

CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY RETURNS TO LIVE PERFORMANCES FOR **2021-22 SEASON**

FIVE CONCERTS SEPTEMBER 18, 2021 – MAY 15, 2022
TWO WORLD PREMIERES FROM CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY YOUNG AMERICAN
COMPOSERS-IN-RESIDENCE, DEEPENING COMMITMENT TO
COMMUNITY AND DIVERSITY

Subscriptions available now. Single tickets go on sale August 13.

WALNUT CREEK, CA (5 August 2021) – Following a strong virtual season that attracted new audiences from across the state and around the world, **California Symphony**, under the leadership of Music Director **Donato Cabrera**, returns to live concerts at the Leshher Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek for its 2021-22 season. California Symphony's new season furthers its promise to present innovative programming, exciting guest artists, and music by living composers, women, and composers of color. Subscriptions for three, four, or five concerts start at \$99 and are available now, while single tickets (\$44-74) go on sale beginning August 13. For more information, the public may visit [CaliforniaSymphony.org](https://www.CaliforniaSymphony.org).

Season highlights include:

- In the 2021-22 season, California Symphony is excited to finally realize its expansion from eight to ten concerts as originally planned for the 2019-20 season, underscoring the organization's ability to retain and grow its audience.
- 35% of composers in the 2021-22 season are living, female, or composers of color, in continuation of California Symphony's [2017 Commitment to Diversity](#) outlining its dedication to presenting living and underrepresented composers.
- Programming includes composers Jessie Montgomery, Marianna Martines, former Composer-in-Residence (2017-20) and recent Rome Prize winner Katherine Balch, George Walker, and current Composer-in-Residence Viet Cuong, featured alongside Beethoven, Haydn, Debussy, Tchaikovsky, Vaughan Williams, and more.
- The season features **two World Premieres** including Balch's final commission from her tenure with the Symphony, a 40-minute cantata for orchestra and three voices.
- Guest Artists include Bay Area natives cellist Nathan Chan and violinist Alexi Kenny, California Symphony Concertmaster Jennifer Cho, and pianist Adam Golka who opens the season with Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*. Three vocalists make their California Symphony debuts: sopranos Molly Netter (Oberlin, Yale) and Alexandra Smither (University of Toronto, Rice University) and mezzo-soprano Kelly Guerra (San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Bard College Conservatory), the trio of singers for whom Balch wrote her new work.

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- After reaching radio listeners across the state of California last season, the Symphony returns to its monthly broadcast series, the last Sunday of each month at 8:00pm on Classical KDFC.

Says Cabrera, “The music I chose for California Symphony's 2021-22 season reflects upon and acknowledges the reality that our community has been without live music for well over a year and a half. When actively engaged with, live music has the unique ability to give us personal perspective and understanding while in a shared setting, and it has been an enormous loss to our society to not be able to experience live music together. The season is bookended by the fifth symphonies of Ralph Vaughan Williams and Piotr Tchaikovsky, one written to help a nation begin to heal from years of war and the other written as an allegory of a hero’s journey from darkness to light. Pieces like Antonio Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons* and Edward Elgar’s *Cello Concerto* help us to understand the world around us and within us. Through our programming this season, California Symphony welcomes back our Bay Area family with open arms.”

Executive Director **Lisa Dell** noted, “We are delighted to welcome in-person audiences back, but we are also happy to report that during the pandemic we were able to continue and expand on our mission in thrilling ways. Over the past 18 months, California Symphony remained connected and engaged with our patrons, and also increased our outreach in ways we couldn’t have imagined. Our virtual performances were viewed not only by audiences across California, but in 41 countries around the globe, from our neighbors in Canada and Mexico to the UK, Singapore, India, Japan, Brazil, Finland, Samoa, New Zealand, Russia, Nigeria, and more. Our education programs also grew, providing fun and informative introductions to classical music in both English and Spanish to more than 300 participants from over 200 households. And we found a way to live up to our name with a brand-new, state-wide radio broadcast series with California’s top Classical music stations, KUSC FM in Los Angeles and KDFC FM in San Francisco.”

