

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**California Symphony's *BRAHMS OBSESSIONS*
Explores the Relationship between Johannes Brahms and Clara
Schumann
and Presents the World Premiere of Saad Haddad's *Mishwar***

**Led by Donato Cabrera, Artistic & Music Director
Featuring Piano Soloist Robert Thies in Clara Schumann's Piano
Concerto**



Robert Thies, Donato Cabrera, California Symphony, and Saad Haddad. Hi res photos available [here](#).

**In Concert May 4 and 5, 2024
At Walnut Creek's Leshner Center for the Arts**

Continuing a season of performances honoring trailblazing composers and unique artists

Tickets & Information: www.californiasymphony.org

WALNUT CREEK, CA – **California Symphony** and Artistic and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** conclude the 2023-24 season, featuring concerts that honor trailblazing composers and unique artists,

with ***Brahms Obsessions*** on **Saturday, May 4, 2024** at 7:30pm and **Sunday, May 5, 2024** at 4pm, at the **Leshner Center for the Arts** (1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek). The concerts reunite the music of two composers who shared an intense friendship – **Johannes Brahms** and **Clara Schumann** – pairing his brilliant Symphony No. 1 with her only surviving Piano Concerto performed by featured soloist **Robert Thies**. The concerts also feature the world premiere performances of the first of three works to be commissioned by California Symphony from its 2023-2026 Young American Composer-in-Residence **Saad Haddad**. Haddad's new work is *Mishwar* (in Arabic: مشوار), which translates as *A Trip*.

“We close our season with the performance of two works that allow us to ponder one of the most profound friendships of the 19th century. Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms shared a deep love and understanding of music and in her Piano Concerto and his Symphony No. 1, we can clearly hear their respective sensibilities and personalities,” says Donato Cabrera. “For Clara Schumann’s concerto, I am very excited to be introducing the extraordinary pianist, Robert Thies, to our audience. He brings an unparalleled musicianship and an intellectual understanding to his performances that I greatly admire. One of the defining characteristics of the California Symphony is its nationally recognized composer-in-residence program, and we will be introducing our new composer-in-residence, Saad Haddad, with the world premiere of his overture, *Mishwar*. Saad’s music is full of unique sounds and energy and *Mishwar* will surely intrigue and excite those that will hear these premiere performances.”

California Symphony’s concerts begin with Saad Haddad’s music, which explores the relationship between the West and the East by translating traditional Arab instruments to a Western symphonic context. Haddad has drawn ***Mishwar*** from his memories of family trips during his childhood, driving up the coast of California and playing what he calls “the Arabic game” during the car ride with his siblings. He says, “My dad liked to see who retained the most out of the Arabic language among the three of us, who were all born in the U.S.: ‘What color is that car?’, ‘Who can count to 20?’, ‘How do you say ‘sky’?’, and so on. None of us were quite good at this game, though the moments when one of us would remember a word or phrase would always bring joy for my dad.” Haddad describes the piece as, “a conversation, albeit quite a loud one, between both my identities: a coastal American trained in Western classical music, and the son of Jordanian and Lebanese immigrants attempting to retain the culture they themselves grew up in.”

The concerts continue with Clara Schumann’s only surviving **Piano Concerto**, completed by the virtuosic pianist/prodigy two weeks before her sixteenth birthday and premiered with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra conducted by famed composer Felix Mendessohn in 1835. Described by *The New York Times* as “music’s unsung renaissance woman,” Schumann was an acclaimed composer and pianist in the 1800s. A passionate champion of new music, she 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 composer Robert Schumann (then virtually unknown, while she commanded an international reputation), and went on to have eight children while maintaining a career as a performer and teacher, and encouraging her husband’s career. Her revolutionary Piano Concerto, which showcases Schumann’s trademark improvisatory style, will be performed by guest soloist **Robert Thies**, known for his “unerring, warm-toned refinement, revealing judicious glimmers of power” (*Los Angeles Times*), 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.

Composers Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms shared an intense friendship, documented by personal diaries and letters between the two over decades. Brahms wrote in a letter to a friend, “I believe that I do not have more concern for and admiration for her than I love her and find love in her. I often have

to restrain myself forcibly from just quietly putting my arms around her and even—: I don't know, it seems to me so natural that she could not misunderstand." Clara wrote in her diary, "There is the most complete accord between us... It is not his youth that attracts me: not, perhaps, my flattered vanity. No, it is the fresh mind, the gloriously gifted nature, the noble heart, that I love in him."

The program concludes with **Brahms's powerful 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."

Up next, California Symphony hosts its annual gala, ***Symphony Supper Club***, on **April 13, 2024** at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley. The honorary gala chair is **Sharon Simpson**, and the event co-chairs are **Julie Basque** and **Abby Dye**. The evening will transport guests back to the golden era of supper clubs, renowned for their elegance and timeless music. The event features a three-course dinner and auction; a performance by international jazz sensation, multi-instrumentalist, and star of Postmodern Jukebox **Gunhild Carling**; and dancing to the seductive, swinging stylings of the **Gunhild Carling Band**. [More information.](#)

Founded in 1986, **California Symphony** has been led by 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 Leshar 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.

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

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: California Symphony presents *Brahms Obsessions*

In the California Symphony's season finale, Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera reunites the music of Johannes Brahms and Clara Schumann. Described by *The New York Times* as "music's unsung renaissance woman," Clara Schumann was an acclaimed composer and pianist in the 1800s. In this concert, her only surviving piano concerto is performed by featured soloist Robert Thies, alongside Brahms' brilliant first symphony. Both the object of Brahms' affections, Clara Schumann, and his mountainous task of succeeding Beethoven's symphonic legacy is explored in the California Symphony's program titled *Brahms Obsessions*. The music of Brahms and Clara Schumann are paired with the world premiere of California Symphony Resident Composer Saad Haddad's newest work, *Mishwar*. Haddad's music explores the relationship between the West and the East by translating traditional Arab instruments to a Western symphonic context.

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, May 4, 2024 at 7:30pm
Sunday, May 5, 2024 at 4:00pm

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

CONCERT:

BRAHMS OBSESSIONS

7:30pm, Saturday, May 4

4:00pm, Sunday, May 5

Donato Cabrera, conductor

California Symphony

Robert Thies, piano

PROGRAM:

Saad Haddad: *Mishwar* (مشوار) (World Premiere)

Clara Schumann: Piano Concerto

Johannes Brahms: Symphony No. 1

TICKETS: 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** or call the Leshner Center Ticket Office at **(925) 943-7469** (open Wed – Sun, noon to 6pm).

PHOTOS: Available [here](#).

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