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# The Maestro's Swan Song

JAHJA LING'S LEGACY WITH THE SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY



After a remarkable 13 years with the San Diego Symphony, Maestro Jahja Ling will conclude his tenure as the symphony's music director this May with a grand finale featuring the works of Johannes Brahms and Jean Sibelius. Ling's talent is unrivaled and has not only helped shape the careers of many aspiring musicians but has touched the hearts of those who had the pleasure of watching his performances. From a young age, Ling has been making his mark in the music world. Born in Jakarta, Ling led the San Diego Symphony on its first international tour that included a sold-out performance at the famed Carnegie Hall in New York. After completing a master's degree at Juilliard, he studied orchestral conducting at the Yale School of Music under Otto-Werner Mueller and received a Doctorate of Musical Arts degree in 1985. Together, Ling and the Symphony have released eight new live recordings, the first recordings by the San Diego Symphony in over a decade.

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Ling's talent will be greatly missed in San Diego, but his legacy will continue to live on through the quality precedent Ling set. FINE Magazine spoke with Jahja Ling about his history with the San Diego Symphony and his future projects.

**What was your inspiration to pursue a career in music?**

I feel like I was born with musical talent. I found that I could play piano at a very young age, and when I played at home, I became very touched and mesmerized by the sounds. I worked on a lot of great things in Jakarta with my teachers in an orchestra that made me want to study music even more. It was that kind of sound that led me to study at Juilliard, where I was very privileged to work with some of the best professors that helped lead me to where I am today. I think it was this progression of events from childhood to working in orchestras in Europe, Asia and America that helped me build my musical credentials and share my knowledge with others.

**How did you initially get involved with the San Diego Symphony?**

Thirteen years ago, the San Diego Symphony was looking for a musical director. I initially started out as a regular conductor, but I needed more assurance of financial stability. Out of all the positions available, this one seemed to offer the most prospect and opportunity. The people that I have worked with [in San Diego] are so talented and have helped make this job enjoyable. The San Diego Symphony offered the most in terms of musical production and recording, and I have had the pleasure of working with some very talented musicians.

**One of the most challenging aspects of your job is trying to coordinate your musicians to work in cohesion. How do you bring them together to work as a team?**

We hire the best musicians. We have some of the best

people audition to work with the San Diego Symphony, and it helps make my job a lot easier. Ultimately, you must listen and work with each other to achieve the desired results, and everything will usually fall into place with hard work. It's my job as the conductor to nurture the musicians and help piece everything together so we can work in unison and [with] cohesion.

**What is one of your most memorable moments over the course of your tenure with the San Diego Symphony?**

I have particularly enjoyed the opportunities I've had to reach out to the young musicians that are currently in school and hope to take part in the symphony one day. I have also had the opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall in front of a sold-out audience. It was just an unbelievable experience. After that, we were able to take a trip to China to play in Shanghai and Beijing. It was just crazy because we played an encore for our audience and the musicians were playing excellently. I was very happy and fortunate to have shared these moments with the musicians in the orchestra [and with] the San Diego Symphony.

**What's your next project?**

I hope to work with younger musicians as their mentor to help them realize their true talents and surpass their own expectations. I have children and grandchildren that I am looking forward to spending more time with as well.

I have been named the first conductor laureate in the history of the San Diego Symphony, which means that I will have the opportunity to come back and continue my work with them in the future, and I am very excited about that. It is very special that I will be able to continue working with my old colleagues.

Jaha Ling's final concert—for now, at least—will be May 26th–28th at Copley Symphony Hall. Tickets are available now at [sandiegosymphony.org](http://sandiegosymphony.org). 📺