

Santa Rosa Symphony announces new season



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The Santa Rosa Symphony has announced its 2018-'19 season, which will welcome new Music Director Francesco Lecce-Chong for three out of the seven concert sets and bring back Conductor Emeritus Jeffrey Kahane and outgoing Music Director Bruno Ferrandis to conduct the final two concert sets.

Familiar faces returning as soloists include Russian-American pianist Olga Kern, classical guitar virtuoso Sharon Isbin and violist Nokuthula Ngwenyama.

“It’s possibly one of the most exciting seasons we’ve ever done for the North Bay,” said Alan Silow, Santa Rosa Symphony president and CEO. “First of all, we’re introducing our new music director, who brings a level of talent, exuberance and enthusiasm that is almost unheard of. At the same time, we’re also bringing back conductors and artists that are deeply loved.”

The symphony’s 91st season and seventh year as resident orchestra at the Green Music Center opens with Beethoven’s beloved Symphony No. 5 and closes with Tchaikovsky’s dramatic Symphony No. 5. Scattered in between are workhorses such as Mozart’s Symphony No. 40 and Mendelssohn’s Symphony No. 3; works by such American legends as Bernstein, Barber and Copland; and seven new works receiving their debut here, including a 1987 work for brass by Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu.

In response to patron requests, the symphony is moving up the start time of the evening concerts to 7:30 p.m. on Saturdays and Mondays; the time of the Sunday afternoon concerts will stay at 3 p.m.

“Patrons want an earlier start time ... so they can get home at a more reasonable time,” Silow said. “A lot of arts organizations across the country are doing that.”

Here are the details of the 2018-'19 Classical Series, which was planned by Ferrandis:

Oct. 6-8: Francesco Lecce-Chong leads the “Passion and Power” program, featuring Ellen Taaffe Zwilich’s exuberant “Celebration,” Brahms’ Violin Concerto performed by French violinist Arnaud Sussmann and Beethoven’s monumental Symphony No. 5.

Nov. 3-5: Francesco Lecce-Chong waltzes back to lead “Dancing Across Time,” featuring Sharon Isbin in Villa-Lobos’ Guitar Concerto, Kodaly’s “Dances of Galánta,” Liszt’s “Mephisto Waltz No. 1,” and Bernstein’s Symphonic Dances from “West Side Story.”

Dec. 1-3: Guest conductor Jayce Ogren, artistic director of Orchestra 2001 in Philadelphia, will lead the “Viva Italia” program, including Vivaldi’s holiday favorite, “Gloria” featuring the Sonoma State University Symphonic Chorus; Rossini’s Overture to “Guillaume Tell”; and Berlioz’ “Harold in Italy,” featuring viola solos by Nokuthula Ngwenyama.

Jan. 12-14: For the “Tiers of Heaven” program, Francesco Lecce-Chong will conduct Takemitsu’s bold “Signals from Heaven,” Mozart’s tragic Symphony No. 40 in G minor, and Mahler’s luminous Symphony No. 4, featuring soprano Marie Plette.

Feb. 9-11: For this unusual “Love Letters” program, guest conductor Sarah Ioannides, music director of the Symphony Tacoma, will lead works that celebrate the love between a pair of well-known female and male composers. Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel’s delicate Overture in C major provides the foil for brother Felix Mendelssohn’s stirring Symphony No. 3, “Scottish.” Meanwhile, Clara Schumann’s passionate Piano Concerto, performed by Anne-Marie McDermott, is paired with husband Robert Schumann’s poetic “Manfred” Overture.

March 16-18: Conductor Emeritus Jeffrey Kahane will lead the “American Dreams” program, kicking off with Gershwin’s jazzy “An American in Paris” and concluding with Copland’s hope-filled Symphony No. 3. In between, the rising, young violinist Elena Urioste will perform Barber’s lyrical Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.

May 4-6: Bruno Ferrandis returns to lead the “From Russia with Love” program, featuring Stravinsky’s festive “Scherzo Fantastique,” Shostakovich’s thrilling Concerto No. 2 performed by Olga Kerns, and Tchaikovsky’s emotional Symphony No. 5.

All Classical Music Series performances are held at Weill Hall at the Green Music Center on the SSU campus in Rohnert Park.

After working with audience development consultants, the symphony has reduced subscription and single ticket prices for Saturday and Monday concerts and raised prices for aisle seats, which are in demand.

Subscriptions for the Classical Music Series will go on sale April 23 at the Patron Services Office, 50 Santa Rosa Avenue. To retain the same seats, renewal must be completed by May 25. Single tickets will go on sale in August. Information: srsymphony.org or 707-546-8742.

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