

PACIFIC SYMPHONY PRESENTS

SUMMERFEST 2025

TCHAIKOVSKY SPECTACULAR: CONCERT OF HOPE

September 6, 2025 - 8PM

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DEAR SUMMER CONCERT FANS,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to **Tchaikovsky Spectacular: Concert of Hope**, the grand finale of **Pacific Symphony's 2025 SummerFest series** at the stunning Great Park Live in Irvine. On behalf of all of us at Pacific Symphony—thank you for joining us this evening for what promises to be an unforgettable night under the stars.

Tonight's concert is a tribute to the enduring power of music and the human spirit. With soaring melodies and dramatic intensity, we celebrate the passion and brilliance of Tchaikovsky's most iconic works. We open with the graceful Waltz from *Sleeping Beauty*, followed by his beloved Piano Concerto No. 1, brought to life by the remarkable Natasha Paremski. After intermission, we delve into the emotional depths of *Francesca da Rimini*, culminating in the thunderous energy of the *1812 Overture*, complete with a spectacular fireworks finale.

We are honored to present this evening's Concert of Hope in partnership with City of Hope Orange County, the Presenting Sponsor of our 2025 SummerFest series. This performance is a heartfelt celebration of courage, strength, and resilience—a tribute to all those affected by cancer, including survivors, patients, and their loved ones. We are deeply grateful for City of Hope's support and the inspiration they bring to our community.

Our sincere thanks also go to the **City of Irvine**, whose partnership and vision have made Great Park Live a welcoming summer home for live orchestral music. These concerts are only possible through the collaboration of city leaders, the dedication of our artists, and the enthusiasm of audience members like you.

As we look ahead, we're excited to launch the 2025–26 season at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. With a thrilling lineup of classical masterworks, world-class guest artists, dynamic Pops performances, and family-friendly programming, there's something for everyone this season.

The Classical Series will explore timeless compositions and bold new works. **The Pops Series**, led by Enrico Lopez-Yañez, brings a wide range of performances—from Dolly Parton's *Threads: My Songs in Symphony* to Danny Elfman's *Music from the Films of Tim Burton* and *My Fair Lady in Concert*. For young audiences, our **Family Musical Mornings** offer engaging, 45-minute concerts led by Assistant Conductor Pola Benke, designed to spark imagination and joy.

Subscriptions and single tickets are on sale now. Scan the QR code below to explore the extraordinary experiences ahead. Thank you for being part of our musical family and for making SummerFest such a vibrant celebration of community, artistry, and shared hope. We are honored to close this season with you tonight.

Wishing you a magical evening and a joyful year ahead,

John Forsyte
President & Chief Executive Officer
Pacific Symphony

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2025–26 Tickets



TCHAIKOVSKY SPECTACULAR: CONCERT OF HOPE **SPEND YOUR SUMMER WITH US**

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MUSIC DIRECTOR CARL ST. CLAIR



CARL ST. CLAIR
WILLIAM J. GILLESPIE
MUSIC DIRECTOR CHAIR

The 2024-25 season marked Music Director Carl St. Clair's 35th year leading Pacific Symphony. He is the longest-tenured American-born conductor of a major American orchestra. During St. Clair's lengthy history, Pacific Symphony has become the largest budgeted orchestra formed in the last 50 years. Pacific Symphony was invited by the League of American Orchestras to become the newest and youngest orchestra among America's Tier 1 Orchestras. Few orchestras can claim such rapid artistic development.

During his tenure, St. Clair has become widely recognized for his musically distinguished performances and his innovative approaches to programming. In April 2018, St. Clair led Pacific Symphony in its *sold-out* Carnegie Hall debut, celebrating Philip Glass' 80th birthday at the final concert of Carnegie's yearlong celebration of the preeminent composer. The concert ended with a standing ovation and with *The New York Times* calling the Symphony "a major ensemble!" St. Clair led Pacific Symphony on its first tour to China in May 2018, the orchestra's first international tour since touring Europe in 2006. The orchestra's European tour included playing concerts in nine cities (including Munich, Frankfurt, Cologne, Lucerne, and Vienna) in three countries appearing before capacity houses and receiving standing ovations and critical acclaim. The *Hannoversche Allgemeine* raved, "St. Clair and his fabulous orchestra completely won over Hanover...with spirit, a sense of sound, and utterly breathtaking precision" and Cologne's *General Anzeiger* exclaimed, "Electrifying...captivating!"

The orchestra made its national PBS debut in June 2018 on *Great Performances* with Peter Boyer's *Ellis Island: The Dream of America*, conducted by St. Clair. Among St. Clair's many creative endeavors are the highly acclaimed American Composers Festival, which began in 2000, and the opera initiative, "Symphonic Voices," which has included concert-opera productions of *Madama Butterfly*, *The Magic Flute*, *Aida*, *Turandot*, *Carmen*, *La Traviata*, *Tosca*, *Rigoletto*, and *La Bohème* in previous seasons.

