

Arts & Culture

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“This will be our fifth year at The Shell and our sixth season there. We had over 125,000 people come to the venue our first year. For our 2025 season, which ran from June to October, we had over 192,000 people attend concerts at The Shell. If we include the ‘bumper time’ of early June — before the official kickoff to our summer season on the last weekend of June — and the month of November, there were an additional 36,200 people who attended concerts during that time last year.”

— Craig Hall, San Diego Symphony vice president for Marketing and Communications



The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park is nestled between San Diego Bay and the downtown skyline. SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY

SHELL OF A SEASON

The Rady Shell’s 2026 lineup mixes music legends and younger acts.

Artists who will perform at San Diego Symphony’s bayside venue range from Buddy Guy and St. Vincent to The Beach Boys and Sarah McLachlan.

The symphony will today announce its new partnership with Southwest Airlines.

By George Varga
UNION-TRIBUNE

The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park isn’t waiting for its 2026 summer season to kick off the \$85 million bayside venue’s 5th anniversary, which will feature return performances by Buddy Guy, Kool & The Gang, the Beach Boys and Gipsy Kings — plus The Shell debuts of St. Vincent, Tedeschi Trucks Band, Wynonna Judd and Jeff Goldblum & The Mildred Snitzer Orchestra.

Between March 20 and June 12, no fewer than 13 pre-season concerts are scheduled at The Shell. They will include return performances by James Taylor, the Avett Brothers and Classic Albums Live, along with The Shell debuts of Paul Simon, Ethel Cain, Yungblud and One Direction alum Louis Tomlinson. The season officially opens with a June 29 concert by the San Diego Symphony — which owns and operates The Shell — and violin star Stefan Jackiw.

Season ticket packages go on sale today. Also today, The Shell will host its free annual Picnic at the Park concert, which will be headlined by award-winning San Diego singer-songwriter Gregory Page and his band. It is being retitled Picnic at the Park Presented by Southwest Airlines to reflect a new partnership between

Southwest and the symphony that will be officially unveiled at today’s concert.

“We’re excited to announce a multi-year partnership with Southwest Airlines as the official airline of the San Diego Symphony. Their commitment to San Diego and dedication to customer service make them the ideal partner to welcome guests from near and far to our world-class venues,” said Casey Patterson, the symphony’s director of corporate partnerships.

This year’s mix of legendary and rising artists at The Shell has remained steady since the San Diego Symphony opened the panoramic venue in August 2021. The venue’s launch came in a year when many concert halls, theaters, nightclubs and amphitheaters across the nation were still shuttered or only partly operational in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown.

“This will be our fifth year at The Shell and our sixth season there,” said San Diego Symphony Vice President for Marketing and Communications Craig Hall.

“We had over 125,000 people come to the venue our first year,” he continued. “For our 2025 season, which ran from June to October, we had over 192,000 people attend concerts at The Shell. If we include the ‘bumper time’ of early June — before the official kickoff to our summer season on the last weekend of June — and the month of November, there were an additional 36,200 people who attended concerts during that time last year.”

Those totals include attendance at performances for which The Shell was rented by outside promoters, including Live Nation and

AEG/Goldenvoice, the world’s two biggest concert promoters.

It does not include the attendance at the approximately 35 private corporate events that are booked each year at The Shell by the San Diego Padres’ hospitality and events division, Finest Collective. Under the auspices of the Padres, The Shell has hosted concerts by such artists as Sting, Billy Joel, Dierks Bentley and Sammy Hagar that were not open to the public.

“The Padres are our corporate-events partners, so they book all the private events for us at The Shell,” said former San Diego Symphony Vice President for Artistic Administration and Audience development Lea Slusher. On Feb. 6, the symphony named her as its Executive Director of The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park.

“A lot of big acts come in for these corporate events, which are a great source of income for us,” Slusher continued.

“The Padres are doing a terrific job and are bringing us some really great events through the partnership we have with them. They do about 35 private events a year at The Shell. So, if anyone asks: ‘Why don’t you book another 35 concerts and not do corporate events?’ — the reality is I don’t think there are 35 other acts to book.”

STATE-OF-THE-ART VENUE

The 2021 opening of The Shell proved doubly fortuitous for the San Diego Symphony. The orchestra was essentially homeless between early 2020 and the fall of 2024 when its downtown Jacobs Music Center reopened

See **SHELL** on Page E6



A scene from City Ballet of San Diego's "Rhapsody in Blue," which is being revised and revived for the company's March dance concerts. CHELSEA PENYAK

The guts and glory of staging a ballet

City Ballet of San Diego is bringing back 'Rhapsody in Blue' and 'Ecliptic' for its March dance concerts

By Marcia Luttrell
FOR THE UNION-TRIBUNE

It can take many months to stage a ballet performance that only lasts a few glorious hours.

The effort takes guts and a lot of collaboration, along with daring and a passionate sense of duty.

There are countless considerations involved ... ready?

To name a few: costs, costumes, casting, choreographic choices, music selection and rights, lighting and venue possibilities and then, that scary toss of the dice.

