



**SAN FRANCISCO
SYMPHONY**

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(High resolution images of Brent Assink are available for download from the San Francisco Symphony's [Online Photo Library](#))

BRENT ASSINK TO STEP DOWN AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY AFTER 18 SEASONS

SAN FRANCISCO – Brent Assink, Executive Director of the San Francisco Symphony since 1999 and a shaper of Bay Area cultural life for almost two decades, today announced his plans to conclude his tenure with the Symphony in 2017.

When he leaves, he will have served at the organization's helm for 18 years, during which he encouraged and led innovative artistic and media projects, worked to strengthen organizational stability, and captured global recognition for the Orchestra.

Assink, 61, is currently one of the longest serving chief executives of a major U.S. symphony orchestra. As Executive Director of the San Francisco Symphony, Assink oversaw significant artistic and operational growth for an orchestra that now presents more than 220 concerts each year in its home, Davies Symphony Hall, and around the world. Assink implemented a broad range of artistic, digital media, and community building initiatives that have put the San Francisco

Symphony into the front ranks of the world's most innovative and accessible orchestras. His commitment to community service has driven an expansion of education projects and community engagement activities, and the development of award-winning national television, radio, and recording projects. The Orchestra's artistic profile has grown through national and international touring, with annual performances at Carnegie Hall and regular invitations by the world's most important festivals and concert halls.

Assink's long tenure with San Francisco Symphony also reflects the organization's stable executive leadership. He is only the fourth Executive Director of the San Francisco Symphony since 1939, when the organization created its top management position (Howard Skinner served from 1939 to 1964, Joseph Scafidi from 1965 to 1978, and Peter Pastreich from 1978 to 1999). Assink also served as the Symphony's General Manager from 1990 to 1994.

"I cannot imagine a life more fulfilling and enriching than the one I have been privileged to lead here since 1999," said Brent Assink. "These have been years of enormous change—in society, in technology, in the way Americans think about orchestral music and its place in their lives. What could be more exciting than to have been part of this! I will always cherish my time here and marvel that I have been able to lead an organization unafraid of change and eager to embrace challenges that opened new ways of experiencing music. Knowing that the San Francisco Symphony's artistic level is stronger than ever, I turn my focus to the next phase of my life. As I do this, I look forward with great anticipation to what the next chapter holds for me personally and to the opportunity to observe the fresh perspectives that the next Executive Director will bring to this organization about which I care so much."

"Between his time as Executive Director and, before that, as General Manager, Brent Assink has given the San Francisco Symphony more than 20 years of transformative leadership," said Sakurako Fisher, the Symphony's President. "The Board of Governors and the entire San Francisco Symphony family are indebted to his vision, his values, and his commitment to making the Symphony one of North America's most forward-looking arts organizations. Brent's musical passion, commitment to artistic excellence, and inspiring leadership have steered us in new directions and made new connections in our community and beyond, forging a path for what an American orchestra can and should be in the 21st century. His love of music informs all his ideas; and his ideas, put into action, have enriched our lives. I will miss him. I am delighted, however, that we will have six more months to work with Brent. He will remain in his position until March 31, 2017. We have begun an international search for his successor."

Said Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas: "Brent Assink has been a close colleague, friend, and trusted partner for almost 20 years. His tireless advocacy has expanded the orchestra's impact on music in the Bay Area and beyond. Our music depends on energy, insight and generosity of spirit. These same qualities define Brent. Today, musicians from all over the world know what's happening here because of projects accomplished under his leadership - projects like American Mavericks, Keeping Score, and our Mahler recording cycle. I am deeply grateful to Brent for his vision and friendship, and for his commitment to make so much possible. The San Francisco Symphony will always bear his imprint.

I have no doubt that he will be bringing his insight and skills to transformative projects in the world of music and art on the national and international scene. He will be greatly missed.”

Brent Assink summarized: “It has been a privilege to serve this community and this orchestra. My thanks go to the great colleagues with whom I have had the pleasure to work, foremost among them Michael Tilson Thomas, and President Sakurako Fisher and her two immediate predecessors, John D. Goldman and Nancy H. Bechtle. I cherish my time with the outstanding members of the administration, and with our dedicated volunteers. Ultimately, the last 18 years have been a gift to me, expressed most directly by the thousands of concerts that I have been privileged to attend. To experience the artistry of the musicians of the San Francisco Symphony and the Symphony Chorus, and to see their impact on the lives of millions of people in the concert hall during this period has been the greatest reward that one can imagine in any career.”

