



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 20, 2024

Gershwin & Ellington

Celebrating the 100th anniversary of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*
May 11, 12, 13, 2024, Weill Hall, Green Music Center

(Santa Rosa, Calif.) – Santa Rosa Symphony presents its final Classical Series concert of the 2023-2024 season, Gershwin & Ellington—performances on May 11, 12 & 13, 2024, at Weill Hall, Green Music Center. This concert celebrates the 100th anniversary of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the original jazz band version. Pianist Conrad Tao will be featured in this work and the world premiere of his new composition *Flung Out*. In addition, the orchestra will be playing Gershwin's dramatic piece, the Catfish Row Symphonic Suite from *Porgy & Bess*, and Duke Ellington's Historic Jazz Symphony, *Black, Brown and Beige*.

Renowned pianist and composer Conrad Tao dubbed “the kind of musician who is shaping the future of classical music” by *New York Magazine*, will present the world premiere of his concerto for piano and orchestra, *Flung Out*. This composition is filled with a mosaic of sounds inspired by Gershwin and Ellington. When Tao was asked to write the concerto, to honor the *Rhapsody in Blue* 100th anniversary, he was intrigued. “I’m really excited to have a baritone saxophone and a banjo in the mix,” said Tao. “The basic starting premise of this work is using the same instruments Gershwin had for *Rhapsody in Blue*.”

The complex Suite for Orchestra, *Black, Brown and Beige*, is an American masterpiece that sets out to broaden a people's and a country's sense of its history. Composed in 1942 by Duke Ellington, who is widely considered one of the top jazz composers of his time. The title *Black, Brown and Beige* refers to the three movements of the suite, each one standing for a period in black history. Despite the seriousness of his subject matter, Ellington interweaved hope and aspiration into this musical journey, bringing this spectacular concert and season to its grand finale!

"100 years after making its first appearance in a concert called "An Experiment in Modern Music", Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* is still the gold standard for the melding of jazz and classical music. The shiny and carefully constructed orchestra version has come to symbolize the work, but for our celebration of the centennial, we return to its roots and the twenty-three-piece ensemble - saxophones, banjo, and all - that changed history. I am so thrilled that the incredible composer-pianist, Conrad Tao, will be bringing us his take on this version as well as giving the premiere of a completely new work he has written for the same unusual ensemble." **Francesco Lecce-Chong**, Music Director and Conductor

BIOGRAPHIES:

Francesco Lecce-Chong, Music Director and Conductor

Conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong is the Music Director of the Santa Rosa Symphony and the Eugene Symphony in Oregon. The press has described him as a “fast-rising talent in the music world” with “the real gift” and recognized his dynamic performances, fresh programming, deep commitment to commissioning and performing new music, and community outreach.

Lecce-Chong has appeared with orchestras around the world including the San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, National Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony,

Toronto Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Colorado Symphony, and Hong Kong Philharmonic, and collaborated with world-renowned soloists including Renée Fleming and Itzhak Perlman.

Lecce-Chong is the recipient of several distinctions, including the prestigious Solti Foundation Award. Trained also as a pianist and composer, he completed his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music with Otto-Werner Mueller after attending the Mannes College of Music and Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Italy. He has been mentored and supported by celebrated conductors including Bernard Haitink, David Zinman, Edo de Waart, Manfred Honeck, Donald Runnicles, and Michael Tilson Thomas.

Conrad Tao, Composer and Piano

Conrad Tao has appeared worldwide as a pianist and composer and has been dubbed “the kind of musician who is shaping the future of classical music” by *New York Magazine*, and an artist of “probing intellect and open-hearted vision” by The New York Times. He is the recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and was named a Gilmore Young Artist—an honor awarded every two years highlighting the most promising American pianists of the new generation. As a composer, he was also the recipient of a 2019 New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award, for Outstanding Sound Design/Music Composition, for his work on *More Forever*, and his collaboration with dancer and choreographer Caleb Teicher.

Tao has recently appeared as a soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony. As a composer, his work has been performed by orchestras throughout the US; his first large-scale orchestral work, *Everything Must Go*, was premiered by the New York Philharmonic in 18-19 and was premiered in Europe by the Antwerp Symphony in 21-22. In the same season, his violin concerto, written for Stefan Jackiw, premiered by the Atlanta Symphony under Robert Spano, and the Baltimore Symphony under Kirill Karabits. In the 2021-22 season, he also made his London solo recital debut at the Wigmore Hall, and appeared in recital throughout North America, including Boston, New York, Washington, and Seattle. Tao’s Bessie Award-winning dance work with Caleb Teicher, *More Forever*, will continue to tour North America, including performances at Cal Performances in Berkeley and Fall for Dance North in Toronto.

