

# LUNAR NEW YEAR

Saturday, Feb. 21, 2026 @ 8 p.m.

Carl St.Clair, conductor  
 Ronald Banks, emcee  
 Cao Kefan, emcee  
 Xiangdong Kong, piano  
 Dennis Kim, violin  
 Shunxiang Zhang, jinghu  
 Yaya Dance Academy—Yaya Zhang, artistic director  
 T.O.P. Awards Dancers  
 Violin Studio of Wendy Castille  
 American Feel Young Chorus—Sam Wei-Chi Sun, director  
 Pacific Chorale—Robert Istad, artistic director  
 Pacific Symphony

- HUANZHI LI** *Spring Festival Overture*  
 Yaya Dance Academy
- SHUNXIANG ZHANG** *Celebration*  
 Shunxiang Zhang, jinghu
- JIANG LIU** *Echoes of the Earth: A Musical Odyssey, Part II*  
 Arr. Shizhe Wang  
 Violin Studio of Wendy Castille
- DEBUSSY** *Clair de Lune*  
 Arr. Arthur Luck  
 Yaya Dance Academy
- TCHAIKOVSKY** *Piano Concerto No.1 in B-flat Minor,*  
*Op. 23: Movement I*  
*Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso*  
 Xiangdong Kong, piano
- INTERMISSION—
- ROSSINI** *Overture to William Tell*  
 Yaya Dance Academy—  
 Yaya Zhang, artistic director  
 T.O.P. Awards Dancers
- CHI LIU** "My Hometown"  
 Arr. Shizhe Wang  
 Orch. Joshua Roach
- HAN-KI KIM** *Spring of Hometown for Violin and Orchestra,*  
*Op. 159*  
 Dennis Kim, violin
- TRADITIONAL** *Suzhou River*  
 Arr. Shirunyu Liu  
 Orch. Elbert Liu  
 American Feel Young Chorus; Pacific Chorale
- ORFF** *Carmina Burana selections*  
 O Fortuna  
 Ecce gratum  
 Blanziflor et Helena  
 Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi  
 American Feel Young Chorus; Pacific Chorale

**WARD** "America the Beautiful"  
 Arr. Greg Prechel  
 Lyricist Katherine Lee Bates  
 American Feel Young Chorus; Pacific Chorale



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 and the latest event information.



Presenting Sponsor **hoag.**

This concert is generously sponsored by  
**Charlie and Ling Zhang.**

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

*Celebrating*

# Lunar New Year

*with health, culture,  
and community.*

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## ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

### Carl St.Clair, Music Director Laureate



For more than 35 years, Carl St.Clair led Pacific Symphony, making him the longest-tenured American-born conductor of a major American orchestra. He was honored with the lifetime role of Music Director Laureate in December 2025 during the orchestra's 47th season, as well as inducted into

the Orange County Hall of Fame by the Orange County Board of Supervisors. Under his leadership, Pacific Symphony has grown into the largest-budgeted orchestra founded in the past half-century, recognized nationally for its artistic, innovative programming, and community impact. St.Clair also helped catalyze the vision to build a 2,000-seat Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in 2006, the Symphony's permanent home and one of the nation's finest concert venues.

St.Clair has guided the Symphony through many landmark achievements. In 2018, he led its sold-out Carnegie Hall debut celebrating Philip Glass's 80th birthday, which *The New York Times* praised as proof that Pacific Symphony is "a major ensemble!" That same year, he conducted the orchestra's first tour of China. Earlier, in 2006, he led the Symphony on its European debut, performing in nine cities across three countries, including Vienna, Munich, Cologne, and Lucerne, to capacity audiences and widespread acclaim. He also conducted the orchestra's national PBS debut on *Great Performances* with Peter Boyer's *Ellis Island: The Dream of America*. His artistic initiatives include the long-running American Composers Festival and Symphonic Voices, the orchestra's acclaimed opera-in-concert series.

A champion of new music, St.Clair has commissioned and premiered dozens of works. Recent highlights include the 2024–25 premieres of Viet Cuong's *Marine Layer* and Adolphus Hailstork's Piano Concerto No. 3 ("The Way Things Are"). In 2024, Pacific Symphony released the world-premiere recording of Sir James MacMillan's *Fiat Lux*. Other notable commissions include works by Philip Glass, Michael Daugherty, William Bolcom, Richard Danielpour, John Wineglass, and Elliot Goldenthal. His discography also includes collaborations with Yo-Yo Ma, Lukas Foss, and others.