St. Clair's commitment to the development and performance of new works by composers is evident in the wealth of commissions and recordings by the Symphony. Beginning in the 2023-24 season, Viet Cuong was named the Symphony's Composer-in-Residence. The 2016-17 season featured commissions from pianist/composer Conrad Tao and Composer-in-Residence Narong Prangcharoen, a follow-up to the slate of recordings of works commissioned and performed by the Symphony in recent years. Other commissions include John Wineglass' *Alone*

Together, William Bolcom's *Songs of Lorca* and *Prometheus*, Elliot Goldenthal's *Symphony in G-sharp minor*, Richard Danielpour's *Toward a Season of Peace*, Philip Glass' *The Passion of Ramakrishna*, and Michael Daugherty's *Mount Rushmore* and *The Gospel According to Sister Aimee*. St. Clair has led the orchestra in other critically acclaimed recordings including two piano concertos of Lukas Foss, Danielpour's *An American Requiem*, and Goldenthal's *Fire Water Paper: A Vietnam Oratorio* with cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Other commissioned composers include James Newton Howard, Zhou Long, Tobias Picker, Frank Ticheli, Sir James MacMillan, Chen Yi, Curt Cacioppo, Stephen Scott, Jim Self (Pacific Symphony's former Principal Tubist), and Christopher Theofanidis.

Internationally, St. Clair has appeared with orchestras throughout the world. He has led orchestras in Asia, Central and South America, and Europe. In January 2024, following a 27-year relationship with Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal (Germany), St. Clair was named Honorary Guest Conductor for Life. In 2023, he concluded a successful 10-year tenure as Music Director with the National Symphony of Costa Rica. From 2008-10, St. Clair was General Music Director for the Komische Oper in Berlin. He also served as General Music Director and Chief Conductor of the German National Theater and Staatskapelle (GNTS) in Weimar, Germany, where he led Wagner's *Ring Cycle* to critical acclaim. He was the first non-European to hold this position at the GNTS; the role also gave him the distinction of simultaneously leading one of the newest orchestras in America and one of the oldest in Europe.

St. Clair has led the Boston Symphony Orchestra (where he served as Assistant Conductor for several years 1985-90), New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, Atlanta, Houston, Indianapolis, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver symphonies, among many.

Carl St. Clair is a strong advocate of music education for all ages and is internationally recognized for his distinguished career as a master teacher. He has been essential to the creation and implementation of the Symphony's extensive education and community engagement programs. In addition to his professional conducting career, St. Clair has worked with most major music schools across the country. He received an Honorary Doctorate from Chapman University and has served as a Presidential Fellow, working closely with the students of the College of the Performing Arts (2018-22). St. Clair has been named "Distinguished Alumni" at the University of Texas Butler School of Music beginning 2019. And, for over 30 years, he has had a continuing relationship with the USC Thornton School of Music where he is Artistic Leader and Principal Conductor of the orchestral and large ensemble program.





ABOUT PACIFIC SYMPHONY

Pacific Symphony is the largest orchestra formed in the United States in the past 50 years and has earned national recognition for its adventurous programming, community engagement, and artistic growth. Founded in 1978, the Symphony has been led for 35 years by Carl St.Clair who is honored with the title of Music Director Laureate starting in the 2025-26 season. In 2024, Alexander Shelley was named Artistic and Music Director Designate for the 2025-26 season and will begin his full-time tenure in the 2026-27 season, marking a bold new chapter in the Symphony's artistic evolution.

With a purpose to lift the human spirit through the power of music, the Symphony is a pillar of the cultural landscape of Southern California, enriching lives and bringing communities together through creative and diverse programming. As the resident orchestra of the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, the Symphony presents more than 100 concerts and events each year alongside a rich array of education and community engagement programs, reaching more than 300,000 residents of all ages.

Pacific Symphony features an expansive range of programming through the Classical Series, the beloved Pops Series led by Principal Pops Conductor Enrico Lopez-Yañez, SummerFest at the Great Park Live outdoor venue in Irvine, and engaging Family Musical Mornings concerts for young children and their families. In its 47-year history, Pacific Symphony has gained national and international recognition, with recent highlights including a 2018 Carnegie Hall debut in celebration of composer Philip Glass; a five-city tour of China; and a PBS *Great Performances* broadcast of Peter Boyer's *Ellis Island: The Dream of America*.

Pacific Symphony's education and community engagement programs have been recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts, expanding access to orchestral music and fostering a lifelong connection to the arts. These include the Frieda Belinfante Class Act program, which enhances music education in elementary schools; arts-X-press, a summer arts program for middle school students; and Heartstrings, which brings free access to music to community members by partnering with local schools, nonprofits, and social service agencies. Pacific Symphony also nurtures the next generation of musicians through its renowned youth ensembles, including Pacific Symphony Youth Orchestra, Youth Wind Ensemble, Santiago Strings, and Youth Concert Band. These groups have toured internationally, earned prestigious awards, and provided young artists with opportunities to excel.

By combining artistic excellence with a commitment to education and accessibility, Pacific Symphony continues to enrich lives, foster new talent, and create meaningful connections throughout Southern California. Its innovative programs ensure music remains a vital part of the community's cultural fabric.

