



## **San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra Biography**

The San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra (SFSYO) has earned a reputation as one of the finest youth ensembles in the world. Founded in 1981 to provide pre-professional training to the Bay Area's most gifted young musicians at no cost, the orchestra has toured Europe and Asia to rave reviews, winning the prestigious City of Vienna Prize at the International Youth and Music Festival in 1986 and performing to packed houses in the great halls of Europe, from Berlin's Philharmonie to Amsterdam's Concertgebouw to the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg. The SFSYO has performed for Queen Elizabeth II of England and been featured on BBC radio. In the summer of 1996, the Youth Orchestra opened the San Francisco Symphony's groundbreaking American Mavericks Festival, performing John Cage's radical music with members of the Grateful Dead under Michael Tilson Thomas' baton.

The SFSYO was established during the summer of 1981, when eighty-five musicians aged eleven to twenty, and representing communities from Napa to Santa Cruz, were selected after twelve days of competitive auditions. The ensemble played its inaugural concert in January 1982, led by founding Music Director Jahja Ling. Over the years, Ling was succeeded as music director by David Milnes, Leif Bjaland, Alasdair Neale, Edwin Outwater, Benjamin Shwartz, Donato Cabrera, and Christian Reif. In 2019, Daniel Stewart was appointed as the San Francisco Symphony's Wattis Foundation Youth Orchestra Music Director. Today, 106 musicians, chosen from more than 300 applicants per season, perform with the Youth Orchestra.

The Youth Orchestra made its first tour of Europe in 1986 and in summer 2019 embarked on its 11th international tour across six European cities. Highlights included performances at Hamburg's new Elbphilharmonie and Vienna's Musikverein, where the orchestra had the opportunity to play Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in the same place where the concerto was premiered by the Vienna Philharmonic in 1881. The SFSYO's 2012 performance of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 1 at the Berlin Philharmonie was recorded and released on SFS Media. Other SFSYO releases include Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 5, recorded live at Davies Symphony Hall in 1994, and Sergei Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 recorded live at Prague's Dvořák Hall in 1998.

The orchestra's success is rooted in its innovative, tuition-free training program, which taps members of the San Francisco Symphony to coach the young musicians every week before the full ensemble rehearses with SFSYO Maestro Daniel Stewart. Youth Orchestra members also get the invaluable experience of working with world-renowned artists, which have included Esa-Pekka Salonen, Michael Tilson Thomas, Herbert Blomstedt, Kurt Masur, John Adams, Yo-Yo Ma, Valery Gergiev, Isaac Stern, Yehudi Menuhin, Wynton Marsalis, Midori, Joshua Bell, Mstislav Rostropovich, Sir Simon Rattle, and many others. Of equal importance, the young musicians are able to speak with these established artists about their professional and personal experiences, and about music.

The San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra is a vital part of the Bay Area's rich cultural life. The Youth Orchestra has opened the Stern Grove Festival three times, performed for patients at Laguna Honda Hospital, played a benefit for Stanford Children's Hospital, given an Earthquake Relief Concert

for the Hollister School of the Arts, and performed at the opening of San Francisco's Main Library. In January 2020, the SFSYO hosted the eighth Bay Area Youth Orchestra Festival, presenting colleague ensembles on the stage of Davies Symphony Hall and benefitting organizations dedicated to the needs of underserved youth.

The SFSYO continued to operate during the 2020–21 season, adapting to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and pivoting to remote learning. SFSYO members participated in weekly online interactive sessions led by Daniel Stewart, covering topics such as score study, analysis of orchestral repertoire, audition preparation and strategies, effective practice techniques, and keeping active musically during COVID-19. Other activities included robust coaching, alumni and faculty roundtables, and special presentations by SF Symphony musicians and administrators. SFSYO musicians were also encouraged to submit video performances, musical compositions, and even samples of writing about music for feedback and group discussions with their peers.

[2021-22 Season]