

CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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California Symphony's 40th Anniversary Season Launches September 26 & 27 with SIBELIUS, HIGDON, AND BARTÓK – AMERICAN CONNECTIONS

**Three works that premiered in the United States, a fitting nod as the nation marks
its 250th anniversary and reflects on artistic ties across continents and
generations**

**Led by Donato Cabrera, Artistic & Music Director
Featuring Julian Schwarz, Cello Soloist**



California Symphony by Kristen Loken. Hi res photos available [here](#).

**In Concert September 26 at 7:30pm & September 27, 2026 at 4:00pm
At Walnut Creek's Leshner Center for the Arts
[Tickets & Information](#)**

**40th Anniversary Season Opening Celebration Dinner on
September 27, 2026 at 6:00pm
[Tickets & Information](#)**

WALNUT CREEK, CA – **California Symphony**, led by Artistic and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** and Executive Director **Lisa Dell**, opens its 40th anniversary season with **SIBELIUS, HIGDON, AND BARTÓK – AMERICAN CONNECTIONS** on **Saturday, September 26 at 7:30pm** and **Sunday, September 27, 2026 at 4:00pm** in the Hofmann Theatre at the **Leshner Center for the Arts** (1601

Civic Drive, Walnut Creek). The concert, which features three works that were premiered in the United States, is a fitting nod as the nation marks its 250th anniversary. From the serenity of Sibelius's ocean to Higdon's fresh contemporary voice and Bartók's exhilarating finale, this program offers a vivid musical arc. On September 27, following the performance at 6:00pm, California Symphony celebrates its milestone season with a special **40th Anniversary Season Opening Celebration Dinner** at Prime Steakhouse and Martini Garden in Walnut Creek, raising funds for the organization's music and education programs. Concert tickets include a free 30-minute pre-concert talk by award-winning instructor Scott Foglesong, one hour before each performance.

California Symphony's season-opening performances explore American connections through music spanning the past century. Finnish composer **Jean Sibelius** composed *The Oceanides* in 1914 for his only trip to America, creating a vivid representation that was hailed at its U.S. premiere as "the finest evocation of the sea." GRAMMY Award-winning American composer **Jennifer Higdon's** Cello Concerto receives its Northern California premiere, performed by the cellist for whom it was written, **Julian Schwarz**. The concerto showcases Higdon's distinctive voice—lyrical, rhythmically vibrant, and deeply expressive. Hungarian composer **Béla Bartók** fled to America during World War II, and while living in New York in 1943, composed his Concerto for Orchestra, commissioned by conductor Serge Koussevitzky for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. A true showpiece, the work turns every instrument in the orchestra into a soloist throughout its five movements.

"Our season opens with a concert that not only perfectly captures the spirit of adventure that California Symphony has had since its inception forty years ago, but also celebrates the 250th anniversary of the United States," **Donato Cabrera** says. "The U.S. has always drawn enormous strength from the diversity and individuality of the opinions and voices that can be heard here, when one chooses to listen. The three voices you will hear in this concert, Sibelius, Higdon, and Bartók, couldn't be more beautifully unique. The stories behind these works are fascinating in their own right. But what matters is the emotion these three composers infuse into every note, and that is what stays with you when you leave the concert hall."

The title of **Sibelius's *The Oceanides*** refers to the nymphs in Greek mythology that inhabited the Mediterranean Sea, and the work traverses the calm ocean and an ominous storm, culminating in thundering waves. It was commissioned by an American patron of the arts, Carl Stoeckel, and premiered at the Norfolk Music Festival in Connecticut in 1914. Sibelius revised the work extensively on his way by ship across the Atlantic to conduct the new piece in Norfolk. After the performance, Stoeckel wrote, "Everyone who was fortunate enough to be in the audience agreed that it was the musical event of their lives, and after the performance of the last number there was an ovation to the composer which I have never seen equalled anywhere."

Jennifer Higdon's Cello Concerto, written for Julian Schwarz, who performs it with the California Symphony, was premiered in April 2026 by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra. The piece is in four virtuosic sections—"Poet," "Dances," "Fervent," and "Lines." In her program notes, Higdon writes, "When getting to know Julian's playing, I was struck by the lyrical gift that he brings to the cello; I knew immediately that melody would be at the heart of this work... In the initial stages of composing, the first movement's title of 'Poet' inspired the idea that all the movement titles should be related in a way that if those titles were lined up sequentially, I would have a little poem: Poet Dances Fervent Lines. It is an apt description of this piece, and of the magnificent history of this noble instrument, as well as a tribute to the gifted cellist, Julian Schwarz."