PACIFIC SYMPHONY MUSICIANS

Carl St.Clair • Music Director

William J. Gillespie Music Director Chair

Alexander Shelley • Artistic and Music Director Designate

Phillip N. and Mary A. Lyons Artistic and Music Director Designate Chair

Enrico Lopez-Yañez • Principal Pops Conductor

Hal and Jeanette Segerstrom Family Foundation Principal Pops Conductor Chair

Richard Kaufman • Principal Pops Conductor Laureate

Jacob Sustaita • Assistant Conductor

Mary E. Moore Family Assistant Conductor Chair

FIRST VIOLIN

Dennis Kim

*Concertmaster;
Eleanor and Michael Gordon Chair*

Yoomin Seo

*Associate Concertmaster
Judy and Wes Whitmore Chair*

Jeanne Skrocki

*Assistant Concertmaster
Arlene and Seymour Grubman Chair*

Michael Siess

Christine Frank

Ayako Sugaya

Ann Shiau Tenney **30**

Joanna Lee+

Robert Schumitzky

Agnes Gottschewski

Dana Freeman

Julie Ahn

Paul Manaster

SECOND VIOLIN

Madalyn Parnas Möller *

Elizabeth and John Stahr Chair

Jennise Hwang**

Yen Ping Lai

Yu-Tong Sharp **30**

Ako Kojian+ **25**

Linda Owen

Sooah Kim

MarlaJoy Weisshaar

Alice Miller-Wrate

Shelly Shi

VIOLA

Meredith Crawford*

Leona Aronoff-Saddaca Chair

Victor de Almeida**

Carolyn Riley

John Acevedo

Hanbyul Jang

Julia Staudhammer

Joseph Wen-Xiang Zhang **30**

Cheryl Gates

Phillip Triggs

CELLO

Warren Hagerty*

Catherine and James Emmi Chair

Benjamin Lash**

Robert Vos

László Mezö

Ian McKinnell **45**

M. Andrew Honea

Rudolph Stein

Emma Lee

BASS

Richard Cassarino *

Douglas Basye**

Christian Kollgaard

David Parmeter+ **30**

Andrew Chilcote

David Black **45**

Andrew Bumatay

Constance Deeter

FLUTE

Benjamin Smolen*

Valerie and Hans Imhof Chair

Sharon O'Connor **45**

Cynthia Ellis **45**

PICCOLO

Cynthia Ellis

OBOE

Jessica Pearlman **15**

Suzanne R. Chonette Chair

Ted Sugata **10**

ENGLISH HORN

Lelie Resnick

CLARINET

Robert Walker*

The Hanson Family Foundation Chair

David Chang

Charlie and Ling Zhang Chair

BASS CLARINET

Joshua Ranz

BASSOON

Rose Corrigan*

Ruth Ann and John Evans Chair

Elliott Moreau **20**

Andrew Klein

Allen Savedoff

CONTRABASSOON

Allen Savedoff

FRENCH HORN

Keith Popejoy* **20**

Adedeji Ogunfolu

Kaylet Torrez**

Henry Bond

TRUMPET

Barry Perkins*

Susie and Steve Perry Chair

Tony Ellis

TROMBONE

Michael Hoffman*

David Stetson

TUBA

Vacant

TIMPANI

Vacant

PERCUSSION

Robert A. Slack*

HARP

Michelle Temple

The Sungaila Family Chair

* Principal

** Assistant Principal

+ On Leave

Celebrating **15** **20** **25**

30 **40** **45**

years with Pacific Symphony
this season.

The musicians of Pacific Symphony
are members of the American
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TCHAIKOVSKY SPECTACULAR: CONCERT OF HOPE

Saturday, September 6 @ 8 PM

Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor
Natasha Paremski, piano
Pacific Symphony

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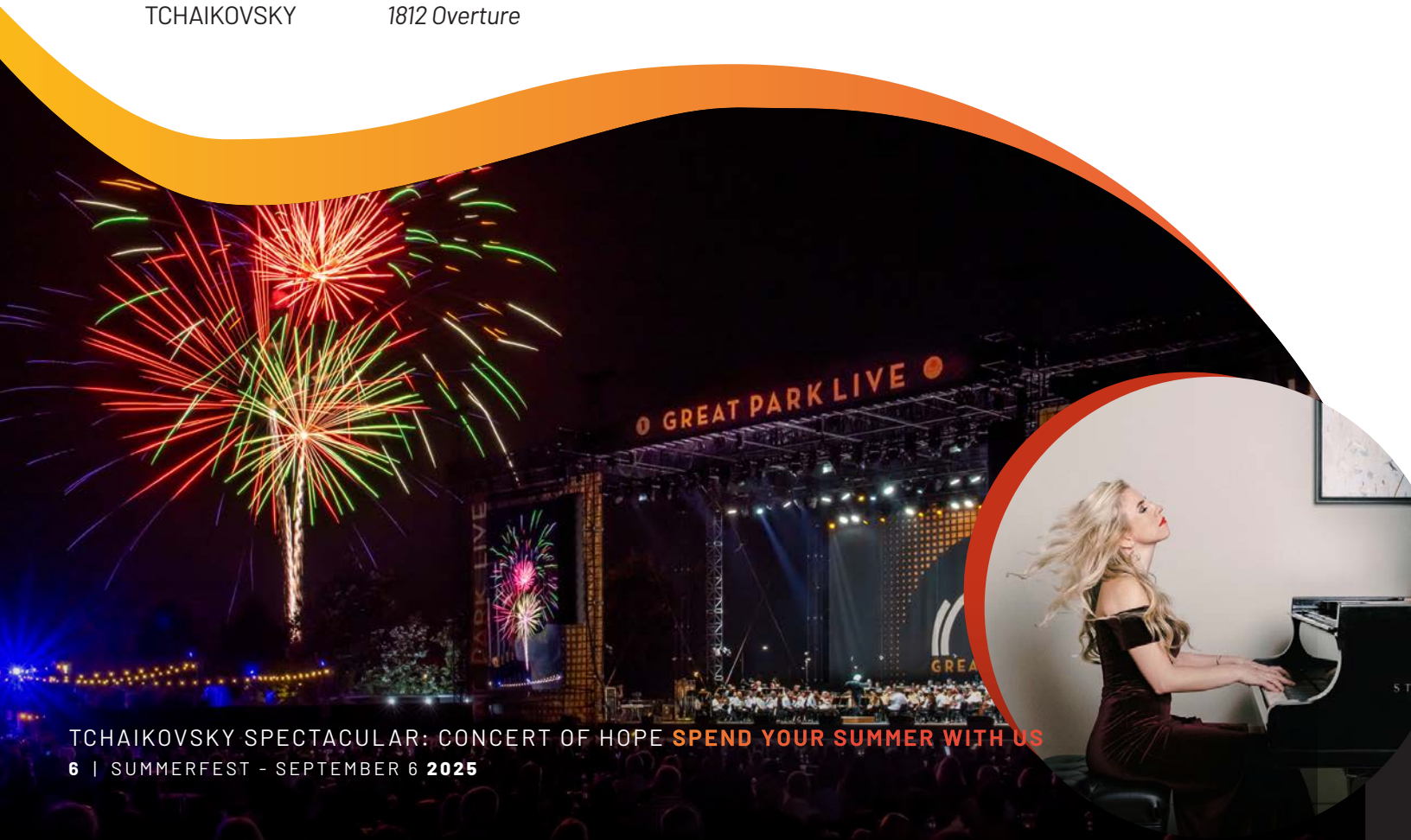
Tchaikovsky Spectacular: Concert of Hope is a heartwarming concert that is a powerful reminder of the strength, resilience, and unwavering spirit of cancer survivors, patients, and their loved ones.

