



Contact:
Public Relations
San Francisco Symphony
415.503.5474
publicrelations@sfsymphony.org
sfsymphony.org/press

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE / MAY 21, 2026



ELIM CHAN NAMED NEXT MUSIC DIRECTOR OF THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY

Chan joins the Orchestra as Music Director Designate effective immediately and officially begins her tenure as Music Director in September 2027

As Music Director Designate, she leads the San Francisco Symphony June 5 & 6 in a program featuring music by Wagner, Berlioz, and Debussy

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—The San Francisco Symphony today announced that Elim Chan will become the Orchestra's next Music Director, beginning in September 2027. Chan will be the 13th

Music Director in the San Francisco Symphony's 115-year history when she takes the post in the 2027-28 season for an initial six-year term. One of the most sought-after artists of her generation, Elim Chan embodies the spirit of contemporary orchestral leadership with her crystalline precision and expressive zeal.

Elim Chan joins the San Francisco Symphony as Music Director Designate effective immediately, and conducts the Orchestra June 5 & 6 in a program including Richard Wagner's Prelude and *Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde*, Hector Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'été* featuring mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke as soloist, and Claude Debussy's *La Mer*. Tickets for these concerts are available now at sfsymphony.org/elimchan. Following the performance on Friday, June 5, all ticketholders are invited to a post-concert welcome celebration featuring complimentary live music, light food, and beverages.

In September 2027, Elim Chan begins her tenure as Music Director, leading the Orchestra in a minimum of 10 weeks of programming, including the Opening Gala and All San Francisco concert. From the 2028-29 season onward, she will conduct a minimum of 10 subscription weeks, as well as Opening Week, with an additional three weeks devoted to special projects such as touring and SoundBox.

"In Elim Chan, we have found a musician of unusual gifts and a leader of equal substance—a rare combination, and the one behind her remarkable international rise," said **San Francisco Symphony Chief Executive Officer Matthew Spivey**. "What sets her apart on the podium is the conviction she brings to the music itself. Works orchestras have played a hundred times sound newly made under her hand, lit by a feeling for structure, color, and emotional architecture that audiences hear before they can name. Just as distinctive is the company she keeps with living composers. She does not simply program new music—she lives inside it, shaping what the canon can become by advocating for it. Her artistry sits naturally inside the San Francisco Symphony's lineage—an orchestra long known for its sound, its appetite for new work, and its conviction that the great repertoire is something to be tested and reanimated, not preserved under glass. She brings the strength, empathy, and intellectual rigor that orchestral leadership demands today, and the generosity to be an effective partner with our musicians, our board, and our community in the work ahead. Her arrival opens new territory for this great American orchestra."

"The San Francisco Symphony is one of the truly great orchestras of the world, and I am honored to take the podium as its next Music Director, said **San Francisco Symphony Music Director Designate Elim Chan**. "From my very first encounter with this orchestra, I have been genuinely struck by the generosity of its musicians—exemplified in their sound, their music-making, and in their spirit. The Bay Area has long been the place where the future gets invented. This orchestra carries that same restless, forward-looking energy in everything it does. Stepping into the rich legacy of my distinguished predecessors, it is this exact spirit that I want to nurture and explore every single night, together with these incredible musicians. I also look forward immensely to interacting with the San Francisco Symphony's audiences and my new community as we begin this exciting journey together."

"Elim Chan is a truly extraordinary human being who makes music with creativity, dynamism, and personality," said **San Francisco Symphony Principal Bass Scott Pingel**. "Her appointment in San Francisco marks a new beginning in the illustrious history of this great cultural institution,

and I look forward to the joy our collaboration will bring to our beloved audiences at home and beyond.”

“From Elim Chan’s first rehearsal with the San Francisco Symphony, it was clear she is an extraordinary musician and an original interpreter with a distinct artistic voice,” said **San Francisco Symphony Assistant Principal Second Violin Jessie Fellows**. “She brings passion, imagination, and a deeply communicative approach that I find incredibly inspiring. Her vision and artistry feel especially aligned with San Francisco’s spirit of innovation, curiosity, and possibility.”

“Elim brings a vibrant and exciting presence to the podium,” said **San Francisco Symphony Principal Oboe Eugene Izotov**. “Her artistic vision resonates with the spirit of San Francisco, blending tradition, curiosity, and humanity. I look forward to our new journey together.”

“San Francisco has always thrived on bold vision and reinvention, and in Elim Chan we have exactly the Music Director this moment calls for,” said **San Francisco Symphony Board of Governors Chair Priscilla B. Geeslin**. “She brings a rare combination of energy, imagination, and openness, along with a natural ability to engage deeply with musicians, audiences, and the spirit of our city alike—qualities that will be central to this next chapter. Her creative vision and leadership, paired with the artistry and excellence of our musicians, create a powerful opportunity to realize something truly extraordinary. In the spirit of E.M. Forster’s ‘Only connect,’ her values embody the importance of forging meaningful connections—between music and audiences, artists and city. It all feels perfectly aligned with where San Francisco is today and where it is going. We are truly fortunate to welcome Elim Chan to the San Francisco Symphony at this pivotal time.”

