

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press contact: Christina Jensen, Jensen Artists
646.536.7864 x1 | christina@jensenartists.com

California Symphony's 2025-2026 Season Opens with PICTURES FROM PARIS

Featuring Three Iconic Orchestral Showstoppers:

Ravel's *Boléro*, Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*



Photo by Kristen Loken; high resolution photos available [here](#).

Led by Donato Cabrera, Artistic & Music Director

**In Concert September 27 at 7:30pm & September 28 at 4:00pm
At Walnut Creek's Leshner Center for the Arts**

**Calling Bay Area Amateur Musicians: Join California Symphony's *Bolero*
Pop-Up Performance with Amateur Music Network
September 20 at 2-2:45pm at Walnut Creek's Water Light Public Plaza
Free Registration: www.californiasymphony.org/amn**

Tickets & Information: www.californiasymphony.org

WALNUT CREEK, CA – **California Symphony** and Artistic and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** launch the 2025-2026 season with **PICTURES FROM PARIS** – two concerts featuring a trio of evocative, orchestral showstoppers by **Maurice Ravel**, **George Gershwin**, and **Modest Mussorgsky** on **Saturday, September 27, 2025** at 7:30pm and **Sunday, September 28, 2025** at 4:00pm at **Hofmann Theatre at the Leshner Center for the Arts** (1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek).

PICTURES FROM PARIS transports audiences to the vibrant scene of 1920s Paris. French composer **Maurice Ravel**'s mesmerizing *Boléro* from 1928 builds from a whisper to a triumphant climax as two beguiling melodies are shared throughout the entire orchestra in what became the composer's most famous piece. Jazz meets classical in American composer **George Gershwin**'s *An American in Paris*, also from 1928. Gershwin and Ravel shared a musical friendship, with Gershwin later being instrumental in bringing Ravel to tour the U.S. Russian composer **Modest Mussorgsky** wrote *Pictures at an Exhibition* for piano in 1874 as a musical depiction of the paintings of artist Viktor Hartmann, but this version is Ravel's famous update for orchestra from 1922, which showcases his unmatched ability to use the orchestra as a palette to create rich textures and vivid imagery.

Amateur musicians in the Bay Area are invited to participate in California Symphony's season opening week. On Saturday, September 20, California Symphony will host a free **Pop Up** event in partnership with the **Amateur Music Network**. From 2-2:45pm at Water Light Public Plaza (1501 Locust St., Walnut Creek), Donato Cabrera will lead an open reading of selections from Ravel's **Boléro** for amateur musicians – all levels are welcome. Registration (which is free, but required) is [open now](#).

Cabrera says, "Alongside all of the literary masterpieces written in 1920s Paris stand a number of musical warhorses that were also composed in the City of Lights during this flapper decade. And standing at the center of this international soirée of gifted composers was Maurice Ravel. This concert not only showcases Ravel's talents as a composer and orchestrator, but also his ability to spot talent and innate promise in others. It is a mark of a great teacher to know when someone doesn't need any tutelage. And while the story of Ravel declining to teach Gershwin is well known, this anecdote became apocryphal, as Gershwin would go on to compose **An American in Paris**, one of the most descriptive and accurate depictions of Paris ever conceived. For as many times as I have conducted Ravel's orchestration of Mussorgsky's brilliantly iconoclastic and pianistic *tour de force* **Pictures at an Exhibition**, I am always surprised by the sounds and instruments he chooses to use. There have been many attempts at orchestrating this piece since then, but none ever come off quite as convincingly as Ravel's. For as large of an orchestra that Ravel requires for his **Boléro**, it is worth remembering that it was originally composed as a solo vehicle for the indomitable *Belle Époque* doyenne of dance, Ida Rubenstein. Whenever I listen to **Boléro**, I imagine what it would've been like to see the premiere at the Paris Opéra, with Ms. Rubenstein dancing on a table."

Ravel's **Boléro** remains one of classical music's most instantly recognizable works. What began as a commission for a ballet became his most performed composition. Reportedly he said of the piece, playing the theme with one finger on the piano, "Don't you think this theme has an insistent quality? I'm going to try and repeat it a number of times without any development, gradually increasing the orchestra as best I can." The U.S. premiere of the piece was performed in 1929 by the New York Philharmonic led by Arturo Toscanini, and according to *The New York Times*, the piece was met with "shouts and cheers" from the audience.

In **An American in Paris**, Gershwin masterfully blends jazz rhythms with classical orchestration. He scored the piece for the standard symphony orchestra plus celesta, saxophones, and car horns, and even brought Parisian taxi horns from his 1926 visit to New York for the premiere of the piece at Carnegie Hall in 1928. Gershwin described the piece as an effort to "portray the impressions of an American visitor in Paris as he strolls about the city, listens to the various street noises, and absorbs the French atmosphere."