PROGRAM

TCHAIKOVSKY *Waltz from Sleeping Beauty*
TCHAIKOVSKY *Piano Concerto No.1 in B-flat Minor, Op.23*
 I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso
 II. Andantino semplice
 III. Allegro con fuoco
Natasha Paremski, piano

~ Intermission ~

TCHAIKOVSKY *Francesca da Rimini*
TCHAIKOVSKY *1812 Overture*



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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Natasha Paremski, piano

With her consistently striking and dynamic performances, pianist Natasha Paremski reveals astounding virtuosity and profound interpretations. She continues to generate excitement from all corners as she wins over audiences with her musical sensibility and a powerful, flawless technique.

Paremski is a regular return guest of major orchestras, including Minnesota Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Grant Park Festival, Winnipeg Symphony, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Oregon Symphony, Elgin Symphony, Colorado Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Virginia Symphony, and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, with whom she has performed and toured frequently since 2008 at venues such as Royal Albert Hall, Royal Festival Hall, and Cadogan Hall. She has also appeared with Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Diego Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Houston Symphony, NAC Orchestra in Ottawa, and Nashville Symphony. In Europe, she has performed with Bournemouth Symphony, Vienna's Tonkünstler Orchester, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Orchestre de Bretagne, Orchestre de Nancy, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Tonhalle Orchester Zurich, and Moscow Philharmonic, under conductors including Thomas Dausgaard, Peter Oundjian, Andres Orozco-Estrada, Jeffrey Kahane, James Gaffigan, JoAnn Falletta, Fabien Gabel, Rossen Milanov, and Andrew Litton. She has toured with Gidon Kremer and Kremerata Baltica in Latvia, Benelux, the U.K., and Austria, and appeared with the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra.

Paremski has given recitals at the Auditorium du Louvre in Paris, Wigmore Hall, Schloss Elmau, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival, Verbier Festival, San Francisco Performances, Seattle's Meany Hall, Kansas City's Harriman Jewell Series, Santa Fe's Lensic Theater, Ludwigshafen BASF Series, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Tokyo's Musashino Performing Arts Center, and on the Rising Stars Series of Gilmore and Ravinia Festivals.

A passionate chamber musician, Paremski is a regular recital partner of GRAMMY®-winning cellist Zuill Bailey, with whom she has recorded a number of CDs. Their *Britten* album on Telarc debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard Classical Chart and remained there for weeks, in addition to being featured on *The New York Times Playlist*. She has appeared at chamber festivals including Jeffrey Kahane's Green Music Center ChamberFest, Lockenhaus, Toronto, Sitka Summer Music, and Cape Cod Chamber Music.

Paremski was awarded the Gilmore Young Artist Prize in 2006 at 18, the Prix Montblanc in 2007, and the Orpheum Stiftung Prize in Switzerland. In September 2010, she was named the Classical Recording Foundation's Young Artist of the Year. Her first recital album, released in 2011, topped the Billboard Classical Charts and was re-released on the Steinway & Sons label in 2016 featuring Islamey on Steinway's Spirio technology. In 2012, she



recorded Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 and Rachmaninoff's Paganini Rhapsody with the Royal Philharmonic and Fabien Gabel.

With a strong focus on new music, Paremski's repertoire reflects artistic maturity beyond her years. In 2010-11, she premiered a sonata written for her by Gabriel Kahane, later included on her solo album.

She has extended her artistry beyond the concert hall, appearing in Benjamin Millepied's *Danses Concertantes* at New York's Joyce Theater, in a BBC two-part film on Tchaikovsky, and in *Twin Spirits* with Sting and Trudie Styler, exploring the lives of Robert and Clara Schumann.

