



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

San Diego Symphony Launches North American Music Initiative, Connecting Its Growing Work Across Mexico, Canada and the United States

Collaboration with Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, shared composer-in-residence Jimmy López, and growing relationships in Baja California advance a tri-national artistic vision

SAN DIEGO, CA — The San Diego Symphony is launching Beyond Borders: North American Music Initiative, a growing network of artistic relationships connecting San Diego with communities and cultural institutions in Mexico and Canada.

The initiative builds on the Symphony's sustained work in Baja California and expands that cross-border perspective north through a new artistic relationship with the **Orchestre symphonique de Montréal (OSM)**. Together, the relationships create new opportunities for musicians, young artists, cultural institutions and audiences to connect across **Mexico, the United States and Canada**, with San Diego as a meeting point.

“When so much of what we are experiencing today is about the differences across our borders, this is an opportunity to celebrate our long collaborative history and our interwoven connections with Mexico—and now throughout North America with our neighbors in Canada,” said **Martha A. Gilmer, President and CEO of the San Diego Symphony**. “With Rafael Payare as music director of both orchestras, we have a strong bond with Montréal that is not just musically relevant, but culturally relevant as well. It is more than symbolic. Both orchestras have musicians from all over the world. Presenting OSM at Jacobs Music Center and then bringing the two orchestras together on a single stage speaks volumes about our ideals for the world we want to live in today.”

The initiative's first major collaboration with Montréal takes place **October 29–30**, when OSM and San Diego Symphony musicians come together in San Diego under the leadership of Rafael Payare, Music and Artistic Director of the San Diego Symphony and Music Director and Artistic Director of OSM.

On **Thursday, Oct. 29, at 7:30 p.m.**, Payare will conduct OSM at Jacobs Music Center in a program featuring Montréal-based composer Samy Moussa's *Elysium*, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with internationally acclaimed violinist Leonidas Kavakos, and Stravinsky's *The Firebird*.

The following day, **Friday, Oct. 30, at 7:30 p.m.**, Payare will bring his two ensembles together on one stage for a free concert at The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park. Titled “**Sound of Two Cities**,” the performance will offer San Diego audiences a unique opportunity to experience the distinct musical perspectives of San Diego and Montréal while bringing musicians of the San Diego Symphony and OSM together for a meaningful artistic exchange. The program features works by Bartók and Ravel performed by each orchestra individually, followed by Prokofiev’s *Scythian Suite* and Respighi’s *Pines of Rome*, performed by the combined ensembles. The concert is free and open to the public, but it is recommended that people RSVP at sdsymph.org/sdso-osm26.

“Music reminds us that we are connected. When we cross borders with an orchestra, we are not just bringing a concert—we are creating a conversation. We celebrate our neighbors, learn from one another, and create a future through collaboration and creativity,” says **Music and Artistic Director Rafael Payare**. “We believe cultural exchange can bring our continent closer together. From Mexico to the United States to Canada, we share so many stories, traditions, and hopes. Through music, we can listen to one another and inspire the next generation of artists and audiences.”

The Montréal collaboration, made possible in part by a sponsorship from the Royal Bank of Canada, is one part of a broader vision taking shape through the **Beyond Borders: North American Music Initiative**. The initiative uses music to create pathways among youth, professional musicians, cultural institutions and audiences across borders.

Building on a binational foundation

The San Diego Symphony’s relationship with Mexico has developed over decades of performances in Tijuana and elsewhere in Mexico. In Baja California, that history has developed into an increasingly sustained network of artistic and educational partnerships.

A significant recent milestone came in January 2018, when the Symphony collaborated with Orquesta de Baja California as co-producer of John Luther Adams’s percussion work *Inuksuit*. Performed at International Friendship Park on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border as part of the Symphony’s *It’s About Time* festival, the performance brought together 60 Mexican and American percussionists and garnered national attention, appearing on year-end best-of lists from NPR Music, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New Yorker*.

The Symphony’s work in Mexico expanded following Rafael Payare’s appointment as Music Director in 2019 and has continued to grow through relationships with artists and institutions throughout Baja California. In 2023, the Symphony performed at CECUT in Tijuana for Día de los Muertos, its first full-orchestra performance in Baja California in more than 20 years. The following year, artists from Orquesta de Baja California, Coro Redes del Sistema Estatal de Música de Baja California, and Sinfónica Juvenil de Tijuana participated in the Opening Weekend festivities of the newly renovated Jacobs Music Center.

Today, the relationship encompasses performances, educational exchanges and opportunities for young musicians to work directly with professional musicians of the San Diego Symphony Orchestra. Through sectionals, workshops, master classes and *Encuentros*—collaborative music gatherings that bring together students, teachers and professional musicians for training and artistic development—San Diego Symphony musicians and musicians from Orquesta de Baja California work with students in the AUKA program and other youth ensembles in Baja California and San Diego.

In 2026, the Symphony's activities in Mexico include two full-orchestra performances at CECUT, a student conversation with Rafael Payare, and two Encuentros with students in the Baja California Sistema program in Mexicali and Tecate. The work continues **Wednesday, October 7, at 7 p.m.** when the **San Diego Symphony returns to CECUT** for a free concert celebrating the cultural center's 44th anniversary. Payare conducts a program featuring Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5. Tickets for the concert are free and only available in person at the CECUT box office beginning September 29.

