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## **California Symphony Signs New Contracts with Music Director Donato Cabrera and Executive Director Aubrey Bergauer**

### **Ends 2017-2018 Fiscal Year with Budget Surplus**



*California Symphony Music Director Donato Cabrera and Executive Director Aubrey Bergauer;  
photo by Arturo Garcia. High-res images available [here](#).*

**Walnut Creek, CA (July 31, 2018)**—On behalf of the California Symphony board of directors, President Bill Armstrong announces Music Director Donato Cabrera and Executive Director Aubrey Bergauer have both agreed to separate contract extensions, effective August 1.

Donato Cabrera joined the California Symphony in 2013 after a national search to replace founding Music Director Barry Jekowsky. One year later, in 2014, Executive Director Aubrey Bergauer was recruited to the California Symphony to lead the organization through a financial turnaround. Both Cabrera and Bergauer brought experience from much larger institutions: Cabrera from San Francisco Symphony, where he served as Resident Conductor and Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, and Bergauer from Seattle, where she spent the previous decade with Seattle Symphony, Seattle Opera, and the Bumbershoot Music & Arts Festival. After one season, Bergauer moved the organization from its prior years of budget shortfalls to ending in the black, with three of the last four years ending with surpluses—including the most recent fiscal year that concluded on July 31—used to nearly eradicate the company’s past accumulated debt. Under Cabrera’s baton, the orchestra has reached new artistic heights, secured a permanent concertmaster in Jennifer Cho of the San Francisco Opera Orchestra, filled multiple orchestra vacancies, and built on its reputation for championing new music.

Together, the two have created a concert experience that emphasizes welcoming newcomers and loyalists alike with a dogmatic focus on patron retention, and over the last four years, the audience has nearly doubled, with 97% more tickets sold during the 2017/18 season than four seasons prior. Through a similar approach in 2016, Bergauer and Cabrera revamped the organization's annual special event fundraiser, producing a new event called *Symphony Surround* where the orchestra performs literally surrounding and among the dinner tables so guests see the musicians and the maestro as if all on stage together. Earlier that same year, the team led the California Symphony to be one of the first professional orchestras to stream a unionized orchestra concert on then-newly launched platform Facebook Live.

More recently, this past season the duo pushed for—and ultimately published along with Board President Bill Armstrong—a public commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion across all facets of the organization. And this spring, under Bergauer and Cabrera's direction, the Symphony rolled out a four-pronged multiculturalism plan to help their growing audience become more representative of the community they serve, which includes strategies from advertising in English and Spanish to launching an adult education course called *Fresh Look: The Symphony Exposed*. The orchestra has simultaneously expanded its footprint in the last four years, with performances around the region in Napa Valley, Concord, Oakland, and Berkeley in addition to its home base of Walnut Creek.

“This level of talent is rare on either the artistic or administrative side,” said Board President Bill Armstrong, “And the combo of the two is even more rare. We brought Donato in as Music Director to maintain and improve our excellent quality of music programs, and we brought Aubrey in as Executive Director to turn around a sub-par financial situation so we could achieve the organization's potential. Together we have turned things around, the musical quality remains outstanding, and we have an orchestra, a Board, and newly renewed contracts with our key leaders to move us to the musical future our region wants and deserves.”

“Since my appointment in 2013,” said Donato Cabrera, “the orchestra's esprit de corps, way of making of music with each other, and sharing the music with the audience has greatly changed. A key component to the California Symphony's success story has been this palpable sense of joy now emanating from the stage. Performing a diverse array of composers and repertoire has also allowed us to offer a far more curated approach to concert programming, providing our audience a narrative beyond the music that is compelling and informative.”

On the organization's strides towards inclusion and equality, Cabrera adds, “Aubrey and I negotiated equal percentage raises in our respective new contracts. This speaks not only to the strength of our partnership, but also to the board's buy-in to how important these issues are in this industry. This is the kind of forward thinking that makes me hopeful and excited for the future of not just the California Symphony, but for how some of the things we've done and are doing here are a model for others in the field.”

“The momentum is surging,” said Aubrey Bergauer, “We have a board who supports my vision and strategy to advance the organization, and I have a true partner in Donato. There are many more ideas, projects, and funding requests in progress, which makes this a distinctly exciting time for the California Symphony.”

Under Bergauer's tenure, the operating budget has grown by nearly 50%, and in addition to the expanding audience, the donor base has nearly quadrupled (180% growth in donor households). The organization's work to bring in new audiences and focus on retaining them has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Symphony magazine*, and is now a regular topic at industry conferences in the U.S. and Canada.

Music Director Donato Cabrera will continue providing his award-winning programming and oversee the selection process of the Young American Composer in Residence. He will also consult with the Executive Director and the board to evaluate the scope, breadth and content of the Symphony's music education programs, and advise on the planning and development of all community engagement activities.

