

Santa Rosa Symphony

2023
2024
SEASON

NEWS

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**For the first time in 20 years, Santa Rosa Symphony
presents Handel's *Messiah*.
December 2, 3 & 4, 2023 at Weill Hall, Green Music Center**

(Santa Rosa, Calif.) — The Santa Rosa Symphony, conducted by Music Director Francesco Lecce-Chong, presents Handel's *Messiah* at Weill Hall, Green Music Center on December 4, 5 & 6, 2023. Handel's *Messiah* is an uplifting and joyful musical rite of the holiday season, with its soaring melodies and triumphant instrumentation that make the piece so beloved, capped off with the wondrous Hallelujah chorus. The orchestra is accompanied by the Sonoma State University Symphonic Chorus, directed by Jenny Bent. Also featured are four soloists: Christina Pier, soprano; Abigail Nims, alto; Daniel Weeks, tenor; and Michael Dean, bass. Lecce-Chong brings his dramatic, acclaimed interpretation—conducting the soloists, chorus, and orchestra, all while performing from the harpsichord.

"I have always been fascinated by Handel's *Messiah* since I sang the alto part in a volunteer chorus when I was in middle school. Despite being one of the most performed and recognizable works in the repertoire, I still think we have only scratched the surface of its possibilities after 300 years. Ancient and modern, academic and chaotic, religious and irreverent - Handel's music contains the drama and nuances of its Biblical text with limitless possibilities for interpretation and improvisation within its structure." **Francesco Lecce-Chong**, SRS Music Director

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE:

FLC Conducts *Messiah*!

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL: *Messiah* [oratorio] for Solo Voices, Orchestra, and Chorus

December 2, 3 & 4, 2023

Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor and harpsichord

Christina Pier, soprano

Abigail Nims, alto

Daniel Weeks, tenor

Michael Dean, bass

SSU Symphonic Chorus, Jenny Bent, director

BIOGRAPHIES:

Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor

Francesco Lecce-Chong is a fast-rising conductor with an international presence. He was appointed Music Director of two U.S. orchestras, the Eugene, and the Santa Rosa Symphony (SRS) before he reached the age of 30. He has successfully launched several groundbreaking projects, commissioned dozens of orchestral pieces, and fostered community engagement. Lecce-Chong has appeared with orchestras worldwide, including the San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, National Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, Toronto Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, and collaborated with top soloists such as Renée Fleming and Itzhak Perlman.

The San Francisco Chronicle described Lecce-Chong's subscription debut with the San Francisco Symphony as "first-rate" and pointed out the "vitality and brilliance of the music-making he drew from members of the San Francisco Symphony." Other recent subscription debuts include the Seattle Symphony, Utah Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Louisville Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, and Detroit Symphony, as well as a return to the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, where he conducted the US premiere of Brett Dean's Piano Concerto.

In September 2023, Lecce-Chong debuted in Europe at the prestigious George Enescu Festival, with the Romanian Radio Orchestra leading a program of Hindemith and Bernstein. During his 2023/2024 season with the Santa Rosa Symphony, he continues a cycle of the significant orchestral works of Rachmaninoff paired with film composers entitled "Rachmaninoff & the Hollywood Sound." He leads the world premieres of new orchestral works by Conrad Tao, Clarice Assad, and Michael Djupstrom.

During Lecce-Chong's tenure, both Eugene and SRS have achieved significant milestones. One of his first large-scale endeavors was the "First Symphony Project," which consisted of full-length commissions from four of America's emerging composers over the course of four seasons, complete with residencies in the communities.

Only last season, Lecce-Chong led the world premieres of five major orchestral works and led the Santa Rosa Symphony in Mozart's *Magic Flute*, for which he wrote his own original dialogue and created the staging and sets. He continues to build partnerships with local art institutions, schools, and businesses to create original, multi-disciplinary experiences for audiences.

