

CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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California Symphony Celebrates the Season on December 18 & 19 with the Return of HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

Part of California Symphony's 40th Anniversary

**Led by Donato Cabrera, Artistic & Music Director
Featuring Guest Organist Eric Choate**



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

In Concert Friday, December 18 at 7:30pm & Saturday, December 19, 2026 at 2:00pm

At Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church

[Tickets & Information](#)

WALNUT CREEK, CA – **California Symphony**, led by Artistic and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** and Executive Director **Lisa Dell**, celebrates the season with the return of **HOLIDAY TRADITIONS** on **Friday, December 18 at 7:30pm** and **Saturday, December 19, 2026 at 2:00pm** at **Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church** (1801 Lacassie Ave.). Back by popular demand, California Symphony's holiday concerts return for the first time in many years as part of the orchestra's 40th anniversary season. Familiar carols such as "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "Carol of the Bells" will be paired with selections from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, creating a program that spans centuries of holiday tradition.

The concerts place guest organist **Eric Choate** and California Symphony's brass and percussion in the spotlight, in the warm setting of Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church. Sacred, classical, and folk influences come together in resonant arrangements that showcase both the intimacy and power of this seasonal music, creating an uplifting experience.

"There's nothing quite like brass and organ ringing through a church in December — it's the sound of the season itself," says Donato Cabrera. "Bringing Holiday Traditions back in our 40th anniversary season felt essential: this is music that has gathered people together for centuries, from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* to the carols everyone knows by heart. Whether it's your first California Symphony concert or you've been with us for years, this celebration is meant for you."

J.S. Bach composed his *Christmas Oratorio* in 1734 as a set of six cantatas for the churches of Leipzig, to be performed over the Christmas season through the Feast of the Epiphany. Its festive opening, with trumpets and timpani ringing out, makes it one of the most joyful works in the sacred repertoire, and it remains a beloved part of holiday celebrations around the world. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" pairs text by the English hymn writer Charles Wesley from 1739 with a melody adapted from a choral piece by Felix Mendelssohn. "Carol of the Bells" is based on a Ukrainian folk chant and New Year's celebration song, which became a holiday favorite in the U.S. after Peter J. Wilhousky arranged it for the NBC Symphony Orchestra and added English lyrics in 1936.

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's holiday concerts are back by popular demand! Brass, percussion, and organ bring the season's music into sharp focus, moving from quiet reflection to rhythmic celebration. Familiar carols such as "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "Carol of the Bells" sit alongside selections from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, creating a program that spans centuries of holiday tradition, led by California Symphony's Artistic and Music Director Donato Cabrera and featuring guest organist Eric Choate. Sacred, classical and folk influences come together in resonant arrangements that highlight both the power and the intimacy of these seasonal works, offering an uplifting way to experience the music of the season.

WHEN:

Friday, December 18, 2026 at 7:30pm

Saturday, December 19, 2026 at 2:00pm

WHERE:

Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church
1801 Lacassie Ave., Walnut Creek

TICKETS: Single tickets (50 – 80) *and student tickets* (20 for students 25 and under with valid Student ID) on sale now. 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 Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, California serves a growing number of music lovers from across the Bay Area.

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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 Leshner Foundation.

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