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE:

GEORGE GERSHWIN: Catfish Row: Symphonic Suite from *Porgy and Bess*

GEORGE GERSHWIN: *Rhapsody in Blue* for Piano and Orchestra [original jazz band version]

CONRAD TAO: *Flung Out* for Piano and Orchestra [World Premiere]

EDWARD “DUKE” ELLINGTON: *Black, Brown and Beige*: Suite for Orchestra

High-res photos and interview opportunities available: Francesco Lecce-Chong, and Conrad Tao

CONCERT ENHANCEMENTS:

Concert Program books: Available at all Classical Series concerts.

Concert Program notes: These can be read on the concert event page

Pre-concert talk: Conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong and Conrad Tao provide a 30-minute pre-concert talk one hour prior to the performances.

SPONSORS:

We gratefully acknowledge the generous contributions from the following:

Classical Concert Series Underwritten by **Anderman Family Foundation**

Sponsored by **Alan and Susan Seidenfeld Charitable Trust, in memory of Susan Seidenfeld**

Conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong sponsored by **David and Corinne Byrd**

Guest Artist Conrad Tao sponsored by **Sara and Edward Kozel**

Commissioned Work *Flung Out* by Conrad Tao (World Premiere) sponsored by
Nancy and Rob Novak

Discovery Open Rehearsal Series sponsored by **The Stare Foundation and
David Stare of Dry Creek Vineyard**

Pre-Concert Talks sponsored by **Jamei Haswell, in honor of Richard Grundy**
Season Media Sponsor: ***The Press Democrat***

AT A GLANCE / CALENDAR LISTING:

WHAT:

Santa Rosa Symphony [“Gershwin & Ellington”](#)

WHO: [Santa Rosa Symphony](#), Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor; Conrad Tao, composer and piano

WHEN: Saturday, May 11, 2024 at 2:00 pm – Discovery Open Rehearsal, no Pre-concert talk

Saturday, May 11, 2024 at 7:30 pm (Doors at 6:00 pm, Pre-concert talk 6:30 pm - 7:00 pm)

Sunday, May 12, 2024 at 3:00 pm (Doors at 1:30 pm, Pre-concert talk 2:00 pm - 2:30 pm)

Monday, May 13, 2024 at 7:30 pm (Doors at 6:00 pm, Pre-concert talk 6:30 pm - 7:00 pm)

WHERE:

Weill Hall, Green Music Center, Sonoma State University

TICKET PRICES:

\$18 / adult; \$10 / youth (7-17) for Discovery Open Rehearsal

\$32-\$105 for Classical Series performances

Youths 7-17 may receive one complimentary ticket with every paid adult. Request tickets through Patron Services at (707) 546-8742. Classical Series concerts only

\$10 student rush tickets for college students with a valid student ID. Available at the door only

TICKETS: srsymphony.org or (707) 546-8742 (Weekdays 9:00 am – 5:00 pm, opening at 10:30 am
Wednesday, closed Saturday & Sunday)

ABOUT SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY

Santa Rosa Symphony, the Resident Orchestra of the Green Music Center, is the third-oldest professional orchestra in California, and the largest regional symphony north of Los Angeles. Francesco Lecce-Chong, the Symphony's fifth music director in its 96 years, began his tenure in 2018. J. Andrew Bradford joined SRS as President and CEO in 2023. The Symphony is committed to the core values of artistic excellence, innovative programming, comprehensive music education, and community service.

The Symphony's performance schedule includes 21 Classical Series concerts (seven sets), seven Discovery Dress Rehearsal concerts, a three-concert Family Series, a four-concert Pops Series, and special concerts.

Awards include an American Symphony Orchestra League MetLife Award for Community Engagement and a first-place award for adventurous programming in the 2012-2013 season from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP).

The Symphony is recognized as having one of California's most comprehensive music education programs, serving nearly 20,000 youths annually. Collaborations with schools and organizations across Sonoma County have gained the Santa Rosa Symphony national attention and support.

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