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FULL PROGRAM ANNOUNCED:
MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS'S 80TH BIRTHDAY CONCERT WITH THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY AND CHORUS, APRIL 26, 2025, AT DAVIES SYMPHONY HALL

Celebratory performance features MTT with the San Francisco Symphony and Chorus, along with guest conductors Edwin Outwater and Teddy Abrams and special guest vocalists including Sasha Cooke, Ben Jones, Frederica von Stade, and Jessica Vosk

San Francisco, CA—On Saturday, April 26, at 7:30pm, the San Francisco Symphony celebrates Music Director Laureate Michael Tilson Thomas's 80th birthday with a one-night-only

performance featuring MTT and the Orchestra and SF Symphony Chorus with special guests including conductors Teddy Abrams and Edwin Outwater and vocalists Sasha Cooke, Ben Jones, Frederica von Stade, and Jessica Vosk.

“I am overjoyed to mark my 80th with the wonderful musicians of the San Francisco Symphony and Chorus,” said Tilson Thomas, who turned 80 on December 21, 2024. “I remember the fantastic celebrations for my 60th and 70th, and I am delighted that this milestone concert features extraordinary artists I’ve had the privilege to know and collaborate with over the years.”

The celebratory program opens with Benjamin Britten’s *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*, which MTT conducted for his first Gala with the Orchestra in 1995, marking the beginning of his remarkable 25-year tenure as Music Director.

The evening also highlights several of MTT’s enduring musical friendships. Tilson Thomas will share the podium on this program with Teddy Abrams and Edwin Outwater, two conductors with whom he shares deep, personal ties. Abrams, a longtime mentee of Michael Tilson Thomas, has known MTT for nearly 30 years—ever since he wrote him a letter after attending his first San Francisco Symphony concert at just nine years old. “I owe my life in music to Michael and his inspiration, leadership, and unwavering generosity of spirit,” said Abrams. “Michael has been a constant in my life. His profound understanding of what music truly means, his capacity to help others perceive previously unimagined possibilities, and his insight into life itself have guided me throughout my journey and have always reminded me of what a genuine artist can be in our world today. Michael and Joshua have been family to me for nearly thirty years; I am grateful for every moment that I’ve spent with them. It is overwhelming and a tremendous honor to come back to my hometown to celebrate Michael’s unparalleled musical life with his (and my) beloved San Francisco Symphony.”

Outwater was MTT’s first appointment to the San Francisco Symphony conducting staff in 2001, when he was named Resident Conductor and Wattis Foundation Music Director of the SF Symphony Youth Orchestra. He has since developed a strong and enduring relationship with the Orchestra. Outwater has collaborated with MTT on numerous projects at the SF Symphony and elsewhere, including the opening of SoundBox, both YouTube Symphony projects, and *S&M2*, the historic concert with Metallica that opened San Francisco’s Chase Center. “Michael changed the course of my life and career, as well as how I make and understand music,” said Outwater. “I’ve cherished every moment I’ve spent with him, even more so these past few years. It is an incredible honor to share the podium with him and Teddy for this beautiful program.”

Following *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*, Abrams will conduct Joseph Rumshinsky’s Overture from *Khantshe in Amerike*. Tilson Thomas included the overture in *The Thomashefskys: Music and Memories of a Life in the Yiddish Theater*, a show highlighting the lives of MTT’s grandparents, Boris and Bessie Thomashefsky, who were pioneers of Yiddish theater in New York.

The centerpiece of the evening is a set of eight songs “For MTT,” conducted by Abrams and Outwater and performed by vocalists Sasha Cooke, Ben Jones, Frederica von Stade, and Jessica Vosk—all singers with close personal and professional connections to MTT. Sasha Cooke will sing “*Immer wieder*” from Tilson Thomas’s *Meditations on Rilke*, a work she premiered with MTT and the San Francisco Symphony in January 2020. She’ll then be joined by legendary singer Frederica

von Stade for a duet performance of Tilson Thomas's "Not Everyone Thinks That I'm Beautiful." Von Stade gave the world premiere performance of the song in 1998, and Cooke has since made it part of her regular repertoire.

Ben Jones will join the Orchestra for "Drift Off to Sleep" and "Answered Prayers," two songs by MTT, and Broadway star Jessica Vosk will perform two songs: Frank Loesser's "Take Back Your Mink" from the musical *Guys and Dolls*, and Tilson Thomas's introspective "Sentimental Again." The concert also features two works for voice and piano: Claude Debussy's "*La flûte de Pan*" from *Chansons de Bilitis*, featuring Frederica von Stade and pianist John Wilson, and Tilson Thomas's "Grace" featuring Sasha Cooke and Wilson. Several of Tilson Thomas's songs heard on this program were also included in the recent PENTATONE box set *GRACE: The Music of Michael Tilson Thomas*.