Will the audience love it?

As part of its Destination Innovation season, City Ballet of San Diego will present "Rhapsody in Blue" at two venues this month, one of its most ambitious concerts yet.

There are three dance professionals involved in staging the triple bill show.

Two répétiteurs traveled to San Diego to teach licensed works by Tony Award-winning choreographer Christopher Wheeldon and internationally renowned dancer-maker Annabelle Lopez Ochoa.

And City Ballet's resident choreographer Geoff Gonzalez is reworking "Rhapsody in Blue," a contemporary ballet first introduced as a dance film during the pandemic and then, performed in 2022 on stage.

It's accompanied by the iconic George Gershwin orchestral jazz score of the same name.

City Ballet rightfully guessed that the familiar music that Gershwin described in his biography as a "musical kaleidoscope of America" would be advantageous in introducing a contemporary ballet, which can be a hard sell when it comes to devoted balletomanes.

The audience response was enthusiastically positive, and for Gonzalez, creating a movement language to Gershwin's masterpiece was fun to film, due to the visual control that editing provides.

But creating a "kaleidoscope" of steps for stage in 2022 was not.

"I thought, 'This is scrambled eggs,'" Gonzalez recalled.

"There were so many sounds and themes. I tried to put a move or a dynamic to every note. But now, I'm taking a step back."



A scene from City Ballet of San Diego's presentation of choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's "Ecliptic," which will return for the company's March dance concerts. ANNA SCIPIONE PHOTOS

CITY BALLET OF SAN DIEGO PRESENTS 'RHAPSODY IN BLUE'

When: 8 p.m. Saturday; 2 p.m. next Sunday
Where: Balboa Theatre, 868 Fourth Ave., San Diego

When: 8 p.m. March 11

Where: California Center for the Arts, Escondido, 340 North Escondido Blvd., Escondido

Tickets: \$39-\$118.80

Online: cityballet.org

A free lecture by City Ballet's artistic director Steven Wistrich starts 45 minutes prior to each performance.

A recent trip to New York inspired the revised version of "Rhapsody in Blue."

Gonzalez got a snow globe view from the 32nd floor of his midtown Manhattan hotel and winter's blue-tinted skyline refreshed his perspective on pacing.

It was beautiful, cool, clear and sharp.

"Over the past month, I've been preparing my mind and my emotions to take what I really need from what I was creating before and really spruce it up," he said.

"There's no sadness in the piece, it's all romanticism."

Costumes will be different too, this time, inspired

by the pinstripes on the New York Yankees baseball uniforms.

"I have this concept," Gonzalez said.

"I want a deep midnight blue leotard with diamond-like pinstripes. I'd love to see what we can do with that. I want to make it so that when you hear the music and see the dance, it takes you to that New York atmosphere."

Another returning work is "Ecliptic," a jaw-dropping ballet by Ochoa.

The dancers perform with large gold hoops that reflect themes of harmony and continuity, and when the company premiered it in 2024, the fluid and phys-

ically demanding ballet

brought the audience to its feet.

It took three weeks of daily rehearsals to teach "Ecliptic" to the company dancers.

In order to conceptualize and space a dance that can be likened to an agility course, the stage is perceived as being divided

into eight sections. Lighting with a range of color schemes is another voice that helps to create different worlds in a progression throughout the dance.

Erickson said she typically familiarizes herself with the work by first dancing with a hoop in her hotel room, noting that Ochoa's choreography is dense, detailed and "she doesn't shy away from fast movement."

"Every stager has a shorthand," she explained.

"There's an accuracy that you need to uphold and to honor the choreographer's intentions. The hoops are like another person. You do one step at a time — there are patterns and sometimes it's just learning the foot work and then learning the port de bras (carriage of the arms) with the hoops."

The "Rhapsody in Blue" production also includes the premiere of Christopher Wheeldon's "The American," one of Wheeldon's first ballets staged by répétiteur Michele Gifford.

"I bring notes and I try to assimilate it in my body, as well," said Gifford, a former New York City Ballet dancer and a répétiteur for both Wheeldon and the George Balanchine Trust.

"One of the things I love about this ballet is that it's like the champagne that cleanses your palate. It's easy on the eyes, easy to digest. It's sparkly. It's buttercream icing. I use a lot of whimsical words like that to get across to the dancers what needs to come forward. They are in light yellow costumes and it's bright and cheery."

Wheeldon's romantic, neoclassical ballet lasts about 30 minutes and includes six couples accompanied by an Antonín Dvořák's score.

Casting "The American" requires an assessment of partnering skills and collaborating with Natalie Test, City Ballet's rehearsal director. If a principal dancer has extended time in one section of the program, he or she may be too overworked for another part of the show.

"I'll have several couples in the room and if it's a struggle, it's not worth it," said Gifford, who also staged Wheeldon's "Morphoses" in 2024 for the company.

"I've actually switched people around. The beauty about coming back to City Ballet of San Diego is that I've worked with them before. I know their capabilities, so that's a huge relief."



