

SHELLEY CONDUCTS AMERICA @ 250

Preview Talk at 7 p.m.

Rich Capparella

Thursday, May 28, 2026 @ 8 p.m.

Friday, May 29, 2026 @ 8 p.m.

Saturday, May 30, 2026 @ 8 p.m.

Alexander Shelley, conductor

Conrad Tao, piano

Deja Foxx, narrator

Joe Sohm, photo-historian

Pacific Symphony

To celebrate the United States Semiquincentennial or "USA 250" in 2026, composer Peter Boyer and photo-historian Joe Sohm are joining forces to create a powerful musical-visual work. The score incorporates and adapts passages from Boyer's existing works while featuring newly composed music, with a live narrator delivering quotes from throughout American history. Sohm's 4K video will be creatively edited to Boyer's music, celebrating the land, cities, towns, people, and spirit of the United States for its 250th birthday.

RAVEN CHACON

Inscription II
West Coast Premiere

GERSHWIN

Ed. F.Campbell-Watson.

Piano Concerto in F Major
Allegro
Adagio - Andante con moto
Allegro agitato
Conrad Tao, piano

—INTERMISSION—

PETER BOYER

American Mosaic
Prologue
The New World
American Roots
Rails, Rivers, and Roads
West of the Continental Divide
Cities Arising
Faces of America
The North Star
The American Spirit
In Defense of Freedom
250 and Counting
Deja Foxx, narrator



Alexander Shelley
Artistic & Music Director Designate

These concerts celebrating **America at 250** are **dedicated to the memory of Ted Smith** and are generously underwritten by the **Ted and Janice Smith Family**.

Friday Evening's Performance is generously underwritten by **Christopher Tower and Robert Celio, Jr.**

Additional underwriting is provided by the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

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

This concert is being recorded for broadcast on Aug. 14, 2026 on Classical California.

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

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Conrad Tao, piano



Conrad Tao is a pianist and composer celebrated for his boundary-defying artistry as well as his powerful performances of traditional repertoire. He has been described by *New York Magazine* as “the kind of musician who is shaping the future of classical music,” and praised by *The New York Times* for

his “probing intellect and open-hearted vision.”

In the 2025–26 season, Tao returns to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as both soloist and recitalist, performing Bartok with Karina Canellakis, and later presenting a recital program featuring Gershwin song arrangements alongside works by Schoenberg, Strayhorn, Schumann, and others. He also returns to the LA Phil at Disney Hall and the Hollywood Bowl, and to the New York Philharmonic at the Bravo! Vail Festival. Meanwhile, return engagements include performances with the San Diego Symphony playing John Adams’ *Century Rolls*, and with the Atlanta Symphony playing Bernstein’s *The Age of Anxiety*. Tao also joins Matthias Pintscher and the Konzerthausorchester Berlin for Pintscher’s *NUR*, and travels to Tokyo to perform Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 17 with the NHK Symphony and Jaap van Zweden.

Recital highlights in 2025–26 include returns to Germany’s Klavierfestival Ruhr, and to the Celebrity Series of Boston, and the Seattle Symphony with *Poetry and Fairy Tales*, a program blending works by David Fulmer, Rebecca Saunders, Todd Moellenberg, Brahms, and Ravel. Tao also makes his harpsichord debut at Princeton University in Patricia Kopatchinskaja’s *Dies Irae*.

Recent highlights include Tao’s return to Carnegie Hall with Debussy’s *12 Études* and his original composition *Keyed In*, as well as appearances with the San Francisco Symphony and Nicholas Collon, Philadelphia Orchestra and Marin Alsop, Boston Symphony and Dima Slobodeniouk, New York Philharmonic and Jaap van Zweden, and Cleveland Orchestra and Jahja Ling. In 2024, he also toured Europe with the Kansas City Symphony and Matthias Pintscher to mark the 100th anniversary of *Rhapsody in Blue*, with sold-out performances at the Elbphilharmonie, Berlin Philharmonie, and Concertgebouw.

Tao continues performing his own works, including *Flung Out*, an homage to Gershwin, which he played recently at the Aspen Festival, and *The Hand*, a companion to Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 1, which was commissioned and performed by the Kansas City Symphony. His orchestral work *Everything Must Go* premiered with the New York Philharmonic and later in Europe with the Antwerp Symphony. He also tours *Counterpoint*, his collaboration with dancer Caleb Teicher, and performs regularly with the Junction Trio alongside Stefan Jackiw and Jay Campbell. Additional recent collaborators include vocalist Charmaine Lee, artist Avram Finkelstein, choreographer Miguel Gutierrez, and brass quartet The Westerlies.

Conrad’s acclaimed recordings include *Voyages*, *Pictures*, and *American Rage* (all on Warner), as well as *the loser* by David Lang, and *Bricolage* with The Westerlies.

He is a recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Gilmore Young Artist Award, and a New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award for his collaboration with Caleb Teicher on *More Forever*.

Deja Foxx, narrator



Deja Foxx is a nationally recognized speaker and digital strategist known for her work empowering young people to engage with their communities and shape the future. She is the founder of GenZ Girl Gang, a platform dedicated to supporting young people through connection, mentorship, and opportunity.

