

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY YOUTH ORCHESTRA

DONATO CABRERA, WATTIS FOUNDATION MUSIC DIRECTOR

The [San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra](#) (SFSYO) is recognized internationally as one of the finest youth orchestras in the world. Founded by the [San Francisco Symphony](#) in 1981, the SFSYO's musicians are chosen from more than 300 applicants in annual auditions. The SFSYO's purpose is to provide an orchestral experience of pre-professional caliber, tuition-free, to talented young musicians from the greater Bay Area. The more than 100 diverse musicians, ranging in age from 12 to 21, represent communities from throughout the Bay Area. The SFSYO rehearses and performs in Davies Symphony Hall under the direction of Wattis Foundation Music Director [Donato Cabrera](#). Jahja Ling served as the SFSYO's first Music Director, followed by David Milnes, Leif Bjaland, Alasdair Neale, Edwin Outwater, and Benjamin Schwartz. The 2014-2015 SFSYO season features three concerts in November, March, and May, as well as the annual holiday performances of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. The 2014-15 season also includes a Bon Voyage concert in June in advance of the SFSYO's tenth international tour which will take the Orchestra to Europe for multi-city concert appearances.

Recent highlights include performances at the *Día de los Muertos* community concert in Davies Symphony Hall in November 2013, and the Orchestra's eighth European tour, in June 2012. For its series of six performances—including appearances at the Berlin Philharmonie, Munich Philharmonie, the International Festival d'Echternach in Luxembourg, the Rheingau Festival Wiesbaden, Regensburg and Salzburg—the SFSYO won a 2011-12 ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming of American music on foreign tours. A live recording from their critically acclaimed Berlin Philharmonie performance of [Mahler's Symphony No. 1](#) is now available on SFS Media.

The SFSYO's yearly series of concerts reflect the artistic identity of the SFS, with a focus on the great masterworks of the orchestral repertoire plus performances of modern and contemporary works by composers such as John Adams, Gabriela Lena Frank, Richard Danielpour, David Carlson, Christopher Rouse, Charles Wuorinen, Deborah Fischer Teason, Tobias Picker, and SFSYO alumnus Nathaniel Stookey. As part of the SFSYO's innovative training program, musicians from the San Francisco Symphony coach the young players each Saturday afternoon in sectional rehearsals, followed by full orchestra rehearsals with Cabrera. SFSYO members also have the opportunity to work with many of the world-renowned artists who perform with the SFS. SFS Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas, SFS Conductor Laureate Herbert Blomstedt, Sir Simon Rattle, Kurt Masur, Valery Gergiev, Leonard Slatkin, Yo-Yo Ma, Isaac Stern, Yehudi Menuhin, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Midori, Joshua Bell, Gil Shaham, Sarah Chang, and many others have worked with the SFSYO. Of equal importance, the students are able to talk with these prominent musicians, asking questions about their lives, their professional and personal experiences, and about music. As part of its annual holiday *Peter and the Wolf* concerts, the SFSYO also collaborates with a wide range of artists and local celebrities – past narrators have included author Daniel Handler (aka Lemony Snicket); actors Sharon Stone, Robin Williams, Sid Caesar, Leonard Nimoy, Rita Moreno, Chita Rivera, Olympia Dukakis, and Danny Glover; singers Linda Ronstadt, and Bobby McFerrin; *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen; and Michael Tilson Thomas.

The SFSYO embarked on its first European tour in 1986, where it was awarded the world's highest honor for a young musician's orchestral ensemble, the City of Vienna Prize, at the 15th International Youth and Music Festival. In the summer of 1989, the SFSYO made its first tour of Asia with performances in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. During the summer of 1992 the ensemble performed in Italy, Spain, and France, including a performance at one of the world's most prestigious festivals, Aix-en-Provence. In 1995, a three-week tour included concerts at Leipzig's Gewandhaus (in a concert broadcast live on German radio) and Amsterdam's renowned Concertgebouw. The SFSYO returned once again to Europe during the summer of 1998, with debuts at the Cité de la Musique in Paris and the Dvořák Hall in Prague in addition to a return engagement at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. In celebration of its 20th

Anniversary Season, the SFSYO embarked on its sixth international tour in June 2001, with concerts in Russia, Lithuania, and Ireland. That year the Youth Orchestra made its debut at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, performing Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony. Upon invitation by Valery Gergiev, the SFSYO also performed at the prestigious "Stars of the White Nights" Festival in St. Petersburg in the famed Mariinsky Theater. The tour's closing concert in Dublin was broadcast live across Ireland on Lyric FM, the country's national classical radio station. In July 2004, the SFSYO embarked on its seventh international tour, performing in many of Europe's most venerable concert halls such as Vienna's Musikverein, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and Paris' Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The Orchestra made its debut in Berlin, appeared in Germany's prestigious Rheingau Festival, and performed in two acclaimed French summer music festivals in Lyon and St. Riquier. Their tour in the summer of 2008 included debuts at the Berlin Philharmonie, the Munich Philharmonie, and Prague's Smetana Hall, and the 2012 tour of Berlin resulted in them winning the ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming of American music on foreign tours (2011-12).

The SFSYO was accorded a prestigious honor in the summer of 1995 when it was selected by the BBC in London to kick off the season broadcast of its "Youth Orchestras of the World" radio series. Audiences throughout Europe were treated to Mahler's Symphony No. 5 (recorded live in Davies Symphony Hall in May 1994), and the SFSYO's March 1995 performance of Bartók's Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*. Other SFSYO recordings include a special two-disc commemorative set released in the 1991-92 season celebrating its 10th anniversary and featuring live concert recordings from 1982-1991. A third recording, from the SFSYO's celebrated performance at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw during the 1995 European tour, was released in the spring of 1997 to rave reviews. In May 1999 the SFSYO released its fourth disc, Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2, recorded live in Prague's Dvořák Hall during the SFSYO's 1998 European tour. Their fifth recording, a 20th Anniversary CD, was released in 2001. A recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 1, recorded in the Orchestra's appearance at the Berlin Philharmonie in July 2012, was recently released by SFS Media, the SFSYO's first on the SFS' in-house media label.

The SFSYO performed at the official inauguration ceremony for Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr. in January 1996; the Public Dedication Ceremony for San Francisco's New Main Library in April 1996; and the special San Francisco salute to Queen Elizabeth II in 1983. They have served three times as the orchestra for a series of conducting workshops sponsored by the League of American Orchestras. They have performed special "New and Unusual Music" concerts, and they opened the city's Stern Grove Festival in 1992, 1989, and 1986. As part of the SFS's June 1996 celebration of American music, *An American Festival*, the SFSYO joined Maestro Tilson Thomas, members of the Grateful Dead, and vocal soloists in an unprecedented collaboration to perform John Cage's *Renga* with *Apartment House 1776*; members of the SFSYO percussion section were also featured in a festival performance of Henry Cowell's *Ostinato pianissimo*. In celebration of its 20th anniversary season, a May 2001 concert featured a performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, with the Grammy Award-winning San Francisco Symphony Chorus and soloists Nicolle Foland and Florence Quivar. In May 2007, the SFSYO celebrated its 25th anniversary season with a special performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. The performance featured the San Francisco Symphony Chorus and four San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows as soloists. In 2009 the SFSYO hosted and participated in the region's first Bay Area Youth Orchestra Festival at Davies Symphony Hall. The Festival was again hosted at Davies Symphony Hall in 2011, 2012, and 2014.

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