

Critical Acclaim

Elim Chan with the San Francisco Symphony

San Francisco Chronicle/San Francisco Classical Voice: [Review: Tchaikovsky takes over at S.F. Symphony](#) (March 14, 2025)

“It’s clear by now that conductor Elim Chan can bring out the best in a top-rank orchestra.

“What the audience sees is a conductor who is as communicative as a dancer. She leads without a baton, but her hand and arm movements are connected to her body’s core, and she stretches and bends with the musical phrases. She actively engages all the orchestra’s sections, regularly switching her focus.

“The orchestra was as energetic and involved as its guest conductor, playing with conviction and attention to dynamics. Entrances and cutoffs were sharp, and Chan’s exacting sense of rhythm built the dances to highly satisfying climaxes, as if she were born to conduct ballet.”

The Daily Californian: [SF Symphony pulls audiences to their feet, points eyes to the sky](#) (November 1, 2023)

“‘Mars, the Bringer of War’ begins [‘The Planets’], and, though technically fourth in the solar system’s lineup, Chan’s bursting, almost militaristic interpretation cemented its place as the opener... ‘Uranus, the Magician’ saw such great and unexpected tone changes that, at times, laughs sputtered throughout the crowd. Chan navigated these skillfully, leading the orchestra into a Nutcracker-esque windup.”

San Francisco Classical Voice: [The Planets Shines Under Elim Chan’s Direction at SF Symphony](#) (October 30, 2023)

“Guest conductor Elim Chan launched the San Francisco Symphony on a thrillingly theatrical visit to Mars in the first movement of Gustav Holst’s *The Planets*. From there and beyond, to six other orbs in the solar system, the confines of Davies Symphony Hall seemed to expand, with mighty brass outbursts, voluptuous strings, surging woodwinds, harp and celesta filigrees, and a battery of perseverating percussion all fully onboard and tightly bonded for this exhilarating ride.

“Chan, who made a dynamic impression earlier this year leading an SFS performance of Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, and Elizabeth Ogonek’s *Moondog* (another work inspired by celestial matters, in that case stargazing), built on her January triumph. Small of stature, she reads big on the podium, summoning and shaping responses with dynamic gestures, wide-flung arms, and a buoyant full-body involvement. A baton would have been superfluous.”

San Francisco Chronicle: [Review: S.F. Symphony’s guest conductor lights up Davies Hall in an incendiary triumph](#) (October 27, 2023)

“Leading the orchestra in music by Benjamin Britten and Gustav Holst, the Hong Kong native displayed a formidable array of skills, both technical and interpretive. She’s the real deal.

“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.”

San Francisco Classical Voice: [Elim Chan and SF Symphony Caught Stargazing](#) (January 16, 2023)

“Chan’s ebullient reading of [Symphony No. 2] felt like a celebration of its populist’s folk-tune roots. Even when the music glowered and darkened in Tchaikovsky’s brooding manner, brightness always lay ahead. String passages skittered and surged. The horns let out their burnished cries of affirmation. The woodwinds burbled and chattered. The brass triumphed.”

Seen and Heard International: [Elim Chan stirs up juicy sounds in her San Francisco Symphony debut \(January 14, 2023\)](#)

“Conductor Elim Chan seemed to be channeling an old soul in a compelling, often exciting concert Thursday afternoon with the San Francisco Symphony and guest violin soloist, James Ehnes. The chief conductor of the Antwerp Symphony and principal guest conductor of the Scottish National Orchestra, the Hong Kong-born, U.S.-trained musician toned down her generation’s tendency for conductorial gymnastics, finding precise and ear-pleasing ways to get the necessary energy out of the orchestra.

“A rousing rendition of the too-seldom-heard Tchaikovsky Symphony No.2... is where Chan really showed her mettle, delivering spot-on tempo choices, shaping dynamics to keep things lively and finding ideal balances that allowed all the layers of sound to remain clear even in the most cluttered passages.”

San Francisco Chronicle: [Review: S.F. Symphony gets the new year off to a ravishing musical start \(January 12, 2023\)](#)

“Thursday’s program brought a dynamic and splendidly controlled debut by the Chinese conductor Elim Chan... who revealed herself to be a podium presence of both wiry discipline and expressive eloquence. Her beat is razor-sharp, which helped the Symphony musicians find common rhythmic ground again and again. Yet within those stark metric frameworks, she elicited playing of uncommon freedom and communicative directness.

