

# CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## California Symphony's 2025-2026 Season Continues with **NORTHERN LIGHTS**

**Music by Politically and Religiously Oppressed Composers  
Valentin Silvestrov, Arvo Pärt, and Jean Sibelius**



Photo of Donato Cabrera with the California Symphony by Kristen Loken; high resolution photos available [here](#).

**Led by Donato Cabrera, Artistic & Music Director**

**Featuring California Symphony Violinists Jennifer Cho and Sam Weiser in Pärt's  
*Tabula Rasa***

**In Concert March 21 at 7:30pm & March 22, 2026 at 4:00pm**

**At Walnut Creek's Leshner Center for the Arts**

**Tickets & Information: [www.californiasymphony.org](http://www.californiasymphony.org)**

WALNUT CREEK, CA – **California Symphony** and Artistic and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** continue the 2025-2026 season with **NORTHERN LIGHTS** – a program featuring defiant and resolute music by politically and religiously oppressed composers including **Valentin Silvestrov's**

*Stille Musik (Quiet Music)*, **Arvo Pärt's** *Tabula Rasa*, and **Jean Sibelius's** Symphony No. 2 on **Saturday, March 21, 2026 at 7:30pm** and **Sunday, March 22, 2026 at 4:00pm** at Hofmann Theatre at the **Leshar Center for the Arts** (1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek). Tickets include a free 30-minute pre-concert talk by award-winning instructor Scott Foglesong, one hour before the performances.

The music included on California Symphony's March concerts is connected on several levels – stylistically, as expressions of deep emotion, and as explicit or implicit artistic responses to Russian/Soviet oppression. The program opens with Silvestrov's *Stille Musik (Quiet Music)*, which sets a reflective tone, taking listeners on an emotional journey through vivid, crystalline memories. California Symphony all-stars Jennifer Cho and Sam Weiser are then featured in Pärt's *Tabula Rasa*, a minimalistic, melodic conversation between two violins, in a deeply moving and powerful modern masterpiece. The concerts culminate with Sibelius's stirring and uplifting Symphony No. 2, which captures the breathtaking beauty of the Nordic landscape and evokes a sense of fearless optimism. Its sweeping melodies and bold themes make it a powerful celebration of resilience and triumph.

"Art created in response to political and religious oppression has been, throughout history, a most effective tool and a lasting memorial," Donato Cabrera says. "From the protest art against the pharaohs of ancient Egypt to Picasso's *Guernica*, from Goya's *Tres de Mayo* to Banksy's *Napalm*, these images remain an forever indelible commentary on the atrocities committed against the innocent and thought provoking. The same has been true for musical works throughout the ages. From Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* to John Adams's *Nixon in China*, music has also been a most effective mirror for our society. In style, personality, and career trajectory, the three composers I have chosen for this concert couldn't be more different from one another, but their music and respective cultural significance clearly places them in this long and noble line of composers of music of resistance and change."

Valentin Silvestrov is a Ukrainian composer who has been living in Berlin since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. He wrote *Stille Musik* in 2002, and the work was premiered that year in Kyiv. In *Fanfare* magazine, Robert Carl describes *Stille Musik*, writing that it "positively drips with fin de siècle world-weariness. Its three movements are a slow and ever-fading waltz, a melancholy but lilting serenade, and a suitably elegiac finale. I find the piece truly haunting in the beauty of its melodies and the deeply sincere love it expresses."

California Symphony joins the worldwide celebration of iconic Estonian composer Arvo Pärt's 90th birthday this season by performing his masterpiece *Tabula Rasa*, composed in 1977. This double concerto for two violins with orchestra was one of Pärt's first works after eight years of compositional silence, brought on by both political and personal crisis. Pärt emerged with a new approach to composing, which he called *tintinnabuli*, influenced by his experiences with early music and Gregorian chant. After the premiere of *Tabula Rasa*, composer Erkki-Sven Tüür said, "I was carried beyond. I had the feeling that eternity was touching me through this music."

Finnish composer Jean Sibelius wrote his second symphony in 1901 and 1902, starting the work in the mountains of Italy. After its premiere in Helsinki, the public connected the piece with Finland's struggle for independence during a time of Russian sanctions, due to its Nordic themes and resilient sound. Sibelius's intentions with the work are unknown, but many listeners were drawn to this interpretation. "There is something about this music – at least for us – that leads us to ecstasy; almost like a shaman with his magic drum," said Finnish composer Sulho Ranta.

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. 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 and Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera continue the 2025-2026 season with NORTHERN LIGHTS – a program featuring defiant and resolute music by politically and religiously oppressed composers including Valentin Silvestrov's *Stille Musik (Quiet Music)*, Arvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa*, and Jean Sibelius's Symphony No. 2. The music is connected on several levels – stylistically, as expressions of deep emotion, and as explicit or implicit artistic responses to Russian/Soviet oppression. The program opens with Silvestrov's *Stille Musik (Quiet Music)*, which sets a reflective tone, taking listeners on an emotional journey through vivid, crystalline memories. California Symphony all-stars Jennifer Cho and Sam Weiser are then featured in Pärt's *Tabula Rasa*, a minimalistic, melodic conversation between two violins, in a deeply moving and powerful modern masterpiece. The concerts culminate with Sibelius's stirring and uplifting Symphony No. 2, which captures the breathtaking beauty of the Nordic landscape and evokes a sense of fearless optimism. Its sweeping melodies and bold themes make it a powerful celebration of resilience and triumph.

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, one hour before the show.

#### **WHEN:**

Saturday, March 21, 2026 at 7:30pm  
Sunday, March 22, 2026 at 4pm

#### **WHERE:**

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

#### **CONCERT:**

#### **NORTHERN LIGHTS**

Donato Cabrera, conductor  
California Symphony

#### **PROGRAM:**

Valentin Silvestrov: *Stille Musik (Quiet Music)*  
Arvo Pärt: *Tabula Rasa*  
Jennifer Cho and Sam Weiser, violins  
Jean Sibelius: Symphony No. 2

**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 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.

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](http://CaliforniaSymphony.org).

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

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