



About the San Francisco Symphony

Long biography

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 its establishment in 1911, the Symphony has grown in acclaim under a succession of distinguished music directors. In May 2026, the Symphony announced Elim Chan as the 13th Music Director in its 115-year history, beginning in September 2027. 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. Her appointment follows a remarkable lineage of 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, and Esa-Pekka Salonen.

The San Francisco Symphony presents more than 200 concerts and presentations annually for nearly 350,000 people at Davies Symphony Hall and throughout the Bay Area. The Orchestra performs a robust schedule of core classical concerts from September through June, and offers a dynamic mix of holiday programs, groundbreaking SoundBox performances, chamber concerts, education concerts, guest artist recitals, live-to-film presentations, popular artist collaborations, a month-long summer series, and other special events that invite audiences across the Bay Area to connect with the Symphony in ways that resonate with their interests, experiences, and traditions.

Innovation is a central theme of the San Francisco Symphony's artistic vision and programming. In 2001, the Symphony became the first American orchestra to launch its own in-house record label, SFS Media, recording and releasing live performances from Davies Symphony Hall while championing both contemporary composers and core orchestral repertoire. During Michael Tilson Thomas's tenure, the Symphony released 56 recordings, including 43 live concert recordings on SFS Media, earning 21 Grammy Award nominations and 13 wins. Among the label's most celebrated achievements is its internationally acclaimed 12-part Mahler recording project, which documented all of Mahler's symphonies and major vocal works and further established Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony as leading interpreters of the composer's music.

During Esa-Pekka Salonen's tenure, the San Francisco Symphony released several digital audio recordings through SFS Media, including Nico Muhly's *Throughline*, Kev Choice's *Movements*, and 17 spatial audio recordings of live concert performances released in partnership with Apple Music Classical. Salonen and the Symphony also released Béla Bartók's three piano concertos with Pierre-Laurent Aimard on PENTATONE and the world premiere recording of Kaija

Saariaho's *Adriana Mater* on Deutsche Grammophon, which won the 2025 Grammy Award for Best Opera Recording.

San Francisco Symphony radio broadcasts, the first in the nation to feature symphonic music when they began in 1926, today carry the Orchestra's concerts across the country. In 2004, Michael Tilson Thomas and the SF Symphony launched the groundbreaking multimedia *Keeping Score* series on PBS-TV and the web; the series was made available for unlimited free streaming on the Symphony's YouTube channel in 2020. Other original video content and experiences include digital SoundBox programs, episodes of the CURRENTS series, chamber performances, educational programming, and signature digital projects with Salonen, such as Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* and *LIGETI: PARADIGMS*. In 2014, the San Francisco Symphony inaugurated SoundBox, an experimental and eclectic live music series, which takes place in an alternative performance space located backstage at Davies Symphony Hall. For its adventurous programming, the Symphony has been honored 19 times by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, and the Symphony's recordings have garnered France's Grand Prix du Disque and Britain's *Gramophone* Award, as well as 17 Grammy® Awards.

As a cornerstone of the organization's mission, the San Francisco Symphony provides some of the most extensive education and community programs offered by any American orchestra. The tuition-free San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra (SFSYO) offers a preprofessional orchestral experience to talented young Bay Area musicians through weekly coaching and rehearsals. The Symphony's free music education experiences reach more than 25,000 San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) students each year through programs such as the Fisher Family Adventures in Music (AIM) program, which serves every child in grades 1–5, and Music and Mentors, which supports SFUSD band and orchestra students in grades 6–12. The Symphony also provides more than 2,500 free tickets to SFUSD middle and high school classes each year. The Symphony's online educational resources include a variety of digital programs that offer lessons and activities designed to support schools and promote music education at home.

The Symphony's community engagement programs aim to serve, enrich, and reflect the Bay Area community through a robust lineup of year-round events and programs that are dynamic, diverse, and accessible to all. These include the All San Francisco Concert, which celebrates the work of Bay Area nonprofit, social services, and grassroots organizations; Music in the Wards, which brings SF Symphony musicians to UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital to perform monthly concerts; the free Community Chamber Concerts series, which partners with a broad range of organizations to bring small ensemble concerts to Bay Area communities; Día de los Muertos, an annual event featuring a concert program of traditional and contemporary Latin American music, lobby art installations by local artists, and a festive array of family-friendly activities; the UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital San Francisco *Peter and the Wolf* open SFSYO dress rehearsal for recently discharged pediatric patients and their families; and Deck the Hall Community Day, an annual holiday concert performed for young people in Davies Symphony Hall every December. The San Francisco Symphony's Community Ticket Program provides an average of more than 12,000 free tickets to community partners throughout the season, expanding equitable access to the Orchestra's concerts for members of the San Francisco Bay Area community.

