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Francesco Lecce-Chong Signs Landmark Evergreen Agreement with the Santa Rosa Symphony

Assumes title of Artistic & Music Director on July 1, 2026

(Santa Rosa, Calif.) – The Santa Rosa Symphony (SRS) announces a landmark evergreen agreement with Music Director Francesco Lecce-Chong, securing his long-term visionary, artistic, and creative leadership as SRS enters an exciting new era of growth, innovation, and impact in the community. Currently in his eighth season with the orchestra, Lecce-Chong will assume the title of Artistic & Music Director on July 1, 2026, reflecting his broadening leadership across SRS’s portfolio of artistic, educational, and community engagement programming.

Rooted in a shared vision for the future, this new agreement—in tandem with a recently adopted five-year [strategic plan](#)—provides important continuity and stability. It supports ambitious multi-year creative projects, deepens SRS’s impact across the North Bay, and guides the organization into its second century.

"Over the last eight years, Santa Rosa has become my beloved home, and it is the thrill of a lifetime to lead such a thriving, innovative orchestra," says Lecce-Chong. "I am deeply grateful to President & CEO Andrew Bradford and the Board of Directors for their enduring trust and shared vision, and I look forward to many more years of vibrant music-making alongside my incredible colleagues on stage."

"We are delighted to have secured Francesco’s future with the Santa Rosa Symphony through this new agreement," said President & CEO Andrew Bradford. "During each year of his tenure, Francesco has demonstrated a remarkable ability to consistently deliver exhilarating concert experiences for our community, find creative ways to align our artistic and educational work, and be just as focused on the long-term future of the organization as on the very next concert. His artistry, vision, and deep connection with our community have strengthened both the orchestra and the organization, and we are excited to continue building on that momentum together."

Board of Directors Chairman Garth Bixler added, "Francesco’s exciting programs have showcased the extraordinary musicianship and richness of our orchestra and won the hearts of our patrons. We are thrilled to have this new agreement in place and to see his artistic leadership continue for years to come."

Only the fifth Music Director in SRS’s 98-year history, Lecce-Chong joined the organization in 2018. Over the last eight seasons, he has led the orchestra in over 100 performances, including the Classical Series, Snoopy Family Concert Series, and Symphony Pops Series, consistently presenting exceptional performances of bold and innovative artistic programming.

HIGHLIGHTS OF FRANCESCO LECCE-CHONG'S TENURE INCLUDE:

SRS NAVIGATES THE PANDEMIC UNDER LECCE-CHONG'S LEADERSHIP

SRS@Home Series During the COVID-19 pandemic, when many California regional orchestras went dark, Lecce-Chong devised and spearheaded SRS@Home, a free concert series streamed on SRS's YouTube Channel. The series allowed the orchestra to continue performing throughout the entire 2020-2021 season and connect with thousands of viewers around the world. Additionally, the series brought in a record number of donations, expanded community recognition, and strengthened the organization for remarkable growth in the following seasons.

SRS@Home on Public Television Because of the success of SRS@Home, SRS partnered with NorCal Public Media during the 2020-2021 season for its first-ever televised concert series. Airing on KRCB TV and KPJK TV, the three televised concerts ensured continued access to live orchestral music during the COVID-19 pandemic and reached over 2.8 million households.

SRS's first CD release Through the SRS@Home performances, Lecce-Chong laid the groundwork for SRS's first commercial recording in its nearly 100-year history with the premiere recording of Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's Cello Concerto with GRAMMY winning cellist, Zuill Bailey. Produced and released in 2022 by industry titans, Five/Four Productions and Delos Records, the recording has been described as "exceptionally enjoyable, rich in diverse moods, glorious melodies, and catchy rhythms" (*MusicWeb International*) and "simply phenomenal" (*Art Music Lounge*), with Lecce-Chong praised for "his energy and sensitivity" (*Fanfare*). Building on the success of its first recording, SRS plans to release two more recordings of major commissions by 2030.

PROGRAMMING GROWTH & ARTISTIC INITIATIVES

First Symphony Project Lecce-Chong envisioned the First Symphony Project and led it from concept to implementation. Co-commissioned by the Santa Rosa Symphony, Eugene Symphony, and nine patron households (including Francesco's), this multi-year project invited four acclaimed American composers to write their first symphonies and included two residencies for each composer in Santa Rosa.

