



2025-26 Hal & Jeanette Segerstrom
Family Foundation Classical Series

FROM MOZART TO MAHLER

Preview Talk at 7 p.m.
KUSC midday host Alan Chapman
Thursday, Feb. 26, 2026 @ 8 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 27, 2026 @ 8 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 28, 2026 @ 8 p.m.

Eduardo Strausser, conductor
Yoav Levanon, piano
Pacific Symphony

MOZART Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K. 488
Allegro
Adagio
Allegro assai
Yoav Levanon, piano

—INTERMISSION—

MAHLER Symphony No. 1 in D Major "Titan"
Langsam schleppend
Kräftig bewegt
Feierlich und gemessen
Stürmisch bewegt

Thursday's concert is dedicated to the memory
of Dr. Don Hecht.

The 2025-26 season piano soloists are generously
sponsored by The Michelle F. Rohé Fund

Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall



Classical
California
KUSC



ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Eduardo Strausser, guest conductor



Brazilian conductor Eduardo Strausser serves as the Principal Conductor and Music Director of Norrlandsoperan. Renowned internationally for his versatility across both symphonic and operatic repertoire, he is deeply committed to contemporary music and brings a unique energy and dynamism

to his performances. In the 2025-26 season, Strausser will conduct Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* with Norrlandsoperan and return to Theater Basel for a new production of Massenet's *Don Quichotte*. In the symphonic arena, he appears regularly as a guest conductor, returning to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the North Carolina Symphony, while also debuting with the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and Pacific Symphony. Alongside core repertoire, Strausser champions contemporary music, and over the course of this season he conducts works by living composers including Anna Clyne, Missy Mazzoli, Thea Musgrave, Nina Shekhar, Jessie Montgomery and Andrea Tarrodi.

Strausser regularly collaborates with orchestras such as Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, The Hallé, Opéra Orchestre National de Montpellier, Philharmonie Zuidnederland, Kansas City Symphony, Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Previously Resident Conductor of Teatro São Paulo from 2014 to 2016, Strausser led productions in São Paulo of *Elektra* and Carlos Gomes' rarely performed *Fosca*, alongside *The Nutcracker* with Balé da Cidade de São Paulo and a striking staging of Mahler's Symphony No. 1 in collaboration with director Stefano Poda. Since then, Strausser's operatic engagements have expanded across Europe. He has conducted *Tosca* for both Northern Ireland Opera and Theater Magdeburg, and led productions at Staatstheater Hannover, including *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Hänsel und Gretel* and *Die Zauberflöte*. His credits also include Leonard Evers' *Die Odyssee* at Zurich Opera and appearances at Teatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro and Teatro Verdi di Padova with *La Bohème*. Last season, Strausser conducted the world premiere of Jenny Wilson's debut opera, *The Lovers*, in March 2025 with Norrlandsoperan. Strausser regularly collaborates with renowned soloists such as Javier Perianes, Nobuyuki Tsujii, Alexandra Lowe, Isata Kanneh-Mason, Marie-Ange Nguci, Paul Lewis, Augustin Hadelich, Richard Galliano, Cédric Tiberghien, and Steven Osborne, among others. A skilled polyglot, he speaks eight languages fluently, including German, Italian, French, Spanish and Hebrew.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Yoav Levanon, piano



"Beautiful sound, effortlessly virtuosic, with great inner security" – Yoav Levanon already shows tremendous power and maturity, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented on the 21-year-old pianist's appearance at the Burghofspiele in the Rheingau.

Highlights of Yoav Levanon's 2025-26 season include recital appearances at the prestigious Brucknerhaus Linz, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and as part of the Jerusalem Music Centre's International Series, alongside performances at Italy's historic Teatro Sociale di Rovigo and the renowned Chopin-Gesellschaft Hannover. Further establishing his reputation on the international stage, Yoav Levanon will collaborate with leading orchestras including Pacific Symphony under Eduardo Strausser, the WDR Symphony Orchestra conducted by Constantinos Carydis, and the Israel Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Christoph Poppen.

Previous appearances cover solo recitals at Wigmore Hall, Tonhalle Zürich, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, the Lucerne Piano Festival and Wiener Konzerthaus. Additionally, he was invited to perform with renowned orchestras like Poznan Philharmonic Orchestra, Antwerp Symphony, Orquesta de la Comunidad de Madrid, Orquesta Sinfónica de Porto Casa da Música, and appeared at the Lanaudière Festival in Quebec.

