

Santa Rosa Symphony announces inaugural season at Green Music Center

By [DIANE PETERSON](#)
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CRISTA JEREMIASON/ PD

The Santa Rosa Symphony at the Green Music Center on Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2012.

The Santa Rosa Symphony will showcase two world premieres and a new children's series to mark its inaugural season this fall as the resident orchestra of the Green Music Center on the Sonoma State University campus.

Following the announcement Wednesday by Music Director Bruno Ferrandis and Executive Director Alan Silow, musicians from the Santa Rosa Symphony gathered onstage at the \$120 million Weill Concert Hall for a rehearsal and to test the acoustics.

The symphony's Green Center debut next fall will mark the culmination of money-raising, construction and controversy that has spanned more than a decade.

"Finally, we are in a place that is human and intimate, and the premises are beautiful," Ferrandis said, after announcing the season to more than 50 board members and donors gathered in the center's restaurant.

Guests included Santa Rosa Symphony Conductor Emeritus Corrick Brown, who has spearheaded the symphony's fund-raising efforts for the hall, and Bay Area composers Edmund Campion and Nolan Gasser, who have been commissioned to compose works for the upcoming season.

Demonstrating its dedication to education, the symphony will launch a Family Concert Series next season, featuring three Sunday matinee performances for children of all ages, Silow said.

The series, underwritten by the Sonoma Paradiso Foundation, includes music from "Peanuts," a production of Prokofief's "Peter and the Wolf," and an interactive rhythm program.

"We're extremely excited," Silow said. "This is a transformative time for the Santa Rosa Symphony."

The orchestra is holding three rehearsals in the Weill Concert Hall this season so that acoustical adjustments can be made in advance of the hall's inauguration.

The symphony will debut Sept. 30 with an historic concert featuring the orchestra's three living conductors: Conductor Emeritus Brown, Conductor Laureate Jeffrey Kahane and Music Director Ferrandis.

Brown will lead off with Beethoven's overture, "Consecration of the House." Ferrandis will take the podium for the rest of the program, which includes Ravel's "Bolero"; Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto, performed by Jeffrey Kahane; and Copland's "Canticle of Freedom," featuring the 110-voice Symphony Honor Choir.

Also for its opening concert, the symphony has commissioned a new orchestral work, "Sonoma Overture," by composer Nolan Gasser of Petaluma.

"This is a classy first season, in ambition and breadth," said Jeff Langley, academic director of the Green Music Center. "There are major masterworks, but not the obvious museum pieces. They are interesting and sonically challenging, with the new hall in mind."

The Green Music Center has been in the works for the past 15 years. Fund-raising kicked off in 1997 with a \$10 million gift by Telecom entrepreneur Don Green and his wife, Maureen, who both joined the SSU Concert Chorale in 1988.

Green and Conductor Emeritus Brown launched a capital campaign in 1998, and the Santa Rosa Symphony signed a partnership agreement with SSU in 2000, the same year that ground-breaking for the center took place.

As a tribute to the Greens, the Sonoma County Bach Choir and the Santa Rosa Symphony will perform Bach's Mass in B Minor in the Weill Concert Hall on Dec. 15.

The 1,400-seat hall, designed by William Rawn Associates in Boston, is modeled after Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood in western Massachusetts and replicates the acoustics of Vienna's Musikverein.

The hall was named after philanthropists Joan and Sandy Weill, who donated \$12 million last March to complete the center in time for a fall 2012 opening. About \$15 million more is needed to complete the adjacent recital hall and an outdoor performance stage.

The university's resident presenting series, planned by impresario Robert Cole of Berkeley, will kick off on Sept. 29 with a concert by Chinese pianist Lang Lang. The university will announce the rest of its 2012-2013 season in early March.