Internationally, he was appointed Music Director of the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra in 2025 and holds honorary posts with the National Symphony of Costa Rica and Germany's Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal. Earlier positions include General Music Director of Berlin's Komische Oper and of the German National Theater and Staatskapelle in Weimar.

Equally committed to education, St.Clair has overseen the development of one of the country's most comprehensive orchestra-based education networks, reaching more than 50,000 participants annually. Pacific Symphony's award-winning Class Act program, arts-X-press, Youth Ensembles, Heartstrings, and *Symphony on the Go!* bring music to schools and communities across Southern California. He has also taught at Chapman University, the University of Texas, Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, and the USC Thornton School of Music, where he has served for more than three decades as Artistic Leader and Principal Conductor of orchestral programs.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

### Ron Banks, emcee



Bass-baritone Ronald M. Banks is pleased to return to Pacific Symphony. Banks has been seen on stages around the world across a 30-year career. A versatile performer, his talents have included work in musical theatre, opera, oratorio, voice-over, and in recital. Operatic roles include

*Rigoletto*, Sharpless in *Madame Butterfly*, *Don Pasquale*, and many others. He has worked with Los Angeles Chamber Singers, La Jolla Symphony, San Diego Symphony, and many other chorales and orchestras around the world. In musical theatre, Banks is best known for his portrayal of the King of Siam in *The King and I*, performing the role over 500 times, garnering awards and critical acclaim in productions across the nation. Other award-winning roles include King Arthur in *Camelot*, and the title role in *Sweeney Todd*. At the Disneyland Resort, Banks was known to audiences for eight years as Jafar in *Aladdin: A Musical Spectacular*. His distinctive speaking voice can be heard in the *World of Warcraft* and *Mortal Kombat* series video games, and most recently, as the English-language voice of Cho (Seung-ryong Ryu) in the Netflix TV series, *Kingdom*. He has a passion for music and arts education, having worked in outreach for Los Angeles Opera, San Diego Opera, and Pacific Symphony.

### Cao Kefan, emcee



Cao Kefan is a television host, actor, and writer. As the chief host of Shanghai Media Group, he is the founder of the high-end celebrity interview program *Listen to Kefan*, through which he has interviewed nearly a thousand prominent figures from various fields. He has also

hosted over a thousand large-scale galas. Additionally, he collaborated with director Zhang Yimou in the film *The Flowers of War*. He has published several essay collections and a family history monograph titled *Dreams and Shadows of the Li Garden*.

### Xiangdong Kong, piano



Xiangdong Kong is a world-renowned pianist and humanitarian ambassador whose career spans performance, cultural diplomacy and philanthropic leadership. He rose to international prominence at age 17 as a prizewinner at the 1986 International Tchaikovsky Competition and has since been

celebrated on stages around the world for his expressive artistry and innovative vision.

Kong has earned top honors at many of the world's most prestigious piano competitions, including medals at the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition, the Sydney International Piano Competition, and the Santander International Piano Competition in Spain. He has also served

on juries for leading international competitions, including Gina Bachauer, Sydney, Villa-Lobos and Khachaturian.

A graduate of the Music Middle School Affiliated with the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Kong studied under distinguished teachers including Zhang Yongqing, Jin Dishan, Fan Dalei, Dr. Paul C. Pollei and Claude Frank.

Throughout his career, Kong has achieved numerous historic milestones, including becoming the first Chinese musician invited to present a solo recital at Vienna's Golden Hall, the first Chinese pianist to perform at the Hollywood Bowl with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the first Asian pianist to sign with the BMG/RCA label. He has performed in more than 40 countries at renowned venues such as Lincoln Center, the Concertgebouw and the Sydney Opera House, collaborating with major orchestras worldwide.

Beyond the concert stage, Kong is deeply committed to music education and humanitarian service. He serves as a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and Vice President of the China Special Arts Association, and co-created the Beijing Olympic theme song *Forever Friends!* In 2025, he was awarded the Chancellor's Medal by NYU Shanghai and appointed Professor-at-Large.

## Shunxiang Zhang, jinghu



Shunxiang Zhang is a renowned jinghu artist and composer, credited with the jinghu piece, *Pu Tian Le*, and four performances of the "Peking Opera Symphonic Concerts of Zhang Shunxiang." He is a National Class-A Performer in the China National Peking Opera Company and visiting

professor at the China Conservatory of Music. Movie credits as a Jinghu performer include the *Da Zhaimen* (television drama) and *Mei Lanfang*.