Symphonic Cycles Lecce-Chong has implemented multi-year cycles of the complete symphonies of major composers to connect audiences more deeply with the music. With "RACH and the Hollywood Sound", Lecce-Chong paired Rachmaninoff's major orchestral works with his contemporaries writing for film. The "Road to 100" series has brought a cycle of the Beethoven symphonies to the stage that will culminate in the orchestra's 2027-2028 centennial season. In addition, the orchestra is in the midst of a monumental cycle of all nine Mahler symphonies—unheard of for a regional orchestra—focusing on Mahler's fascination with the human condition through music.

Mozart's The Magic Flute (April 2023): A multidisciplinary tour de force, developed in partnership with ArtQuest at Santa Rosa High School, featuring choral singers, narrators, dancers, theatrical backdrops, photography exhibits, and mini performances in the lobby. Lecce-Chong wrote, directed, and conducted the semi-staged production while collaborating closely with teachers and students throughout the process.

Snoopy Family Concert Series Lecce-Chong has relaunched and revitalized SRS's family programming with the Snoopy Family Concert Series in partnership with the Charles M. Schulz Museum. He has personally curated, written, and directed each program to bring the joy of symphonic music to audiences of all ages. Through the series, Lecce-Chong has also connected SRS with dance, theater, and choral youth ensembles throughout the county.

Expanded Impact and New Series Since his arrival, Lecce-Chong has nearly doubled the number of public performances by launching three new small ensemble series: "Symphony Uncorked" brings SRS

to picturesque wineries; "Santa Rosa Symphony at Brannan Center" is SRS's first series in Napa Valley; and a partnership with the Sonoma County Library created by Lecce-Chong that brings year-round free performances to all twelve regional branches.

COMMISSIONS

Expanded the SRS's commitment to contemporary music through commissions and performances of new works by leading composers.

MATT BROWNE: *The Course of Empire* (February 2020)

GABRIELLA SMITH: *One* (January 2021)

DAVID KRAKAUER & KATHLEEN TAGG: *The Fretless Clarinet: Concerto for Klezmer Clarinet* (November 2021)

MICHAEL DAUGHERTY: *Valley of the Moon* (May 2022)

ENRICO CHAPELA BARBA: *Los Braceros [The Laborers]* Cantata for Mariachi (June 2022)

ANGÉLICA NEGRÓN: *Sinfonia Isleña* (March 2023)

ELLEN TAAFFE ZWILICH: *Concerto for Two Pianos* (May 2023)

CLARICE ASSAD: *Play!* for percussion quartet and vocalist (November 2023)

MICHAEL DJUPSTROM: *Symphony No. 1* (March 2024)

CONRAD TAO: *Flung Out* for Piano (May 2024)

KATHERINE BALCH: *musica pyralis* (October 2024)

JONATHAN LESHNOFF: *Warum hast du gelitten?* (December 2024)

SHUYING LI: *Coping Cadences* (March 2026)

MATT BROWNE: *Divertimento* (October 2026)

JONATHAN LESHNOFF: *Symphony No. 7* (March 2027)

MUSIC EDUCATION

Strengthened connections between SRS and the SRS's Institute for Music Education through expanded artistic collaboration, mentorship, and performance opportunities. Lecce-Chong has integrated SRS Youth Orchestra musicians into the SFamily Concert series through side-by-side performances with SRS musicians and by featuring the Concerto Competition winner as a soloist with the orchestra. He also collaborates closely with Youth Orchestra conductors and spends time each season coaching the SRS's six different youth ensembles.

Interview with Francesco Lecce-Chong, J. Andrew Bradford upon request

Hi-res photos of Francesco Lecce-Chong available upon request

ABOUT SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY

The Santa Rosa Symphony (SRS), Resident Orchestra at Green Music Center, is the third-oldest professional orchestra in California and the largest regional symphony north of Los Angeles.

Francesco Lecce-Chong began his tenure in 2018 as the Symphony's fifth Music Director in its 98 years. J. Andrew Bradford joined SRS as President and CEO in 2023.

SRS performances include 21 Classical Series concerts presented over seven concert weekends, six Discovery Rehearsals, a three-concert Snoopy Family Concert Series, a four-concert Symphony Pops Series, and special events.

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

Awards include a League of American Orchestras' 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). In 2022, SRS, in conjunction with Delos Productions,

released its first commercial label recording, *Cello Concerto & Other Works*, featuring works by composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

The Santa Rosa Symphony is committed to the core values of artistic excellence, innovative programming, comprehensive music education, and community service.

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