"Culture is a fundamental tool for humanizing international relations because it allows societies to get to know each other directly and discover the common elements that they share," said **Amb. Alicia G. Kerber Palma, Consul General of Mexico in San Diego**. She continued, "Music demonstrates, perhaps better than any speech, the possibility of building bridges. The San Diego Symphony's performances in Tijuana and the musical exchanges from Tijuana to San Diego transform the stage into a binational space."

Laura Reynolds, San Diego Symphony's Vice President of Impact and Innovation, said, "These relationships are about much more than performing in another country. They are about creating opportunities for musicians to meet, for young people to learn from one another, and for audiences to discover the richness of the communities that surround us."

A shared composer creates a lasting connection

The artistic relationship between San Diego and Montréal continues beyond the OSM's West Coast visit.

Jimmy López serves as composer-in-residence with both the San Diego Symphony and the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal. The two orchestras have co-commissioned López's **Symphony No. 6, *Monarch***, which both ensembles will perform in 2027.

López described the symphony's poetic concept using the migration patterns of monarch butterflies as a metaphor. "They encompass all of North America. Their breeding grounds are in the Midwestern United States, then they go all the way to Southern Canada, and then they fly all the way to their wintering sites in Mexico, and back to the States. This cycle happens within a year and over three generations of monarch butterflies. He continued, "It reminds us that borders are something that we humans invented, but that actually, the natural world doesn't acknowledge."

In San Diego, *Monarch* will receive its U.S. premiere and close the Symphony's 2026–27 season, performed alongside Beethoven's **Symphony No. 9, Choral** at Jacobs Music Center **June 4–6, 2027**.

The pairing places López's new work, created through a partnership between two North American orchestras, alongside Beethoven's enduring musical expression of human connection. Together, the works reflect the possibilities that emerge when artists and institutions collaborate across borders.

"*Monarch* is a wonderful symbol of what can happen when artistic relationships cross borders," says Payare. "It is a work shared by two orchestras, written by a composer whose life and work cross cultures, and it will be performed for audiences in two countries. That is the kind of connection we want to keep building."

The Symphony's North American vision will continue to develop in the seasons ahead, with additional exchanges and performances planned with partners in Mexico and opportunities to expand its cultural relationships in Canada.

For San Diego, the initiative reflects the possibilities inherent in being a border city—not simply a place where one country ends and another begins, but a place where cultures meet, artists work together, and relationships can extend across borders.

Mexico. The United States. Canada. Three countries, connected through music.

CONCERT DATES

Wednesday, Oct. 7, 2026 — Tijuana, Mexico

San Diego Symphony at CECUT

7:00 p.m. | Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT)

Free concert

Rafael Payare, conductor

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 5

Thursday, Oct. 29, 2026 — San Diego, California

Orchestre symphonique de Montréal

7:30 p.m. | Jacobs Music Center

Rafael Payare, conductor

Leonidas Kavakos, violin

Samy Moussa: *Elysium*

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto

Igor Stravinsky: *The Firebird*

Friday, Oct. 30, 2026 — San Diego, California

"Sound of Two Cities"

7:30 p.m. | The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park
San Diego Symphony + Orchestre symphonique de Montréal
Rafael Payare, conductor
Free concert
Béla Bartók: Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*
Maurice Ravel: Suite No. 2 from *Daphnis et Chloé*
Sergei Prokofiev: *Scythian Suite*
Ottorino Respighi: *Pini di Roma*

June 4–6, 2027 — San Diego, California

San Diego Symphony “Ode to Humanity”

June 4, 7:30 p.m. | June 5, 7:30 p.m. | June 6, 2 p.m.
Jacobs Music Center
Rafael Payare, conductor
Tasha Hokuao Koontz, soprano
Nikola Printz, mezzo soprano
Viktor Antipenko, tenor
Hansung Yoo, baritone
San Diego Symphony Orchestra
San Diego Symphony Orchestra Chorus
Jimmy López: Symphony No. 6, *Monarch* (U.S. premiere)
Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 9, *Choral*

ABOUT THE SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY

The San Diego Symphony Orchestra stands among the nation’s leading orchestras and serves as a dynamic cultural ambassador for the United States and the San Diego region. Led by President and Chief Executive Officer Martha Gilmer and Music and Artistic Director Rafael Payare, its 82 full-time, internationally distinguished musicians bring artistry of the highest caliber to audiences at home and abroad. Globally connected and firmly grounded in its community, the Symphony is anchored by two downtown San Diego venues: The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park, a striking open-air performance space on the San Diego waterfront, and the recently renovated Jacobs Music Center, a premier concert hall and architectural landmark. The Orchestra presents a broad and ambitious repertoire, from cornerstone symphonic works to major new commissions and collaborations with leading artists of our time, positioning San Diego as a destination for conductors, soloists, composers, and creative partners. Guided by its mission of Changing Lives Through Music, the Symphony’s community programs serve more than 65,000 students, families, educators, military service members, and nonprofit partners each year. In schools and neighborhoods throughout the region, its programs integrate music into daily learning and expand access to live performance. Learn more at www.sandiegosymphony.org.

ABOUT BEYOND BORDERS: NORTH AMERICAN MUSIC INITIATIVE

Beyond Borders: North American Music Initiative is the San Diego Symphony's multi-year artistic and cultural bridge across North America. Rooted in Rafael Payare's leadership and the Symphony's growing international presence, the initiative connects San Diego, Baja California, Mexico, Canada, and the United States through performances, youth mentorship, artist exchange, community storytelling, and major artistic collaboration. The initiative reflects the movement, resilience, and connections that link communities across borders.

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