In choreographer Annabelle Lopez Ochoa's "Ecliptic," the dancers perform with large gold hoops that reflect themes of harmony and continuity.

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RADY SHELL SUMMER SEASON



James Taylor made his debut at The Shell with two sold-out shows last year. He returns for an encore concert on April 28. SANDY HUFFAKER / FOR THE U-T

SHELL

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after a five-year, \$163 million, top-to-bottom rebuilding.

The Shell provided the orchestra with a state-of-the-art venue where it could rehearse and perform for a good number of its spring, summer and fall performances — and even for some early winter holiday concerts. The venue also provided San Diego with a new musical and visual landmark that, barely a month after it opened, was featured as part of Apple's global iPhone 13 promotional rollout.

Held on Aug. 6, 2020, The Shell's first concert featured the Rafael Payare-led San Diego Symphony and several international guest soloists. It drew televised coverage on the PBS Evening News and was also covered by The New York Times and publications in San Francisco, Toronto and Montreal, whose Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal is also led by Payare.

Along with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Cleveland Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the San Diego Symphony is now one of the only major classical music organizations in the country that owns and operates both an indoor and outdoor concert venue. That advantage is furthered by the temperate weather in San Diego, which is home to at least five major outdoor venues that typically hold concerts for up to eight months each year.

"Our season at The Shell is really never over because we are able to do concerts in March, April, May and in the fall that aren't part of our summer subscription series," Slusher said.

"A lot of our symphony colleagues' venues end their outdoor concert seasons by October. But The Shell keeps going and our holiday concerts at The Shell in December are very well-attended."

Hall agreed, adding: "Last year was the first year since 2019 that we brought our holiday concerts back indoors to the Jacobs Music Center. And what we realized is that a lot of people grew to love those holiday events at The Shell. So, we're looking at doing them indoors and outdoors, because people have a desire to go to holiday concerts at The Shell in December, even if it is a cooler time."

This year will see the venue present seven spring and summer performances at which the symphony will provide a live orchestral soundtrack to popular films, including "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone," "Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black

Pearl" and "Star Wars: A New Hope."

There will also be tributes to The Beatles, Bee Gees and Eagles, along with two themed concerts whose titles — "Let The Sunshine In: The Music of '69" and "The Sixties Show" — clearly indicate the nostalgia-fueled target audience they are designed to attract. The fact that 1969 is the year that the fabled Woodstock festival took place is no coincidence.

"We can't call it 'Woodstock,'" Slusher said. "But the program will be a celebration and recognition of what happened at Woodstock. At the same time, 1969 was the same year the (third edition of the) Harlem Culture Festival took place and we're going to try to integrate both those festivals into the program. It's a concert to recognize the music of that time and social change, but in a positive manner."

A QUICK STARTER

The rule of thumb in the concert industry is that it usually takes at least three years for a new venue, festival or concert season to just break even, let alone become successful. The Shell did well right out of the gate, due to both a variety of factors beyond its stunning setting on San Diego Bay with the downtown skyline to the right, Coronado and North Island on the left, and — for performers looking out at the audience from the stage — the lights of Tijuana and Baja to the south.

Or as James Taylor put it at the first of his two sold-out concerts at The Shell last May as he introduced his 1975 hit, "Mexico": "This may be the closest I've ever played this song to Mexico."

The Shell boasts other attributes beyond its eye-catching setting and a seashell-shaped stage that suggests a more intimate iteration of the famed Hollywood Bowl nestled alongside San Diego Bay.

The venue's Una Davis Family Stage covers 3,865 square feet. It is 54 feet deep, 57 feet high and 92 feet wide at the front of the stage.

It contains two top-line sound systems — the Meyer Constellation Acoustic System, which provides the sound for the performers on stage, and a K2 LAcoustics system, which provides the sound that the audience hears in the venue. The Constellation is the first of its kind to be built for an outdoor venue, rather than an indoor one, and provides musicians a level of sonic quality usually only found in first-rate concert halls.

Including the food court by the front entrance and the backstage dressing rooms, offices and storage spaces, The Shell occupies a third of downtown's 10.8-



Wynonna Judd will perform July 11 at The Shell. Melissa Etheridge will open the show.

SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY

acre Embarcadero Marina Park.

The entire venue, including its permanent restrooms, is open 85 percent of the year as a public park. The symphony's summertime rehearsals are open free of charge to the public, as are some of the pre-concert soundchecks by bands and solo artists who perform orchestra-free concerts.

STAYING FLEXIBLE

Depending on the seating configuration, the capacity for each concert at The Shell can increase or decrease.

For seated performances with cabaret table seating at the front of the venue, the capacity is usually around 4,500. For standing-room-only concerts, the capacity can be between 8,500 and 10,000.

The symphony's agreement with the San Diego Port Commission and California Coastal Commission to operate The Shell stipulates that no more six events a year can be held at that maximum 10,000 capacity. The agreement also includes a 55-day, or 110 half-day, a year limit — from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. — on the number of ticketed events that can be held at the venue.

