



NEWS

For Immediate Release

PACIFIC SYMPHONY ANNOUNCES ALEXANDER SHELLEY AS ITS NEXT ARTISTIC AND MUSIC DIRECTOR, BEGINNING IN 2026-27 SEASON



Shelley Succeeds Carl St.Clair, Who Becomes Music Director Laureate Next Season

[COSTA MESA, CA—November 13, 2024]—Pacific Symphony Board Chair Arthur Ong and President and CEO John Forsyte are pleased to announce the appointment of **Alexander Shelley** as the orchestra’s third Music Director, beginning in the 2026-27 season, for an initial five-year term. Shelley will serve as Music Director Designate during the 2025–26 season, before assuming full artistic leadership in 2026-27.

Shelley succeeds Carl St.Clair, who will become Music Director Laureate in 2025-26, providing a seamless transition of artistic leadership to the orchestra he has led for more than three decades.

“I am filled with excitement about leading Pacific Symphony—a versatile, vibrant organization that has enmeshed itself so deeply in the culture, community and imagination of Southern California through the commitment of Carl St.Clair, the musicians and the administration,” said Alexander Shelley. “Since my first visits to Orange County as a boy, its natural beauty and human dynamism have resonated with me deeply. Serving this community, inspiring its youth and enriching its cultural life will be an honor and a joy. The artistic excellence, flexibility and passion of this great orchestra have struck me since our first meeting. I look forward to building on these deep foundations, growing the reach and renown of the orchestra, and reaffirming the power and importance of music in our world through innovative programming and committed performances.”

Alexander Shelley has served as both Music Director of the National Arts Centre Orchestra (NACO) in Ottawa, Canada and Principal Associate Conductor of London’s Royal Philharmonic Orchestra since 2015. In 2023, he was also named Artistic and Music Director at Artis—Naples in Florida, leading the Naples Philharmonic. He was also the youngest-ever Chief Conductor of Germany’s Nürnberger Symphoniker, a position he held for eight seasons from 2009–2017.

A passionate and articulate advocate for new music and the role of music in society, Shelley has led 40 major world premieres; highly praised cycles of symphonies by Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms; and numerous groundbreaking projects—such as *Life Reflected*, a multimedia work celebrating Canadian female pioneers, and *Encount3rs*, which commissioned new ballets from top composers and choreographers. His commitment to creative programming is evident through his many innovative multimedia productions, such as *UnDisrupted* and *UAQUE*. He is equally at home leading symphonic, opera and ballet repertoire as well as multi-genre initiatives.

A New Era for Pacific Symphony

The appointment of Alexander Shelley to this post marks a significant inflection point in Pacific Symphony’s legacy. While recognizing the conclusion of St.Clair’s tenure—the longest for an American-born music director of a major U.S. orchestra—Pacific Symphony welcomes its third-ever artistic leader in Shelley, who brings his international experience to Orange County.

“Pacific Symphony’s Board of Directors is thrilled to name Alexander Shelley as our next Artistic and Music Director,” said Board Chair Arthur Ong. “Alexander’s appointment marks the beginning of a new chapter for Pacific Symphony, building on the legacy of international recognition and local community engagement that Carl has firmly established over the past 35 years. We are fortunate that Carl will continue to be a vital presence as Music Director Laureate for many years to come, and we look forward with great anticipation to Alexander’s return to the podium.”

“Alexander Shelley brings a remarkable combination of artistry, creativity and leadership,” said Concertmaster Dennis Kim, a member of the search committee, on behalf of the orchestra. “On the podium, he is inspiring, his ideas are clear, and his preparation is impeccable. He has a vast repertoire and all of us are excited to explore new works with him. Off the podium, he is a true gentleman and a

musician's musician. He is someone who fully understands the huge responsibility that comes with *this* position, at *this* time, for *this* orchestra. Those of us on the search committee were captivated by his innovative programming, his vision for the orchestra, his ideas to reach new audiences, and his plans to keep our supportive audience members excited for the future. My fellow musicians and I are eagerly looking forward to working with him and to starting a new chapter with this incredible orchestra."

Carl St.Clair endorsed Shelley's appointment, saying, "What an exciting day for Pacific Symphony! I am pleased and honored to welcome Alexander Shelley as the third Music Director of Pacific Symphony. His exceptional talents as a conductor, music director and community leader have been celebrated and praised internationally. More importantly, he has captured the hearts of Pacific Symphony musicians and inspired them deeply. I know you will join me in welcoming Alexander Shelley as I proudly pass the baton to him."

