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Pasadena Symphony Association
Pasadena Symphony & POPS
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For full artist bios and high res images visit: <https://pasadenasympphony-pops.org/beethoven-emperor-press-release-2/>

**KENSHO WATANABE RETURNS TO CONDUCT PASADENA SYMPHONY'S BEETHOVEN EMPEROR
FEATURING STAR PIANIST GEORGE LI**

Pasadena, CA – The **Pasadena Symphony** continues its 96th season with **Beethoven Emperor** on **Saturday, January 27, 2024** with performances at **2:00pm** and **8:00pm** at **Ambassador Auditorium**. Beethoven's heroic voice is on full display with his powerful **Piano Concerto No. 5 "Emperor"** performed by award-winning pianist **George Li**. With unparalleled talent, Li has garnered international attention with his "staggering technical prowess, sense of command and depth of expression" (*Washington Post*), winning the International Tchaikovsky Competition Silver Medal and the Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Conductor **Kensho Watanabe** returns to lead the orchestra after making his Pasadena Symphony debut last season. Fast becoming one of the most exciting and versatile young conductors to come out of the United States, Watanabe has served as Assistant Conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra and has received the Solti Foundation's Career Assistance Award. Along with Beethoven's heroic masterpiece, Watanabe will conduct **Kolády's** Hungarian tone poem **Dances of Galánta**, and will open the program with **Jessica Hunt's Climb**, inspired by the composer's shared struggle with Beethoven in overcoming physical adversities.

The Pasadena Symphony provides a vibrant experience specially designed for the music lover, the social butterfly or a date night out. Arrive early for the pre-concert discussion *Insights*, or enjoy a bite or a glass in the Symphony Lounge, a posh setting along Ambassador Auditorium's beautiful outdoor plaza with a full service beverage center serving coffee, spirits and fine wines from The Michero Family, plus sandwiches, soup, appetizers and dessert by **Cynthia Brooks Catering** before the concert and during intermission.

All concerts are held at Ambassador Auditorium, 131 South St. John Ave, Pasadena, CA. Subscription packages start at as low as \$99, with single tickets starting at \$42. Both may be purchased online at www.pasadenasympphony-pops.org or by calling (626) 793-7172.

IF YOU GO:

- **What:** The Pasadena Symphony presents Beethoven Emperor
Kensho Watanabe, conductor
George Li, piano

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|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Jessica Hunt | Climb |
| Kolády | Dances of Galánta |
| Beethoven | Piano Concerto No. 5 “Emperor” |

- **When:** Saturday, January 27, 2024 at 2:00pm and 8:00pm
- **Where:** Ambassador Auditorium | 131 South St. John Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91105
- **Cost:** Tickets start at \$42.00
- **Parking:** Valet parking is available on St. John Ave for \$20. General parking is available in two locations: next to the Auditorium (entrance on St. John Ave) at the covered parking structure for \$10 and directly across the street at the Wells Fargo parking structure (entrance on Terrace at Green St). ADA parking is located at the above-ground parking lot adjacent to the Auditorium (entrance on St. John Ave.) for \$10. Parking may be pre-purchased or purchased onsite. **Parking purchased onsite is cash only.**

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Kensho Watanabe **Conductor**

Emerging onto the international stage, Kensho Watanabe is fast becoming one of the most exciting and versatile young conductors to come out of the United States. Recently recognized as a recipient of a Career Assistance Award by the Solti Foundation U.S, Kensho held the position of Assistant Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra from 2016 to 2019. During this time, he made his critically acclaimed subscription debut with the Orchestra and pianist, Daniil Trifonov, taking over from his mentor Yannick Nézet-Séguin. He would continue on to conduct four subscription concerts with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 2019, in addition to debuts at the Bravo! Vail Festival and numerous concerts at the Mann and Saratoga Performing Arts Centres. Watanabe has previously been an inaugural conducting fellow of the Curtis Institute of Music from 2013 to 2015, under the mentorship of Nézet-Séguin.

The 2022-23 season will see Watanabe give debuts with the Minnesota Orchestra, Edmonton Symphony, and Pasadena Symphony Orchestras. He will also return to the Philadelphia

Orchestra for subscription concerts, as well as to the Rhode Island Philharmonic and RTE Concert Orchestra.

Equally at home in both symphonic and operatic repertoire, Watanabe has led numerous operas, most recently at the Spoleto Festival 2022 conducting *La bohème*. This season will see Kensho work with Nézet-Séguin for Kevin Puts' *THE HOURS* with the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Met, Terence Blanchard's *CHAMPION* with the Met. He will also conduct *Madame Butterfly* with the Michigan Opera Theatre.

Recent highlights include Kensho's debuts with the London Philharmonic and Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestras, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Rhode Island Philharmonic, Jyväskylä Sinfonia, Turku Philharmonic, and his Polish debut with the Filarmonia Szczecin. Kensho has also enjoyed recent collaborations with the Houston Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Brussels Philharmonic, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Charlotte Symphony, Sarasota Orchestra, the Seiji Ozawa Matsumoto Festival, and the Orchestre Métropolitain in Montreal.

George Li **Piano**

Praised by the *Washington Post* for combining "staggering technical prowess, a sense of command and depth of expression," pianist George Li possesses an effortless grace, poised authority, and brilliant virtuosity far beyond his years. Since winning the Silver Medal at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition, Li has rapidly established a major international reputation and performs regularly with some of the world's leading orchestras and conductors, such as Dudamel, Gaffigan, Gergiev, Gimeno, Honeck, Orozco-Estrada, Petrenko, Robertson, Slatkin, Temirkanov, Tilson Thomas, Long Yu, and Xian Zhang.