"Something we continue to look at is the fact there is no fixed seating at The Shell, so we can scale our events from 4,500 to 10,000 and everything in between," said symphony marketing and communications vice president Hall. "This allows us to figure out which configuration works best for different artists and different genres."

If that means removing all the tables to add more rows of seating, or creating room for dancing and a mosh pit at the front of The Shell's stage — as was the case for last year's concert by the neo-psychedelic Australian band King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard — no problem.

"That was a first for us

with King Gizzard, especially considering that it was an orchestral concert!" Slusher said. "The band was very clear about the mosh pit being part of the experience. We said 'Great,' and we were prepared for it."

King Gizzard has now performed in two concert seasons at The Shell. Other artists — including The Beach Boys, Gipsy Kings and Smokey Robinson — have also performed multiple times there — although not nearly as often as they have at the 1,450-seat Humphreys Concert by the Bay on Shelter Island. Humphreys this year is celebrating its 45th anniversary and will exclusively announce its 2026 season in next week's San Diego Union-Tribune.

It is not uncommon for acts to alternate the venues they appear in here.

Bonnie Raitt performed at The Shell in 2023, then did two nights at Humphreys in 2024. Mt. Joy, which played at Humphreys in 2021, was part of the 2025 Shell season and will do an encore performance there on Aug. 18. The veteran English pop-reggae band UB40, which has performed several times at Humphreys, this year will appear at SDSU's Aztec Bowl at Cal Coast Credit Union Amphitheatre.

The lines are further blurred by the fact that AEG/GoldenVoice Senior Vice President of Talent John Wojas — who has exclusively booked the Humphreys series since 2007 — also books the AEG-produced concerts at The Shell.

"Humphreys is a fantastic venue, but there are differences in size between it and The Shell," Slusher said.

"In San Diego, the number of live events taking place on the same night at different venues is competitive. But that's not specific to music. The Padres have games at Petco Park on days when we have concerts at The Shell, and both are very

well-attended. So, it's not an 'either/or' situation.

"When we opened in 2021, The Shell was a new venue that was not yet on the radar of a lot of (talent) agents. Now, we are. It's all about growth and we know so much more now about the operation of The Shell than we did in 2021."

Initially, the venue featured three summer jazz concerts per season, most of them were led by top San Diego trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos. He is the jazz curator for the symphony's annual indoor Jazz at the Jacobs concerts series, which was launched 11 years ago and typically sells out each of its three annual concerts.

But jazz shows at The Shell have in recent years been trimmed back to just one. For this summer's season, it will be "Manteca! A Dizzy Gillespie & Chano Pozo Celebration," featuring Castellanos & The KSDS Jazz Orchestra, on Sept. 5.

"Gilbert consistently brings us great guest artists for his jazz concerts and his shows sell out for us at Jacobs Music Center," Slusher said.

"But I think it's unsustainable to do two or three jazz shows a year at The Shell, just because of the costs of doing concerts there. At the Jacobs Music Center, which seats around 1,750, Gilbert sells out and his shows are wonderful. "It doesn't work at The Shell, which has 4,500 seats and more overhead (expenses)."

"We are really lucky to have Gilbert. But we have to be smart about what we do, financially. There are so many things I'd present, if money and ticket sales didn't have to be taken into consideration. And there are so many great artists that should play The Shell. But we have to look at the numbers and make tough decisions."

'THREE BUCKETS'

Hall uses a tri-pronged analogy to illustrate how

The Shell has sustained itself and flourished.

"It takes the form of three buckets — the concerts that the San Diego Symphony does, the concerts that outside promoters like AEG and Golden Voice do at The Shell, and the private events that the Padres book," he said. "The symphony envisioned all three aspects back when it was thinking about building The Shell and what might be the best core vision for the venue to succeed."

Several new concert venues have opened in San Diego County since The Shell launched in 2021. They include The Epstein Family Amphitheatre at UC San Diego, FrontWave Arena in Oceanside and The Sound in Del Mar.

While each generally has a different musical focus, there is some overlap. And the more venues there are in one market that compete to book some of the same acts can yield mixed results. Music fans have more concert options, but sometimes those options are in the same week or even on the same day.

"There are some nights where I might be at another venue because I want to see that show," Slusher said.

"The reality is we have a lot of shows in San Diego. There is so much and you have to ask yourself, as a promoter: 'When is there too much? When does having too many concerts on the same night lead to (a venue) not doing as well?' That is the reality of the business here and it is similar in other cities."

Hall regards it as a simple matter of math.

"How much is too much? For us it's no more than 110 half days a year at The Shell," he said. "That's where our focus is, because we cannot go above 110. To my knowledge, that's not something that is likely to change."

Hall and Slusher are working to maximize The Shell's future appeal and earning potential. They are aiming high.

"One of the things I think about in terms of what the future looks like is wanting The Shell to eventually become one of the outdoor legacy venues in the United States," Hall said.

