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## **Santa Rosa Symphony Presents Mahler's *Resurrection***

Featuring soprano Esther Tonea, mezzo-soprano Gabrielle Beteag, and the SSU Symphonic Chorus  
**December 7, 8 & 9, 2024 Weill Hall, Green Music Center**

(Santa Rosa, Calif.) — Santa Rosa Symphony presents an evening of symphonic drama featuring Mahler's Symphony No. 2, *Resurrection*, and *Warum hast du gelitten?*—a companion piece to the Mahler composed by GRAMMY-nominated Jonathan Leshnoff, commissioned by the Santa Rosa Symphony and conducted by Francesco Lecce-Chong. Performances at Weill Hall, Green Music Center, on December 7, 8 & 9, 2024. Tickets available at [srsymphony.org](http://srsymphony.org).

"Mahler's gargantuan symphonies are the marathons upon which orchestras measure themselves. They are also monuments to humanity, created by an artist full of doubt and insecurity, with the orchestra his only outlet of expression. As we approach the milestone of our centennial season, I am thrilled for the Santa Rosa Symphony to begin our own multi-year Mahler journey with a focus on the unquenchable thirst of an artist's creativity. Jonathan Leshnoff, one of the great symphonists of our time, has created a very special introductory work that will lead directly into Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony using Mahler's own words and giving us a unique view into his creative process."

**- Francesco Lecce-Chong**, Music Director and Conductor

Described by *The New York Times* as "a leader of contemporary American lyricism," Jonathan Leshnoff is celebrated for his captivating harmonies, intricate structures, and compelling themes. Leshnoff's *Warum hast du gelitten?* is a new introductory work that will open the concert and transition directly into the first movement of Mahler's masterpiece, which examines the concepts of life, death, and renewal. To help audiences fully appreciate the first movement's dramatic impact, Mahler himself recommended a brief pause, and the intermission will provide that time for reflection.

Alongside the SSU Symphonic Chorus directed by Jenny Bent, featured soloists Esther Tonea, soprano, and Gabrielle Beteag, mezzo-soprano, will perform the solo parts in Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony. Fresh from the San Francisco Opera's Adler Program, Tonea has been praised for her dramatic excellence and has performed with major orchestras, including Mahler's second and fourth symphonies. Beteag, also an Adler Fellow, has been recognized for her versatility across various repertoires and recently achieved semifinalist status in the Operalia World Opera Competition.

### **BIOGRAPHIES:**

**Francesco Lecce-Chong**, Music Director and Conductor

Francesco Lecce-Chong has established himself as a respected leader in the orchestral world through acclaimed performances, innovative projects, and passionate arts advocacy.

Appointed Music Director of Eugene Symphony and Santa Rosa Symphony (SRS) before age 30, he launched groundbreaking projects, commissioned over a dozen major works, and forged innovative community partnerships. Now in his seventh season, he has grown the SRS's reputation as one of the most prominent US regional orchestras, with performances at the world-class Green Music Center. This season, he also serves as Artistic Partner with the Eugene Symphony, further advancing his artistic vision.

Lecce-Chong regularly appears with major US orchestras, from the San Francisco Symphony to the New York Philharmonic, collaborating with top soloists such as Renée Fleming and Itzhak Perlman. Additional debuts include Seattle Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Utah Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Louisville Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, and Detroit Symphony. In 2023, Lecce-Chong debuted in Europe at the prestigious George Enescu Festival with the Romanian National Radio Orchestra, which led to a regular relationship with the orchestra.

Throughout his career, Lecce-Chong has fostered an unparalleled dedication to the orchestral art form's future. One of his first large-scale endeavors was the "First Symphony Project," which consisted of major commissions from next-generation composers across four seasons, including multiple residencies. He has integrated a dozen new orchestral works into the repertoire from composers like Grammy winner Michael Daugherty, Conrad Tao, Clarice Assad, and Gabriella Smith. To keep SRS connected to its community during the pandemic, he spearheaded SRS @ Home, which brought live internet performances to thousands of households. Several performances were broadcast on local PBS TV, reaching two million viewers. This series included works by living composers and a partnership with Pulitzer Prize winner Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, culminating in a CD release in 2022.

Lecce-Chong is equally committed to the opera repertoire, having first conducted performances of Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* at age 24 in New York City. He served as staff conductor with the Santa Fe Opera and led performances with Milwaukee's Florentine Opera. Recently, he led the Eugene Symphony's semi-staged presentation of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. At SRS, Lecce-Chong conducted and directed Opera in Concert: Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, featuring his original dialogue, and partnered with Santa Rosa High School's ArtQuest program to create a multi-disciplinary experience.

