

# CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY PRESENTS *GERSHWIN IN NEW YORK*

Led by Donato Cabrera, Artistic & Music Director

In Concert January 27 & 28, 2024  
At Walnut Creek's Leshher Center for the Arts



Featuring the Marcus Roberts Trio celebrating the 100th Birthday of  
George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*

Plus William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* & Samuel Barber's *Symphony No. 1*

Continuing a season of performances honoring trailblazing composers and unique artists

Tickets & Information: [www.californiasymphony.org](http://www.californiasymphony.org)  
[Meet the Trailblazers of Gershwin in New York](#)

WALNUT CREEK, CA – California Symphony and Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera continue the 2023-24 season, featuring concerts that honor trailblazing composers and unique artists, with *Gershwin in New York*, a program that spotlights the promise of the American Dream, on **Saturday, January 27, 2024** at 7:30pm and **Sunday, January 28, 2024** at 4pm, at the **Leshher Center for the Arts** (1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek).

*Gershwin in New York* features famed jazz combo the **Marcus Roberts Trio** – jazz pianist **Marcus Roberts**, NEA Jazz Master drummer **Jason Marsalis**, and bassist **Marty Jaffe** – in a modern interpretation to **George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue***, which celebrates its 100th birthday in 2024. The trio comes to the California Symphony directly after

their Carnegie Hall performance of this work with the Philadelphia Orchestra. The program opens with **Symphony No. 1 by Samuel Barber**, most famously known for his Adagio for Strings. Barber's symphony takes the major elements of a traditional four-movement symphony and condenses them into one. **William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*** takes its themes from traditional spirituals. The piece enjoyed a rapturous reception at its Carnegie Hall debut in 1934. 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." Despite its early success, it soon disappeared into obscurity and is only now being rediscovered and celebrated almost a century later.

"In celebrating the centennial of Gershwin's extraordinary *Rhapsody in Blue*, I wanted to showcase other pieces that had also received momentous performances in New York City, performances that not only changed the trajectory of the composition itself, but also the career of the composer who wrote it," says Cabrera. "Alongside his *Adagio for Strings*, the initial performances of Samuel Barber's Symphony No. 1, especially the March 24, 1937 Carnegie Hall performance with Artur Rodzinski and the New York Philharmonic, firmly established Barber's presence as a new voice for American music. I can't think of another composition with such a lauded premiere as William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* to then fall into such absolute obscurity. After its November 1934 Carnegie Hall premiere by Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra, a performance that was enthusiastically received by the audience and lauded by the critics, the *Negro Folk Symphony* became an unfortunate tragedy of racism. Dawson couldn't entice a single publisher to publish it, or a single conductor to program it. With a new edition finally available just this year, I am very excited to offer this masterpiece to the California Symphony audience!"

Marcus Roberts and his trio first performed Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with orchestra in Chicago in 1995. Jazz critic Howard Reich wrote, "To say that Roberts 'improvised' this *Rhapsody* actually may be an understatement, for it implies that he simply embellished Gershwin's score. In fact, Roberts radically reconceived the piano part, using Gershwin's basic melodic material to create new themes, unexpected harmonies and bracing, utterly modern dissonances. ... By offering sections of stride piano, steeped-in-blue chord progressions and plaintive countermelodies of his own, Roberts made this his *Rhapsody* as much as Gershwin's."

William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* is only now widely being recognized as an American masterpiece, 90 years after its premiere, with orchestras across the country performing it over the last three years. In a feature about the piece, NPR reported, "The three-movement piece is emotionally charged and rigorously constructed. Dawson said he wasn't out to imitate Beethoven or Brahms, but wanted those who heard it to know that it was 'unmistakably not the work of a white man.' He found inspiration for the piece in traditional spirituals, which he preferred to call 'Negro folk-music.'"

Composed when he was 25 years old, Samuel Barber wrote his Symphony No. 1 (In One Movement) in 1934 while studying at the American Academy in Rome, later revising it in 1942. In it, he combines the elements of a four-movement symphony, capturing the lyricism, drama, and intensity of a full symphony, all within one movement. "Probably no other American composer has ever enjoyed such early, such persistent and such long-lasting acclaim," wrote *The New York Times* about Barber.

Founded in 1986, **California Symphony** is in its eleventh season under the leadership of Artistic and 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 developing 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 Mason Bates, Christopher Theofanidis, and Kevin Puts.

California Symphony's 2023-24 season is sponsored by the Leshner Foundation. Three-concert subscriptions start at \$99 and are available now, along with single tickets (\$45-90, and \$20 for students 25 and under). More information is available at [CaliforniaSymphony.org](https://www.californiasymphony.org). A 30-minute pre-concert talk and Q&A led by lecturer Scott Fogelson will begin one hour before each performance.

#### **FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:**

#### **WHAT: California Symphony presents *Gershwin in New York***

The California Symphony conducted by Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera presents *Gershwin in New York*, a program that spotlights the promise of the American Dream. Famed jazz combo the Marcus Roberts Trio – jazz pianist Marcus Roberts, NEA Jazz Master drummer Jason Marsalis, and bassist Marty Jaffe – brings a modern interpretation to George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, which celebrates its 100th birthday in 2024. The concert opens with Symphony No. 1 by Samuel Barber, most famously known for his Adagio for Strings. Barber's symphony takes the major elements of a

traditional four-movement symphony and condenses them into one. William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* takes its themes from traditional spirituals. The piece enjoyed a rapturous reception at its Carnegie Hall debut in 1934, and a *New York Times* critic called it "the most distinctive and promising American symphonic proclamation which has so far been achieved." Despite its early success, it soon disappeared into obscurity and is only now being rediscovered and celebrated almost a century later.

California Symphony takes the stuffiness out of the concert experience: Take selfies at the photo booth, order a signature cocktail, and sip at your seat. Tickets include a free 30-minute pre-concert talk by award-winning instructor Scott Foglesong, starting one hour before the show.

**WHEN: Saturday, January 27, 2024 at 7:30pm**  
**Sunday, January 28, 2024 at 4:00pm**

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

**CONCERT:**

**GERSHWIN IN NEW YORK**

**7:30pm, Saturday, Jan. 27**

**4:00pm, Sunday, Jan. 28**

Donato Cabrera, conductor

California Symphony

The Marcus Roberts Trio

**PROGRAM:**

Samuel Barber: Symphony No. 1, in One Movement

George Gershwin: *Rhapsody in Blue*

William Dawson: *Negro Folk Symphony*

**TICKETS:** Three-concert subscriptions start at \$99 and are available now. Single tickets are \$45-90 and \$20 (for students 25 and under with valid Student ID).

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

**PHOTOS:** Available [here](#).

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