Reflecting on the two World Premieres on the upcoming season, Cabrera shared, “One of the initial losses of the pandemic was the cancellation of Katherine Balch’s, *Illuminate*, which was scheduled to premiere in the spring of 2020. Not only is it the final commission of Katie’s three-year residency with California Symphony, but it also represents the culmination of a relationship between composer and orchestra that is unique in the orchestra world, our **Young American Composer-in-Residence** program. I am beyond thrilled that we are finally able to premiere this extraordinary composition. Our current resident composer Viet Cuong will compose his second commission for California Symphony, which will be workshopped in the upcoming months and premiered during the final concert of the 2021-22 season. This follows the wildly successful premiere of his prior piece for strings, *Next Week’s Trees*, which debuted in last season’s online three-part *Poetry in Motion* series, garnering over 10,000 viewers.”

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"Since 2017 California Symphony has actively implemented our Commitment to Diversity Statement, and with our upcoming 2021-22 season I'm happy to note that 35% of the composers I've programmed are living, women, and/or composers of color," continued Cabrera. Starting in 2020, California Symphony further expanded access to its 21st-century programming through an ongoing partnership with Classical KDFC, making sure living composers, female composers, composers of color, and commissioned works are heard far beyond the concert hall. The 2021-22 broadcasts of full concerts from past seasons can be heard the last Sunday of each month at 8:00pm, starting September 2021.

2021-22 SEASON

EMPEROR

September 18 - 19, 2021

After more than a year of offering virtual performances during the pandemic, **California Symphony** returns to live concerts this September. California Symphony's acclaimed Music Director Donato Cabrera launches the 2021-22 season with *Emperor*, a program that presents music of comfort to Bay Area audiences during this significant time of recovery and hope. Award-winning pianist **Adam Golka** headlines the evening with Beethoven's heroic *The Emperor Concerto* (Piano Concerto No. 5 in E \flat major, Op. 73). Composed during another difficult period, while Vienna was under invasion, it was described by one critic at its premiere as "without doubt one of the most original, imaginative, most effective but also one of the most difficult of all concertos." Golka, who returns after appearing virtually in last season's opener, has been praised for his "brilliant technique and real emotional depth" (*The Washington Post*). Also on the program is Marianna Martines' captivating *Sinfonia*. A prominent composer in 18th-century Vienna, Martines received more acclaim than perhaps any other female composer of her time. She was an early pupil of the young struggling composer Haydn. Later celebrated as the "Father of the Symphony," Haydn became perhaps the most influential of Beethoven's teachers, offering an interesting link between two of the works on this program. The evening rounds out with English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams' achingly beautiful, soul-soothing *Symphony No. 5*, giving audiences an opportunity to hear this rarely performed work. Written during the darkest moments of WWII, Vaughan Williams composed his *Symphony No. 5* to console and heal a nation. Music Director Cabrera has chosen this symphony to do the same for the Bay Area community.

FOUR SEASONS

November 6-7, 2021

California Symphony presents a line-up of illustrious works in this all-strings concert. Violinist **Alexi Kenney** headlines the evening with a performance of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, returning to his native Bay Area after an acclaimed 2018 debut with the California Symphony and a 2020 virtual finale recital. Named by *The New York Times* as "a talent to watch," Kenney has earned wide-spread

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acclaim for his insightful and artistic interpretations and range, often melding the new with the old, the familiar with the obscure. Other featured works include George Walker's hauntingly beautiful *Lyric for Strings*. Dedicated to the memory of his grandmother, Walker's *Lyric for Strings* is full of rising and falling melodic lines, concluding somberly yet with a sense of peace. A notable figure in the music community, Walker was the first African American composer to win a Pulitzer Prize. Also on the program is Jessie Montgomery's *Starburst*, a brief one-movement work that plays on imagery of rapidly changing musical colors. One of the most remarkable composers of her generation, Montgomery has been affiliated since 1999 with The Sphinx Organization, which supports young African American and Latinx string players. Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* (arr. by Mahler) ties the evening together, exploring the range of human emotions, from dark to positive and optimistic.