Paremski began piano studies at age four in Moscow, later studying at San Francisco Conservatory and Mannes College of Music in New York, where she graduated in 2007. She made her professional debut at nine with El Camino Youth Symphony, and at fifteen debuted with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, recording two discs with the Moscow Philharmonic.

Born in Moscow, she moved to the United States at eight, became a U.S. citizen shortly thereafter, and is now based in New York City, where she serves as Artistic Director of the New York Piano Society, a non-profit supporting pianists whose professions lie outside of music.

ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Francesco Lecce-Chong

American conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong has established himself as a respected leader in the orchestral world through his acclaimed performances, innovative projects, and passionate advocacy for the arts. He was appointed Music Director of two U.S. orchestras, the Eugene Symphony and the Santa Rosa Symphony, before he turned 30. With those groups, he successfully launched several groundbreaking projects, commissioning over a dozen major orchestral works, and building innovative community partnerships. Now, in his seventh season leading the Santa Rosa Symphony, he has grown the orchestra's reputation as one of the most exciting and important regional orchestras in the U.S. with performances at one of the renowned concert halls in the world, the Green Music Center. In the 2024-25 season, Lecce-Chong took on the role of Artistic Partner with the Eugene Symphony, a newly created position which allows him to further develop his artistic vision with the orchestra.

Lecce-Chong regularly appears with major orchestras around the country from the San Francisco Symphony to the New York Philharmonic, collaborating with top soloists such as Renée Fleming and Itzhak Perlman. His subscription debut with the San Francisco Symphony was described by *The San Francisco Chronicle* as "first rate" and pointed out the "vitality and brilliance of the music-making he drew from members of the San Francisco Symphony." Other recent subscription debuts include the Seattle Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Utah Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Louisville Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, Detroit Symphony, and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. In 2023, Lecce-Chong debuted in Europe at the prestigious George Enescu Festival with the Romanian National Radio Orchestra, which led to an immediate re-invitation and established a regular relationship with the orchestra.

Through his leadership, Lecce-Chong has fostered an unparalleled dedication to the future of the orchestral art form through commissions, community initiatives, and arts education. One of his first large-scale endeavors was the "First Symphony Project," which consisted of major commissions from the next generation of renowned composers across four seasons, complete with multiple residencies in the communities. In less than a decade, he has brought over a dozen major new orchestral works into the repertoire from composers like Pulitzer Prize winner Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, GRAMMY® winner Michael Daugherty, Conrad Tao, Clarice Assad, and Gabriella Smith. During the pandemic, the Santa Rosa Symphony reached



over two million households in the Bay Area through its "Santa Rosa Symphony Presents" TV broadcasts through local PBS. The programming included over 20 works by living composers and a partnership with Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, culminating in a recording of her music conducted by Lecce-Chong released in 2022 on the Delos label, the first CD release in the orchestra's history.

Lecce-Chong is equally committed to the opera repertoire, having first conducted performances of Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* at age 24 in New York City. He continued to build his opera credentials as staff conductor with the Santa Fe Opera and leading performances with the Florentine Opera in Milwaukee. More recently, he led the Eugene Symphony through the most ambitious project in its history: a semi-staged presentation of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. In Santa Rosa, Lecce-Chong conducted and directed Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, complete with his own original dialogue, in addition to partnering with a local arts high school to create a multi-disciplinary experience of the opera.

PROGRAM NOTES

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born: May 7, 1840 in Votkinsk, Russian Empire

Died: November 6, 1893 in St. Petersburg, Russian Empire

Waltz from *Sleeping Beauty*

Composed: 1888–1889

Premiered: January 15, 1890 at the Mariinsky Theatre, St. Petersburg.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: September 8, 2001, at the Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre with Dimitri Liss conducting.

Approximate duration: 5 minutes

Instrumentation: Two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.



When Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was approached in 1888 with the idea of composing a ballet based on the beloved fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*, he was instantly captivated. That autumn, he began crafting what would become one of his most enduring scores, working in close collaboration with legendary choreographer Marius Petipa of the Imperial Ballet in St. Petersburg. Although a concert tour promoting his newly completed Symphony No. 5 briefly delayed progress, Tchaikovsky completed the entire *Sleeping Beauty* score in just 40 days—a remarkable feat. He would later describe it as one of his finest achievements: a “dancing symphony” that captures themes of fate, love, and transformation. The sweeping Waltz from Act I accompanies a grand celebration as four princes arrive to vie for the hand of Princess Aurora. Elegant, effervescent, and instantly recognizable, it remains the most iconic and widely loved moment in the entire ballet. Composer Igor Stravinsky later hailed the work as “the convincing example of Tchaikovsky’s great creative power”—a tribute well deserved.

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Piano Concerto No.1 in B-flat Minor

Composed: 1874–1875

Premiered: October 25, 1875, in the Music Hall in Boston, conducted by B.J. Lang with Hans von Bülow at the piano.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: October 22, 2022, in the Renée & Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, with Carl St.Clair conducting and Claire Huangci as soloist.

Approximate duration: 32 minutes

Instrumentation: Solo piano, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.



