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Santa Rosa Symphony Presents *Echoes of Innocence* with Mahler's Radiant Fourth Symphony

November 14, 15 & 16, 2026, Weill Hall, Green Music Center

(Santa Rosa, Calif.) — Santa Rosa Symphony (SRS) presents Echoes of Innocence, a concert that pairs intimate, expressive works with music of sweeping beauty. Conducted by Artistic & Music Director Francesco Lecce-Chong, the program features Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise*, Camille Saint-Saëns' Cello Concerto No. 1, and Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 4, with Bay Area native cellist Oliver Herbert and soprano Elisa Sunshine. Performances are November 14, 15, and 16, 2026, at Weill Hall, Green Music Center. Tickets are available at srsymphony.org.

Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise* opens the program with a soaring melody that conveys longing and tenderness. Originally composed as a song without words for soprano, the piece is celebrated for its long, expressive lines and quiet intensity. In this orchestral performance, its lyrical beauty sets the tone for an evening that moves between intimacy, virtuosity, and passion.

Bay Area native Oliver Herbert joins the Symphony for Saint-Saëns' Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, a work that unfolds in a single continuous movement rather than the traditional concerto structure. A 2021 Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient, Herbert has appeared as a soloist with leading orchestras including the San Francisco Symphony and Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In Saint-Saëns' concerto, he brings his expressive artistry to music that shifts seamlessly between urgency and repose, creating an intimate dialogue between soloist and orchestra.

The program concludes with Mahler's Symphony No. 4 in G major, a work filled with delicacy, humor, mystery, and yearning. Soprano Elisa Sunshine, a recent San Francisco Opera Adler Fellow, joins the orchestra in the symphony's final movement, which presents an idyllic vision of heavenly paradise. Following acclaimed appearances with San Francisco Opera and orchestras including the San Francisco Symphony and Boston Symphony Orchestra, Sunshine brings her vocal sparkle and theatrical presence to Mahler's radiant conclusion.

"Mahler's Fourth Symphony continues our monumental Mahler cycle with a look at the most intimate and magical of his symphonies. It is one of the most transcendent views of a musical heaven in all the repertoire. I am also thrilled to work with my friend and one of the Bay Area's homegrown musical heroes, Oliver Herbert, on Saint-Saëns' ever-popular cello concerto."

-**Francesco Lecce-Chong**, Artistic & Music Director

BIOGRAPHIES:

Francesco Lecce-Chong, Artistic & Music Director

American conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong is recognized for his imaginative programming, dynamic performances, and visionary artistic leadership. Appointed Music Director of the Santa Rosa Symphony (SRS) before the age of 30, he has transformed the organization through bold artistic initiatives, innovative community partnerships, and an unwavering commitment to expanding access to orchestral music. In 2026, SRS reaffirmed that shared vision by signing Lecce-Chong to a landmark evergreen agreement and

naming him Artistic & Music Director, reflecting his leadership across the organization's artistic, educational, and community engagement programs.

Since joining SRS in 2018, Lecce-Chong has led more than 100 performances across the Classical Series, Symphony Pops, and Snoopy Family Concert Series, while guiding the orchestra through one of its most ambitious artistic periods. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he conceived and led the groundbreaking SRS@Home digital concert series, allowing the orchestra to continue performing throughout the entire 2020–2021 season while many regional orchestras remained inactive. The series reached audiences around the world, generated record philanthropic support, and led to SRS's first televised concert series in partnership with NorCal Public Media, bringing live orchestral performances into more than 2.8 million households. Those performances also formed the foundation of the Symphony's first commercial recording, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's *Cello Concerto* with GRAMMY Award-winning cellist Zuill Bailey.

Lecce-Chong has expanded SRS's artistic impact through long-term creative projects that deepen audience engagement and champion contemporary music. He launched the multi-year First Symphony Project, commissioning four American composers to write their first symphonies, and has introduced large-scale programming cycles including *Road to 100*, a complete Beethoven symphony cycle leading into the orchestra's centennial season, as well as an ambitious presentation of all nine Mahler symphonies. His interdisciplinary productions, including *The Magic Flute*, have brought together musicians, students, dancers, visual artists, and community partners in uniquely collaborative performances. Under his leadership, SRS has also expanded its commitment to new music through commissions by leading composers while launching new performance series in wineries, Napa Valley, and Sonoma County libraries. His close collaboration with the Institute for Music Education has strengthened connections between professional musicians and young artists through coaching, mentorship, and side-by-side performances.

