

# CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Nicholas Phan, tenor, with California Symphony, performs Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings in episode three of Poetry in Motion. Photo: Mercury Soul. Images available [here](#).

**CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY AND MUSIC DIRECTOR  
DONATO CABRERA PRESENT "POETRY IN MOTION"  
SEASON FINALE IN THREE PARTS, PREMIERING OVER  
THREE CONSECUTIVE SATURDAYS ON MAY 8, MAY 15,  
AND MAY 22 AT 7:00 P.M. PST**

**Series Opens with the World Premiere of *Next Week's Trees*, the First  
California Symphony Commission from its Newest Young American  
Composer-in-Residence Viet Cuong**

## **New Approach Puts Film Quality Visuals, Performance at the Heart of a New Way to Experience the California Symphony, Streaming Free at [californiasymphony.org](http://californiasymphony.org)**

WALNUT CREEK, CA (April 15, 2021) – **California Symphony** and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** today announce details of **POETRY IN MOTION**, a three-part series premiering over consecutive Saturdays at 7:00 p.m. PST on May 8, 15, and 22. Filmed at Bay Area landmark Oakland Scottish Rite Center, each 20- to 45-minute episode features music for string orchestra that uses poetry as a source of inspiration. In terms of audience experience, the series marks a step change from previous digital offerings by the orchestra during the 2020/21 virtual season.

POETRY IN MOTION will broadcast locally on May 8, May 15, and May 22 at 7:00 p.m. PST on *Walnut Creek Public Access Television* and simultaneously stream worldwide at [californiasymphony.org](http://californiasymphony.org), where it will remain for on-demand viewing through May 31, 2021.

The new three-part series also serves as California Symphony's 2020/21 season finale. *Next Week's Trees*—the first commission by California Symphony Young American Composer **Viet Cuong**, 2020-23—receives its world premiere in episode one, Saturday, May 8 at 7:00 p.m. Currently teaching at Kennesaw State University and finishing his PhD at Princeton University, Cuong's "alluring" and "wildly inventive" works (*New York Times*) have been performed in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and Kennedy Center. Episode two, on Saturday, May 15 at 7:00 p.m. features *Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night)* by Arnold Schoenberg, while episode three on Saturday, May 22 at 7:00 p.m. explores Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings*, featuring Bay Area soloists [Nicholas Phan](#) (tenor) and [Meredith Brown](#) (horn).

Since becoming California Symphony's Music Director in 2013, Cabrera has enhanced the orchestra's performance repertoire, often highlighting the incredibly diverse musical genius of American composers, including alumni of the Symphony's acclaimed Young American Composer-in-Residence program. POETRY IN MOTION was filmed in collaboration with [Mercury Soul](#), a San Francisco Bay Area collective of musicians, dancers, visual artists, DJs and videographers, one of whose co-founders is Grammy-winning composer **Mason Bates**, himself a former resident composer of the California Symphony and longtime personal friend of Cabrera. Cabrera said: "Both of our current institutions, Mercury Soul and the California Symphony, reflect the vision of breaking down barriers between the audience and the performer."

"Donato's approach to our virtual concerts provides an opportunity to get to know the Orchestra on a more intimate level," said California Symphony Executive Director **Lisa Dell**. "How often can you see a violinist's fingerings from your seat? Or the conductor's expression? This pandemic has changed—and in some ways enhanced—how our audience can connect with the music California Symphony presents."

The series premieres Saturday, May 8, with [EPISODE ONE—Next Week's Trees](#), which is the title of the first commission by California Symphony Young American Composer-in-Residence [Viet Cuong](#) in his three year tenure with the orchestra, 2020-23. Instead of the orchestral overture piece Cuong would normally have written for an in-person performance, Music Director Donato Cabrera requested Cuong write for string orchestra, specifically to be the opener for this project. In place of in-person readings with the orchestra, Cuong was present virtually during rehearsals.

Cuong's *Next Week's Trees* takes its name from American poet Mary Oliver's *Walking to Oak-Head Pond, And Thinking Of The Ponds I Will Visit In The Next Days And Weeks*. A reflection of current times, Cuong says he considers the poem "a gentle reminder of the uncertainty of the

future, the confident hope of the present, and the propulsive force of live that drives us through any doubt that a new day will arrive.”

**[EPISODE TWO— Verklärte Nacht \(Transfigured Night\)](#)**, debuting Saturday, May 15, features a Schoenberg piece arranged for string orchestra which draws on German poet Richard Dehmel’s poem of the same name. Dehmel’s text explores a woman’s confession to her lover that she is pregnant with another man’s child, and the man’s ultimate acceptance and willing forgiveness of her. Between the subject matter and Schoenberg’s lush and romantic musical treatment of it, the piece was shocking and scandalous when it was debuted to early 20th century Vienna audiences.