Trained as a pianist as well as a composer, Tchaikovsky was born into the great age of virtuosic concerto composition—the Romantic era of classical music—and his spectacular Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra is one of the staples of the genre. Concertos had been written for centuries, but Beethoven (b. 1770) had raised the stakes; by 1875, when Tchaikovsky was 35 and was composing his Piano Concerto No. 1, pianos and piano concerts had grown in size and spectacle. Composers followed Beethoven’s lead, relishing the chance to create large-scaled, serious concertos showcasing the soloist’s technical skills and the composer’s flair for musical theatricality. More than just popular hits, these concertos also expressed a basic principle of the Romantic age: the individual’s struggle against massed opposition, the one versus the many. But they were also vehicles for charismatic showmanship and elevated the soloist to a sort of cult-virtuoso status. Often seemingly unplayable, they helped make Paganini and Liszt into Western culture’s defining musical superstars.

Playing the seemingly unplayable made the legendary violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782 – 1840) a cult figure with rumored satanic connections that were taken seriously by his adoring public—how else could he play the impossible? Oddly, “unplayable” also turns out to be a fateful word in the performance history of concertos by the hapless Tchaikovsky, who lacked both luck and self-confidence. The concerto literature is rife with works that are now popular, their greatness undisputed, that were condemned by critics and soloists back in the day; most often, they were described as having been written “against the instrument” or as technically unplayable. Were soloists hedging their bets? It’s hard to know; playing the unplayable was, after all, their calling card. Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 and the Violin Concerto in D both suffered this characterization, and both are now among the most beloved concertos in the standard repertory.

When it came to the violin, Tchaikovsky was on less-than-familiar ground, and he proceeded with nervous caution after being inspired by Edouard Lalo’s exuberant five-movement concerto. (Tchaikovsky’s work with violinists in crafting the score didn’t help ease its way into the world.) But Tchaikovsky was a respected pianist, and though he lacked the encyclopedic technique of Russia’s foremost soloists, he could be confident of his knowledge of the instrument. For it he created a concerto in which towering grandeur and poetic utterance are abundant and unmistakable—earmarks of a hit concerto. The melodies are gorgeously lyrical and are well suited to the instrument’s expressive capabilities. So why did Tchaikovsky’s friend and possibly the intended dedicatee for the score, the great

PROGRAM NOTES

pianist Nikolai Rubinstein, diss it as artistically crude and, yes, unplayable? Musicologists are still speculating about the reasons, though after its quick success with the public, critics, and other pianists, Rubinstein changed his mind and praised it effusively.

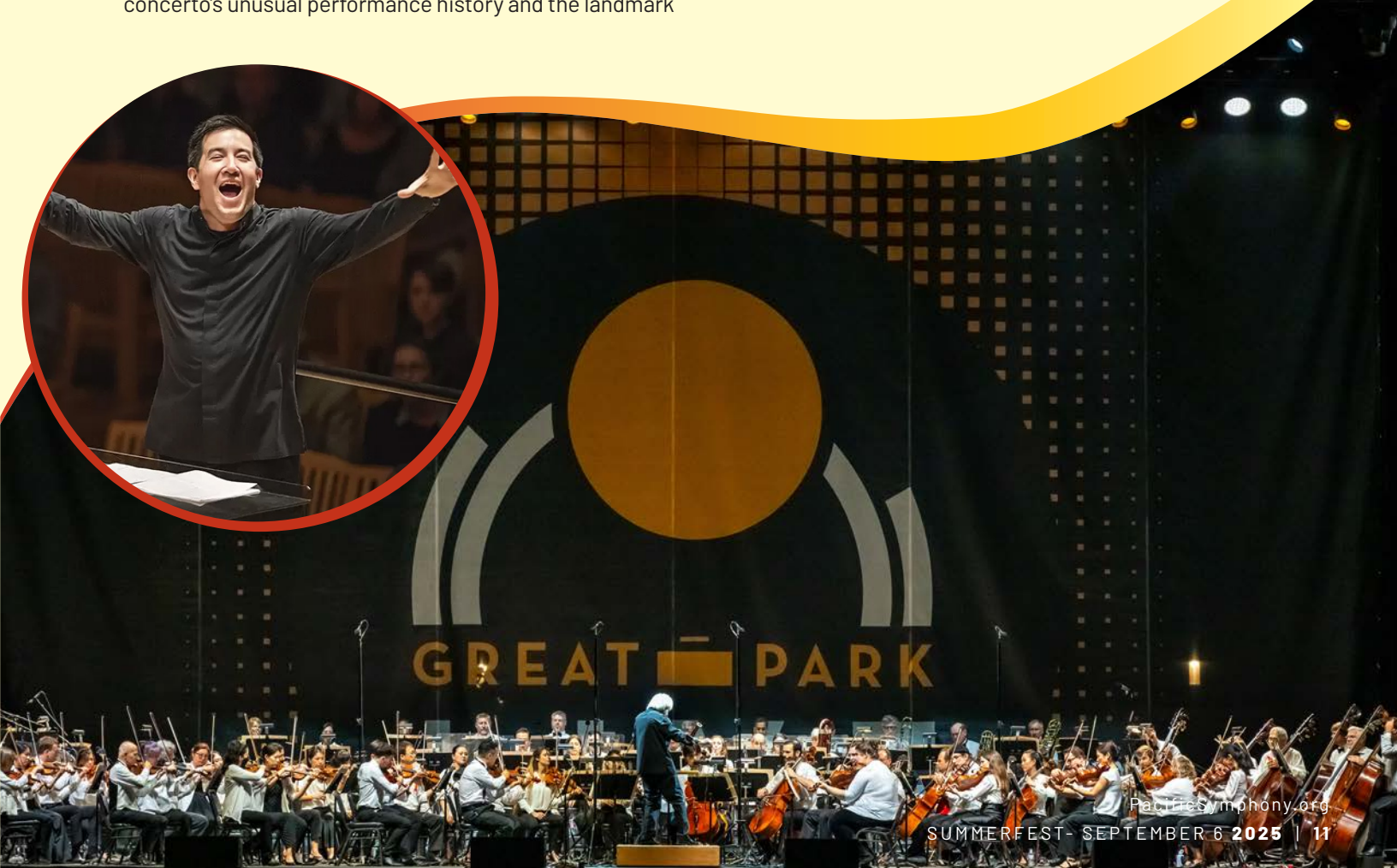
We can hear a characteristically Romantic spirit of heroic rebellion in this concerto. It bursts upon us with an opening that is explosive and iconic: a moment of brassy orchestral fanfare introducing thunderous piano chords grouped in threes. They are played in unison with both hands as they move in bold, multi-octave leaps up the keyboard.