Beyond Santa Rosa, Lecce-Chong enjoys an active guest conducting career with many of North America's leading orchestras, including the San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Utah Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Louisville Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Internationally, he has appeared with the Romanian National Radio Orchestra, the Janáček Philharmonic, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Xi'an Symphony Orchestra, collaborating with distinguished artists including Renée Fleming and Itzhak Perlman.

Trained also as a pianist and composer, Lecce-Chong studied at the Curtis Institute of Music, Mannes College of Music, and Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Italy before winning positions as Associate Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony and Milwaukee Symphony. Lecce-Chong is the recipient of several distinctions, including the prestigious Solti Foundation Award. He has had the privilege of being mentored and supported by renowned conductors, including Bernard Haitink, David Zinman, Edo de Waart, Manfred Honeck, Donald Runnicles, and Michael Tilson Thomas.

Oliver Herbert, cello
Oliver Herbert is a concert cellist with a rapidly growing international presence and a 2021 Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient. He has appeared as soloist with the San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and others, performing under conductors such as Michael Tilson Thomas, Giancarlo Guerrero, and Juanjo Mena.

Gaining attention for the clarity and imagination of his musical thinking, Herbert curates recital and chamber programs with distinct artistic focus, often drawing connections across eras, styles, and disciplines. This has led to opportunities to present his curatorial work with institutions such as Deutschlandfunk.

He has appeared as a soloist with ensembles such as the San Francisco Symphony and Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and performs regularly at leading festivals and venues including Marlboro, Carnegie Hall, the Rheingau Festival, Verbier Festival, the Utrecht Festival, and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. He has performed with musicians such as Mitsuko Uchida and Tabea Zimmermann.

With a love for programming, Herbert approaches his projects with a wide-ranging curiosity—exploring lesser-known repertoire, music of today, and connections that reveal new perspectives on familiar works. His interests have led to projects around the world, including chamber music curations for Deutschlandfunk and the TICA Festival in Hong Kong, as well as premieres of new works by composers such as Andrew Moses and Žibuoklė Martinaitytė.

Herbert studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and the Colburn School, where he worked with Carter Brey, Pamela Frank, Clive Greensmith, and Peter Wiley, and at the Kronberg Academy in the Professional Studies Program with Frans Helmerson. He plays on a Guadagnini cello that belonged to Antonio Janigro, generously on loan from the Janigro family. In 2025, Herbert was accepted into the Orpheum Foundation's development program for young soloists.

Elisa Sunshine, soprano
Celebrated for her "blend of vocal sparkle and theatrical charisma" by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, American soprano Elisa Sunshine is a recent graduate of San Francisco Opera's Adler Fellowship. In the 2025-2026 season, she returned to San Francisco Opera in a double appearance as the Page and Gilda cover in *Rigoletto* and a Flower Maiden and Squire in *Parsifal*, both conducted by Music Director Eun Sun Kim, as well as her Seattle Opera, Portland Opera, and San Diego Opera debuts as Lucy in *Fellow Travelers*. She also debuted with The Santa Fe Symphony for Handel's *Messiah* and looks excitedly ahead to future collaborations with The Santa Fe Opera, the Sag Harbor Song Festival, and the Santa Rosa Symphony.

In the 2024-2025 season, Sunshine returned to the Lyric Opera of Chicago to cover Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Gilda in *Rigoletto* and made debuts with The Atlanta Opera as Iris in *Semele* and Boston Symphony Orchestra as Juliette in *Die tote Stadt*, garnering critical acclaim for Iris as "the most delightful singer of the evening" for her "superb technique and Mozartean timbre. She will excel in leading roles" (*OperaWire*). Sunshine joined The Santa Fe Opera as an Apprentice Artist in 2024, marking her company debut as Annina in a new production of *La Traviata* and covering Sheila in the world premiere of *The Righteous*.