"The best example of that is the Hollywood Bowl and everything it has been for Los Angeles and Southern California, with the events it has hosted and the impact it has over years and years."

"That is something we look at a lot. You can't do that in five years, but we are constantly striving to make sure we serve the community in best way we can. We have monthly yoga events and have held a naturalization ceremony at The Shell.

"We want to be a valuable resource and that's how you become a legacy venue."

RADY SHELL SUMMER SEASON

2026 PRESEASON CONCERTS AT THE RADY SHELL AT JACOBS PARK

All concerts are at 7:30 p.m. unless otherwise indicated.

March 20: Foreigner: "The Hits Orchestral," with the San Diego Symphony, featuring conductor Stuart Chafetz (\$75-\$657)

April 10: Black Coffee, 3 p.m. (\$136-\$282)

April 11: Reik (\$110-\$280)

April 14: Ethel Cain, 7 p.m. (\$87-\$110)

April 28: An Evening with James Taylor & His All-Star Band (\$109-\$1069)

May 1 & 3: "Star Wars: A New Hope" In Concert, featuring conductor Scott Terrell and the San Diego Symphony (\$51-\$152)

May 2: Bob Moses & Cannons, 6:30 p.m. (\$70-\$141)

May 10: The Avett Brothers & Mike Patton (\$78-\$167)

May 19: Alex G, 7 p.m. (\$64.30-\$86.40)

May 20: Yungblud, 7 p.m. (\$79-\$289)

June 9: Paul Simon "A Quiet Celebration," 7 p.m. (\$90-\$730)

June 10: Louis Tomlinson, 7 p.m. (\$101.50)

June 12: Classic Albums Live performs The Eagles' "Their Greatest Hits" (\$39-\$124)



Actor-musician Jeff Goldblum will perform at The Shell with his jazzy group, The Mildred Snitzer Orchestra, and the San Diego Symphony on Aug. 23. **SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY**

2026 CONRAD PREBYS SUMMER SEASON AT THE RADY SHELL AT JACOBS PARK

All concerts are at 7:30 p.m. unless otherwise indicated.

June 26: Opening Night with the San Diego Symphony, featuring music and artistic director Rafael Payare and violinist Stefan Jackiw (\$39-\$268)

June 27: The Beach Boys with the San Diego Symphony, featuring conductor Sean O'Loughlin (\$39-\$268)

June 28: Kool & The Gang, with The Sugarhill Gang, (\$39-\$268)

July 3: "Blockbuster Broadway," featuring conductor Evan Roider, vocalists Jessica Hendy, Alex Getlin, Scott Coulter and John Boswell, and the San Diego Symphony (\$39-\$268)

July 4: "America The Beautiful: 250," featuring conductor Byron Stripling, guest artists Mamie Parris, Leo Manzari, Bobby Floyd, Rick Shaw and Jim Rupp, and the San Diego Symphony (\$39-\$268)

July 10: "Let The Sunshine In: The Music of '69," featuring conductor Ted Sperling, vocalists Morgan James, Bryonha Marie and Noah Rickets, and the San Diego Symphony (\$39-\$268)

July 11: Wynonna Judd and Melissa Etheridge, 7 p.m. (\$39-\$268)

July 12: Beethoven by the Bay, featuring the San Diego Symphony Orchestra and pianist Parker Van Ostrand. (\$39-\$268)

July 17: "Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy, Celebrating 25 Years of Final Fantasy, XI," featuring conductor Arnie Roth, vocalist Rikki, the San Diego Symphony and the San Diego Master Chorale (\$39-\$268)

July 18: "How To Train Your Dragon 2" In Concert, featuring conductor Jason Seber and the San Diego Symphony Orchestra (\$39-\$268)

July 31: The Music of John Williams, featuring conductor David Newman and the San Diego Symphony (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 1: St. Vincent with the San Diego Symphony, featuring conductor Jules Buckley (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 2: Sarah McLachlan, with Allison Russell 7 p.m. (\$79-\$299)

Aug. 7: "Disney '80s-'90s Celebration in Concert," featuring conductor Jason Seber and the San Diego Symphony (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 8: "Stayin' Alive: The Bee Gees Beyond," with Rajaton and the San Diego Symphony, featuring conductor Steven Reineke (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 9: Gipsy Kings, featuring Nicolas Reyes, with Reyes Heritage (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 14: "The Gershwins in Hollywood," featuring conductor Rob Fisher, vocalist Michael Feinstein and the San Diego Symphony (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 16: Tedeschi Trucks Band, with Lukas Nelson 6 p.m. (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 18: Mt. Joy: Celebrating 10 years, 7 p.m. (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 21 & 22: "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" In Concert, featuring conductor Justin Freer and the San Diego Symphony, 7 p.m. (\$39-\$268)

Aug 23: Jeff Goldblum & The Mildred Snitzer Orchestra with the San Diego Symphony, featuring conductor Stuart Chafetz (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 28: "Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl" In Concert, featuring conductor Larry Loh and the San Diego Symphony (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 29: Classic Albums Live performs "The Beatles (The White Album)" (\$39-\$268)

Aug. 30: Tchaikovsky Spectacular, featuring conductor Enluis Montes Olivar, pianist Joyce Yang, and the San Diego Symphony (\$39-\$268)

Sept. 5: "Manteca! A Dizzy Gillespie & Chano Pozo Celebration," featuring Gilbert Castellanos & The KSDS Jazz Orchestra (\$39-\$268)

Sept. 11: Buddy Guy "90" (\$39-\$268)

Sept. 13: Chris Tomlin: Worship Under the Stars, 7 p.m.