Highlights for the 2022-2023 season include concerto engagements with The Cleveland Orchestra in Miami, Dallas, Detroit, Kansas City, New Jersey, Indianapolis, Portland (ME), Arkansas, Pacific, Fairfax, and Modesto Symphonies, and the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège in Belgium. In recital, Li returns to Carnegie Hall and appears in El Cajon, Santa Rosa, and Carmel (CA), Richmond (VA), New Orleans (LA), Rochester (NY), Middlebury (IN), Williamstown (MA), and Chapel Hill (NC).

Recent concerto highlights include performances with the Los Angeles, New York, London, Rotterdam, Oslo, St. Petersburg, Buffalo Philharmonics; the San Francisco, Tokyo, Frankfurt Radio, Sydney, Nashville, New World, North Carolina, Pacific, Valencia, Montreal, and Baltimore Symphonies; as well as the Philharmonia, DSO Berlin, and Orchestre National de Lyon. His eight-concert tour of Germany with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra included performances at the Berlin Philharmonie, Philharmonie am Gasteig Munich, and the Stuttgart Liederhalle. He frequently appears with Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra, including performances at

the Paris Philharmonie, Luxembourg Philharmonie, New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music, Graffenegg Festival, and in various venues throughout Russia.

In recital, Li has previously performed at venues including Carnegie Hall, Davies Hall in San Francisco, Symphony Center in Chicago, the Mariinsky Theatre, Elbphilharmonie, Munich's Gasteig, the Louvre, Seoul Arts Center, Tokyo's Asahi Hall and Musashino Hall, NCPA Beijing, Shanghai Poly Theater, and Amici della Musica Firenze, as well as appearances at major festivals including the Edinburgh International Festival, Verbier Festival, Ravinia Festival, Festival de Pâques in Aix-en-Provence Festival, and Montreux Festival. An active chamber musician, Li has performed alongside Benjamin Beilman, Noah Bendix-Balgley, James Ehnes, Daniel Hope, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, and Kian Soltani.

Li is an exclusive Warner Classics recording artist, with his debut recital album released in October 2017 which was recorded live from the Mariinsky. His second recording for the label features Liszt solo works and Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No.1, which was recorded live with Vasily Petrenko and the London Philharmonic and was released in October 2019.

Li gave his first public performance at Boston's Steinway Hall at the age of ten, and in 2011 performed for President Obama at the White House in an evening honoring Chancellor Angela Merkel. Among Li's many prizes, he was the recipient of the 2016 Avery Fisher Career Grant, a recipient of the 2012 Gilmore Young Artist Award, and the First Prize winner of the 2010 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. He is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma at the New England Conservatory, continuing to work with Wha Kyung Byun. When not playing piano, George is an avid reader and photographer, as well as a sports fanatic.

Jessica Hunt **Composer**

Jessica Hunt (b. 1987) has been commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra (Climb), the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra (The Eagle Tree), the Gaudete Brass Quintet (seven works), Detroit Chamber Winds and Strings, The Michigan Lighthouse Landmark Legacy Project, Access Contemporary Music, and many others; has served as the 2018 Boontling Community Fellow at the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music and as the 2017-18 Young Composer in Residence with the Detroit Chamber Winds and Strings; and was awarded a Regents Fellowship at the University of Michigan, where she completed her doctoral studies in 2019.

In her work as a composer, Hunt's primary goal is to seek emotional resonance in the rhetorical dialogue between herself, the audience, and the performer by creating eclectic works that explore the aural and syntactical intersections between theatre, narrative, sound, truth and fiction. As such, she has a particular focus on works engaging with the interpretation of text and identity, ranging from her opera-in-progress *Thurso's Landing* based on the lengthy narrative poem by Robinson Jeffers, to recently-premiered *Climb* (Philadelphia Orchestra commission) which explores Hunt's physical experiences with disability and chronic illness.

As a scholar and educator, Hunt serves as an Assistant Professor of Music Theory at The Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University where her research interests include the phonetic and articulatory phenomena of sung text, harmonic vocabulary and syntax in musical theater, and expanding the canon through creative analysis and curricular development focusing on the works of under-represented composers.

Hunt was born on a small cattle ranch in the desert mountains of eastern California during a blizzard. Most of her childhood and adolescence were spent in Vancouver, Washington, after which she transplanted to the Midwest. Hunt holds degrees from Columbia College Chicago (BM '09), DePaul University (MM '16), and the University of Michigan (DMA '19). She presently lives in Baltimore, MD, with her partner and high-school crush, Mark.

Hunt is a member of both ASCAP and the American Composers Forum, and is published exclusively by Just A Theory Press.

ABOUT THE PASADENA SYMPHONY ASSOCIATION

Formed in 1928, the Pasadena Symphony and POPS is an ensemble of Hollywood's most talented, sought after musicians. With extensive credits in the film, television, recording and orchestral industries, the artists of Pasadena Symphony and POPS are the most heard in the world.

The Pasadena Symphony and POPS performs in two of the most extraordinary venues in the United States: Ambassador Auditorium, known as the *Carnegie Hall of the West*, and the luxuriant Los Angeles Arboretum & Botanic Garden. The multi-platinum-selling, two-time Emmy and five-time Grammy Award-nominated entertainer dubbed "The Ambassador of the Great American Songbook," Michael Feinstein, leads the POPS as Principal Pops Conductor, succeeding Marvin Hamlisch.

A hallmark of its robust education programs, the Pasadena Symphony Association has served the youth of the region for over five decades through the Pasadena Youth Symphony Orchestras (PYSO) comprised of seven performing ensembles, with over 400 gifted 4th-12th grade students from all over Southern California. The PYSO Symphony has performed at venues across the globe as well as on the television show *GLEE*.

The PSA provides people from all walks of life with powerful access points to the world of symphonic music.

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