## Dennis Kim, violin



Concertmaster Dennis Kim holds the Eleanor and Michael Gordon Chair of Pacific Symphony. Born in Korea, raised in Canada, and educated in the United States, violinist Dennis Kim has held concertmaster positions with orchestras around the world. Appointed concertmaster of the Tucson Symphony

at age twenty-two, he later served in that role with the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Seoul Philharmonic, Tampere Philharmonic, and the Buffalo Philharmonic. He has also appeared as guest concertmaster on four continents, performing with the London Philharmonic, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Singapore Symphony, and others, under conductors including Riccardo Muti, André Previn, and Sir Simon Rattle. An active soloist and chamber musician, Kim is a member of Trio Barclay and regularly performs with Pacific Symphony's Café Ludwig series. He is assistant professor of violin at the University of California, Irvine, and teaches each summer at Interlochen Arts Camp. A graduate of the Curtis Institute and Yale School of Music, Kim performs on the 1701 "ex-Dushkin" Stradivarius.

# ABOUT YAYA DANCE ACADEMY

Yaya Zhang, artistic director  
Radhanath Thialan, associate artistic director



Yaya Zhang is an interdisciplinary artist with over 20 years of experience in stage performance, choreography,

and contemporary art. A graduate of the Beijing Dance Academy, she performed for four years as *Rumpleteazer* with Shiki Theatre Company (Japan) in *CATS the Musical* before relocating to the United States in 2007, where she continues her work as a teacher and choreographer in Los Angeles.

In 2014, she founded Yaya Dance Academy (YDA), whose students have earned national and international recognition at Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP), Showstopper, and Kids Artistic Revue (KAR), including YAGP Finals invitations, the Outstanding Studio Award from KAR, performances at an NBA halftime show, and participation in Los Angeles' Holiday Celebration (2024). Zhang has collaborated extensively with Pacific Symphony as the main choreographer for the Lunar New Year Concert at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall since its debut, with YDA students featured in the *Los Angeles Times*. She also serves as Program Director for T.O.P Awards, fostering professional collaboration and industry exposure for young artists, and is the founder of the nonprofit San Musae Cultural Center (SMCC), dedicated to cultural exchange and community engagement through the arts.

## Yaya Dance Academy

Yaya Zhang / Artistic Director

Radhanath Thialan / Associate Artistic Director

Hui Xie / Instructor Grace Yin Chun Mei / Instructor

Megan Cao	Sabrina Wang
Gennabelle Chao	Freya Wang
Amber Chen	Sarah Wang
Victoria Cheung	Xinran (Cathy) Wang
Eli Hong	Alice Wu
Gillian Jiang	Ariel Yang
Phoebe Lee	Nelly Yin
Charlin Li	Cynthia Yuan
Cynthia Li	Eugenie Yuan
Kaitlyn Liu	Haowen (Mia) Yuan
Stacy Liu	Shirley Zeng
Jaycie Low	Aiwei (Sunnie) Zhang
Venessa Ma	Janelle Zhang
Fanxi Meng	Jeanette Zhang
Mila Ni	Iris Zhang
Athena Pan	Merida Zhang
Mia Shang	Wenwei (Rainie) Zhang
Hailey Shum	Chloe Zhao
Olivia Su	
Jenifer Tan	
Melissa Wang	

# ABOUT PACIFIC CHORALE

The GRAMMY® Award-winning PACIFIC CHORALE is an Orange County “treasure” with a “fresh viewpoint” that “can sing anything you put in front of it with polish, poise and tonal splendor” (*Orange County Register*). Founded in 1968, the resident choir at Segerstrom Center for the Arts is celebrated for artistic innovation and expanding the choral repertoire, having given more than 40 world, U.S., and West Coast premieres—including commissions by leading composers such as John Adams, Jocelyn Hagen, Jake Heggie, David Lang, Morten Lauridsen, Tarik O'Regan, Frank Ticheli, and Eric Whitacre. Led by Artistic Director Robert Istad, Pacific Chorale presents its own concert series and enjoys long-standing partnerships with Pacific Symphony and the LA Phil, with which it won the 2022 GRAMMY® Award for Best Choral Performance for *Mahler: Symphony No. 8* conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. The ensemble tours internationally, maintains a discography of 14 self-produced recordings, and offers extensive free digital programming. Its choral-theatrical film *To the Hands* was featured as an Official Selection at the Newport Beach Film Festival and won Best Experimental Feature Film at the Culver City Film Festival. Education programs include after-school vocal instruction for elementary students, a high school summer camp, and an annual community-wide singing event. [www.pacificchorale.org](http://www.pacificchorale.org)