Although played as one continuous piece, the work consists of five sections which correspond directly to the five stanzas of the poem. Says Cabrera, “Schoenberg wrote melodic and rhythmic content that reflected the meaning of each stanza. In this sense, Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht* is purely an abstract representation of Dehmel’s poem, and in this act, Schoenberg created something wholly original and independent.”

The mini-series—and California Symphony’s 2020/21 season of performances—concludes on Saturday, May 22, with **[EPISODE THREE— Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings](#)** by Britten. Performed by string orchestra and featuring soloists [Nicholas Phan](#), tenor, and [Meredith Brown](#), horn, the Serenade sets to music a selection of six poems by British poets on the subject of night.

As a former horn player himself, Cabrera has a special affection for the Britten piece, “Nicholas Phan and I have talked about performing Britten’s Serenade since perhaps when we were in school together nearly twenty years ago. Since those early days, Nicholas has gone on to become one of the foremost interpreters of Britten and his recordings of Britten’s songs have garnered much deserved acclaim. It takes a supreme musician and a keen mind to sing Britten’s music and Nicholas has both in spades.”

The piece begins and ends with horn solos, performed by acclaimed hornist Meredith Brown. “Meredith Brown is a Bay Area musical superstar. She plays horn for many California orchestras and opera companies, including the California Symphony, and I have admired her musicality and sound for as long as I have known her, which is to say since I’ve lived in Bay Area! I’m very excited to work with Meredith on this cornerstone of the horn repertoire,” says Cabrera.

The POETRY IN MOTION series is supported by Hewlett Foundation, Leshar Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and New Music USA.

## **CALENDAR DATES AND DETAILS**

POETRY IN MOTION will broadcast locally on May 8, May 15, and May 22 at 7:00 p.m. PST on *Walnut Creek Public Access Television* and simultaneously stream worldwide at [californiasymphony.org](http://californiasymphony.org), where it will remain for on-demand viewing through May 31, 2021. Each episode will run approximately 20 to 45 minutes.

### **Saturday, May 8 at 7 pm (PST)**

#### **[EPISODE ONE—Next Week’s Trees](#)**

Donato Cabrera, conductor  
California Symphony String Orchestra

#### **PROGRAM:**

Cuong—Next Week’s Trees (World Premiere)

**Saturday, May 15 at 7 pm (PST)**

**[EPISODE TWO— Verklärte Nacht \(Transfigured Night\)](#)**

Donato Cabrera, conductor

California Symphony String Orchestra

**PROGRAM:**

Schoenberg—Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night)

**Saturday, May 22 at 7 pm (PST)**

**[EPISODE THREE— Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings](#)**

Donato Cabrera, conductor

California Symphony String Orchestra

**PROGRAM:**

Britten—Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings

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**[ABOUT VIET CUONG](#)**

Called “alluring” and “wildly inventive” by The New York Times, the “irresistible” (San Francisco Chronicle) music of American composer Viet Cuong (b. 1990) has been commissioned and performed on six continents by musicians and ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, Eighth Blackbird, Sō Percussion, Alarm Will Sound, Sandbox Percussion, Albany Symphony, PRISM Quartet, Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke’s, JACK Quartet, and Minnesota Orchestra, among many others. Viet’s music has been featured in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, National Gallery of Art, and Library of Congress, and his works for wind ensemble have amassed hundreds of performances worldwide, including at Midwest, WASBE, and CBDNA conferences.

In his music, Viet enjoys exploring the unexpected and whimsical, and he is often drawn to projects where he can make peculiar combinations and sounds feel enchanting or oddly satisfying. His recent works thus include a percussion quartet concerto, tuba concerto, snare drum solo, and, most recently, a concerto for two oboes. Viet is also passionate about bringing different facets of the contemporary music community together, and he will have opportunities to do so with an upcoming concerto for Eighth Blackbird with the United States Navy Band. He recently began his tenure as the California Symphony’s 2020-2023 Young American Composer-in-Residence, where he and the symphony will develop three new orchestral works together over three years. Viet is also a composition and music theory faculty member at Kennesaw State University.