Sept. 16: "Weird Al" Yankovic, 7 p.m. (\$71-\$225)

Sept. 18: "The Sixties Show," featuring Craig O'Keefe, Tom Licameli, Jim Boggia, Kevin Bents, Scott Devours and Peter Chiusano, 7 p.m. (\$39-\$268)

Sept. 26: Mariachi USA, 6 p.m. (\$39-\$268)

TICKET INFORMATION

Series ticket packages go on sale today, March 1, at 10 a.m. online at sandiegosymphony.org, by phone at (619) 235-0804, and at The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park box office, 222 Marina Park Way, downtown. The Summer 2026 individual package prices below include the \$30 handling fee per package. Single ticket sales will be announced at a later date.

Friday A (8 concerts): \$222 to \$832

Friday B (4 concerts): \$131 to \$457

Friday C (4 concerts): \$131 to \$457

Saturday A (8 concerts): \$260 to \$1,028

Saturday B (4 Concerts): \$166 to \$650

Saturday C (4 concerts): \$138-\$470

Sunday A (5 concerts): \$166.50-\$591.50



Annie Clark, who performs using the stage name St. Vincent, will perform an orchestral concert with the San Diego Symphony this summer at The Shell. **AXEL KOESTER**



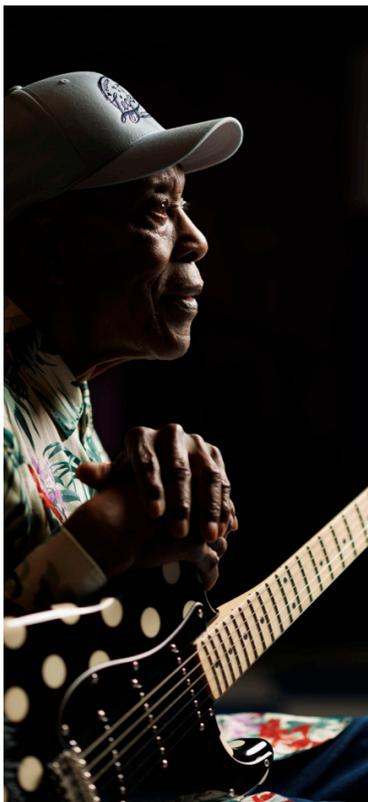
Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductees Kool & The Gang will perform June 28. **SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY**



Japanese singer Ritsuki Nakano, whose stage name is Rikki, will perform at The Shell on July 17 with the San Diego Symphony as part of the "Distant Worlds: Music from Final Fantasy, Celebrating 25 Years of Final Fantasy, XI" concert. **SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY**



The L.A. indie-rock band Mt. Joy's 10th anniversary tour will include an Aug. 18 concert at The Shell. **SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY**



Blues guitar and vocal legend Buddy Guy will perform at The Shell on Sept. 11, just six weeks after he will turn 90. **CHICAGO TRIBUNE**



The Mexicali pop-rock band Reik — formed in 2003 by Jesús Alberto Navarro Rosas, Julio Ramírez Eguía and Gilberto Marín Espinoza — will make its Shell headlining debut April 11 as part of the venue's pre-summer season. **SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY**



Billie Eilish performs during "Hit Me Hard And Soft: The Tour." GETTY IMAGES



The Earth, Wind & Fire documentary is set to air on HBO this year. TNS

Framing the music in 2026

Ten documentaries will center on singers and songwriters Billie Eilish, Ann Wilson, Wu-Tang Clan and more

By Charlie Vargas
and Holly Alvarado

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA NEWS GROUP

Music documentaries have long offered more than just behind-the-scenes access. At their best, they serve as time capsules, preserving pivotal moments in culture while peeling back the layers of the artists who helped shape them. From intimate portraits of reinvention to deep dives into eras that altered the course of popular music, the genre continues to evolve alongside the stories it tells.

This year, a new slate of music documentaries promises to do just that, spotlighting artists at moments of transformation, reckoning and creative rebirth. Whether revisiting legendary careers or examining the fleeting intensity of modern pop, these films offer music lovers a chance to experience the stories behind the sound.

Here are 10 to add to your watchlist.

"Ann Wilson — In My Voice": Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee Wilson is ready to tell her story in her own words. Her upcoming documentary chronicles the life of one of the most iconic rock singers, who brought us "Crazy On You," "Barracuda" and "Magic Man."