TAKE FLIGHT

January 29-30, 2022

California Symphony launches the New Year with **Take Flight**, highlighting a selection of works that draw inspiration from the sound of birds and the beauty of the great outdoors. California Symphony Concertmaster **Jennifer Cho** headlines the evening with a performance of Vaughan Williams' masterpiece for solo violin and orchestra, *The Lark Ascending*, which he composed in the early days of WWI, when a pastoral scene of a singing bird seemed far away. Music Director Donato Cabrera continues his commitment to regularly present Haydn symphonies with the inclusion of *Symphony No. 83 (The Hen)*. Full of irony and conflict, the piece derives its name from a fowl-like "clucking" heard from a rhythmic motif in the first movement. In the same regard, Sibelius' *Swan of Tuonela* is an ethereal tone poem that is based on a Finnish folk tale about a mystical swan that guards the island of the dead. The evening ends on a high note with Dvorák's *Symphony No. 8*. Known as the most tuneful and cheery of his large-scale works, *Symphony No. 8* was inspired by the folk music of Bohemia and the sounds of nature found in the Bohemian woods.

FRENCH IMPRESSIONS

March 26-27, 2022

To commence spring, California Symphony presents **French Impressions**, highlighting the two pillars of French music, Debussy and Ravel, an homage to Couperin, and the World Premiere of a new work set to a Rimbaud poem. Mezzo-soprano Kelly Guerra and sopranos Molly Netter and Alexandra Smither headline the evening in **Katherine Balch's** *Illuminate*, a work that was originally scheduled to make its World Premiere on March 14, 2020. Balch was the California Symphony Young American Composer-in-Residence from 2017-2020. Based on *Les Illuminations* by French poet Rimbaud, *Illuminate* intertwines the original French words with the English translation, resulting in a libretto that depicts many shades of femininity and honors women. In the same vein, British composer Thomas Adès pays homage to François Couperin, the French baroque composer who served as Louis XIV's organist at Versailles, in *Three Studies After Couperin*, an arrangement of three harpsichord pieces. A master of understatement, Couperin used the keyboard to tell short stories that sketched portraits of those around him. Also on the program is Debussy's *Danse* and Ravel's *Ma mère l'Oye (Mother Goose)*. These two impressionist composers, considered the most important and influential French composers of the 20th century, show their lighter sides with these lively works.

EPIC FINALE

May 14-15, 2022

California Symphony closes out the season with a spectacular finale. Bay Area-born cellist **Nathan Chan** headlines the evening with Edward Elgar's beloved *Cello Concerto*, a cornerstone of the solo cello repertoire, contemplative with soaring themes and wild mood swings. A child prodigy, Chan made his debut as a conductor at the age of three, leading the San Jose Chamber Orchestra in a set of Mozart variations, despite not yet being able to read music. Initially drawn to the sounds of low strings, he began formal music lessons with cellist Irene Sharp at age five, and later studied with Sieun Lin at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Since then, Chan has performed as a soloist with the San Francisco Symphony, the Royal Philharmonic, Albany Symphony, Reno Philharmonic, and Hong Kong Chamber Orchestra. Also on the program is a World Premiere by California Symphony's newest Young American Composer-in-Residence Viet Cuong (2020-2023), whose music has been acclaimed as "wildly alluring" and "inventive" by *The New York Times*. The finale wraps up with Tchaikovsky's most often performed and beloved symphony, *Symphony No. 5*. Using a recurring melody to represent the idea of fate, his *Symphony No. 5* transforms from dark and menacing in the first movement, to joyous and triumphant by the fourth and final movement – ending the evening on a high note.

California Symphony's 2021-22 season is sponsored by the Dean & Margaret Lesher Foundation and Diablo Regional Arts Association (DRAA). The symphony's September concert, *Emperor*, is sponsored by Mechanics Bank, while its May concert, the *Epic Finale*, is sponsored by KMPG.

