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California Symphony Accepting Applications for 2026-2029 Composer-in-Residence Program

**Unique opportunity to compose, rehearse, premiere, and record
multiple orchestral compositions over three years**



L-R, Composers Viet Cuong and Saad Haddad with Donato Cabrera and the California Symphony.
Photos by Kristen Loken available in high resolution [here](#).

Donato Cabrera, Artistic & Music Director

Information & Online Application: www.californiasymphony.org/composerinresidence
Deadline: October 31, 2025 (11:59pm PT)

WALNUT CREEK, CA – **California Symphony** is now accepting applications for its unique three-year **Composer-in-Residence Program**, now in its 34th year. Applications through the [online portal](#) will be accepted until October 31, 2025 at 11:59pm PT. The residency runs from August 1, 2026 through July 31, 2029, and the selected composer will be notified no later than February 1, 2026.

California Symphony's Composer-in-Residence Program is unusual in that it gives early-career professional composers or graduate students in composition the opportunity to work with a professional orchestra over an extended period, composing a new orchestral work each season and visiting the orchestra and community multiple times in order to build experience and relationships. The program has become one of the most sought-after in the country, with past participants going on to win major honors and awards, including GRAMMY Awards, the Rome Prize, the Barlow Prize, Guggenheim Fellowships, and more.

Writing for symphony orchestra is a major challenge for many early-career composers. Creating balance among the different sections of an orchestra, exploring the nuances of tone color between instruments, and learning how to communicate effectively with the conductor and orchestra members during rehearsals are important skills best gained in the hands-on environment of real-time work with a professional orchestra. California Symphony recognized this need early on and founded its Composer-in-Residence program in 1991. Opportunities for composers to collaborate with professional orchestras in a three-year, immersive setting like this remain few and far between.

California Symphony's Composer-in-Residence will work closely with Artistic and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** and the musicians of the orchestra throughout the residency. California Symphony will commission three new orchestral pieces from the composer, with each being premiered on one of the orchestra's subscription concerts at the Leshner Center for the

Arts during the 2026-27, 2027-28, and 2028-29 seasons. Additionally, each season Cabrera and the full orchestra will record 30-minute reading workshops for the new pieces, from which study recordings will be provided to the composer.

California Symphony's Composer-in-Residence Program also provides early-career composers with experience in the full ecosystem of the orchestra. The composer will engage with the community through participating in California Symphony's education work in local schools; interacting with audiences at concerts and during pre-concert discussions; attending special events and other fundraising activities; and supporting promotion of performances by writing guest blog entries, providing social media content, and giving interviews to the press.

"There is no greater joy for me than helping to bring a new piece of music into this world, and our composer-in-residence program facilitates this process like no other that I'm aware. The challenge for composers, like conductors, is that there is no way to hone one's craft except in real time, with the orchestra responding to everything you have prepared for them in advance," says Cabrera. "In providing 30-minute reading workshops for composers to actually hear their ideas before they are committed to a printed and published piece of music, introducing them to our community through donor events and community partnerships, and having them interact with student musicians and composers, the California Symphony's Composer-in-Residence Program is unique and essential."

In addition to commission fees for the three new orchestral works composed during the residency, California Symphony provides travel expenses and accommodations for two residency weeks for the composer, for each of the three concert seasons. Early-career professional composers or graduate students in composition who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents are eligible to apply. The three-round application process is blind. Applicants' identities are not disclosed to the selection panel, which includes Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera, the current Composer-in-Residence, and other professionals in the field.

Previous Composer-in-Residence Mason Bates says, "The California Symphony has one of the most outstanding composer-in-residence programs in the country. They have this orchestra-as-laboratory idea, and they let the composer work in ways that almost never happen anywhere else."

California Symphony's current and previous composers in residence are Saad Haddad (2023-2026), Viet Cuong (2020-2023), Katherine Balch (2017-2020), Dan Visconti (2014-2027), D.J. Sparr (2011-2014), Mason Bates (2007-2010), Kevin Beavers (2002-2005), Pierre Jalbert (1999-2002), Kevin Puts (1996-1999), Christopher Theofanidis (1994-1996), Kamran Ince (1991-1994).

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.

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

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