at the Leshner Center for the Arts; 1601 Civic Drive; Walnut Creek, CA

Ticket Information: 5-Concert Subscriptions concerts start at \$120 and are available now. 3- and 4-Concert subscriptions go on sale in late May, and single tickets (\$50-110) and student tickets (\$25 for students 25 and under with valid Student ID) on sale in July. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit CaliforniaSymphony.org or call 925.280.2490.

About the California Symphony:

Founded in 1986, California Symphony has been led by Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera since 2013. It is distinguished by its vibrant concert programs that span the breadth of orchestral repertoire, including works by American composers and by living composers. Its concert season at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, California serves a growing number of music lovers from across the Bay Area.

California Symphony believes that the concert experience should be fun and inviting, and its mission is to create a welcoming, engaging, and inclusive environment for the entire community. Through this commitment to community, imaginative programming, and its support of emerging composers, California Symphony is a leader among orchestras in California and a model for regional orchestras everywhere.

Since 1991, California Symphony's three-year Young American Composer-in-Residence program has provided a composer with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to collaborate with the orchestra over three consecutive years to create, rehearse, premiere, and record three major orchestra compositions, one each season. Every Composer-in-Residence has gone on to win top honors and accolades in the field, including the Rome Prize, Pulitzer Prize, Grammy Awards, and more.

The orchestra's nationally recognized educational initiative Sound Minds impacts students' trajectories by providing instruction for violin or cello and musicianship skills. Sound Minds has proven to contribute directly to improved reading and math proficiencies and character development, as students set and achieve goals, learn communication and problem-solving skills, and gain self-confidence. Inspired by the El Sistema program of Venezuela, the program is offered completely free of charge to the students and families of Downer Elementary School in San Pablo, California.

Through its innovative adult education program Fresh Look: The Symphony Exposed, California Symphony provides lifelong learners a fun-filled introduction to the orchestra and classical music. Led by celebrated educator and California Symphony program annotator Scott Foglesong, these live classes are held over four weeks in the summer annually.

In 2017, California Symphony became the first orchestra with a public statement of a commitment to diversity. Its website is available in both Spanish and English.

Reaching far beyond the performance hall, since 2020 the orchestra's concerts have been broadcast nationally on multiple radio series through Classical California (KUSC/KDFC) and the WFMT Radio Network, reaching over 1.5 million listeners across the country.

For more information, visit CaliforniaSymphony.org.

California Symphony's 2025-26 season is sponsored by the Leshner Foundation.

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