## Robert Istad, artistic director



a GRAMMY® Award-winning conductor who “fashions fluent and sumptuous readings” (*Voice of OC*) with his “phenomenal” artistry (*Los Angeles Times*), was appointed Pacific Chorale’s Artistic Director in 2017. The 2026-27 season celebrates 10 years under his leadership, continuing to

expand the chorus’s reputation for excellence in delivering fresh, thought-provoking interpretations of beloved masterworks, rarely performed gems and newly commissioned pieces. His artistic impact can be heard on two recent recordings featuring Pacific Chorale, including the 2022 GRAMMY® Award-winning *Mahler: Symphony No. 8* with the LA Phil conducted by Gustavo Dudamel on Deutsche Grammophon (2021), for which he prepared the chorus. Additionally, Istad conducted the Pacific Chorale’s recording *All Things Common: The Music of Tarik O'Regan* released on Yarlung Records (2020). He regularly conducts and collaborates with Pacific Symphony, Berkshire Choral International, and Yarlung Records. His extensive credits also include recording for Sony Classical and guest conducting Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, Bach Collegium San Diego, Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra, Bath Philharmonia, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Tesseræ Baroque, and Freies Landesorchester Bayern. An esteemed educator, Istad is Professor of Music and Director of Choral Studies at California State University, Fullerton, where he was recognized as CSUF’s 2016 Outstanding Professor of the Year. Istad, who is on the Executive Board of Directors of Chorus America and serves as Dean of Chorus America’s Conducting Academy, is in demand as guest conductor, lecturer, and clinician.

## Pacific Chorale

Robert Istad / Artistic Director and Conductor  
*Phillip N. and Mary A. Lyons Artistic Director Chair*  
Rhett M. Del Campo / President and CEO  
Alex Nelson / VP, Artistic Production and Operations  
Kibsaïm Escárcega / Assistant Conductor  
*Ron Rudderow Legacy Chair*  
David Clemensen, DMA / Collaborative Pianist

### SOPRANO

Rebecca Hasquet  
*Section Leader*  
Amy Bandy  
Ariana Celeste  
Chelsea Chaves  
Katy Compton  
Jessica Dalley  
*Rita Major Memorial Chair*  
Stephanie Garcia Cochran  
Marsha Haezer  
Saousan Jarjour  
Corinne Larsen Linza  
Grace J. Lee  
Jenny Mancini 15  
Maria Cristina Navarro  
Hien Nguyen  
Minerva Padilla Nguyen  
Laura Pluth  
Sarah Schaffner-Pepe  
Linda Wells Sholik  
Amelia H. Thompson  
Haven Watts  
Victoria Wu  
Yewon Yoon

Michael Ben-Yehuda 40  
Christopher Brush 10  
Chris Buttars  
Abraham Cervantes  
Craig Davis 25  
Michael Elson  
David Evered  
José Gil Férrez  
Johnny Gonzales  
Vincent Hans  
Steven M. Hoffman  
Jin Ming Liao  
David López Alemán  
Gerald McMillan  
David Melendez  
Bryce Rivera  
Marc Robles  
David García Saldaña  
Sammy Salvador  
*Ron Gray Legacy Chair*  
Lissandra Tong  
Jeff Wang  
Frank Watnick  
Christiaan Westerkamp  
Eric Xu

### BASS

Ryan Thomas Antal  
*Section Leader,*  
*Ron Gray Legacy Chair*  
John Bergquist  
Kyle Boshardy  
Adam Daruvala  
Karl Forsstrom  
Sean Gabel  
Larry Gates  
Randall Gremillion  
Mark Hamilton  
Jared Hughes  
Jens Hurty  
Dylan Leisure  
Aaron Leppke  
Elliot Z. Levine  
Michael Lopez  
Tom Mena  
Martin Minnich  
Kenneth Moore  
Ryan Morris  
Seth Peelle  
Ryan Ratcliff  
Ben Reyes  
Ian Schipper  
Joshua P. Stansfield  
Sean TenBrook  
David Tkach

### ALTO

Jane Hyun-Jung Shim  
*Section Leader*  
Kathryn Cobb-Woll  
Denean R. Dyson 15  
Ivanna Evans  
Erin Girard  
Kathleen Thomsen Gremillion 10  
Meadow Jones  
Stacey Y. Kikkawa  
Hyocheong Kim  
Kristen Kleinhaus  
Nellie Kwang  
Michele M. Mulidor 30  
Pat Newton  
Kathleen Preston 20  
Elizabeth Provencio  
Ashley Riopka  
Kaleigh Sanchez  
Laurel Sanders  
Sarah Shaler  
Stephanie Shepson  
Grace Stewart  
Abby Tyree

### TENOR

Nicholas Preston  
*Section Leader,*  
*Roger W. Johnson Memorial Chair*  
Jephte Acosta

Celebrating milestone years with Pacific Chorale this season.