We all have this stunningly dramatic, oft-quoted opening in our heads. But listen anew and notice Tchaikovsky's remarkable musical calculation here: The piano soloist grabs the primary role, even entering alone. But once the orchestra enters, it has the melody. Those chords, so full of life and confidence, actually accompany the orchestra's statement. They can be heard as a heroic response to the melodic lifeline. Once it has been introduced, the piano takes up the melody in a manner that is vigorous but more moderated and less tumultuous, setting up a pattern of alternating grandeur and lyricism that prevails throughout this concerto.

As 21st-century listeners, we are the beneficiaries of this concerto's unusual performance history and the landmark

interpretation of the great American pianist Van Cliburn (1934 – 2013). When Cliburn won the first International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow in 1958 (as a tall, rangy, young-looking 23-year-old), the Cold War was at its height; Sputnik had been launched the previous year, and the space race and nuclear arms race were at full tilt. His victory came with this concerto, and it had an impact we can scarcely imagine now. He received a tickertape parade down Broadway and instantly became an American hero. But the response was even more dramatic in Moscow, where weeping listeners rushed the stage and mobbed him. Why?

In a sense, the answer goes back to the concerto's duality—the alternation of heroic and poetic sound that Tchaikovsky deftly gives us, mixing powerful chords and parallel octaves with rippling passages of rapid fingerwork that require flawless legato. Yes, superbly trained Soviet-era pianists combined accuracy and power. But where was the passionate individuality of their predecessors? Under the Soviet system, such highly personalized expressiveness was shunned. But in Cliburn's performance, the judges heard this kind of interpretive artistry combined with superb technique, and the conclusion was undeniable; listeners heard a cherished part of their national patrimony being restored to them by the unlikelyst of artists.



PROGRAM NOTES

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky *Francesca Da Rimini*, Op.32, Th 46

Composed: 1876

Premiered: 1877 in Moscow by the Russian Musical Society conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: November 16, 2024, in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall with Valentina Peleggi conducting.

Approximate duration: 22 minutes

Instrumentation: Three flutes including piccolo, three oboes including English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

Looking to the events of composers' lives to find insight into their compositions can be misleading, and musicologists often warn us against it. But Tchaikovsky is a notable exception. Historians have connected the expressiveness of his romantic narratives with his own deeply held, thwarted passions. In the tone poem *Francesca da Rimini* we almost certainly hear the turbulence of Tchaikovsky's own romantic feelings—feelings that he could only express in music.

Composers, painters, and writers have drawn inspiration from the story of Francesca and her lover Paolo since medieval times, when these lovers were trapped in a real-life melodrama. But the literary treatment goes back even further: to Ovid's mythic tale of the love affair between Mars and Venus, whose husband, Vulcan, found vengeance by forging an invisible net, locking them in an inescapable embrace. The historical Francesca, a 13th-Century Italian noblewoman, was also trapped... in a politically expedient, loveless marriage. Her affair with the dashing Paolo prompted her husband, Giovanni Malatesta—known as "Giovanni the lame"—to kill her. In the *Inferno*, Dante depicts the eternal punishment of the adulterous lovers as they are tossed by the swirling winds of a storm without end. Theirs is an eternity of remembered passion and unrequited yearning as they pass in midair, never reunited or touching ground.

Dante's masterpiece is one of several inspirations we hear in Tchaikovsky's intense, tempestuous *Francesca*. In a letter dated July of 1876, Tchaikovsky noted that "This morning, when I was in the train, I read [the Fifth Canto of Dante's *Inferno*] and was seized with a burning



desire to write a symphonic poem on *Francesca*." He also knew Liszt's "Dante" symphony on the same subject, and wrote about how the four revolutionary operas of Wagner's *Ring* cycle affected his composition despite his antipathy to most of the German composer's musical ideas. In a letter he called this connection "strange," but the result was music of remarkable intensity. An operatic setting by Zandonai came too late for Tchaikovsky to hear (1914), but Tchaikovsky had been composing operas since early in his career, and his way with Dante's narrative is unmistakably operatic. In it, Camille Saint-Saëns noted, "the gentlest and most kindly of men has unleashed a fearful tempest."