Foxx gained national attention as a teenager for her advocacy and has since become a leading voice on the influence of social media, youth leadership, and the ways a new generation is redefining civic and cultural participation. A *Forbes* 30 Under 30 honoree, she speaks widely on the intersection of digital platforms, identity, and community, bringing a contemporary perspective to conversations about American life and shared experience.

Peter Boyer, composer



Peter Boyer is one of the most frequently performed American orchestral composers of his generation. His works have received over 800 public performances by more than 300 orchestras, and tens of thousands of broadcasts on classical radio stations around the United States and abroad.

He has conducted recordings of his music with three of the world’s finest orchestras: the London Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. His GRAMMY®-nominated work *Ellis Island: The Dream of America* has received over 300 performances, and was nationally televised on PBS’ *Great Performances*. Boyer has received commissions from prestigious American institutions, including the Kennedy Center for the National Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Pops, Cincinnati Pops, Pacific Symphony, and the U.S. Marine Band, which premiered his *Fanfare for Tomorrow* at the inauguration of President Biden. Other orchestras include the Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Nashville Symphony, and Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. www.PropulsiveMusic.com

Joe Sohm, photo-historian



Joe Sohm’s Americana imagery has been published more than one million times in major publications such as *National Geographic*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, on television—NBC, CBS, PBS, CNN, MSNBC & Fox TV—in Al Gore’s Oscar-winning film *An Inconvenient Truth*, and 24 hours

a day worldwide on the Internet. Sohm’s imagery, scripts and editing have been featured by the Boston Pops, Philly Pops, New West Symphony, and the Kansas City Symphony. His “photo-symphonies” have featured narrations by Clint Eastwood and William Shatner, and his Presidential music video was featured during President Clinton’s 1993 Inaugural on worldwide television on MTV. Sohm’s work was featured in the “Concert for America” at the Kennedy Center on 9/11/02, attended by President George W. Bush and broadcast on NBC. In 2013, Sohm co-published, with *Reader’s Digest*, his award-winning *Visions of America* tabletop book, featuring an introduction by Paul Theroux. www.JoeSohm.com | www.VisionsofAmerica.com.

PROGRAM NOTES

Raven Chacon

Born: 1977 in Fort Defiance, AZ (Navajo Nation)

Inscription II



Composed: 2025

Premiered: Jan. 23, 2026, with the Naples Philharmonic conducted by Alexander Shelley. Pacific Symphony Artistic and Music Director Designate.

Instrumentation: Two flutes, two oboes including English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, three horns, two trumpets, one trombone, one tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

Approximate duration: 9 minutes.

The work of the versatile composer, musician and fine artist Raven Chacon is deeply informed by his Native American heritage. In 2022 Chacon became the first Native American to win a Pulitzer Prize for music for his composition *Voiceless Mass*.

Born within the Navajo Nation in Fort Defiance, Arizona, Chacon attended the University of New Mexico, receiving a BA in Fine Arts and an MFA in music composition from the California Institute of the Arts. At CalArts he studied with noted composers James Tenney, Morton Subotnik, Michael Pisaro, Wadada Leo Smith, and Christopher Shultis.

In works such as *Inscription II*, Chacon blazes trails and bridges worlds. His work encompasses the visual and the aural, the traditional and the new, and Native American and European classical traditions. In Dine culture, music and dance and the visual arts including painting, textiles pottery and jewelry are not merely entertainment, but have sacred significance, providing pathways to the spiritual world. Chacon's oeuvre offers us the opportunity to experience art in this context. His artwork has been exhibited widely in the U.S. and abroad, and he also performs in the groups KILT with Bob Bellerue, Mesa Ritual with William Fowler Collins, Endlings with John Dieterich, and collaborations with Laura Ortman and Igor Cavalera. In 2016 he received a commission from the Kronos to compose for their *Fifty for the Future* project.

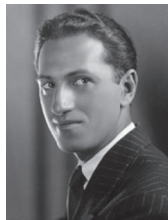
Chacon serves as Composer-in-Residence with the Native American Composers Apprenticeship Project and in 2013 received a Creative Capital Visual Arts grant. In 2014 he was honored with a Native Art and Cultures Foundation fellowship, and in 2018 was awarded the Berlin Prize by the American Academy in Berlin. He lives in Albuquerque with his wife, the curator Candice Hopkins.

George Gershwin

Born: Sept. 26, 1898 in Brooklyn, NY

Died: Jul. 11, 1937 in Los Angeles, CA

Piano Concerto in F



Composed: 1925

Premiered: Dec. 3, 1935 at Carnegie Hall, NY, with the New York Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter Damrosch and the composer as piano soloist.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Dec. 2, 2017 in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert

Hall with Anu Tali conducting and Xiyin Wang as soloist.

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

Approximate duration: 31 minutes.