“If show business is the art of leaving them wanting more, then Thursday’s program accomplished its mission. Let’s have Chan [...] back again without delay... The sooner the better, please and thank you.”

The Rehearsal Studio: [SFS Takes New Year Off to a Roaring Start \(January 12, 2023\)](#)

“Chan’s conducting made it clear that she understood everything about the nuts-and-bolts of the score well enough to provide the audience with a stimulating listening experience.

“Chan pulled out all the stops in her interpretation of the Tchaikovsky symphony. This is a symphony that provides the attentive listener with a prodigious panoply of contrasting sonorities, and Chan knew exactly how to make sure that the uniqueness of each of those sonorities registered with the attentive listeners in the audience. Mind you, in the interest of those sonorities, there was more than a generous amount of thematic repetition; but Chan provided the best possible account for allowing listeners to appreciate and savor the differences.

“I hope that Chan’s lightning will strike again in a not-too-distant future SFS season.”

Additional Critical Acclaim of Elim Chan

Los Angeles Times: [Will it be Elim Chan? A potential Dudamel successor makes magic in her L.A. Phil Hollywood Bowl debut \(July 11, 2024\)](#)

“Chan was very much in her element. Opening the program with Korean composer Unsuk Chin’s ‘subito con forza’ (suddenly with power), she needed less than 10 seconds to prove it. The score... opens with the famed compelling beginning of the “Coriolan” overture. The long-held loud C in the strings followed by a sharply attacked staccato chord in the orchestra heralds one of Beethoven’s great calls to attention.

“Chan, however, interrupted the action immediately with wildly trembling percussion, squeaky high harmonics in the violins and an ominous low C drone in the cellos. In a dizzying instant, we were transported to a weird, oddly enjoyable, place. Leading the L.A. Phil, Chan pulled this and other trickery that followed like a magician with not only a baton but compellingly expressive fingers and facial gestures that conveyed a sense of wonder.”

The Guardian: [First Night of the Proms review – a thrilling adventure ride \(July 19, 2024\)](#)

“The overture to Handel’s Music for the Royal Fireworks started with a monumental wash of sound, Elim Chan conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra baton-free, arms sweeping as if applying thick paint with a roller. But she also commanded minute pianissimos and a level of detail easily lost in this mixing-bowl

acoustic. ... Chan's dynamic control was superlative, her gestures ranging from minute finger-waggles to full air-traffic control."

The New York Times: [Review: Two Electric Debuts at the New York Philharmonic](#) (March 8, 2024)

"Born in Hong Kong, trained in the United States and already a sensation in Europe, Chan walked to the podium with confidence. Her physical ease was justified: She showed up to her first gig with the Philharmonic fully ready to harness its forces.

"Even with a baton in hand, Chan never abandoned her fingers as her principal tools: Her stick was merely an appendage. At every point, she urged the orchestra to dig deeper into the score technically and emotionally, and they responded with equal verve and appreciation."

Bachtrack: [Precision, energy and expressive poise in Elim Chan's Tanglewood debut](#) (August 3, 2025)

"Chan proved an alert and responsive partner, shaping orchestral textures with transparency and a keen ear for detail, thereby revealing more depth than the concerto's glittering surfaces might suggest. She let the melodies unfurl naturally but knew when to tighten the reins, and the BSO responded with a bright, clean sound to her direction. ... In her Tanglewood debut, Elim Chan proved herself to be a conductor of precision, energy and expressive poise. She conducted both works with clarity and conviction, guiding the Boston Symphony through a programme that favoured nuance over novelty."

Cleveland Classical: [Cleveland Orchestra tackles Beethoven's 'Fateful Fifth' with conductor Elim Chan, trumpeter Michael Sachs](#) (March 19, 2026)

"The art of conducting is a kind of alchemy — the transformation of inert notes on a page into something vividly alive. A conductor absorbs a composer's intentions, reimagines them, and releases them again through that remarkable instrument, the symphony orchestra. On a good night the music feels less reproduced than re-created, and the listener senses the thrill of discovery. In her appearance with The Cleveland Orchestra at Severance Music Center Thursday, March 12, conductor Elim Chan provided such an evening."