

CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY ANNOUNCES

2023-24 SEASON

FIVE CONCERT SERIES SEPTEMBER 30, 2023 – MAY 5, 2024

CELEBRATES TRAILBLAZING COMPOSERS AND ARTISTS

WITH TWO WORLD PREMIERES,

A 100TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF GERSHWIN'S *RHAPSODY IN BLUE*, PLUS
WORKS BY THREE CALIFORNIA COMPOSERS

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

WALNUT CREEK, CA (23 February 2023) – **California Symphony** and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** announce a dazzling 2023-24 season celebrating trailblazing composers and artists who have pushed boundaries and forged new paths. In addition to three commissioned works, audiences will hear music from American composers such as Aaron Copland, Wynton Marsalis, and George Gershwin, as well as European masters including Handel, Mozart, Brahms, Schumann, and Strauss. Says Cabrera, “I am incredibly proud and excited to share the 2023-24 season with our Bay Area audiences. Each concert has been carefully crafted to weave together these individual masterpieces to create a unique concert experience.”

The 2023-24 season will also welcome **Saad Haddad** as the symphony’s next Young American Composer-in-Residence (2023-26). Haddad’s work has been hailed by *The New York Times* for achieving a “remarkable fusion of idioms” across Western and Middle Eastern musical traditions. California Symphony’s 2023-24 season will feature five concerts (10 performances) from **September 30, 2023 – May 5, 2024** at the **Leshner Center for the Arts**, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek. Subscriptions for three, four, or five concerts start at \$99 and are available now, with single tickets (\$45-90) going on sale in July 2023. More information is available at CaliforniaSymphony.org.

Season highlights include:

- Three California Symphony commissions, including two World Premieres.
- The centenary celebration of a George Gershwin classic uniquely interpreted by the Marcus Roberts Trio featuring NEA Jazz Master Jason Marsalis.
- 25% of the composers this season are living, with 38% of the programmed composers being women or a person of color.
- Composers with California links are featured on three of the five programs: Viet Cuong, Lou Harrison, and Saad Haddad.

2023-24 SEASON

COPLAND—AMERICAN TRADITIONS

September 30–October 1, 2023

Black, folk, and Mexican music converge in California Symphony’s 2023-24 season joyous opener ***Copland—American Traditions***, a celebration of the diverse cultural influences that shape the American story. The season launches with **Juan Pablo Contreras’** inspiring ***MeChicano***, co-commissioned by California Symphony through New Music USA’s Amplifying Voices Program, and debuted in 2022 by Donato Cabrera with the Las Vegas Philharmonic. In a short period, Contreras has already made a substantial mark on the musical world, becoming the youngest Mexican classical composer to be nominated for a Latin Grammy Award, as well as winning 13 international music prizes. *MeChicano*, the first piece Contreras penned after becoming a U.S. citizen, is a celebration of Mexican-American communities that have flourished around the nation, including Las Vegas, Fresno, Tucson, Louisiana, Richmond, and Walnut Creek. The work was hailed by the *Arizona Daily Star* as “A sonic cross-culture kaleidoscope that borrowed equally from Mexican music styles – toe-tapping cumbias, flashes of mariachi, and Tejana polka – and quintessential American – jazz and rock.”

The concert continues with Grammy Award–winning composer **Wynton Marsalis’** unique ***Violin Concerto in D***, a piece that is neither jazz nor classical, but something completely original. Considered one of the greatest musicians of all time, Marsalis weaves elements of gospel music, blues, and jazz from his native New Orleans into this genre-bending violin concerto. This work will be performed by guest soloist **Kelly Hall-Tompkins**, a trailblazing musician who has been described by *The New York Times* as a “versatile violinist who makes music come alive.” Also featured is **Ruth Crawford Seeger’s** playful ***Rissolty Rossolty***, which marries the composer’s passion for folk music with her love of classical music. A remarkable American pioneer, Crawford Seeger was the first woman to be awarded a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in composition (1930). Performed just a few times during Crawford Seeger’s short lifetime, this exuberant piece based on folk tunes is subtitled “An American Fantasy for Orchestra.”