Much of what we know of Tchaikovsky's stormy inner life comes from scholarship on his violin concerto, which he composed in 1878, shortly after completing *Francesca*. This research has helped us understand more about Tchaikovsky's torment over the homosexual feelings he desperately repressed. To escape the pain of his failed marriage and the false hopes it represented, he sequestered himself in a country house and immersed himself in work on the concerto. Musicologists draw a straight line from his agonized, unconsummated marriage—which arose from a young woman's declaration of love in a letter—to Tatiana's declaration of love in the "letter scene" of *Eugene Onegin*, considered his greatest opera.

Are these painful experiences among the reasons why, in all his musical narratives on romantic themes, Tchaikovsky so convincingly expresses the dark side of love as well as its joys? Many listeners say yes. Even in *The Nutcracker*, a story of Christmas and children and toys, there's a bit of menace about young Clara's "Uncle Drosselmeyer." Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* captures the young lovers' romantic fervor, but it is tinged with tragedy from beginning to end. His *Francesca da Rimini* narrative is even darker. "But," as Saint-Saëns noted, "such was the composer's talent and supreme skill that one takes pleasure in [Francesca's and Paolo's] damnation and torture."

PROGRAM NOTES

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky **1812 Overture, Op. 49**

Composed: 1880

Premiered: August 20, 1882, in Moscow, conducted by Ippolit Al'tani under a tent near the almost-finished Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

Most recent Pacific Symphony

performance: September 7, 2024 at Great Park Live with Carl St.Clair conducting.

Approximate duration: 13 minutes

Instrumentation: Three flutes including piccolo, three oboes including English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings.

Few pieces in the orchestral repertoire have achieved the iconic status of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. Composed in 1880 to commemorate Russia's defense against Napoleon's Grande Armée in 1812, the overture is a tour de force of musical storytelling. It begins with



a somber, hymn-like melody, representing the prayers of the Russian people. As the music progresses, Tchaikovsky weaves in Russian folk songs and martial themes, building to a climactic battle scene. The famous use of cannon fire and ringing chimes in the finale creates a sense of triumphant celebration, symbolizing Russia's victory. Although Tchaikovsky himself was ambivalent about the piece, considering it more of a "loud and noisy" work rather than a profound artistic statement, the *1812 Overture* has nonetheless become synonymous with grandeur and patriotism. Its popularity extends far beyond the concert hall, making it a frequent fixture in public celebrations and fireworks displays, where its bombastic energy and stirring melodies never fail to captivate audiences.

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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A Tribute to Carl St.Clair

From bold first impressions to three decades of visionary leadership, Carl's impact echoes in every note, every life, and every corner of our community.



I remember the first time I saw Carl St.Clair conduct. In 1991, he led the Chicago Symphony in Mendelssohn's *Italian* Symphony at a national gathering of the League of American Orchestras in front of thousands of orchestra managers, peers, and volunteers. Despite the pressure of this event, Carl radiated confidence and passion. His intensity, grace, and purpose left a lasting impression. I remember thinking, "This is a conductor I won't forget."

Years later, when I heard Pacific Symphony was searching for a new administrative leader, and that Carl was its Music Director, my heart leapt. The idea of joining forces with such an inspiring artist leading one of the country's fastest-growing orchestras filled me with excitement.

During my interview week, I visited the orchestra's Santa Ana home—an old church near a Jack in the Box—and sat in on a rehearsal of Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*. Despite the humble setting, the music soared. Carl was fully immersed, sculpting phrases with precision and drawing out powerful expression. What struck me most was the deep trust between Carl and the musicians. This wasn't just an orchestra; it seemed to be a family. As Carl once said, "People weren't hugging before I got here."

Over the past two decades, Carl has taught me about music, vision, and leadership. He sees musicians not just as ensemble

players but as artists with unique voices. He handpicked most of today's Pacific Symphony musicians, shaping a sound defined by passion, expressiveness, individuality, and flexibility. The character of this orchestra reflects Carl's belief in personal expression within collective excellence.

Carl also modeled what it means to be a true community-based orchestra. He inspired us to bring music out of the concert hall—into schools, community centers, parks, and places of healing. This year marks the 30th anniversary of our Frieda Belinfante Class Act program, which reaches thousands of schoolchildren annually. Ten years later, we launched Heartstrings, offering free tickets and instrumental instruction to children from underserved communities. Carl's vision ensured that thousands of young people experience live classical music for the first time. Pacific Symphony also sponsors four youth ensembles and a middle school arts immersion camp. The commitment to music education and community engagement set Pacific Symphony apart.

Under Carl's leadership, Pacific Symphony has achieved international acclaim—from performances at Carnegie Hall to tours across Europe and China. Today, we are the largest-budgeted American orchestra founded in the past 50 years and proudly recognized as a Group 1 orchestra by the League of American Orchestras. We perform in one of the crown jewels of the Segerstrom Center—the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall—a world-class venue that likely would not have been built without a first-rate orchestra to call it home.

Through it all, Carl has modeled loyalty, humility, and love—especially in his devotion to his wife Susan through life's challenges and joys.

Carl, thank you for your vision, your generosity of spirit, and the beauty you've brought to this community. Your legacy lives on in every note we play and every life we touch. It remains an honor to work with you. With admiration and love,

John Forsythe
President and CEO, Pacific Symphony

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IRVINE, CA 92614
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