The documentary's announcement states that it draws from a "personal archive of home movies, photographs, journals, and never-before-seen footage." Wilson will give additional commentary from friends, family members, music executives and bandmates.

"This film is my story in my own words, told the way I've always wanted to tell it. I can't wait to take you behind the scenes of my music and my story," Wilson wrote in an Instagram post about the film.

Although the post mentioned it is slated for this year, no release date has been specified.

"The Best Summer": Tamra Davis, known for her insightful documentary on Kathleen Hanna of Bikini Kill and Le Tigre, is back with a new project that also dusts off rare archival footage. The film features behind-the-scenes looks at some of the most prominent up-and-coming indie rock and punk bands of the '90s. Acts include the Beastie Boys, Sonic Youth, Foo Fighters, Pavement, Rancid, Beck, The Amps and some more Bikini Kill.

The inspiration for the film came after Davis evacuated from the Palisades fire last January and discovered a box of videotapes she shot in 1995 at Summersault, a little-known Australian indie music festival.

"The Best Summer" tells an oral and visual history of the tour, featuring performances, interviews and never-before-seen backstage footage. The documentary serves as a nostalgic time capsule of archival footage from 30 years earlier, capturing a moment in time before the groups' launch into stardom.

Davis' film premiered Jan. 24 at the Sundance Film Festival. No theatrical release date has been announced.

"Broken English": The British Invasion is often associated with the groups that led

the charge onto American charts, including The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, The Kinks and others. Among the leading female acts of the British Invasion was singer and actress Marianne Faithfull. While she was a popular figure in the musical movement taking over America, much of her success was overshadowed by personal problems in the '70s, when she became anorexic, homeless and addicted to heroin.

Faithfull's distinctive high-register vocals had defined her career, but her voice was permanently altered by severe laryngitis and her persistent drug abuse. After nearly a decade, Faithfull made a comeback in 1979 with the release of a critically acclaimed seventh studio album, "Broken English." The album signified a resurgence of her musical career, earning her a Grammy Award nomination for best female rock vocal performance, and is now the title of the upcoming documentary.

"Broken English" stars Faithfull (who died last year at 78) alongside Tilda Swinton, George MacKay, Sophia Di Martino, Zawe Ashton and Calvin Demba. Additional appearances include Nick Cave, Warren Ellis, Jehmny Beth, Courtney Love, Suki Waterhouse and Beth Orton.

The documentary dramatizes Faithfull's life and career by presenting real events and framing them within a fictionalized group known as the Ministry of Not Forgetting, composed of Swinton and MacKay, to explore and correct the often-misrepresented legacy of the singer.

Although the film was released at a few festivals last year, its U.S. theatrical debut is scheduled for sometime in March.

"The Disciple": Wu-Tang Clan is among the most prolific rap groups. In her directorial debut, Joanna Natasegara dives into the legends and myths surrounding Wu-Tang's 2015 album, "Once Upon a Time in Shaolin." Only one copy of the album was created, an intentional choice by RZA, the leader of the group, and Dutch Moroccan rapper and producer Cilvaringz, who felt the streaming age was cheapening music.

Natasegara tells the story of how Cilvaringz, as an outsider, worked his way into Wu-Tang's inner circle to craft the album that sparked discussions about art's material value and controversy over who gets to own rare art. The copy was sold in 2015 for \$2 million to Martin Shkreli, the disgraced CEO of Turing Pharmaceuticals. It remains the most expensive piece of music ever sold, after NFT company PleasrDAO bought it for \$4 million. The album can only be legally played at private listening parties and is barred from use for any commercial purpose until 2130.

The film debuted at the Sundance Film Festival and is expected to be released theatrically later this year.

"Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour (Live in 3D)": Billie Eilish, known for megahits such as "Lovely," "Bad Guy" and "Birds of a Feather," is teaming with director James Cameron for her next documentary project. According to The Hollywood Reporter, Eilish first teased the project over the summer during a sold-out concert in Manchester, England, but couldn't share



Ann Wilson of Heart, seen in 2019, is set to release a documentary of her life sometime in 2026. GETTY IMAGES



Wu-Tang Clan, seen in 2023, is the subject of the documentary "The Disciple," set for release this year. GETTY IMAGES



Charli XCX's "The Moment" is a mock documentary about her meteoric rise to musical fame. BERTRAND GUAY

many details beyond the fact that it was a 3D collaboration with the Oscar-winning director known for "Titanic," "The Terminator" and the "Avatar" franchise.

"So you may have noticed that there are more cameras than usual in here," she told the crowd at the time. "Basically, I can't say much about it, but what I can say is that I'm working on something very, very special with somebody named James Cameron, and it's going to be in 3D. So, take that as you will, and these four shows here in Manchester, you and I are part of a thing that I am making with him. He's in this audience somewhere, just saying. So don't mind that, and also I'll probably be wearing this exact outfit for like four days in a row."

Eilish's previous documentaries include "Billie Eilish: The World's a Little Blurry" directed by R.J. Cutler, and the concert movie "Happier Than Ever: A Love Letter to Los Angeles."

"Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour (Live in 3D)" is scheduled to be released in theaters in May.

"Take That": When it comes to classic '90s boy bands, English group Take That is one of the stars. The group climbed the charts with its combination of catchy pop hits and heartthrob appeal. However, just a little over a decade into its budding career, the band split. The three-part Netflix documentary will take fans and viewers to the group's beginnings in the early '90s and through the present day, and chart Take That's rise, reunion and transition into a three-piece act.

The documentary features interviews with the three remaining musicians, Gary Barlow, Howard Donald and Mark Owen, while former bandmates Robbie Williams and Jason Orange will be featured in archival footage. The series was directed by David Soutar, who has worked on music documentaries for acts such as Ed Sheeran and Bros.

"Take That" debuted on Netflix in January.

"Antiheroine": Few figures loom as large — or as polarizing — in alternative rock history as Courtney Love.

The former Hole singer, songwriter and actor helped define the sound and attitude of 1990s alt-rock, often commanding as much attention for her public persona as for her music. "Antiheroine," slated to drop this year, aims to shift that narrative by allowing Love to tell her story on her own terms.

Set against the backdrop of her life in London, traces her evolution as an artist, mother and cultural figure. While her marriage to Nirvana front man Kurt Cobain inevitably factors into the story, the docu-

mentary positions it as only one chapter in a much larger, more complex life shaped by fame, loss, addiction and survival.

The film features appearances by longtime peers and collaborators, including Green Day front man Billie Joe Armstrong, former R.E.M. singer Michael Stipe, and Hole bandmates Melissa Auf der Maur and Patty Schemel.

"Antiheroine" premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January. No theatrical release date has been announced.

"The Moment": The film captures Charli XCX at the height of her pop-culture impact, offering a stylized, mockumentary-style look at a fictionalized version of her explosive summer 2024 rise. Conceived by Charli and directed by longtime collaborator Aidan Zamiri, the film blends real concert footage with scripted scenes to explore fame, pressure and the chaos behind the scenes.

Rather than presenting a straightforward portrait of stardom, the documentary leans into the strange in-between spaces of pop life, backstage hours, rehearsals and the emotional whiplash of being both celebrated and scrutinized in real time. It's a self-aware examination of what it means to "be the moment," and the inevitability that it won't last forever.

The film features a stacked cast of cameos by Alexander Skarsgård, Kylie Jenner, Rachel Sennott, Rosanna Arquette and Jamie Demetriou, adding to its sharp, satirical edge.

It opened in cinemas in February, but no streaming date has been announced.

"Man on the Run": The newest Paul McCartney documentary takes fans on a ride through his creative rebirth in the years following the breakup of The Beatles, tracing his transition from a member of the most famous band in the world to an artist rebuilding himself on his own terms. The documentary focuses on the formation of Wings with his wife, Linda McCartney, and the challenges of defining a new musical identity in the 1970s.

Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Morgan Neville, the film draws from extensive interviews with McCartney, his personal journals and Linda McCartney's photographs, offering an intimate look at a period often overshadowed by Beatlemania. Rare archival footage and previously unseen material help illuminate the doubts, risks and reinvention that shaped McCartney's solo career.

"Man on the Run" made its streaming debut Friday on Amazon Prime Video.

"Earth, Wind & Fire": A new documentary directed by Questlove will explore the legacy and lasting cultural impact of one of the most influential American bands. Founded by Maurice White, the group helped shape the sound of funk, soul, R&B and pop while delivering a message rooted in spirituality, unity and joy.

The film examines the band's expansive body of work through rare and previously unseen archival material, drawing from visual, audio and written records with the full support of the band and White's estate. Rather than functioning as a traditional career overview, the documentary aims to contextualize Earth, Wind & Fire's music within the broader cultural and social movements that surrounded it. Following acclaimed projects such as "Summer of Soul" and "Sly Lives! (aka The Burden of Black Genius)," Questlove brings his historian's eye to a story that has long deserved deeper exploration.

The Earth, Wind & Fire documentary will air on HBO later this year.

"Bowie in Berlin": This film studies one of the most transformative periods in David Bowie's career, when he retreated from fame and relocated to Berlin between 1976 and 1978. Seeking distance from the pressures of stardom and a reset both personally and creatively, Bowie's time in the city would ultimately lead to the creation of albums "Low," "Heroes" and "Lodger," collectively known as the Berlin Trilogy.

The documentary uses archival footage and rare interviews with four women who played pivotal roles during Bowie's Berlin years, offering an intimate perspective on a side of the artist rarely seen by the public. Their reflections frame a period of deep artistic reinvention, as Bowie shed his theatrical personas and began performing as himself rather than through characters.

Directed by longtime Bowie documentarian Francis Whately, the film places Berlin at the center of Bowie's regeneration, capturing a moment when he hit a personal low while simultaneously producing some of the most influential work of his career.

"Bowie in Berlin" is set to air on BBC Two and BBC iPlayer next fall.

STEVEN & ELIZABETH WISTRICH, DIRECTORS

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