

San Diego Symphony Roars to Life in Newly Renovated Jacobs Music Center

On September 28, 2024, the San Diego Symphony celebrated the grand reopening of the newly renovated Jacobs Music Center.



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When Music Director Rafael Payare led the San Diego Symphony in Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 11 in its last concert together before the pandemic lockdown in February 2020, the San Diego Union Tribune marveled: “Nothing prepares you for the visceral power of this score in a concert hall. With Payare on the podium, the San Diego Symphony roared.” Little did anyone know that this roar would be silenced for over two years, only to return with even greater resonance in a transformed space.

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On September 28, 2024, that same visceral power was on display in a new home as the San Diego Symphony celebrated the grand reopening of the newly renovated Jacobs Music Center, formerly known as Copley Symphony Hall. The sold-out gala concert marked not only the Symphony’s triumphant return to its historic venue but also showcased the stunning acoustic and architectural improvements that have breathed new life into this cultural landmark.

The Jacobs Music Center, a former movie palace opened in 1929 as the Fox Theatre, has always been a grand place to hear classical music. Its

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embrace, while its rich warmth fantasies of its origins. Now, in early 2022, it has become performances.



Opening night at Jacobs Music Center, Todd Rosenberg Photography

The transformation is immediately apparent upon entering the hall. Custom-designed permanent orchestra enclosures now grace the stage, draped in what the design acoustician describes as a “tunable acoustic canopy”—a gray mesh covering a system of adjustable louvers. This innovative feature, combined with a new stage floor and a redesigned choral terrace, among other improvements, has revitalized the historic venue’s acoustics.

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“Even though we call it a renovation,” Payare explained after the concert, “this is practically a new hall. The space is the same, but everything is completely new.” The makeover also addressed audience comfort, with more spacious seating reconfigured for better sightlines, while meticulously restoring the hall’s architectural details. Backstage areas for the musicians and the music library also received much-needed upgrades, enhancing the overall functionality of the space.

The concert itself was a testament to the hall’s newfound acoustic brilliance, with an all-star lineup featuring Payare’s wife, cellist Alisa Weilerstein; pianist Inon Barnatan; and rising opera soprano Hera Hyesang Park. The evening began with a rousing brass fanfare titled “Welcome Home,” composed by Texu Kim specifically for the reopening, setting the stage for a diverse program that would explore every corner of the renovated hall’s sonic capabilities.

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Opening night at Jacobs Music Center, Todd Rosenberg Photography

Park's performances were a highlight of the evening. She joined eight cellists for the Aria from Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras* No. 5, delivering an interpretation of Callas-like intensity that showcased both her vocal prowess and the hall's ability to convey subtle nuances. Next she performed "Un voce poco fa" from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, infusing the aria with both virtuosity and theatrical flair. In a playful moment that delighted the audience, Park even sat on the concertmaster's lap, demonstrating the joyous and celebratory atmosphere of the evening.

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coco Variations with abandon, os and techniques. Her ng lyrical lines and delicate

trills seemed to dance in the air of the newly tuned hall. The performance reached a thrilling climax as Weilerstein, her husband, and the orchestra in full hue and cry, took the Finale at a breathtaking speed, pushing the limits of virtuosity and acoustic clarity.

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In a surprise moment that demonstrated the versatility of the new space, concertmaster Jeff Thayer appeared in the balcony. The silvery strains of the Jacobs family’s 1708 “Bagshawe” Stradivarius filled the air with Paganini’s 24th Caprice before segueing into Rachmaninoff’s Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, which Inon Barnatan, on stage with the orchestra, infused with celebratory brio that matched the occasion.

The evening concluded with Payare, now in a cool gray jacket, leading the orchestra through a brilliant performance of Ravel’s Daphnis and Chloe Suite No. 2. An encore of Arturo Márquez’s *Conga del Fuego Nuevo* brought the house down, its catchy rhythms recalling the Technicolor scores that once filled this very hall during its days as a movie palace.

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Dancers perform at Jacobs Music Center Day of Music celebration, Todd Rosenberg Photography

The gala was followed Sunday by a free Day of Music event at the Center, highlighting the Symphony's commitment to community engagement. More than 5,000 attendees enjoyed performances by a diverse array of musical groups, including the First Marine Division Band (with Payare himself conducting a few numbers), youth orchestras, chamber ensembles, dance groups, choirs, mariachi bands, rock groups, and even puppeteers. This inclusive event underscored the Symphony's role not just as a world-class orchestra, but as a vital part of San Diego's cultural fabric.

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With the opening of the renovated Jacobs Music Center, the San Diego Symphony is poised to elevate its status on the national and international stage. It now stands proudly alongside its northern California counterparts in Los Angeles and San Francisco, with whom it created a triumvirate for last year's California Festival. Unlike its rivals to the north, both of which are facing identity crises, San Diego is rightfully proud of how the Symphony balances competitive artistic products with strong community bonds and vital educational services that have a friendly feel.

The renovated hall is well-equipped for multimedia presentations, opening up new possibilities for innovative programming. Payare hinted at future plans, saying, "We have a blank canvas. We want to really explore." This exploration began over the weekend of October 18-20, with performances of Payare's own suite from Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet ballet accompanied by projections created and directed by

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and artistic consultant Gerard

As the San Diego Union-Tribune noted in their review of the gala, “San Diego Symphony finally has a San Diego venue that permits it to sound like the world-class orchestra they’ve been since Payare took over.” Indeed, as the applause faded and the last notes lingered in the air, it was clear that this was more than just a reopening—it was the beginning of a new era for the Symphony. With a renovated home that matches their artistic ambitions and a clear vision for the future, the symphony is well-positioned to continue its ascent in the world of classical music while remaining deeply rooted in the community it serves.

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