Béla Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra from 1943 is one of his best-loved works. In it, he showcases each section of the orchestra equally through virtuosic and soloistic writing. Bartók made numerous trips to the United States, remaining in the country from 1940 as he and his family fled the rise of fascism. A few years later while he was in the hospital due to what was later discovered to be leukemia, he received word of the commission for this piece and luckily for future listeners, rallied to compose it. The premiere by the Boston Symphony Orchestra the following year was a massive success and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra was an instant favorite. The piece embodies the composer's guiding philosophy. Bartók described his purpose as serving the idea of "the brotherhood of peoples, brotherhood in spite of all wars and conflicts," adding that he tried, "to the best of my ability—to serve this idea in my music."

The performance on September 27 will be immediately followed by California Symphony's **40th Anniversary Season Opening Celebration Dinner** at Prime Steakhouse and Martini Garden (1719 Bonanza St., Walnut Creek), benefiting the orchestra's music and education programs. The evening

will begin at 6:00pm with a martini reception, where guests will mingle with California Symphony musicians, select featured artists from the 2026-27 season, and fellow supporters. Throughout the evening, guests will hear behind-the-scenes stories and share in the excitement of the season ahead. Proceeds directly support California Symphony's upcoming season of inspiring performances, impactful community engagement programs, and free music education for under-resourced members of the community, reaching thousands of Contra Costa residents each year.

During the 2026-2027 season, California Symphony celebrates 40 years of bringing vibrant orchestral music to the Bay Area in five compelling programs over ten performances from September 2026 to May 2027, plus the return of California Symphony's Holiday Traditions concerts in December 2026. California Symphony's signature programming approaches orchestral music as storytelling, and this season explores American connections across continents and generations; musical contemporaries from Russia and America; the grandeur of the Enlightenment era in Paris; California innovators alongside Beethoven's bold optimism; and evocative orchestral landscapes from Spain, Mexico, and Italy. World-class soloists join the orchestra in riveting concertos, including cellist **Julian Schwarz** in **Jennifer Higdon's** Cello Concerto, clarinetist **Cory Tiffin** in **Aaron Copland's** Clarinet Concerto, violinist **Helen Kim** in **John Adams' Violin Concerto**, and pianist **Tanya Gabrielian** in **Manuel de Falla's** *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*.

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.

During the 2026-2027 season, California Symphony will continue 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 continue and expand its community partnerships with the **Amateur Music Network** and the **Trinity Center Walnut Creek**.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: California Symphony opens its 40th anniversary season with a program celebrating American connections. All three works on the program share a common thread: they were premiered in the United States, a fitting nod as the nation marks its 250th anniversary and reflects on artistic ties across continents and generations. Finnish composer Jean Sibelius composed *The Oceanides* in 1914 for his only trip to America, creating a vivid representation that was hailed at its U.S. premiere as "the finest evocation of the sea." GRAMMY Award-winning American composer Jennifer Higdon's Cello Concerto receives its Northern California premiere, performed by the cellist for whom it was written, Julian Schwarz. The concerto showcases Higdon's distinctive voice—lyrical, rhythmically vibrant, and deeply expressive. Hungarian composer Béla Bartók fled to America during World War II, and while living in New York in 1943, composed his Concerto for Orchestra, commissioned by conductor Serge Koussevitzky for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. A true showpiece, the work turns every instrument in the orchestra into a soloist, offering dazzling displays across all five movements. From the serenity of Sibelius's ocean to Higdon's fresh contemporary voice and Bartók's exhilarating finale, this program offers a vivid musical arc.

Tickets include a free 30-minute pre-concert talk by award-winning instructor Scott Foglesong, one hour before each performance.

WHEN:

Saturday, September 26, 2026 at 7:30pm

Sunday, September 27, 2026 at 4pm

WHERE:

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

CONCERT:

SIBELIUS, HIGDON, AND BARTÓK – AMERICAN CONNECTIONS

Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony

PROGRAM:

Jean Sibelius: *The Oceanides* (1914)
Jennifer Higdon: Cello Concerto (Northern California Premiere)
Julian Schwarz, cello
Béla Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra (1943)

TICKETS: Single tickets (\$50-110) and student tickets (\$25 for students 25 and under with valid Student ID) on sale now. Subscribe to a 5-, 4-, or 3-Concert Series for 20% savings on tickets. For more information or to purchase, visit [CaliforniaSymphony.org](https://californiasymphony.org) or call (925) 280-2490.

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](https://californiasymphony.org).

California Symphony's 2026-27 season is sponsored by the Leshar Foundation.

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