Trained as a pianist and composer, Lecce-Chong studied at the Curtis Institute of Music, Mannes College of Music, and Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Italy before winning positions as Associate Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony and Milwaukee Symphony. Lecce-Chong has received several distinctions, including the Solti Foundation Award. He has been mentored by renowned conductors, including Bernard Haitink, David Zinman, Edo de Waart, Manfred Honeck, Donald Runnicles, and Michael Tilson Thomas.

### **Esther Tonea, soprano**

Fresh off three years in San Francisco Opera's Adler Program, Romanian-American soprano Esther Tonea has been praised for dramatic excellence, flexibility, and beauty of her singing. Her rendition of Imogene's mad scene from Bellini's *Il pirata* is acclaimed as "a performance of powerful, gleaming tone, effortless precision and expressive immediacy, all rendered with the sublime assurance of an established diva." She is a recent winner of the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition, Presser Scholar, and recipient of the Richard F. Gold Career Grant.

A frequent collaborator with composer-librettist duo Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer, Tonea premiered the role of Diana in *If I Were You* with the Merola Opera Program and workshopped *Intelligence* as Callie Van Lew with Houston Grand Opera. She has performed *Fiordiligi* with "gleaming tones and impeccable dynamic control" and continues to sing Mozart heroines such as Donna Anna and Contessa. She covered *Eugene Onegin's* Tatyana and *Dialogues of the Carmelite's* Blanche de la Force at San Francisco Opera and has performed excerpts from *Turandot* (Liù), *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Prima Donna), *Idomeneo* (Elettra), *Don Giovanni* (Donna Anna), *Roméo et Juliette* (Juliette), and *Il pirata* (Imogene) with the San Francisco Opera and Metropolitan Opera orchestras. Last season, she made her San Francisco Opera debut in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

No stranger to orchestral works, Tonea has appeared as soprano soloist in Mahler's second and fourth symphonies, Janáček's Glagolitic Mass, Haydn's The Creation and Missa in Angustiis, Mozart's Requiem in D minor and Exsultate, Jubilate, and Saint-Saëns' Christmas Oratorio. This season she solos in Orff's *Carmina Burana* with Richmond Symphony and Ballet.

Because of her passion for increasing accessibility to classical music and opera, Tonea appears as guest artist in elementary school outreach programs across the United States. She has also curated recitals in

more intimate casual venues, namely in-home salons and outdoor festivals. This season she works with pianist Andrew King and the Shoshana Foundation in a free public recital and continues a series of recitals centered around various topics such as her Romanian heritage and increased awareness of domestic violence. Continuing her work in higher education, she served as resident artist at Tennessee Wesleyan University where she gave a recital, taught lessons, and held a masterclass for undergraduate students. She also performs in collaboration with pianist Ronny Michael Greenberg and Roots of Peace, an organization based in Napa Valley whose mission is to replace land mines with vineyards in war-torn countries such as Ukraine and Croatia.

She holds a Master of Music in Voice from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and Cello Performance from the University of Georgia.

**Gabrielle Beteag**, mezzo-soprano

American mezzo-soprano Gabrielle Beteag (pronounced Bee-tag) brings a fresh joy and commanding warmth to repertoire spanning Baroque to contemporary works. Praised as a “showstopper” by the San Francisco Chronicle, Beteag’s recent performance in the Merola Grand Finale concert was “a virtuoso display of rhythmic precision and vocal exuberance.”

A recent graduate of the Adler Fellowship at San Francisco Opera, Gabrielle began the 2023-2024 season appearing with the company as Stimme von Oben in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* an Image of Frida Kahlo in *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, and the Teacher in *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*. She then traveled to Cape Town, South Africa, where she placed as a semifinalist in the 2023 Operalia World Opera Competition. Later this season, she sings Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* with the San Francisco Ballet.

Inspired by contemporary repertoire, Beteag counts her role creation of Iras in John Adams’ *Antony and Cleopatra* during San Francisco Opera’s Centennial Season (2022-2023) a career highlight, in addition to performing in the West Coast premiere of Errolyn Wallen’s *Roundel*. During the same season, she also performed the role of Sœur Gertrude in *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

Other recent performances Mercédès in *Carmen* at The Atlanta Opera, where she was a Studio Player, Woman with Hat/Duchess in *The Ghosts of Versailles* at Chautauqua Opera, and Lady Billows in *Albert Herring* during her graduate studies at Georgia State University. Additionally, Beteag has covered the following roles: Octavia in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Mere Jeanne and Sœur Mathilde in *Dialogues des Carmélites*, Flora in *La Traviata* (San Francisco Opera); Mrs. Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera*, and Der Trommler in *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (The Atlanta Opera).