Christina Pier, soprano

American soprano Christina Pier has been hailed by Opera News for her "big, gleaming soprano and impressive coloratura," and has received great critical and audience acclaim for her work on opera and concert stages. She has performed Micaëla in Bizet's *Carmen* with Opera Carolina and Toledo Opera; Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Tallahassee Symphony; Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem*, and Hailstork's *The World Called* with the Oratorio Society of Virginia; and Handel's *Messiah* with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.

Pier has been recognized with numerous prestigious awards. She was named Gilbert Artist at the Florida Grand Opera and was a finalist for two years for the Richard Tucker Career Grant. She is the recipient of a George London Award, Sullivan Award, two Charles A. Lynam awards, and two Palm Beach Opera Competition Awards.

Originally from Flagstaff, AZ, Pier received her BM and MM in voice at Indiana University and began her career under the tutelage of legendary soprano Virginia Zeani.

Abigail Nims, alto

Abigail Nims is renowned as a musician of integrity and versatility for her performances of repertoire spanning from Bach, Handel, and Mozart to Crumb, Ligeti, and premieres of contemporary works. Recent highlights include Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra and Bach's Christmas Oratorio with the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra.

Previous solo appearances include a premiere performance of Missy Mazzoli's commissioned opera *Proving Up* with Opera Omaha, Handel's *Messiah* with the Phoenix Symphony, Bach's *St. John Passion* with the Louisiana Philharmonic, Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra, and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus. She has performed Handel's *Messiah* with the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra and Mahler's Symphony No. 3 with the Augusta Symphony. Nims is currently a member of the voice faculty at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

Daniel Weeks, tenor

Daniel Weeks is an American Tenor - Artist/Professor. In 2015, he joined the voice faculty of the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music and continues to maintain a performance career encompassing opera, concerts, solo recitals, and recordings. Praised for his Italianate voice and sensitive musicianship, Weeks is also a highly sought-after teacher and master clinician. From 1998-2015, he was a member of the faculty at the University of Louisville.

As a concert artist, he has appeared with such orchestras as the Houston Symphony, the Dallas Symphony, the Cincinnati Symphony, the Indianapolis Symphony, the Columbus Symphony, the Louisiana Philharmonic, the Memphis Symphony, the Dayton Philharmonic, the Louisville Orchestra, the Huntsville Symphony, the South Dakota Symphony, Symphony Silicon Valley, the Chattanooga Symphony, the Oratorio Society of New York,

the Winter Park Bach Festival, the Bozeman Symphony, the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the National Symphony of Mexico, the National Symphony of Costa Rica, the Xalapa Symphony (Mexico), and the National Youth Orchestra of Caracas (Venezuela).

Michael Dean, bass

Lauded by the *New York Times* for his "strong appealing bass-baritone," American Michael Dean has been hailed by the *San Jose Mercury News* as "the standout, his voice a penetrating wake-up call." Recent highlights include performances of Mozart's *Requiem* with the Eugene Symphony, Handel's *Messiah* with the Rochester Philharmonic, Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* at the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park, and Beethoven's 9th with the Santa Rosa Symphony in December 2022. Dean is currently the Chair of Vocal Studies and Professor of Voice at The University of California, Los Angeles.

Sonoma State University Symphonic Chorus, Jenny Bent, Director

The Sonoma State University Symphonic Chorus comprises music majors, students from other majors, staff, faculty, and community members. The chorus performs large works such as Mozart's *Requiem*, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, and Orff's *Carmina Burana*, as well as thematic projects such as *Madrigals and All That Jazz* and the annual holiday *Family Concert by Candlelight*. Beginning with a special Sunrise Choral Concert during the Green Music Center's 2012 grand opening weekend, the Symphonic Chorus makes its permanent home in the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Hall and Schroeder Hall at Sonoma State University.

Jenny Bent, DMA, is Director of Choral Activities at Sonoma State University and Project Manager of Chanticleer's summer program, *Chanticleer in Sonoma*, in addition to her responsibilities as Choral Director for Santa Rosa Symphony. In addition to her academic work, Bent serves as an adjudicator for such organizations as the California Music Educators Association, the American Choral Directors Association, Golden State, and clinic choirs throughout the Bay Area and beyond.

