



San Francisco Symphony

Facts about the Symphony

- Founded in 1911 and performing its 113th season in 2024–25, the San Francisco Symphony is widely considered to be among the country’s most artistically adventurous arts institutions.
- Esa-Pekka Salonen assumed his post as the San Francisco Symphony’s twelfth Music Director in the 2020–21 season. The 2024–25 season marks his fifth season with the Orchestra.
- In their inaugural season together, Esa-Pekka Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony introduced a groundbreaking artistic leadership model anchored by eight Collaborative Partners from a variety of cultural disciplines: Nicholas Britell, Julia Bullock, Claire Chase, Bryce Dessner, Pekka Kuusisto, Nico Muhly, Carol Reiley, and esperanza spalding.
- Michael Tilson Thomas (MTT) is the San Francisco Symphony’s first Music Director Laureate, having concluded his remarkable 25-year tenure as Music Director in June 2020.
- Over 350,000 people hear more than 170 concerts and presentations of the San Francisco Symphony each year.
- More than 60,000 people hear the San Francisco Symphony at no cost each season.
- The San Francisco Symphony receives support from more than 9,500 individual donors and 160 partner institutions.
- Throughout its history, the San Francisco Symphony has presented almost 300 world premieres, commissioned more than 150 new works, and received 19 awards from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) for adventurous programming and/or commitment to American music.
- The San Francisco Symphony has served as a cultural ambassador for the Bay Area through its more than 60 national and international concert tours, nearly 280 recordings, including commercial videos on DVD and Blu-ray, and through its radio broadcasts, heard on more than 300 stations nationally and internationally.
- The San Francisco Symphony distributes approximately 12,000 complimentary tickets annually through its Free Community Ticket Program. Guided by a goal of increasing access to Symphony concerts, this program supports providing free tickets to local nonprofits, social services organizations, and members of the community at large.

- The low-priced All San Francisco Concert, held for more than 40 years, welcomes more than 100 local social service and neighborhood organizations.
- The SF Symphony's renowned education programs date back to 1919 and are among the most comprehensive of any orchestra in the United States. The SF Symphony's second concert, in 1911, was a concert for children.
- The SF Symphony's Fisher Family Adventures in Music (AIM) program is a comprehensive music education program designed specifically for San Francisco's public elementary schools, in partnership with the San Francisco Unified School District. Now in its 38th year of partnership with the SFUSD during the 2024–25 season, AIM serves every child in grades one through five in every San Francisco public elementary school. AIM reaches more than 20,000 children and their teachers annually and is presented to schools absolutely free of charge. Since its inception in 1988, more than 150,000 children have participated in the AIM program.
- The SF Symphony launched its Music and Mentors program (formerly called Instrument Training & Support) in 2006, designed to assist San Francisco's public middle and high school orchestra and band programs with professional coaching, instruments and supplies, sheet music, and free concert tickets for students and their families.
- The SF Symphony and MTT launched *Keeping Score* in 2006, an unprecedented multimedia program designed to make classical music more accessible to people of all ages and musical backgrounds. *Keeping Score* is a national PBS television series comprising eight composer documentaries and eight live concert films; an interactive web site to explore and learn about music; a national radio series; documentary and live performance DVDs and Blu-rays; and an education program for K-12 schools to further teaching through the arts by integrating classical music into core subjects. To date, more than six million people have seen the *Keeping Score* television series in the United States and episodes have been broadcast in countries around the world. The radio series has been broadcast on more than 400 stations nationally. The Mahler episode won the prestigious German *Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten Kritik* award in 2011.
- In 1981, the SFS founded the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, now led by Wattis Foundation Music Director Radu Paponiu. The 100+ young musicians perform annually for audiences of more than 10,000. Several SF Symphony musicians coach these young players. The program also includes visits by renowned visiting guest artists, including Yo-Yo Ma, Sir Simon Rattle, Joshua Bell, and Midori.
- The SF Symphony Chorus, founded in 1973, is led by Chorus Director Jenny Wong and comprised of 32 professional and 120 non-professional singers. The San Francisco Symphony is one of only a handful of major orchestras in the United States with its own chorus. The Chorus has been recognized for its excellence with multiple Grammy awards, most recently in 2010 for its performance with MTT and the SF Symphony in Mahler's Symphony No. 8. The San Francisco Symphony Chorus celebrated its 50th anniversary in the 2023–24 season.
- The SF Symphony Volunteer Council is an organization of approximately 1,200 committed volunteers, whose purpose is to support the Symphony in areas of fundraising, audience development, and community outreach.