Gershwin was born in 1898, just a few years after his parents, Russian Jews, arrived in New York from St. Petersburg. The Yiddish music he heard at home brought together stylistic elements from all over the world, awakening a voracious appetite for American pop culture and classical music alike. From the very beginning, it was music for George and verse for his brother Ira, who distinguished himself in writing light poetry as a student at City College. George was no student, but—to his family's astonishment—had secretly learned to play the piano, acquiring what could only be called mad skills today.

Gershwin left high school in 1914 to become a “plugger” in Tin Pan Alley, demonstrating songs to potential buyers at Remick's, a music publisher. He heard all kinds of music, and there was no style that failed to excite his ear: African American folk music, jazz, Yiddish songs and the Jewish cantorial tradition, European classical music. After three years in Tin Pan Alley he had published the first song of his own: “When You Want ‘Em, You Can’t Get ‘Em; When You Have ‘Em, You Don’t Want ‘Em.” It hardly caused a stir, but did pave the way for “Swanee,” his first mega-hit, published when he was just 21.

He was fascinated by classical traditions and was one of many American composers who made the pilgrimage to Nadia Boulanger, the venerated Parisian teacher of composition. His reported encounter with Maurice Ravel, though celebrated, remains unconfirmed: he supposedly sought lessons from Ravel, who—upon learning how much Gershwin earned from his songs—said that he should be taking lessons from Gershwin instead.

The Concerto in F is often called Gershwin's "most classical" composition, though opera enthusiasts point out that his opera *Porgy and Bess* is huge in scope and draws directly upon Wagner and Puccini. But the concerto, written in 1925 on commission for Walter Damrosch, hews closely to traditional concerto form. In this sense it is far more "classical" than, say, the popular *Rhapsody in Blue*. Gershwin scored the concerto himself (unlike the *Rhapsody*) and was piano soloist at the premiere.

The musical building blocks of the Concerto in F are American jazz and dance, synthesized in classical forms. It probably remains the most successful and frequently programmed such work in the American canon. Its "jazziness" is unmistakable from the opening moments, with explosive timpani strikes. The extended orchestral introduction that builds to a dramatic solo piano entrance is traditional in form, but with jazz flair. Blues, of course, were never far from Gershwin's pen, and in the second movement we hear the flatted thirds of the blues in "blue notes" that glitter elegantly, rather than wailing. In the final movement, Gershwin invokes the spirit of Ragtime, where his songwriting success began.

Gershwin himself commented on this concerto's sound, eloquently describing its riot of rhythms. "The first movement employs the Charleston rhythm," he wrote. "It is quick and pulsating, representing the young enthusiastic spirit of American life. It begins with a rhythmic motif given out by the kettle drums....The principal theme is announced by the bassoon. Later, a second theme is introduced by the piano. The second movement has a poetic, nocturnal atmosphere, which has come to be referred to as the American blues, but in a purer form than that in which they are usually treated. The final movement reverts to the style of the first. It is an orgy of rhythms, starting violently and keeping to the same pace throughout."

The concerto presents a finale of requisite flash, with exciting, rapid octave scales and pentatonic chord progressions juxtaposed against emphatic, vigorous percussion. The sound is as American as Broadway.

Peter Boyer

Born: 1970 in Providence, RI

American Mosaic



Composed: 2025

Premiered: Feb. 19, 2026 at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. with the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Thomas Wilkins.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: This is a West Coast Premiere.

Instrumentation: Three flutes

including piccolo, three oboes including English horn, three clarinets including bass clarinet, three bassoons including contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta, piano, narrator, and strings.

Approximate duration: 33 minutes.

Providence native Peter Boyer began composing at age 15; his first large-scale composition was a requiem mass in memory of his grandmother. He was named to the first All-USA College Academic Team, comprised of "the 20 best and brightest college students in the nation," by *USA TODAY* in 1990. Boyer received his Bachelor's degree from Rhode Island College, which awarded him an honorary Doctor of Music degree in 2004. He received Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from The Hartt School of the University of Hartford, which named him its 2002 Alumnus of the Year. He studied privately with John Corigliano, and completed the Film Scoring Program at the USC Thornton School of Music.

Boyer's compositions have received over 900 public performances by more than 300 orchestras, and tens of thousands of broadcasts by classical radio stations around the United States and abroad. His music has been heard in some of the most prestigious venues in the classical music world, including performances at Carnegie Hall (eight different works, two premieres), the Hollywood Bowl, Symphony Hall, Boston, and the Berlin Philharmonie. His works have been narrated in live performance by acclaimed Hollywood actors Robert De Niro, Morgan Freeman, Ed Harris, Alec Baldwin, and Martin Sheen. Boyer is a recipient of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor. He held the Helen M. Smith Chair in Music at Claremont Graduate University from 1999 to 2025.

American Mosaic celebrates the people, places, and spirit of the United States in its 250th anniversary year. The work blends sweeping orchestral music, spoken narration, and vivid 4K video by Joe Sohm, drawn from all 50 states. Commissioned by a consortium of leading American orchestras, and anchored by a premiere at the Kennedy Center, this 33-minute multimedia experience will be performed in a dozen cities in 2026.

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](https://www.operahound.com)