CLASSICAL SERIES EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENTS:

CONCERT CONVERSATIONS (*one hour prior to Classical Series performances*)

Music Director Francesco Lecce-Chong discusses the music and composers, often with the guest artists, one hour prior to the Classical Concert Series performances in Weill Hall. These informative, pre-concert talks, which are included in the price of the ticket, are general seating. Concert Conversations are held before Saturday and Monday night performances at 6:30 pm and prior to Sunday afternoon performances at 2:00 pm.

PROGRAM NOTES

Program Notes, posted on each of the seven Classical Series concert event pages offer insight and fascinating details about the concert program. See srsymphony.org.

SPOTIFY PLAYLISTS

Classical Series concert event pages include a Spotify playlist of the works on that concert program. Full-season Spotify playlists can also be found on the Symphony's website under, Plan Your Visit.

PROGRAM BOOKS

New season Program Books are available for all patrons at the concerts.

SPONSORS:

Classical Concert Series Underwritten by **Anderman Family Foundation**

Sponsored by **The Donald and Maureen Green Orchestral Works Endowment Fund**

Conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong sponsored by **David and Corinne Byrd**

Guest Artist **Abigail Nims** sponsored by **Garth Bixler**

Sonoma State University Symphonic Chorus sponsored by **Linda and David Hanes**

Discovery Open Rehearsal Series sponsored by **The Stare Foundation and David Stare of Dry Creek Vineyard**

Pre-Concert Talks sponsored by **Jamei Haswell, in honor of Richard Grundy**

Season Media Sponsor: *The Press Democrat*

AT A GLANCE / CALENDAR LISTING:

WHAT:

[Santa Rosa Symphony concert FLC conducts *Handel's Messiah*](#)

WHO:

[Santa Rosa Symphony](#)

[Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor](#)

Interview Opportunities: Francesco Lecce-Chong

WHEN:

Saturday, December 2, 2023 at 7:30 PM (Doors at 6:00 PM, Pre-concert talk 6:30 PM-7:00 PM)

Sunday, December 3, 2023 at 3:00 PM (Doors at 1:30 PM, Pre-concert talk 2:00 PM-2:30 PM)

Monday, December 4, 2023 at 7:30 PM (Doors at 6:00 PM, Pre-concert talk 6:30 PM-7:00 PM)

WHERE:

Weill Hall, Green Music Center, Sonoma State University

TICKET PRICES:

\$32-\$110 for Classical Series performances

Receive ONE FREE TICKET for a youth 7-17 with each paid adult ticket! Call Patron Services to redeem this offer.

Student Rush tickets are available 1-1/2 hours before the performance, \$10/ticket with a valid student ID.

TICKETS: srsymphony.org or (707) 546-8742 (Weekdays 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, opening at 10:30 AM

Wednesdays, closed Saturday & Sunday)

ABOUT SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY

Santa Rosa Symphony, the Resident Orchestra of the Green Music Center, is the third-oldest professional orchestra in California and the largest regional symphony north of Los Angeles. Francesco Lecce-Chong, the Symphony's fifth music director in its 96 years, began his tenure in 2018. The Symphony is committed to the core values of artistic excellence, innovative programming, comprehensive music education, and community service.

The Symphony's performance schedule for 2023-2024 includes 21 Classical Series concerts (seven sets), six Discovery Rehearsal concerts, a three-concert Family Series, a four-concert Pops Series, and special concerts. Awards include an American Symphony Orchestra League MetLife Award for Community Engagement and a first-place award for adventurous programming in the 2012-2013 season from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP).

The Symphony is recognized for having one of California's most comprehensive music education programs, serving nearly 20,000 youth annually. Collaborations with schools and organizations across Sonoma County have gained the Santa Rosa Symphony national attention and support.

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