The program concludes with **Aaron Copland’s *Appalachian Spring Suite***, originally commissioned by dancer/choreographer Martha Graham as “music for an American ballet.” The composition was an instant success, with Copland awarded the 1945 Pulitzer Prize for Music. Offering a distinctive American voice in music, *Appalachian Spring Suite* amplifies the pioneer spirit, with famous quotes from of the Shaker hymn *Simple Gifts*.

HANDEL—RIVERS OF INSPIRATION

November 11–12, 2023

California Symphony presents a line-up of water-inspired works for ***Handel—Rivers of Inspiration***, including the highly-anticipated World Premiere of ***Chance of Rain*** by the Symphony’s 2020-2023 Young American Composer-in-Residence **Viet Cuong**. Composed shortly after his father’s death, Cuong’s

inspiration for this work came from early mornings spent as a child, watching the weather report over breakfast before practicing the piano while his father listened. Says Cuong, “The process of writing it has also reminded me that—while rain may fall—our fondest memories can keep us dry.” The concert continues with **George Frideric Handel’s *Water Music, Suites No. 1 and No. 2***. Jolly, jaunty, and packed with catchy tunes, the work was met with acclaim during its premiere at an outdoor concert on London’s River Thames in 1717 – so much so that King George I commanded the musicians to play it through three times over. An ingenious blend of popular styles of the day, *Water Music* is still among the most popular of Handel’s pieces. The program concludes with **Robert Schumann’s euphoric *Symphony No. 3 (Rhenish)***. Composed in a little over a month, *Symphony No. 3* was inspired by a happy, peaceful trip that Schumann took with his wife Clara in the German countryside. Full of joyful rhythms and inventive melodies, the work beautifully captures the sights and sounds as the Rhine River rolls through the scenic landscape.

GERSHWIN IN NEW YORK

January 27–28, 2024

California Symphony continues its 2023-24 season with ***Gershwin in New York***, a program that shines light on the promise of the American Dream. In honor of one of the most significant and popular American composers of all-time, famed jazz pianist **Marcus Roberts**, NEA Jazz Master drummer **Jason Marsalis**, and bassist **Marty Jaffe** bring a modern interpretation to **George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue***, which celebrates its 100th birthday in 2024. Regarded as one of the most important American musical works of the 20th century, *Rhapsody in Blue* opened the door for generations of composers to draw on jazz elements. At its debut in 1924, *The New York Times* noted, “This composition shows extraordinary talent, just as it shows a young composer with aims that go far beyond those of his ilk.” To commemorate this major milestone, Marcus Roberts gives the piece a fresh, new twist with a largely improvised version of *Rhapsody in Blue*, which was first performed with his trio and the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra in 1995. “Roberts radically reconceived the piano part, using Gershwin’s basic melodic material to create new themes, unexpected harmonies and bracing, utterly modern dissonances,” said the *Chicago Tribune*. “...Roberts made this his *Rhapsody* as much as Gershwin’s.”

The concert opens with ***Symphony No. 1*** by **Samuel Barber**, most famously known for his *Adagio for Strings*. This piece takes the major elements of a traditional four-movement symphony and condenses them into one movement. “Probably no other American composer has ever enjoyed such early, such persistent and such long-lasting acclaim,” said *The New York Times* about Barber. The final work featured is **William Dawson’s** lush and sophisticated ***Negro Folk Symphony***, which enjoyed a rapturous reception during its Carnegie Hall debut in 1934, and then quickly disappeared into obscurity. A *New York Times* critic called it “the most distinctive and promising American symphonic proclamation which has so far been achieved,” while the *New York World-Telegram* praised the work for its “imagination, warmth, drama – (and) sumptuous orchestration.” Rarely performed since its inception, this neglected American masterpiece is only now starting to receive the attention it merits.