In previous seasons, Sunshine covered Marie in Laurent Pelly's sparkling production of *La fille du regiment* with Lyric Opera of Chicago and won third prize in The Dallas Opera's 2024 National Vocal Competition. San Francisco Opera's centennial season celebration saw Sunshine return as part of Richard Strauss's masterpiece *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles. In concert, Sunshine has made debuts with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra for Handel's *Messiah*, led by Music Director Richard Egarr, and with the San Francisco Symphony under the baton of Esa-Pekka Salonen for Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE:

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF: *Vocalise* in C-sharp minor for Soprano and Orchestra, Opus 34, No. 14
CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS: Concerto No. 1 in A minor for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 33
GUSTAV MAHLER: Symphony No. 4 in G major for Soprano and Orchestra

High-res photos and interview opportunities available: Francesco Lecce-Chong and Oliver Herbert, and Elisa Sunshine.

CONCERT ENHANCEMENTS:
Concert Program books: Available at all Classical Series concerts.
Concert Program notes: These can be read on the Digital Program Books & Notes page.
Pre-Concert Talk: Conductor Francesco Lecce-Chong and Oliver Herbert provide a 30-minute pre-concert talk one hour prior to the performances.

SPONSORS:
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AT A GLANCE / CALENDAR LISTINGS:
WHO: Santa Rosa Symphony, Francesco Lecce-Chong, conductor

WHAT: Echoes of Innocence

WHERE: Weill Hall, Green Music Center, Sonoma State University

WHEN:
Saturday, November 14, 2026, at 2:00 pm – Discovery Rehearsal (no Pre-Concert Talk)
Saturday, November 14, 2026, at 7:30 pm (Doors at 6:00 pm, Pre-Concert Talk 6:30 pm - 7:00 pm)
Sunday, November 15, 2026, at 3:00 pm (Doors at 1:30 pm, Pre-Concert Talk 2:00 pm - 2:30 pm)
Monday, November 16, 2026, at 7:30 pm (Doors at 6:00 pm, Pre-Concert Talk 6:30 pm - 7:00 pm)

TICKET PRICES:
$20/adult; $10/youth (7-17) for Discovery Rehearsal
$34-$110 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 students with a valid student ID. Available at the door only

HOW TO PURCHASE TICKETS:
srsymphony.org or (707) 546-8742 or in person: 50 Santa Rosa Ave, 1st Floor, Santa Rosa CA. (Weekdays 9:00 am – 5:00 pm; 10:30 am – 5:00 pm on Wednesday; closed Saturday & Sunday.)

ABOUT SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY
Now in its 99th season, the Santa Rosa Symphony (SRS) is the third-oldest professional orchestra in California and one of the oldest symphony orchestras in the western United States. The resident orchestra at Sonoma State University's Donald and Maureen Green Music Center, SRS performs seven Classical Series concert sets in the acoustically acclaimed 1,400-seat Weill Hall, along with Snoopy Family Concert Series, Discovery Rehearsal Series, and Winterlude… Also performed are the summer series Symphony Uncorked all over Sonoma County, the Symphony Pops at the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts, and a series of intimate chamber performances at the Brannan Center.

Led by Music Director Francesco Lecce-Chong since 2018, the orchestra is recognized for artistic excellence, innovative programming, and a commitment to presenting both established masterworks and new music. SRS has earned national recognition for its adventurous programming and community engagement, including an ASCAP award for adventurous programming and an American Symphony Orchestra League MetLife Award for Community Engagement.

Through the Santa Rosa Symphony Institute for Music Education, SRS reaches more than 20,000 young people annually through five youth ensembles, a beginning strings program, Simply Strings, inspired by El Sistema, in-school programs, summer music education, and free concerts for youth. Its broad community offerings also include free, family-friendly chamber music performances across all twelve Sonoma County Library regional branches, as well as other community programs throughout the region.

In 2022, SRS released its first commercial recording, Cello Concerto & Other Works, featuring music by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. The Santa Rosa Symphony is led by J. Andrew Bradford, who joined SRS as President and CEO in 2023. It is supported by a 15-person full-time administrative staff and is a member of the League of American Orchestras and the Association of California Symphony Orchestras.

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