Elim Chan was recently appointed Artistic Partner with the Vienna Symphony for the 2026–27 and 2027–28 seasons, following her designation as Portrait Artist at the Musikverein in the 2022–23 season. Chan served as Principal Conductor of the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra from 2019–2024 and Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra between 2018–2023.

Chan made her San Francisco Symphony debut during the 2022–23 season, conducting a program that included the world premiere of Elizabeth Ogonek’s *Moondog*, a Symphony commission, which Joshua Kosman (*San Francisco Chronicle*) called, “a dynamic and splendidly controlled debut.” Subsequent appearances, including performances of Britten’s *Les Illuminations* and Holst’s *The Planets* and an all-Tchaikovsky program, also garnered critical praise. Following her second conducting appearance in October 2023, Kosman proclaimed that Chan is “the real deal.” “For one thing,” he continued, “Chan ... projects a degree of physical authority from the podium that is rare to witness. All she has to do is raise her arms and the orchestra responds with torrents of finely shaped sounds, as if she were some kind of Wagnerian superhero bending the sonic environment to her will. At the same time, she leaves plenty of space for eloquent turns of phrase and the slight fluctuations in rhythm that make music sound truly alive.”

Of her March 2025 all-Tchaikovsky program, Michael Zwiebach (*San Francisco Classical Voice*, *San Francisco Chronicle*) noted, “It’s clear by now that conductor Elim Chan can bring out the best in a top-rank orchestra. ... Chan clearly works from a detailed conception of the score, but

what the audience sees is a conductor who is as communicative as a dancer. ... Her hand and arm movements are connected to her body's core, and she stretches and bends with the musical phrases.”

Upcoming concerts with the San Francisco Symphony feature Debussy's *La Mer* and Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'été* with mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke in June 2026, and a program pairing choral works of Brahms and Arvo Pärt with the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto alongside Renaud Capuçon, and the first SF Symphony performances of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* Symphony, in October 2026.

A sought-after guest conductor, Chan will make her Berlin Philharmonic debut in the 2026–27 season, alongside first appearances with the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, NHK Symphony Orchestra, and Dallas Symphony Orchestra. She conducts her first staged opera with John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* at Zurich Opera House in a new production. In 2028, she will make her Vienna Philharmonic debut.

Recent debuts and upcoming re-invitations include leading orchestras such as the Boston Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Pittsburgh Symphony in the United States, and the London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Staatskapelle Berlin, Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden, Munich Philharmonic, Bamberg Symphony, Orchestre de Paris, Hong Kong Philharmonic, and Toronto Symphony internationally.

Chan appeared at both the Lucerne and Salzburg festivals and conducted the First Night of the Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 2024 and returned in 2025 to conduct the Last Night of the Proms. With the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, she recorded *All These Lighted Things* for Alpha Classics, pairing the titular Elizabeth Ogonek work with works by Prokofiev and Ravel.

Born in Hong Kong, Elim Chan studied at Smith College in Massachusetts and at the University of Michigan. In 2014, she became the first female winner of the Donatella Flick Conducting Competition and went on to spend her 2015–16 season as Assistant Conductor at the London Symphony Orchestra, where she worked closely with Valery Gergiev. In the following season, Chan joined the Dudamel Fellowship program of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She also owes much to the support and encouragement of Bernard Haitink, whose masterclasses she attended in Lucerne in 2015.

San Francisco Symphony

The San Francisco Symphony is among the most adventurous and innovative arts institutions in the United States, celebrated for its artistic excellence, creative performance concepts, award-winning recordings, and standard-setting education and community engagement programs. Since it was established in 1911, the Symphony has grown in acclaim under a succession of distinguished music directors: Henry Hadley, Alfred Hertz, Basil Cameron, Issay Dobrowen, Pierre Monteux, Enrique Jordá, Josef Krips, Seiji Ozawa, Edo de Waart, Herbert Blomstedt, Michael Tilson Thomas, Esa-Pekka Salonen, and now Elim Chan. The San Francisco Symphony is deeply committed to nurturing the next generation of musicians and music lovers through a comprehensive range of educational programs. These include Fisher Family Adventures in Music

(AIM) and Music and Mentors, which serve more than 25,000 San Francisco public school students annually; interactive youth and family concerts; heritage events; and the prestigious, tuition-free San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra. With a reputation for artistic daring and a dedication to excellence, innovation, and community engagement, the San Francisco Symphony continues to shape the future of orchestral music, making a lasting impact on the cultural fabric of San Francisco and the world.

San Francisco Symphony Music Directors

Henry Hadley (1911–1915)

Alfred Hertz (1915–1930)

Basil Cameron (1930–1932)

Issay Dobrowen (1930–1935)

Pierre Monteux (1935–1952)

Enrique Jordá (1954–1963)

Josef Krips (1963–1970)

Seiji Ozawa (1970–1977)

Edo de Waart (1977–1985)

Herbert Blomstedt (1985–1995)

Michael Tilson Thomas (1995–2020)

Esa-Pekka Salonen (2020–2025)

Elim Chan (2027–)