The program will also include the radiant finale from Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, conducted by Outwater and featuring the San Francisco Symphony Chorus. Bernstein was a close friend and mentor to Tilson Thomas, and they collaborated frequently over their two-decade friendship.

To close the program, Tilson Thomas will conduct Ottorino Respighi's *Roman Festivals*, and brilliant showcase for the full Orchestra. The evening will also feature special birthday surprises for MTT and the audience honoring MTT's life, career, and immeasurable contributions to the classical music community.

Due to high demand, a limited number of obstructed view seats for MTT's 80th Birthday Concert have been made available for purchase; those tickets may be purchased by calling the SF Symphony box office at 415.864.6000. Additional returned tickets may become available; check sfsymphony.org for current information.

Michael Tilson Thomas made his San Francisco Symphony debut in 1974 at age 29 and quickly became a frequent and favorite guest conductor with the Orchestra. He was appointed Music Director in 1995, a role he served in for 25 years. During his tenure, he pushed the boundaries of traditional orchestral performances through cutting-edge stagings of musical theater, operas, and theatrical works, the expansion of the symphonic repertoire, and experimental new concert formats like SoundBox, which debuted in 2014. He has made a tremendous impact on the San Francisco Symphony and the entire classical music world as a conductor, composer, pianist, educator, mentor, and visionary.

MTT has championed the City of San Francisco through orchestral tours nationally and internationally, and frequently collaborated with Bay Area luminaries, composers, and bands. He helped expand the San Francisco Symphony's education initiatives, affecting the lives of countless young people in San Francisco and beyond, as part of his deep commitment to education and mentorship of young people. Additionally, he created the acclaimed multimedia education series *Keeping Score* in 2004, making classical music more accessible to people of all ages and musical backgrounds.

Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony's recordings—many of them released through the Symphony's own SFS Media label, which launched under MTT's leadership—have been recognized with 12 Grammy® Awards. In October 2024, to celebrate MTT's 80th birthday

and honor his lifetime of contributions as a composer, PENTATONE released [*GRACE: The Music of Michael Tilson Thomas*](#), a deluxe collection of CDs and digital recordings of his compositions. The four-disc set spans more than five decades of MTT's compositional career and features 18 works, from premiere recordings to remastered archival recordings available for the first time, including nine works featuring the San Francisco Symphony. The deluxe collection also includes an extensive booklet containing composer's notes, original essays, and a timeline of archival photos chronicling MTT's life as a pianist, conductor, composer, recording artist, and teacher. All proceeds from *GRACE: The Music of Michael Tilson Thomas* will be donated to brain cancer research at UCSF Brain Tumor Center.

Michael Tilson Thomas is an Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France, member of the American Academies of Arts & Sciences and Arts & Letters, National Medal of Arts recipient, Peabody Award winner, Kennedy Center Honoree, and a member of the California Hall of Fame. In 2023, Mayor London N. Breed and Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi joined the San Francisco Symphony to honor and recognize MTT with new commemorative street signs for "MTT Way" on the 200 Block of Grove Street between Van Ness Avenue and Franklin Street, home to the iconic Davies Symphony Hall.

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

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Location:

Davies Symphony Hall is located at 201 Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco.

SPECIAL EVENT

MTT 80th Birthday Concert

Saturday, April 26, 2025, at 7:30pm

Michael Tilson Thomas conductor

Teddy Abrams conductor

Edwin Outwater conductor

Sasha Cooke vocalist

Ben Jones vocalist

Frederica von Stade vocalist

Jessica Vosk vocalist

San Francisco Symphony Chorus, Jenny Wong director

San Francisco Symphony

BENJAMIN BRITTEN *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*

JOSEPH RUMSHINSKY (arr. Michael Tilson Thomas) Overture from *Khantshe in Amerike*

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS “*Immer wieder*” from *Meditations on Rilke*

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS (orch. Bruce Coughlin) “Not Everyone Thinks That I’m Beautiful”

CLAUDE DEBUSSY “*La flûte de Pan*” from *Chansons de Bilitis*

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS (orch. MTT/Bruce Coughlin) “Drift Off to Sleep”

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS (orch. MTT/Bruce Coughlin) “Answered Prayers”

FRANK LOESSER “Take Back Your Mink” from *Guys and Dolls*

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS (orch. MTT/Larry Moore) “Sentimental Again”

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS “Grace”

LEONARD BERNSTEIN Finale from *Chichester Psalms*

OTTORINO RESPIGHI *Roman Festivals*

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