At the beginning of 2021, Levanon took part in a filmed project with Daniel Barenboim and soon after he signed an exclusive recording agreement with Warner Classics. His debut album

A Monument for Beethoven with the label was released in May 2022. It attracted great attention from reviewers worldwide and garnered many excellent reviews. In February 2024, *Rachmaninoff: Etudes-Tableaux Op.39* followed his debut album: "There have been some tremendous versions of the *Études-tableaux* in the past few decades, but I would place Levanon's recording near to the top" (*Gramophone*). His latest release, *Liszt: Piano Concertos & Totentanz* (November 2024), features Liszt's Piano Concertos No.1 and 2, alongside other works by the composer, recorded with the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester under the baton of chief conductor Michael Sanderling.

Yoav Levanon first appeared on stage at the age of four and soon became a winner of his first National Piano Competition in Israel. He won his first Gold Medal at an International Piano Competition in the USA a year later and performed on the prestigious stage of Carnegie Hall in New York. Following his orchestral debut with the Israel Chamber Orchestra he went on to take part in the Tsinandali Festival, Georgia, where he played Mozart and Bach Concertos for Two Pianos and Orchestra with acclaimed pianist Sergei Babayan. Later he received the "Young Talent Award" of the Fundación Excelentia and performed at a ceremony at the National Auditorium Madrid in the presence of Queen Sofia. In 2019, Yoav appeared as one of the youngest pianists ever in the festival history of the renowned Verbier Festival and was celebrated as a 'discovery.' His debut solo recital, broadcast globally on medici.tv, attracted the largest online audience of any at the 2019 Festival's events.

Yoav Levanon is guided by top piano professors and musicians. He was privileged to take part in the Piano Program for Outstanding Young Pianists at the Jerusalem Music Center, working with the prestigious American concert pianist Murray Perahia as well as working under the guidance of distinguished pianist Sir Andras Schiff in his artist performance studio at the Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin.

PROGRAM NOTES

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: Jan. 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria

Died: Dec. 5, 1791 in Vienna, Austria

Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K. 488



Composed: 1786

Premiered: Spring 1786 in Vienna, with the composer as soloist and conductor.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Apr. 13, 2019 in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall with Jean-Marie Zeitouni conducting and Juho Pohjonen as soloist.

Instrumentation: One flute, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, strings, and solo piano.

Approximate duration: 26 minutes.

Mozart was prolific from boyhood onward; he seemed to become increasingly productive as time went on, with this year or that one singled out for particular significance. And 1786, when he composed the Piano Concerto No. 23, was certainly one of those important years: it came toward the end of a span of two and one-half years when he wrote a dozen piano concertos, including many of his greatest. No. 23 was one of three he wrote in that year; the fact that he was hard at work on *The Marriage of Figaro* at the same time may help account for the operatic, singing quality we hear in these concertos.

This outpouring of piano works came at an auspicious time for Mozart—six years after his success with the opera *Idomeneo*, when his popularity as a composer and piano soloist was high with the Viennese public. He and his best students often performed his piano concertos at subscription concerts, known as “academies,” which were successful events during the Lenten season. It was for one of these concerts that he composed the Concerto No. 23.

Musicologists tell us that Mozart often reserved this concerto’s key of A major for warm, brightly lit works like this one. But in this case, after the unassuming gentleness of its opening melody, the concerto’s warmth is deepened by occasional melancholy. The music soon challenges us as listeners, gathering weight as it goes. The discourse between soloist and ensemble is spontaneous, rather than formulaic, and reaches a climax in the second movement, a remarkable adagio. Here, couched in the slow, rocking Italian rhythm of a Siciliano, Mozart surprises us with leaping intervals and daring chromaticism. In the lively third movement, the concerto’s occasional melancholy is resolved—as so often in Mozart’s concertos—in a joyful rondo that displays the composer’s incomparable abundance of melodic invention.

Gustav Mahler

Born: July 7, 1860 in Kaliště, Austria-Hungary (now in the Czech Republic)

Died: May 18, 1911 in Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 1 in D Major



Composed: 1887-88; revised in 1893 and 1898

Premiered: Nov. 20, 1889 at the Vigadó Concert Hall in Budapest, Hungary; final version premiered on Dec. 16, 1909 at Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by the composer.

Most recent Pacific Symphony

performance: Jun. 9, 2019 in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall with Carl St.Clair conducting.

Instrumentation: Four flutes including piccolo, four oboes including English horn, five clarinets including bass clarinet and e-flat clarinet, three bassoons including contrabassoon, seven horns, five trumpets, four trombones, one tuba, two timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

Approximate duration: 53 minutes.