MOZART SERENADES

March 16–17, 2024

California Symphony will explore the unique, individual sounds of the orchestra in **Mozart Serenades**, a program that beautifully showcases woodwinds, brass, and percussion – from **Richard Strauss’** popular **Serenade** to **Lou Harrison’s** compelling **Concerto for Violin with Five Percussionists** and **Mozart’s Serenade No. 10 (Gran Partita)**. Written by the 17-year-old Strauss, *Serenade* drew inspiration from the composer’s famous horn-playing father. While the classical style of this work shows some influence of Mozart and Mendelssohn, Strauss was able to turn *Serenade* into something remarkably original. Full of achingly beautiful lyricism and rich wind scoring, *Serenade* enjoys a special position among Strauss’ works. California Symphony returns to the music of American maverick composer Lou Harrison with his *Concerto for Violin with Five Percussionists* featuring acclaimed violinist **Jennifer Cho**, who was appointed Concertmaster of California Symphony by Music Director Donato Cabrera in 2017. Both fabulously virtuosic and fervently expressive, *Concerto for Violin with Five Percussionists* includes an original variety of percussion instruments – from wash tubs to coffee cans, flowerpots, and other “junk percussion” that Harrison discovered while rummaging with his colleague John Cage. The program closes with Mozart’s seven-movement tour de force, *Serenade No. 10 (Gran Partita)*. One of the most notable works for the wind ensemble, *Gran Partita* is famous for its clever harmonies, sparkling textures, and beautiful melodies.

BRAHMS OBSESSIONS

May 4–5, 2024

California Symphony concludes its season with **Brahms Obsessions**, highlighting the brilliance of early career works by composers coming into their own. This performance marks the California Symphony debut of Young American Composer-in-Residence **Saad Haddad**, who will present the World Premiere (title TBA) of his first work commissioned by California Symphony. Haddad’s music delves into the relationship between the West and the East by transferring the performance techniques of traditional Arab instruments to Western symphonic instruments. His orchestral works have been performed by the Minnesota Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Illinois Philharmonic, Chicago Composers Orchestra, Kaleidoscope Chamber Orchestra, Symphony in C, Hangzhou Philharmonic, and the symphony orchestras of Albany, Columbus, Milwaukee, New Jersey, Princeton, and Sioux City.

The concert continues with **Clara Schumann’s** only surviving **Piano Concerto**, completed by the virtuosic pianist/prodigy two weeks before her sixteenth birthday. It will be performed by guest soloist **Robert Thies**, who captured international attention in 1995 when he became the first American since Van Cliburn to win the Gold Medal at a Russian piano competition. He is known for “unerring, warm-toned refinement, revealing judicious glimmers of power” (*Los Angeles Times*). A passionate champion of new music, Clara (Wieck) Schumann was a child prodigy who became one of the 19th century’s foremost piano virtuosos, remaining active for over six decades. At age 21, she married Robert Schumann (then

CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY ANNOUNCES 2023-24 SEASON

5-5-5-5-5

virtually unknown, while she commanded an international reputation) over the objections of her father, and went on to have eight children while maintaining a career as a performer and teacher, and encouraging her husband's career.

Clara Schumann was also the longtime object of **Johannes Brahms'** ardent affections, and the program concludes with his brilliant ***Symphony No. 1***. Tortured by comparisons to Beethoven, it took Brahms 21 years to finish writing his first symphony. Some critics hailed the piece as "Beethoven's tenth" in recognition of Brahms's ultimate triumph. "Seldom, if ever, has the entire musical world awaited a composer's first symphony with such tense anticipation," said 19th century music critic Eduard Hanslick. "The new symphony is so earnest and complex, so utterly unconcerned with common effects, that it hardly lends itself to quick understanding... [but] even the layman will immediately recognize it as one of the most distinctive and magnificent works of the symphonic literature."

California Symphony's 2023-24 season is sponsored by the Lesher Foundation.

