

CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY

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California Symphony Goes Vintage Vegas in Viva Las Symphony!



Photos by Drew Altizer Photography, available in high resolution [here](#).

Hosted by Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera

www.californiasymphony.org

WALNUT CREEK, CA – On Saturday, April 5, 2025 at Berkeley’s iconic Claremont Hotel, **California Symphony** presented its annual gala, this year titled **Viva Las Symphony!**, hosted by Artistic and Music Director **Donato Cabrera**. Over one hundred guests mixed and mingled at the vintage Vegas-themed night of glitz, glamour, and timeless music. The gala honoree was **Michael Weiner**, a long-time California Symphony Board Member and Walnut Creek philanthropist.

The event raised over \$169,000, with proceeds supporting the musicians of the California Symphony and music education initiatives including the acclaimed Young American Composer-in-Residence program and the nationally recognized Sound Minds program for underserved local students. The gala co-chairs were **Julie Basque** and **Mike Elmore**. Among the guests enjoying the festivities were California Symphony Music and Artistic Director **Donato Cabrera** of San Francisco; **Barbara Hodgkinson**, president of the California Symphony Board of Directors; Bay Area philanthropist **Sharon Simpson**; **Navid and Bill Armstrong** of Walnut Creek; and Classical KDFC host **Dianne Nicolini**. Tables at the event were hosted by civic and social leaders including **Sharon Simpson**, **Timothy Carlson**, **California Symphony Alliance**, **Julie Basque**, and **Michael and Denise Weiner**.

Following a cocktail hour, guests enjoyed a 3-course gourmet dinner, paired with wine from **Wine Family Group**, and an open bar. Fundraising continued with a fund-a-need paddle raise and live auction, led by auctioneer **Graham Crow**. Entertainment was provided by California Symphony musicians **Anne Ranzani**, principal bassoon and **Marc Shapiro**, principal keyboard. Afterward, guests tried their luck at the casino tables and danced the night away to live music provided by **Jason Marquez and the Sin City Trio**, flown in directly from Las Vegas specifically for this occasion. It all added up to an unforgettable party for Bay Area culture-lovers, philanthropists, and movers and shakers, with proceeds benefitting the musicians of the California Symphony and music programs that uplift and inspire our community.

Donato Cabrera says, “Our annual themed fundraising event has become known throughout the Bay Area as being both an evening of raising awareness and money for our world-class orchestra and our celebrated education programs, as well as being just a fun party! I am always humbled by the generosity of our donors and we simply couldn’t do all of the things we’ve become so well-known for without their support.”

Founded in 1986, California Symphony has been led by Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera since 2013. It is distinguished by its innovative programming and for redefining the concert experience. Reaching far beyond its concert series at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, California, the orchestra’s performances 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. In 2017, California Symphony became the first orchestra with a public statement of a commitment to diversity, and it’s one of just a few orchestras to offer a website that is available in both Spanish and English.

California Symphony’s mission is to present engaging and inclusive concert experiences, and to provide music education that inspires and connects people of all ages. Through world-class performances, supporting emerging composers, and a commitment to community, our vision is to be a leader among orchestras in California and a model for regional orchestras everywhere.

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