Pictures at an Exhibition tells the story of a friendship through music. When Mussorgsky's friend artist Viktor Hartmann died suddenly at age 39, Mussorgsky was devastated. Walking through a memorial exhibition of Hartmann's paintings in 1874, the composer was inspired by Hartmann's work to create a musical tour through the gallery, complete with "Promenade" sections representing moving from painting to painting. Mussorgsky wrote the work for piano, and it was Ravel's brilliant 1922 orchestration that transformed it into a colorful orchestral piece.

Illustrating California Symphony's signature approach to creating vibrant concerts, rich in storytelling and spanning the breadth of orchestral repertoire, the 2025-2026 season explores evocative programmatic music including **Maurice Ravel's Boléro**, **Modest Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition**, and **Valentin Silvestrov's Stille Musik**; the fruitful intersection of jazz and classical in music by **Jessie Montgomery**, **Friedrich Gulda**, and **George Gershwin**; the monumental symphonies of **Ludwig van Beethoven**, **Franz Schubert**, **Jean Sibelius**, and **Alexander Borodin**; the timelessness of **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** including excerpts from *Don Giovanni*; and world-class soloists in riveting concertos including pianist **Robert Thies** in Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21, **Nathan Chan** in Friedrich Gulda's Cello Concerto, violinists **Jennifer Cho** and **Sam Weiser** in **Arvo Pärt's Tabula Rasa**, and pianist **Sofya Gulyak** in **Sergei Rachmaninoff's** Piano Concerto No. 3.

This season, California Symphony continues to serve its community beyond the stage through its nationally recognized educational initiative **Sound Minds** and its innovative lifelong learning program **Fresh Look: The Symphony Exposed**. It will also expand its programs for vulnerable populations at **Trinity Center Walnut Creek** and continue community partnerships to reach more underserved youth throughout Contra Costa County.

Founded in 1986, California Symphony has been led by Donato Cabrera since 2013. Its concert season at the Leshner 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.

Single tickets start at \$50 and at \$25 for students 25 and under. Season subscriptions and single tickets are available now. More information is available at [CaliforniaSymphony.org](https://californiasymphony.org) or call the Leshner Center Ticket Office at (925) 943-7469

(open Wed – Sun, 12pm to 6pm).

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: California Symphony opens its 2025-2026 season with *PICTURES FROM PARIS*, featuring three iconic orchestral showstoppers that transport audiences to the vibrant artistic world of 1920s Paris. Conducted by Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera, the orchestra performs Maurice Ravel's hypnotic *Boléro*, George Gershwin's jazz-infused *An American in Paris*, and Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* in Ravel's brilliant orchestration.

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. Ice cream from Handel's will also be available for sale at intermission. Tickets include a free 30-minute pre-concert talk by Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera, starting one hour before the show.

WHEN:

Saturday, September 27, 2025 at 7:30pm

Sunday, September 28, 2025 at 4:00pm

WHERE:

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

CONCERT:

PICTURES FROM PARIS
Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony

PROGRAM:

Maurice Ravel: *Boléro* (1928)
George Gershwin: *An American in Paris* (1928)
Modest Mussorgsky: *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874; orch. by Ravel 1922)

TICKETS: Single tickets start at \$50 and at \$25 for students 25 and under. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [CaliforniaSymphony.org](https://californiasymphony.org) or call the Leshner Center Ticket Office at (925) 943-7469 (open Wed – Sun, 12pm to 6pm).

PHOTOS: Available [here](#)

ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY:

Founded in 1986, California Symphony has been led by Artistic and Music Director 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 Leshner 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.

Since 1991, California Symphony's three-year Young American Composer-in-Residence program has provided a composer with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to collaborate with the orchestra over three consecutive years to create, rehearse, premiere, and record three major orchestra compositions, one each season. Every Composer-in-Residence has gone on to win top honors and accolades in the field, including the Rome Prize, Pulitzer Prize, Grammy Awards, and more.

The orchestra's nationally recognized educational initiative Sound Minds impacts students' trajectories by providing instruction for violin or cello and musicianship skills. Sound Minds has proven to contribute directly to improved reading and math proficiencies and character development, as students set and achieve goals, learn communication and problem-solving skills, and gain self-confidence. Inspired by the El Sistema program of Venezuela, the program is offered completely free of charge to the students and families of Downer Elementary School in San Pablo, California.

Through its innovative adult education program Fresh Look: The Symphony Exposed, California Symphony provides lifelong learners a fun-filled introduction to the orchestra and classical music. Led by celebrated educator and California Symphony program annotator Scott Foglesong, these live classes are held over four weeks in the summer annually.

In 2017, California Symphony became the first orchestra with a public statement of a commitment to diversity. Its website is available in both Spanish and English.

Reaching far beyond the performance hall, since 2020 the orchestra's concerts 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.

For more information, visit [CaliforniaSymphony.org](https://californiasymphony.org).

California Symphony's 2025-26 season is sponsored by the Lesher Foundation.