Tickets to the upcoming 2018/19 Season are on sale now with subscription ticket packages starting at \$99, including the Saturday night series which debuted last year to accommodate the growing audience. Single tickets are also now on sale with a tribute to Beethoven & Bernstein opening the season on September 23. All 2018-19 season performances take place at the Leshar Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, and tickets can be purchased online at [www.californiasymphony.org](http://www.californiasymphony.org) or through the Leshar Center Box Office by phone (925-943-7469) or in person.

## **ABOUT CALIFORNIA SYMPHONY**

The California Symphony, now entering its sixth season under the leadership of Music Director Donato Cabrera, is distinguished by its vibrant concert programs that combine classics alongside American repertoire and works by living composers, and for bringing music to people in new and unconventional settings. The orchestra includes musicians who perform with the San Francisco Symphony, San Francisco Opera, San Francisco Ballet, and others, and is based in Walnut Creek at the Leshner Center for the Arts with additional recent performances around the region in Napa Valley, Concord, Oakland, and Berkeley.

Outside the concert hall, the Symphony actively supports music education as a driver for social change through its El Sistema-inspired Sound Minds program at Downer Elementary School in San Pablo, CA, which brings intensive music instruction and academic enrichment to schoolchildren in an area where 94% of students qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program, at no cost to the students who participate. The Orchestra also hosts the highly competitive Young American Composer-in-Residence program and its current composer, Katherine Balch. California Symphony has launched the careers of some of today's most well-known artists, including violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, cellists Alisa Weilerstein and Joshua Roman, pianist Kirill Gerstein and composers such as Mason Bates, Christopher Theofanidis, and Kevin Puts.

For more information, please visit [californiasymphony.org](http://californiasymphony.org).

## **ABOUT DONATO CABRERA**

Donato Cabrera is the Music Director of the California Symphony and the Las Vegas Philharmonic, and served as the Resident Conductor of the San Francisco Symphony and the Wattis Foundation Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra from 2009–2016. Since Cabrera's appointment as Music Director of the California Symphony, the organization has been reinvigorated. With its expanded concerts, dramatically increased ticket sales, and innovative programming, the California Symphony and Cabrera are redefining what it means to be an orchestra in the 21st Century. Under Cabrera's leadership, The Las Vegas Philharmonic has also enjoyed a dramatic increase in ticket sales and an engagement with the community never before seen in Southern Nevada. Over the last couple of seasons, Cabrera has made impressive debuts with the National Symphony's KC Jukebox at the Kennedy Center, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Louisville Orchestra, Hartford Symphony, New West Symphony, Sinfónica de Oaxaca, and the Orquesta Filarmónica de Boca del Rio. In 2016, he led the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in performances with Grammy Award-winning singer Lila Downs. Cabrera co-founded the New York-based American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME), and recently led performances of Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson's *Drone Mass* with ACME and Theatre of Voices at Duke Performances and the Big Ears Festival. Awards and fellowships include a Herbert von Karajan Conducting Fellowship at the Salzburg Festival and conducting the Nashville Symphony in the League of American Orchestras' prestigious Bruno Walter National Conductor Preview. Donato Cabrera was recognized by the Consulate-General of Mexico in San Francisco as a Luminary of the Friends of Mexico Honorary Committee, for his contributions to promoting and developing the presence of the Mexican community in the Bay Area. For more information please visit [www.donatocabrera.com](http://www.donatocabrera.com).

## **ABOUT AUBREY BERGAUER**

Aubrey Bergauer defies trends, and then makes her own. In a time when most arts organizations are scaling back programs, tightening budgets, and seeing declines in tickets and subscriptions, Bergauer has dramatically increased earned and contributed revenue at organizations ranging from Seattle Opera to the Bumbershoot Music & Arts Festival to the California Symphony. Her focus on not just engaging—but retaining—new audiences grew Seattle Opera's BRAVO! Club (for audience members in their 20's and 30's) to the largest group of its kind nationwide, led the Bumbershoot Festival to achieve an unprecedented 43% increase in revenue, and propelled the California Symphony to nearly double the size of its audience and nearly quadruple the donor base.

A graduate of Rice University with degrees in Music Performance and Business, for the last 15 years Bergauer has used music to make the world around her better, through programs that champion social justice and equality, through marketing and audience development tactics on the forefront of trends and technology, and through proving and sharing what works in the rapidly changing landscape of funding, philanthropy, and consumer behavior. If ideas are a dime a dozen, what separates Bergauer is her experience and record of execution and impact at institutions of all sizes. Praised for her leadership which “points the way to a new style of audience outreach,” (*Wall Street Journal*) and which drove the California Symphony to become “the most forward-looking music organization around”

(*Mercury News*), Bergauer's ability to strategically and holistically examine and advance every facet of the organization, instilling and achieving common goals and vision across what are usually siloed marketing, development, and artistic departments is creating a transformational change in the audience, in the office, on the stage, in the community, and is changing the narrative for the classical music industry.

**MEDIA CONTACTS:** For more information, or for interview requests, please contact Theresa Madeira at [theresa@californiasymphony.org](mailto:theresa@californiasymphony.org) or 415.577.5823.

High resolution photos can be downloaded [here](#).

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