

San Diego Symphony Celebrates the Piano Concerto of Recently Appointed Composer in Residence Jimmy López

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Music Director Rafael Payare and the San Diego Symphony opened their 2025-26 season last weekend with a charming, vibrant concert production of Maurice Ravel's rarely encountered opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges*. That turned out to be the appealing appetizer to this weekend's more substantial main course that featured Peruvian composer Jimmy López's exhilarating 2022 piano concerto *Ephemeræ*.



Composer Jimmy López [Photo (c.) Jenna Gilmer]

Recently named the orchestra's Composer in Residence, López and his brilliant piano concerto proved an exciting introduction to the San Diego audience. In her concert words of welcome, Symphony President and CEO Martha Gilmer explained that in the two years that López will serve as Composer in Residence, the orchestra would feature several of his compositions, culminating in a commissioned work by the San Diego Symphony, his Symphony No. 6, to be heard later in his second year with the orchestra.

López wrote *Ephemeræ* for the Spanish concert pianist Javier Perianes, who was the soloist in Saturday's concert. The three movement concerto opens with mysterious solo motifs in the piano's lowest range that are quickly echoed by agile woodwind voices. Soon the piano announces the movement's main themes, long, brilliant cross-hand flourishes that Perianes executed with panache congruent to the composer's bracing style. By the opening movement's final cadence, López's masterful orchestration, rich and continuously varied like Ravel's, was securely established.

The piano's delicate rolled chords and a reflective, suspenseful cantabile line set the mood of the second movement before the orchestra adds its deftly understated support. I particularly appreciated the *pianissimo* duet between Perianes and Concertmaster Jeff Thayer. The movement takes shape as an elegantly shaped long crescendo to full orchestra and piano, only to drop back to the solo piano's translucent song.

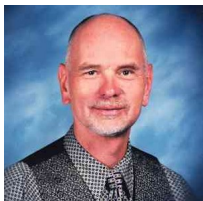
Without a pause, the final movement's array of bold, athletic interplay between the soloist and the full orchestra takes off and charts its dramatic course, excited by assertive percussion riffs and glossy trumpet fanfares. No concerto would be complete without a cadenza, and Perianes supplied the appropriate flamboyant air to the composer's fiery solo.

Ephemeræ—in spite of its title—is a substantial concerto, filled with alluring themes, yet exhibiting a sophisticated structure that invites revisiting and contemplation. Like Jean Sibelius and some mid-20th century European composers, López uses tonality and modality without apology, while skillfully avoiding its more predictable conventions.

A fine performance of *Ephemeræ* can be found online given by the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, one of the orchestras that commissioned the concerto, also featuring Perianes as soloist.

Payare surrounded *Ephemeræ* with Emmanuel Chabrier's evergreen *España* and Robert Schumann's less familiar Symphony No. 2 in C Major, Op. 61. Payare and the orchestra indulged the festive exuberance of *España* while maintaining a meticulously polished level of performance. The Schumann Symphony performance also proved a spirited, well-tailored account, especially with Payare's persuasive calibration of dynamic contrasts and the sumptuous solos from the woodwinds. I don't think there is any mystery, however, why we do not hear this Second Symphony very often.

This concert was presented by the San Diego Symph0ny on October 11 & 12, 2025, at the Jacobs Music Center in downtown San Diego.



Ken Herman, a classically trained pianist and organist, has covered music for the San Diego Union, the Los Angeles Times' San Diego Edition, and for sandiego.com. He has won numerous awards, including first place for Live Performance and Opera Reviews in the 2017, the 2018, and the 2019 Excellence in Journalism Awards competition held by the San Diego Press Club. A Chicago native, he came to San Diego to pursue a graduate degree and stayed.[Read more...](#)