

CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY CONTINUES SEASON WITH **FRENCH IMPRESSIONS**

March 26 – 27, 2022

Hofmann Theatre at the Leshner Center for the Arts

WALNUT CREEK, CA (1 March 2022) – **California Symphony** and Music Director **Donato Cabrera** present the World Premiere of California Symphony's Young American Composer-in-Residence (2017-2020) **Katherine Balch's** *Illuminate*, the centerpiece of a program titled ***French Impressions***. Mezzo-soprano Kelly Guerra and sopranos Molly Netter and Alexandra Smither, who were personally selected by the composer, will perform this new work. The program will also present British composer Thomas Adès's homage to Couperin, the French baroque composer who served as Louis XIV's organist in Versailles, in *Three Studies from Couperin*, an arrangement of three harpsichord pieces that recall the master's ability to sketch nimble personal portraits with his keyboard. *French Impressions* also includes works by the two leading French impressionist composers, Debussy's *Danse (orch. Ravel)* and Ravel's *Ma mère l'Oye (Mother Goose)*, displaying their lighter sides with these lively selections.

Incorporating text from *Les Illuminations* by French poet Rimbaud, blended with works by Balch's other favorite poets, *Illuminate* offers a celebration of friendship and joy from the female perspective over the course of five movements via a framework of the cycle of the seasons, beginning and ending with the spring. This World Premiere, which marks Balch's third California Symphony commission, was originally scheduled for March 2020, but was postponed due to COVID-19. Her previous commissions, *like a broken clock* (2018) and violin concerto *Artifacts* (2019), were acclaimed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "breathtakingly beautiful" and "sparklingly inventive." Noting that she was the first-ever female Composer-in-Residence for California Symphony, Balch has expressed from the start a commitment to relating her work to other female artists who have influenced and inspired her. Balch's celebration of women continues in *Illuminate*, her third commission for California Symphony, which highlights the unique perspective of the female poets and performers of this work.

French Impressions will be presented live on stage, 7:30pm, Saturday, March 26 and 4:00pm, Sunday, March 27, at the **Hofmann Theatre at the Leshner Center for the Arts**, 1601 Civic Drive, Walnut Creek. For tickets (\$44-\$74) or more information, the public may visit [CaliforniaSymphony.org](https://www.CaliforniaSymphony.org) or call the Leshner Center Ticket Office at (925) 943-7469 (open Wed – Sun, 12:00pm to 6:00pm).

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Patrons must be fully vaccinated, and masks are required. For more information, please visit californiasymphony.org/COVIDsafety.

Described by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as “some kind of musical Thomas Edison,” composer **Katherine Balch**’s music captures the magic of everyday sounds, inviting audiences into a sonic world characterized by imagination, discovery, and textural lyricism. Her work has been commissioned and performed by leading ensembles including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta, l’Orchestra Philharmonique de Radio France, Ensemble Intercontemporain, and the symphony orchestras of Minnesota, Oregon, Albany, Indianapolis, and Tokyo. Her work has also been presented in major global venues including Carnegie Hall, Disney Hall, and Tokyo’s Suntory. Recently, Balch was named a winner of the 2020-21 Rome Prize. During her tenure as the 2017-2020 young composer-in-residence for California Symphony, Balch was lauded by *The Mercury News* as a “superbly gifted composer [with] a compositional voice that is truly unique and full of wonder.” Her song cycle ***Illuminate*** pulls from texts by four of Balch’s favorite poets – Sharon Olds, Adrienne Rich, Alejandra Pizarnik, and Sappho (via Anne Carson’s translations) – and interweaves them with lines from French poet Rimbaud’s *Les Illuminations*. A celebration of friendship, *Illuminate* is an expression of delight in the unique perspectives of the poets as well as the performers. Says Balch, “I hope the piece will be heard as a joyful outpouring because that’s what I feel when I think about these texts, the women they represent to me, and the women who will be singing them.”

Renowned as both a composer and performer, **Thomas Adès** works regularly with the world’s leading orchestras, opera companies, and festivals. Known for his creative use of instrumental color, Adès’s complex and appealing music exhibits a flair for drama, humor, and personal expression. He is a regular conductor with major orchestras around the world including the Los Angeles Philharmonic as well as the Boston, London, and BBC Symphonies, among others. As a pianist, Adès has appeared in some of the most prestigious concert halls in the world, including Carnegie Hall and the Barbican in London, as well as concerto performances with the New York Philharmonic. His compositions and performances have been recorded on many labels – from EMI Classics to Warner Classics and Deutsche Grammophon. His ***Three Studies from Couperin***, a work composed for chamber orchestra in 2006, arranges three harpsichord pieces by French Baroque master François Couperin (1668-1733). Throughout each movement, Adès incorporates offbeat and unexpected arrangements, allowing Couperin’s harpsichord music to re-emerge in an array of orchestral colors. “*Three Studies from Couperin* looks at music as if through a kaleidoscope, the shattered pieces of the original tumbling around like glinting fragments of colored glass,” says the *Financial Times*. Adès’s *Three Studies from Couperin* is one of several works in which he pays homage to the French composer. Says Adès, “My ideal day

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would be staying at home and playing the harpsichord works of Couperin – new inspiration on every page.”

The evening rounds out with works by two leading French composers, **Claude Debussy** (1862-1918) and **Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937). Considered the founder of musical Impressionism, Debussy was among the most influential composers of the late 19th/early 20th centuries and acted as a mentor to Ravel, 13 years his junior. Following Debussy’s death in 1918, Ravel was asked, as an act of homage, to develop Debussy’s ***Danse*** into a version for orchestra, which received its premiere in 1923. The airy, light feeling of *Danse*, mixed with its quick tempo, gives listeners intermittent splashes of excitement and a dramatic ending. Ravel’s unparalleled skill in orchestration and command of orchestral color is evident both in his own works as well as his orchestrations of music by other composers. His fairytale-inspired ***Ma mère l’Oye (Mother Goose)***, originally composed as five delicate movements for piano duet, is also featured in *French Impressions*. Deep-seeded in nostalgia, *Ma mère l’Oye (Mother Goose)* is an extension of happy, celebratory moments.

California Symphony’s 2021-22 season is sponsored by Diablo Regional Arts Association (DRAA) and the Dean & Margaret Leshner Foundation.

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 Leshner Center for the Arts, serving audiences in Contra Costa County and the wider Bay Area.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

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

TICKETS: Single tickets \$44-\$74 and \$20 (for students 25 and under with valid Student ID)

INFO: For more information or to purchase tickets, the public may visit [CaliforniaSymphony.org](https://californiasymphony.org) or call the Leshner Center Ticket Office at (925) 943-7469 (open Wed – Sun, 12:00pm to 6pm).

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PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here:
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