10 15 20 25 30

# ABOUT AMERICAN FEEL YOUNG CHORUS



American Feel Young Chorus (AFYC) is a nonprofit organization formed in Jan. 2015 by a group of friends who love music in Southern California. Conducted by Sam Wei-Chi Sun and dedicated to expanding the Chinese and Western choral music experience through performances and community. Our mission: To become the leader at amateur chorus in the U.S. by building a passionate team with artistic excellence and reputable image.

AFYC performed on various occasions including Orange County Chinese New Year celebrations, the *Yellow River Cantata* in Walt Disney Hall as part of the Memorial of World War II Victory Concert, in addition to our local concerts that were conducted by renowned conductors from China, including Jiao Miao and Li Xi Lin. AFYC has been growing rapidly and getting evolved into a well-known chorus in the Chinese American community in Southern California.

With the generous support from Mr. Charlie Zhang (founder of Pick Up Stix and Zion Enterprise, Entrepreneur of the Year by Ernst & Young, and Winner of the prestigious Ellis Island Medal of Honor), the chairman of the Board of Directors, AFYC is committed to becoming the best amateur chorus in the U.S. by nurturing excellence in its members, while offering the finest repertoire and choral artistry.

## VIOLIN STUDIO OF WENDY CASTILLE

Hugo Ado  
Brendan Chang  
Chelsea Chen  
Zoey Chen  
Jason Chen  
Claudia Cheng  
Elizabeth Chu  
Ryan Chu  
Audrey Cocan  
Herman Hu  
Julie Jin  
Andrew Kao  
Angela Lee  
Yue Dora Li  
Alex Li  
Scarlett Lin  
Stella Liu  
Catherine Liu  
Winstone Lu

Kingstone Lu  
William Ma  
Emily Peng  
Grace Prunean  
Hannah Prunean  
George Sun  
Vanna Xiang  
John Xu  
William Yan  
Abigail Yang  
Melody Ye  
Anthea Zhang  
Caroline Zhang  
Mia Zhang  
Nicole Zheng  
Aaron Zheng  
Angela Zheng  
Olivia Zhu

## American Feel Young Chorus

Sam Wei-Chi Sun / Director

### Chorus

#### SOPRANO

Lily Shum  
Jun Li  
Sandra Chiang  
Ping Hou  
Jenny Du  
Hao Yu  
Zhaoli Huang  
Megan Creigh  
Amy Weng  
Xuhong Li  
Meiyong Shen  
Sarah Liu  
Shiping Jiang  
Hanne Xian  
Yiwen Mao  
Liyong Lin  
Jean Tao  
Sharon Shao  
Wei Wang  
Karen Xie

#### ALTO

Lin Pu  
Dana Liu  
Ling Lin  
Jane Li  
Linda Du  
Theresa Liu  
Tracy Chen  
Krystal Yan  
Tao Chen  
Wendy Wen  
Shu Wang  
Jade Shen  
Sherry Shan  
Grace Tsai  
Wen Yu Conklin  
Judy Zhu  
Linda Jin  
Julie Guo  
Sharon Yin  
Sherry Lundstedt  
Grace Gao  
Haihong Wang  
Maggie Jiang

#### TENOR

Steven Chiang  
Tony Yang  
Adam Lin  
XianHong Yang  
Jerry Liu  
Bob Zhang

#### BARITONE

Fang Jie Zhang  
Ghaffar Pourazar  
Howard Shen  
Xiaowei Lin  
Lizhi Sun  
Jim Nie  
George Yen  
Bin Nan

## T.O.P. AWARDS DANCERS

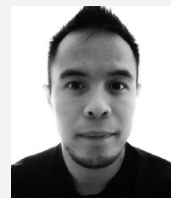
Leandro Glory Damasco Jr. / Choreographer

T.O.P. Awards Dancers represent the Talented Outstanding Performer Awards (T.O.P.), a premier program dedicated to developing young dancers through elite training, professional mentorship and access to world-renowned choreographers. Guided by a collaborative philosophy that honors dancers, mentors and community, T.O.P. prepares emerging artists for long-term success as performers and cultural ambassadors.

### GUEST PERFORMERS



Natalie Palmgren



Leandro Glory Damasco Jr.

### T.O.P. AWARDS ENSEMBLE

Phoebe Lee  
Samantha Matkov  
Tayla Banayan  
Valentina Joaquin