- Davies Symphony Hall, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2020, was built at a cost of \$27.5 million. Named for Louise M. Davies, the largest individual contributor, the building is owned by the City of San Francisco, which contributed \$10 million toward its construction. Davies Symphony Hall underwent a successful \$10 million acoustic renovation in 1992.
- The San Francisco Symphony has won 16 Grammy Awards, including seven for its Mahler recording cycle of all of the composer's symphonies and his works for voice, orchestra, and chorus.
- The San Francisco Symphony was an early pioneer of the composer-in-residence concept. John Adams was the first composer to assume that role, in 1982.

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY

FIFTEEN FIRSTS

1. The first San Francisco Symphony Music Director was American composer and conductor Henry Hadley (1911–1915).
2. The Orchestra performed its first concert on December 8, 1911. The program included Wagner's Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, Haydn's *Theme and Variations* from the *Emperor* Quartet, and Liszt's *Les Préludes*. The Orchestra rehearsed for this performance 16 times.
3. The San Francisco Symphony's second concert was a concert for young people held on December 29, 1911, and the first series of concerts for young people began in 1922.
4. In 1924, the San Francisco Symphony was the first major American orchestra to hire women as full-time musicians other than as harpists.
5. The first San Francisco Symphony recording was of Auber's *Fra Diavolo* Overture and the Prelude and Good Friday Spell from Wagner's *Parsifal*. It was led by SF Symphony Music Director Alfred Hertz and recorded in 1925 by the Victor Talking Machine Company, precursor to RCA Victor.
6. The San Francisco Symphony was the first orchestra with its own syndicated radio show. The Standard Symphony Hour began broadcasting in 1926 and continued as the Standard Hour until 1955.
7. The San Francisco Symphony performed the first concert held at Sigmund Stern Grove in 1932.
8. The San Francisco Symphony's first tour was to Los Angeles in 1928. Its first US tour was in 1947, and its first overseas tour, to Japan, was in 1968.
9. The Symphony held its first Black and White Ball fundraiser in 1956.
10. Seiji Ozawa led the Orchestra on its first European tour in 1973. On that tour, the first radio signal ever relayed live via satellite broadcast the opening performance in Paris back home in San Francisco. The Orchestra also performed in the USSR with cellist Mstislav Rostropovich.
11. The San Francisco Symphony's first composer-in-residence was John Adams, in 1982. Prior to that appointment he held the position of new music advisor with the SF Symphony, starting in 1978.
12. The opening concert in Davies Symphony Hall was a San Francisco Symphony performance led by Music Director Edo de Waart on September 13, 1980.
13. The San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra performed its first season of concerts in 1981, led by their first Music Director, SF Symphony Associate Conductor Jahja Ling.
14. The San Francisco Symphony won its first Grammy award in 1993, for a recording of Orff's *Carmina burana*, conducted by Music Director Herbert Blomstedt and featuring the San

Francisco Symphony Chorus led by Vance George. As of August 2024, the San Francisco Symphony has won a total of 16 Grammy Awards.

15. In their inaugural season together in 2020–21, Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony introduced a first-of-its-kind, groundbreaking artistic leadership model anchored by eight Collaborative Partners from a variety of cultural disciplines: Nicholas Britell, Julia Bullock, Claire Chase, Bryce Dessner, Pekka Kuusisto, Nico Muhly, Carol Reiley, and esperanza spalding. This group of visionary artists, thinkers, and doers, along with Mr. Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony, set out to explore and develop new ideas inspired by the Partners' unique areas of expertise, including innovative digital projects, expansive and imaginative performance concepts in a variety of concert formats, commissions of new music, and projects that foster collaboration across artistic and administrative areas.