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**SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY ANNOUNCES THE APPOINTMENT OF
MANFRED HONECK AS FESTIVAL DIRECTOR, A NEWLY CREATED
ROLE BEGINNING IN THE 2028–29 SEASON FOR A FIVE-YEAR TERM**

As Festival Director, Honeck will create, program, and lead a new multi-season Festival launching in the 2028–29 season that will explore five distinct fundamental themes of the human experience through works of the core symphonic repertoire

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—The San Francisco Symphony announces the appointment of **Manfred Honeck** as Festival Director, a newly created position beginning in the 2028–29 season for a five-

year term. In this position, Honeck will conceive and lead a new annual, multi-week Festival spanning five seasons. Honeck will join the San Francisco Symphony for at least four weeks of concerts each season during his tenure: two to three Festival weeks and additional Orchestral Series programs.

Honeck has earned a reputation as one of the most distinguished and compelling conductors of his generation. As Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra since 2008, he has led the ensemble to widespread critical acclaim through thought-provoking performances, award-winning recordings, and major international tours. Beyond his work with the Pittsburgh Symphony, Honeck is a sought-after guest conductor with the world's leading orchestras and a frequent presence at the most prestigious festivals and concert venues across the globe.

His contract in Pittsburgh was recently extended throughout the 2032–33 season, which will make him the longest-serving Music Director in the orchestra's history. Coinciding with his appointment as the San Francisco Symphony's Festival Director, Honeck has been appointed the seventh Principal Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra in London.

"Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire." is a famous quote often attributed to Gustav Mahler. It expresses the Festival's intent to celebrate iconic works from the core classical repertoire through the creation of innovative performance concepts. The Festival will be independently planned and programmed by Honeck and will explore universal elements of the human experience across five distinct fundamental themes such as birth, community, healing, death, and love. Each Festival season will be anchored by large-scale orchestral or choral masterworks, operas, or oratorios, brought to life in ways that reflect Honeck's approach to musical storytelling. The Festival will also feature smaller-scale works tied to each season's distinct theme. Details about the first edition of the Festival in the 2028–29 season will be announced at a later date.

Honeck's appointment as Festival Director marks the expansion of the San Francisco Symphony's artistic leadership, joining Music Director Designate Elim Chan, whose appointment was announced in May and whose tenure begins in Fall 2027. The artistic leadership also includes Resident Conductor of Engagement and Education Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser, Chorus Director Jenny Wong, and San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra Wattis Foundation Music Director Radu Paponiu.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to create a Festival with the San Francisco Symphony," said Manfred Honeck. "The city of San Francisco itself inspires creativity and has always stood for something special. It is my conviction that the classical masterworks we are blessed to serve speak directly to the human heart. I hope that this Festival will become a passionate celebration of the human condition and a source of inspiration to many. We will work hard to present classical core repertoire in unprecedented ways allowing the sparks of beauty to spread through the Bay Area and beyond."

"Finally, the news is out! Manfred Honeck is a musician for whom I have long had profound admiration and respect, particularly for his extraordinary work ethic and the rare warmth he brings to every rehearsal and performance," said San Francisco Symphony Music Director Designate Elim Chan. "He has this incredible, innate ability to make orchestras sound transcendent simply through his deep reverence for the music and the musicians he works with. I

am thrilled that his Festival will now have a home here at Davies Symphony Hall, running alongside the musical experiences this orchestra and I are actively creating. I am so excited about what this collaboration can bring to the San Francisco audiences.”

“Manfred Honeck is among the most compelling musicians of our time. In his hands the great symphonic works stop being monuments and become stories about what it means to be human, and that is the whole premise of this Festival,” said Matthew Spivey, Chief Executive Officer of the San Francisco Symphony. “Creating the position of Festival Director gives an artist of his stature something rare: the time and the freedom to build one idea across five seasons rather than a single week. During the course of conversations with both Elim and Manfred, it has been very clear that these two artists share a conviction in the pure humanity of this artform. We are delighted to welcome Manfred to San Francisco.”

Honeck made his San Francisco Symphony conducting debut in May 2017, conducting the first San Francisco Symphony performances of Shostakovich’s Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti, featuring baritone Matthias Goerne, and Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 5. He has since led five other Subscription Series programs, including his February 2026 performances of his own dramatic production of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Requiem. The unique production featured portions of the Requiem that Mozart completed before his death, interspersed with readings from Mozart’s letters and the poetry of Nelly Sachs, Gregorian chant, and interpolations of other late Mozart works.

During the 2026–27 season, Honeck returns March 5–7, 2027, to conduct the first San Francisco Symphony performances of his arrangement of Erwin Schulhoff’s Five Pieces; Alban Berg’s Violin Concerto with Alexi Kenney; and Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 6, *Pathétique*.

Manfred Honeck

Manfred Honeck has firmly established himself as one of the world’s leading conductors, renowned for his distinctive interpretations that have garnered international acclaim. As Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, where he is now in his 19th season, he continues to shape the orchestra’s artistic identity with a deep sense of purpose and passion. His tenure, recently extended through the 2032–33 season, has seen the orchestra flourish artistically while strengthening its role as a cultural ambassador for the city of Pittsburgh. Celebrated at home and abroad, the orchestra has appeared at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York, as well as at major venues throughout Europe and leading festivals such as the Salzburg Festival, Lucerne Festival, Musikfest Berlin, and Rheingau Music Festival. This successful artistic partnership is reflected in numerous highly acclaimed and award-winning recordings, including a 2018 GRAMMY® Award for Best Orchestral Performance.

Beginning with the 2028–29 season, Honeck will become the seventh Principal Conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra in London, which will be his artistic anchor in Europe. This coincides with his five-year tenure as Festival Director with the San Francisco Symphony, creating his own annual, multi-week festival exploring universal elements of the human experience.

Born in Austria, Manfred Honeck completed his musical training at the Academy of Music in Vienna. His many years as a member of the Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra have had a lasting influence on his work as a conductor. He began his conducting career as an assistant to Claudio Abbado and was subsequently engaged by the Zurich Opera

House, where he was awarded the prestigious European Conductor's Award. Following early posts with the MDR Symphony Orchestra in Leipzig and the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, he served as Music Director of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra in Stockholm and as Music Director of the Staatsoper Stuttgart.

As a guest conductor, Manfred Honeck works with the world's leading orchestras, including the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, and the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. In the United States, he has conducted all of the nation's most distinguished orchestras. He also maintains a distinguished profile as an opera conductor; most recently, he returned to the Salzburg Festival in summer 2026, conducting *Ariadne auf Naxos* with the Vienna Philharmonic.

In the 2026–27 season, Honeck will commemorate the 200th anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven's death with special programs and a new commission from Jüri Reinvere, to be presented worldwide.

Among his many honors, Manfred Honeck holds honorary doctorates from several US universities and has been awarded the honorary title of Professor by the Austrian Federal President. In 2018, the jury of the International Classical Music Awards declared him "Artist of the Year." In 2026, he received the Kilenyi Bruckner Medal of Honor in recognition of his distinguished interpretations of Bruckner's music.

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, and Esa-Pekka Salonen. In May 2026, the Symphony announced Elim Chan as its 13th Music Director, beginning with the 2027–28 season. 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.

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