The international search for Pacific Symphony's new music director evaluated numerous guest conductors, and input from the orchestra's musicians was invaluable throughout the process. The search committee, chaired by board member Mark Nielsen, included six orchestra members, who served as ambassadors for the ensemble by gathering feedback, fostering dialogue, and ensuring that the voices of their fellow musicians were heard.

Commitment to Education and Community Engagement

Shelley's experience has been highlighted by a strong commitment to education and community engagement. With NACO, he has led innovative festivals, such as SPHERE and Ideas of North, and tours that celebrated Indigenous stories and music, including a historic performance on Eskasoni First Nation Reserve. He conceived and spearheads the NAC Mentorship Program, designed to nurture the next generation of musicians, ensuring that the impact of orchestral music extends beyond the concert hall.

Shelley was also the founding artistic director of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen's "Future Lab," an award-winning program that uses music and art to unlock potential in some of the most disadvantaged youth in Germany. For his engagement in bringing music and the arts to young people in Germany and for his commitment to the power of music as a force for good, Shelley was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany by President Steinmeier.

In his new role at Pacific Symphony, Shelley will build on the orchestra's educational and community engagement initiatives, helping to shape a vibrant future for the arts in Southern California.

"Alexander's dedication to developing young talent is inspiring," added President and CEO John Forsythe. "His vision of music as a vehicle for community connection and education aligns perfectly with Pacific Symphony's. We know that his dynamic leadership will guide our orchestra into its next era through inclusive programming, storytelling, meaningful connections and cultural celebration. We can't wait to welcome Alexander to Orange County."

As Artistic and Music Director, Shelley will conduct eight of Pacific Symphony's 12 Classical subscription weeks, plus special events, education and community engagement work, recordings and other special projects in the 2026-27 season. As Music Director Designate in 2025-26, Shelley will lead four subscription weeks and St.Clair will lead three, providing a seamless leadership transition.

More about Alexander Shelley

One of the foremost conductors of his generation, Alexander Shelley is "a natural communicator, both on and off the podium" (*Daily Telegraph*), regularly performing across six continents with the world's finest orchestras and soloists.

He has collaborated with Lang Lang, Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, Renée Fleming and Thomas Hampson, among other renowned artists, and with some of the finest orchestras of Europe, the Americas, Asia and Australasia, including Leipzig's Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Deutsche Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Helsinki, Hong Kong, Luxembourg, Malaysian, Oslo, Rotterdam and Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestras, and the Sao Paulo, Houston, Montreal, Toronto, Munich, Singapore, Melbourne, Sydney and New Zealand symphony orchestras.

Born in London to celebrated concert pianists Howard Shelley and Hilary Macnamara, Shelley began playing the piano as a toddler and later learned to play the cello. He gained widespread attention when he was unanimously awarded first prize at the 2005 Leeds Conductors' Competition, praised as "the most exciting and gifted young conductor to have taken this highly prestigious award."

As his career on the symphonic stage subsequently flourished so did his operatic credentials, and he has since led productions at the Royal Danish Opera, Opera Lyra/National Arts Centre, Canadian Opera Company/National Arts Centre, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Opéra National de Montpellier and Opera North (Leeds).

About Pacific Symphony

Pacific Symphony, under the dynamic leadership of Music Director Carl St.Clair since 1990, has been the resident orchestra of Orange County's Segerstrom Center for the Arts and performs in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. Founded in 1978, the Symphony is the largest orchestra formed in the U.S. in the last 50 years and is not only a fixture of musical life in Southern California but is also recognized as an outstanding ensemble making strides on both the national and international scenes.

Committed to commissioning new works, its recorded catalog includes works of Bolcom, Corigliano, Danielpour, Daugherty, Foss, Glass, Goldenthal, MacMillan and Ticheli. The Symphony has earned recognition both nationally and internationally, including a debut at Carnegie Hall in 2018, followed by a tour of China, and a national broadcast on PBS's "Great Performances." The orchestra presents more than 100 concerts and events annually and offers a rich array of award-winning education and community engagement programs, inspiring more than 300,000 residents of all ages. Located between Los Angeles and San Diego, Orange County is a major cultural, economic and educational hub, blending innovation, tourism and a vibrant arts scene anchored by the Segerstrom Center and Pacific Symphony.

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Images: Alexander Shelley, credit Doug Gifford

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