Brent Assink’s Legacy at the San Francisco Symphony

The American orchestra world has changed drastically since 1999, when Brent Assink became the San Francisco Symphony’s Executive Director. Under his leadership, the Symphony has not only adapted to changes; it has been at their forefront and carved out new ways to bring audiences and music closer together.

A musician himself, Assink possesses a deep love of the standard repertory and contemporary music alike. He has aligned himself with Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas in championing new and unfamiliar works. Such efforts were reflected as early as 2000, in the first American Mavericks festival. During Assink’s tenure, the Symphony commissioned/co-commissioned 41 works. It maintained its close relationship with its first composer-in-residence John Adams, including a multi-year commissioning project around the Orchestra’s Centennial, expanded its relationship with Steve Reich, and formed a new bond with young composers such as Mason Bates and Samuel Adams. In 2012, in partnership with the publisher Boosey & Hawkes, it established the New Voices program to seek out and promote the work of new composing talents. The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers recognized the Symphony’s commitment to innovative programming with eight awards since 2000. *Soundbox*, a series of experimental music presented in a club-like environment and aimed at the next generation of concertgoers, opened in 2014.

In 2001, the San Francisco Symphony became the first US orchestra to successfully launch its own recording label, SFS Media, commencing a Mahler cycle that upon its completion encompassed all the composer’s symphonies and major song cycles. The label has gone on to offer recordings of many other major works, including those of Beethoven, Ives, and John Adams, as well as a compilation of American maverick composers, classic orchestral miniatures, and a complete *West Side Story*. In all, 45 SFS Media releases to date (CDs and DVD/Blu-ray) have captured eight Grammy Awards, as well as such honors as France’s Diapason d’Or and Germany’s Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik.

Among the most radical changes in music and society during Assink’s tenure have been those spurred by digital culture. With the support of local philanthropies, Assink fostered and encouraged MTT’s unique abilities to communicate the joys and context of symphonic music, ultimately leading to the creation of *Keeping Score*, a multi-year, multi-tier program (inaugurated in 2004) to bring music to a global audience through video, radio, DVD and Blu-ray, and a website that enabled visitors to delve deeply into the music, at their own pace. *Keeping Score* documentaries alone reached 10 million American viewers on PBS Television.

During the Assink tenure, Symphony education programs expanded. Adventures in Music now reaches all first- through fifth-grade students in every San Francisco public school, more than 23,000 students annually. Instrument Training and Supports provides resources and coaching to music programs in all San Francisco public elementary and middle schools. To reach young listeners, the Symphony in 2002 launched a website designed for children, sfskids.com, revamping the site completely in 2014 to reflect advancements in digital design and educational thinking.

Assink spearheaded outreach to the wider Bay Area cultural communities. An annual Chinese New Year concert, introduced in 2001, celebrates Asian and Western musical traditions. Each year the Día de los Muertos concert, first performed in 2008, invites the Latino community to Davies Symphony Hall. And in 2011, the year the Symphony celebrated its 100th anniversary, the Community of Music Makers program brought amateur musicians to the Symphony stage for coaching with Symphony musicians, and to perform together. The centennial season also embraced the American musical community, welcoming the orchestras of Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia to Davies Symphony Hall, and sponsoring a series of free public discussions that focused on the future of the orchestra in the US.

Partnerships with other San Francisco cultural organizations have flourished. Assink has been a leader in building relationships among San Francisco's arts organizations. . In 2001, through a special loan arrangement with the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Symphony secured exclusive use for Concertmaster Alexander Barantschik of the 1742 "David" Guarnerius violin willed to the Museums by the legendary Jascha Heifetz.

Assink has also fostered and encouraged a profound attentiveness to ongoing artistic development of the orchestra throughout his tenure. Audiences around the world have experienced the SFS live through eleven tours of Europe (including a three-year residency at the acclaimed Lucerne Festival), two tours of Asia, and fifteen tours throughout the US. Each year, more than 30 million listeners on six continents hear the Symphony through expanded radio syndication. Perhaps most significantly, he has worked tirelessly to insure that the world's finest orchestral musicians find a rewarding and fulfilling career when they win their auditions to join the ranks of the Symphony.

Brent Assink's San Francisco Symphony legacy began several years before he became the organization's Executive Director. While serving as General Manager from 1990 to 1994, he participated in a major acoustic renovation of Davies Symphony Hall, launched the *Wet Ink* series of new-music concerts, and expanded community and education activities.

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