Founded in 1986, **California Symphony** is now in its eleventh season under the leadership of Music Director Donato Cabrera. It is distinguished by its vibrant concert programs that combine classics alongside American repertoire and works by living composers, and for making the symphony welcoming and accessible. The orchestra includes musicians who perform with the San Francisco Symphony, San Francisco Opera, San Francisco Ballet, and others. Committed to the support of new talent, California Symphony has launched the careers of some of today's most well-known artists, including violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, cellists Alisa Weilerstein and Joshua Roman, pianist Kirill Gerstein and composers such as Mason Bates, Christopher Theofanidis, and Kevin Puts. California Symphony is based in Walnut Creek at the Lesher Center for the Arts, serving audiences in Contra Costa County and the wider Bay Area.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: **California Symphony** and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** announce a dazzling 2023-24 season celebrating trailblazing composers and artists who have pushed boundaries and forged new paths. In addition to three commissioned works, audiences will hear music from American composers such as Aaron Copland, Wynton Marsalis, and George Gershwin, as well as European masters including Handel, Mozart, Brahms, Schumann, and Strauss. The 2023-24 season will also welcome **Saad Haddad** as the symphony's next Young American Composer-in-Residence (2023-26).

WHEN: **September 30, 2023 – May 5, 2024**

WHERE: **Hofmann Theatre at the Lesher Center for the Arts**
1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek

CONCERTS:

**COPLAND—AMERICAN
TRADITIONS** (*23-24 Season
Opener*)

7:30pm, Saturday, Sept. 30

4:00pm, Sunday, Oct. 1

Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony
Kelly Hall-Tompkins, violin

**HANDEL—RIVERS OF
INSPIRATION**

7:30pm, Saturday, Nov. 11

4:00pm, Sunday, Nov. 12

Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony
Viet Cuong, composer

GERSHWIN IN NEW YORK

7:30pm, Saturday, Jan. 27

4:00pm, Sunday, Jan. 28

Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony
Marcus Roberts Trio (pianist
Marcus Roberts, drummer
Jason Marsalis, and bassist
Marty Jaffe)

MOZART SERENADES

7:30pm, Saturday, Mar. 16

4:00pm, Sunday, Mar. 17

Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony
Jennifer Cho, violin

PROGRAM:

Juan Pablo Contreras—
MeChicano

Wynton Marsalis—*Violin
Concerto in D*

Kelly Hall-Tompkins, violin
Ruth Crawford Seeger—*Rissolty
Rossolty*

Aaron Copland—*Appalachian
Spring Suite*

PROGRAM:

Viet Cuong—*Chance of Rain*

George Frideric Handel—
*Water Music, Suites No. 1 and
No. 2*

Robert Schumann—*Symphony
No.3, op.97, E-flat major
(Rhenish)*

PROGRAM:

Samuel Barber—*Symphony
No.1, in One Movement, op.9*

George Gershwin (orch.
Grofé)—*Rhapsody in Blue*

Marcus Roberts Trio
William Dawson—*Negro Folk
Symphony*

PROGRAM:

Richard Strauss—*Serenade*

Lou Harrison—*Concerto for
Violin with Five Percussionists*

Jennifer Cho, violin
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart—
*Serenade No.10, K.361 (370a),
B-flat major (Gran partita)*

BRAHMS OBSESSION

7:30pm, Saturday, May 4

4:00pm, Sunday, May 5

Donato Cabrera, conductor

California Symphony

Saad Haddad, composer

Robert Thies, piano

PROGRAM:

Saad Haddad—World Premiere
(title TBA)

Clara Schumann—*Concerto,
Piano, op.7, A minor*

Robert Thies, piano

Johannes Brahms— *Symphony
No.1, op.68, C minor*

TICKETS: Subscriptions for three, four, or five concerts start at \$99 and are available now.

Single tickets \$45-90 and \$20 (for students 25 and under with valid Student ID) go on sale in July 2023.

INFO: For more information or to purchase tickets, the public may visit CaliforniaSymphony.org or call the Leshner Center Ticket Office at **(925) 943-7469** (open Wed – Sun, noon to 6pm).

-30-

MEDIA: Contact Sydney Albin, Carla Befera & Co.
sydney@cb-pr.com

PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<http://www.cbpr.co/press/californiasymphony>