Founded in 1986, **California Symphony** is now in its ninth season under the leadership of Music Director Donato Cabrera. It is distinguished by its vibrant concert programs that combine classics alongside American repertoire and works by living composers, and for making the symphony welcoming and accessible. The orchestra includes musicians who perform with the San Francisco Symphony, San Francisco Opera, San Francisco Ballet, and others. Committed to the support of new talent, California Symphony has launched the careers of some of today's most well-known artists, including violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, cellists Alisa Weilerstein and Joshua Roman, pianist Kirill Gerstein and composers such as Mason Bates, Christopher Theofanidis, and Kevin Puts. California Symphony is based in Walnut Creek at the Lesher Center for the Arts, serving audiences in Contra Costa County and the wider Bay Area.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: Following a strong virtual season, **California Symphony**, under the leadership of Music Director **Donato Cabrera**, returns to live concerts at the Lesher Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek for its 2021-22 season. California Symphony's new season

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further its promise to present innovative programming, exciting guest artists, and music by living composers, women, and composers of color. The season launches on an uplifting note with **Emperor**, marking the company's much-anticipated return to in-person performances. It is followed by **Four Seasons**, bringing a dramatic line-up of all-strings. The season continues in the New Year with the nature-inspired **Take Flight** and **French Impressions**, an evening of inventive French and French-inspired music and the postponed World Premiere of a new work by former California Symphony Young American Composer-in-Residence (2017-2020) Katherine Balch. The fifth and final concert of the season is California Symphony's **Epic Finale**, showcasing another World Premiere, by the symphony's newest Young American Composer-in-Residence Viet Cuong.

WHEN: September 18, 2021 – May 15, 2022

WHERE: Hofmann Theatre at the Lesher Center for the Arts
1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek

CONCERTS:

EMPEROR (21-22 Season

Opener)

7:30pm, Saturday, Sept. 18

4:00pm, Sunday, Sept. 19

Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony
Adam Golka, piano

PROGRAM:

Marianna Martines—*Sinfonia*
Beethoven—*Piano Concerto*
(*Emperor*)

Adam Golka, piano
Vaughan Williams—*Symphony*
No.5

FOUR SEASONS

7:30pm, Saturday, Nov. 6

4:00pm, Sunday, Nov. 7

Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony
Alexi Kenney, violin

PROGRAM:

Walker—*Lyric for Strings*
Vivaldi—*Four Seasons*
Alexi Kenney, violin
Montgomery—*Starburst*
Schubert—*Death and the*
Maiden (arr. by Mahler)

TAKE FLIGHT

7:30pm, Saturday, Jan. 29

4:00pm, Sunday, Jan. 30

Donato Cabrera, conductor
California Symphony
Jennifer Cho, violin

PROGRAM:

Vaughan Williams—*The Lark*
Ascending
Jennifer Cho, violin
Haydn—*Symphony No. 83 (The*
Hen)

Sibelius—*Swan of Tuonela*

FRENCH IMPRESSIONS

7:30pm, Saturday, March 26

4:00pm, Sunday, March 27

Donato Cabrera, conductor

California Symphony

Kelly Guerra, mezzo-soprano

Molly Netter, soprano

Alexandra Smither, soprano

Dvořák—*Symphony No. 8*

PROGRAM:

Thomas Adès—*Three Studies from Couperin*

Balch—*Illuminate*

Kelly Guerra, mezzo-soprano

Molly Netter, soprano

Alexandra Smither,

soprano

Debussy - *Danse* (orch. Ravel)

Ravel - *Ma Mère l'Oye (Mother Goose)*: Prélude & Danse du route

Ravel - *Ma Mère l'Oye (Mother Goose)*: 5 pièces enfantines

EPIC FINALE

7:30pm, Saturday, May 14

4:00pm, Sunday, May 15

Donato Cabrera, conductor

California Symphony

Nathan Chan, cello

PROGRAM:

Cuong—World Premiere

Elgar—*Cello Concerto*

Nathan Chan, cello

Tchaikovsky—*Symphony No. 5*

TICKETS: Subscriptions for three, four, or five concerts start at \$99 and are available now.

Single tickets \$44-\$74 and \$20 (for students 25 and under with valid Student ID) go on sale August 13.

INFO: For more information or to purchase tickets, the public may visit CaliforniaSymphony.org or call the Leshner Center Ticket Office at (925) 943-7469 (open Wed – Sun, noon to 6pm).

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MEDIA: Contact Sydney Albin, Carla Befera & Co.
sydney@cb-pr.com

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
<http://www.cbpr.co/press/californiasymphony>