March 2020 marked a major career milestone, with Beteag winning The Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition– just two weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. During the shutdown, she created the Songbook Sundays series, through which she shared her renditions of Golden Era jazz standards on social media, accompanying herself on the ukulele. Gabrielle Beteag is currently a second-year Adler Fellow at San Francisco Opera.

**SSU Symphonic Chorus, Jenny Bent**, director

Jenny Bent is Professor of Music, Director of Choral Activities, and Associate Dean of the School of Arts & Humanities at Sonoma State University. Additionally, she manages Chanticleer’s summer program, *Chanticleer in Sonoma*. She earned degrees from Boston University (BM & MM Voice Performance, MM Choral Conducting) and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (DMA Choral Conducting & Choral Literature).

Described by the *San Francisco Classical Voice* as “superb” with “excellent diction and well-controlled dynamics,” Bent’s choirs have earned unanimous superior ratings and command performances at festivals throughout California. Recipient of the 2019 California Music Educators Association Bay Section *Outstanding Choral Educator Award*, Bent for a decade enjoyed teaching high school music, most recently as Choral Director at the Marin School of the Arts and voice faculty member at the Boston University

Tanglewood Institute. Presently, Bent's premier SSU ensemble, SonoVoce, looks forward to performing in February at CASMEC (California All-State Music Education Conference) in Fresno, CA.

Bent serves as an adjudicator, guest conductor, clinician, and conference presenter for organizations, including the California Music Educators Association, the American Choral Directors Association, Golden State, and NorCal. She is currently Treasurer for the California Choral Directors Association and from 2007-2014 hosted *The Choir Loft* on KRCB-FM.

**PROGRAM AT A GLANCE:**

**JONATHAN LESHNOFF:** *Warum hast du gelitten?* (World Premiere)

**GUSTAV MAHLER:** Symphony No. 2 in C minor/E-flat major, *Resurrection*

**High-res photos and interview opportunities available:** Francesco Lecce-Chong, Esther Tonea, and Gabrielle Beteag

**CONCERT ENHANCEMENTS:**

**Concert Program books:** Available at all Classical Series concerts.

**Concert Program notes:** These can be read on the [Digital Program Books & Notes](#) page.

**Pre-concert talk:** Conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong, Esther Tonea, and Gabrielle Beteag provide a 30-minute pre-concert talk one hour prior to the performances.

**SPONSORS:**

Classical Series underwritten by **Anderman Family Foundation**

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Pre-concert Talk sponsored by **Jamei Haswell & Mack Schwing**

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**AT A GLANCE / CALENDAR LISTINGS:**

**WHO:** [Santa Rosa Symphony](#), [Francesco Lecce-Chong, Conductor](#)

**WHAT:** [Mahler's Resurrection](#)

**WHERE:** Weill Hall, Green Music Center, Sonoma State University

**WHEN:**

Saturday, December 7, 2024 at 7:30 pm (Doors at 6:00 pm, Pre-concert Talk 6:30 pm - 7:00 pm)

Sunday, December 8, 2024 at 3:00 pm (Doors at 1:30 pm, Pre-concert Talk 2:00 pm - 2:30 pm)

Monday, December 9, 2024 at 7:30 pm (Doors at 6:00 pm, Pre-concert Talk 6:30 pm - 7:00 pm)

**TICKET PRICES:**

\$34-\$110 for Classical Series performances.

Youths 7-17 may receive one complimentary ticket with every paid adult. Request tickets through Patron Services at (707) 546-8742. Classical Series concerts only.

\$10 student rush tickets for college students with a valid student ID. Available at the door only.

**HOW TO PURCHASE TICKETS:**

[srsymphony.org](http://srsymphony.org) or (707) 546-8742 or in person: 50 Santa Rosa Ave, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Santa Rosa CA. (Weekdays 9:00 am – 5:00 pm; 10:30 am – 5:00 pm on Wednesday; 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 began his tenure in 2018 as the Symphony's fifth music director in its 97 years. J. Andrew Bradford joined SRS as President and CEO in 2023. The Symphony is committed to the core values of artistic excellence, innovative programming, comprehensive music education, and community service.

The Symphony's performance schedule includes 21 Classical Series concerts grouped into seven sets, seven Discovery Dress 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 as having one of California's most comprehensive music education programs, serving nearly 20,000 youths annually. Collaborations with schools and organizations across Sonoma County have gained the Santa Rosa Symphony national attention and support.

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