Today we know Mahler primarily as a symphonist—some would say the pre-eminent symphonist since Beethoven. But during his lifetime, the acceptance that Mahler’s symphonies won from critics and the public was mostly grudging, barely hinting at the appreciation that these masterworks would receive later. His cycles of art songs placed him within in the lineage of the foremost German-language art-song composers but somehow did not establish him as a composer of greatness. As a conductor, on the other hand, Mahler was a giant of his day, with a reputation that made him perhaps the first modern celebrity-conductor. (His ill-fated stint as leader of the New York Philharmonic is one of the tragedies of his life and of American music.) As a conductor of opera he was a penetrating musical analyst with a tremendous sense of theater. All of these factors helped shape his approach to the symphony, which he reserved for his biggest ideas about music and the search for meaning in life. Often described as monumental, Mahler’s symphonies offer the listener an experience that is not only transcendently beautiful, but that also reflects Mahler’s experience in working through these ideas.

Born in 1860 in Bohemia, Mahler was one of the composers who toiled in the shadow of Beethoven, who had redefined the possibilities of symphonic form with his Choral Symphony, the Ninth. In 1888, when Mahler composed most of his Symphony No. 1, other composers were still incorporating the familiar, decorative conventions of the late Romantic era in their symphonies—Dvořák, Saint-Saëns, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky, to name a few. Though Brahms was also haunted by the specter of Beethoven, he worked as an apprentice might with a master’s tools and traditions. It was Mahler who faced the challenge of revolutionizing the form as Beethoven did, and who used it to express the fullness of meaning he found in the biggest metaphysical questions and the deepest personal experiences we face as human beings.

Musicologists marvel that the 29-year-old Mahler expected nothing but success when his First Symphony premiered in

Budapest on November 20, 1889. Instead, it was greeted with scattered boos and halfhearted applause. "Naively, I imagined it would be child's play for performers and listeners, and would have such immediate appeal that I should be able to live on the profits and go on composing," he told his friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner. By contrast, Brahms, who was in his 40s and a successful composer by the time he completed his first symphony, was tormented by anxiety over its introduction.

What could have caused Mahler to miscalculate the musical public's readiness for his Symphony No. 1 so grossly? No less than his later symphonies, this symphony incorporates formal innovations, jarring dissonances, and cheek-by-jowl juxtapositions of classical and popular musical motifs—elements that might have shocked contemporary listeners, but had lost all sense of novelty and risk for Mahler, whose work habits were obsessive and immersive. Though he did most of his work on this symphony in the year 1888, when he was 28, he drew upon musical sources dating back to his teens. Mahler may also have taken confidence from initial reaction to his 1884 song cycle, *Songs of a Wayfarer*, which was already revered by musical insiders though it had not yet achieved a wider following. Two of the cycle's songs provide thematic material for the symphony, and the love that inspired it—Mahler's thwarted affair with the soprano Johanna Richter—was a wellspring for the emotions we hear in the symphony.

As with many of his compositions, Mahler continued to revise and correct his Symphony No. 1 for years after its premiere. He completed the final performing edition in 1906. As the first movement of the symphony takes rise, we hear the legacy of Beethoven: the seemingly random accretion of natural sounds as they gather into music, evoking a beautiful spring morning. As the tempo hastens, the movement's key settles into D major and we hear the wayfarer's walking theme as he seeks consolation over love's disappointment. Many listeners hear a questing, self-questioning mind at work in Mahlerian movements such as this one, prompted by a wounding experience: As we listen, are we working through the lover's personal anguish? Or are we listening to a supreme artist's self-pity?

We know the rustic Austrian dances known as *Ländler* from composers dating back to Haydn, Beethoven, and Mozart (who loved to write them). But in Mahler, they are staples in his recurring juxtaposition of the elegant and the vulgar. In the second movement of this symphony, the example we hear is based on Mahler's 1880 song "Hans und Grethe." Some listeners hear suggestions of taking comfort through drinking here—a frequent element in such country dances. But any possible humor or sentimentality is eclipsed in the symphony's third movement, a funeral march that intensifies the contrast between elegance and vulgarity to a degree that Mahler's contemporary audiences found disturbing. Yes, that is the familiar children's song "Frere Jacques" (known in German as "Brüder Martin") that we hear in the midst of the grotesquely solemn funeral march. More street music follows—café songs, hints of *klezmer* and Magyar themes—before Mahler startlingly transports us to an extended lyrical passage that brings the movement to a close.

The symphony ends with one of the most theatrical movements in the symphonic repertory, as the hysteria of a violently dissonant opening evokes what Mahler called "the cry of a wounded heart." This agony yields to a peaceful, expansive melody borne up by cellos and violins; and though the pain of the opening bars returns, it includes trumpet fanfares suggesting the eventual triumph over the pain of lost love. Eventually we hear a reprise of the morning sounds that opened the symphony and a final interchange between optimism and despair. Mahler's scoring instructs that the horn players rise to their feet, playing "as if to drown out the entire orchestra" in triumphant resolution.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and has written numerous articles for magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and U.K. and hundreds of program notes for orchestras and opera companies. Operahound.com



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