Viet is currently finishing his PhD at Princeton University and recently served as the 2020 Early-Career Musician-in-Residence at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington, D.C. He holds degrees in music composition from the Curtis Institute of Music (Artist Diploma), Princeton University (MFA), and the Peabody Conservatory (BM/MM). His mentors include Jennifer Higdon, David Ludwig, Donnacha Dennehy, Steve Mackey, Dan Trueman, Dmitri Tymoczko, Kevin Puts, and Oscar Bettison. During his studies, he held the Daniel W. Dietrich II Composition Fellowship at Curtis, Naumburg and Roger Sessions Fellowships at Princeton, and Evergreen House Foundation scholarship at Peabody, where he was also awarded the Peabody Alumni Award (the Valedictorian honor) and Gustav Klemm Award.

A scholarship student at the Aspen, Bowdoin, and Lake Champlain music festivals, Viet has been a fellow at the Orchestra of St. Luke’s DeGaetano Institute, Minnesota Orchestra Composers Institute, Mizzou International Composers Festival, Eighth Blackbird Creative Lab, Cabrillo Festival’s Young Composer Workshop, Cortona Sessions, and Copland House’s CULTIVATE

workshop. Viet has held artist residencies at Copland House, Yaddo, Ucross, and the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and his music has been awarded the Barlow Endowment Commission, ASCAP Morton Gould Composers Award, Theodore Presser Foundation Award, Suzanne and Lee Ettelson Composers Award, Cortona Prize, New York Youth Symphony First Music Commission, Boston GuitarFest Composition Prize, and Walter Beeler Memorial Prize.

### **ABOUT DONATO CABRERA**

[Donato Cabrera](#) is the Music Director of the California Symphony and the Las Vegas Philharmonic, and served as the Resident Conductor of the San Francisco Symphony and the Wattis Foundation Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra from 2009-2016.

Since Cabrera's appointment as Music Director of the California Symphony in 2013, the organization has reached new artistic heights by implementing innovative programming that emphasizes welcoming newcomers and loyalists alike, building on its reputation for championing music by living composers, and committing to programming music by women and people of color. With a recently extended contract through the 2022-23 season, Cabrera continues to advise and oversee the Symphony's music education programs and community engagement activities. Cabrera has also greatly changed the Las Vegas Philharmonic's concert experience by expanding the scope and breadth of its orchestral concerts. Cabrera has also reenergized the Youth Concert Series by creating an engaging and interactive curriculum-based concert experience.

In recent seasons, Cabrera has made impressive debuts with the National Symphony's KC Jukebox at the Kennedy Center, Louisville Orchestra, Hartford Symphony, Orquesta Filarmónica de Jalisco, New West Symphony, Kalamazoo Symphony, and the Reno Philharmonic. In 2016, he led the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in performances with Grammy Award-winning singer Lila Downs. Cabrera made his Carnegie Hall debut leading the world premiere of Mark Grey's *Ātash Sorushan* with soprano, Jessica Rivera.

Awards and fellowships include a Herbert von Karajan Conducting Fellowship at the Salzburg Festival and conducting the Nashville Symphony in the League of American Orchestra's prestigious Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview. Donato Cabrera was recognized by the Consulate-General of Mexico in San Francisco as a Luminary of the Friends of Mexico Honorary Committee, for his contributions to promoting and developing the presence of the Mexican community in the Bay Area.

### **ABOUT CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY**

Under the leadership of Music Director [Donato Cabrera](#), California Symphony is distinguished by its vibrant concert programs that combine classics alongside American repertoire and works by living composers, and for bringing music to people in new and unconventional settings. The orchestra includes musicians who perform with the San Francisco Symphony, San Francisco Opera, San Francisco Ballet, and others, and performs around the extended Bay Area region in Walnut Creek, Napa Valley, Concord, Oakland, and Berkeley.

Outside the concert hall, the Symphony actively supports music education as a driver for social change through its El Sistema-inspired [Sound Minds program](#) which brings intensive after-school music instruction and academic enrichment to elementary school children in a part of the Bay Area where 94% of students qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program, at no cost to the students who participate.

The Orchestra also hosts the highly competitive [Young American Composer-in-Residence program](#) and its current, tenth composer is **Viet Cuong** (2020-2023). Past composers include [Mason Bates](#), [Christopher Theofanidis](#), and [Kevin Puts](#). California Symphony has also

launched the careers of some of today's most well-known artists, including violinist [Anne Akiko Meyers](#), cellists [Alisa Weilerstein](#) and [Joshua Roman](#), and pianist [Kirill Gerstein](#).

In 2017, California Symphony was the first professional orchestra to publish a public **Commitment to Diversity**. For more information, please visit [californiasymphony.org](http://californiasymphony.org).

#### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

For more information, or for interview requests, please contact Theresa Madeira at [Theresa@californiasymphony.org](mailto:Theresa@californiasymphony.org) or 415.577.5823.

Poetry in Motion images available [here](#). Other press photos [here](#).

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