

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Pasadena Symphony & POPS**

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March 10, 2026

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**Pasadena Symphony Presents Dvořák's New World and  
a Bold New Symphony by Juan Pablo Contreras**

**Pasadena, CA** – Music Director **Brett Mitchell** and the **Pasadena Symphony** continue the 2025/26 Symphony Season at **Ambassador Auditorium** with **Dvořák's Symphony No. 9, "From the New World"** on Saturday, **March 21** with matinee and evening performances at **2pm and 8pm**. The program celebrates the rich tradition of American orchestral music, opening with **Leonard Bernstein's Three Dance Variations** from the ballet **Fancy Free**, painting a picture of 1944 wartime America.

Three-time Latin GRAMMY®-nominated composer **Juan Pablo Contreras' Symphony No. 1** continues the new world theme. Contreras' first symphony, **"MyGreat Dream"** was co-commissioned by the Pasadena Symphony and captures his journey to becoming a composer and a US Citizen.

It's an incredible opportunity to have a symphony commissioned and premiered by the Pasadena Symphony at a time when orchestras so often champion the classics. It took me a year to compose this work, and its 2026 premiere is especially meaningful because it coincides with a personal milestone: I've now lived half of my life in Mexico and half in the United States. **Symphony No. 1 "MyGreat Dream"** (a play on words that reads "my great dream" but sounds like "migrate dream") is about my journey to pursue "my great dream" of becoming an orchestral composer. It's a tribute to my two homelands, and it's dedicated to all who pursue the migrant dream. – **Juan Pablo Contreras**

The concert will conclude with a powerhouse orchestral tribute to the American spirit - **Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 "From the New World."** Written during the composer's time living in New York, this monumental composition cemented Dvořák's reputation as a world-renowned composer. Classical audiences are eagerly anticipating Maestro Mitchell's exhilarating rendition of one of the most popular symphonies of all time.

To learn more about the works being performed, arrive early for the pre-concert discussion **Insights** with **KUSC host Brian Lauritzen, Music Director Brett Mitchell** and **composer Juan Pablo Contreras**. The Pasadena Symphony provides a vibrant experience for the music lover, the social butterfly or a date night out. Nearby Old Town Pasadena provides a host of revered dining options or patrons can enjoy a bite or a glass along Ambassador Auditorium's veranda, which offers two full-service beverage centers

serving fine wines, spirits and coffee, plus snacks, charcuterie and dessert before the concert and during intermission.

All concerts take place at **Ambassador Auditorium, 131 South St. John Ave, Pasadena, CA** with matinee and evening performances at **2pm and 8pm**. Single tickets start at **\$55**. Subscriptions start at **\$120**, and both may be purchased online at [www.pasadenasympphony-pops.org](http://www.pasadenasympphony-pops.org) or by calling (626) 793-7172.

#### **IF YOU GO:**

- **What:** The Pasadena Symphony presents **Dvořák New World Symphony**
- **Brett Mitchell**, conductor  
**Juan Pablo Contreras**, composer and special guest

**Bernstein** Three Dance Variations from *Fancy Free*

**Contreras** Symphony No. 1, "MyGreat Dream" *\*co-commission*

**Dvořák** Symphony No. 9, "From the New World"

- **When:** Saturday, March 21, 2026 at 2:00pm and 8:00pm
- **Where:** Ambassador Auditorium | 131 South St. John Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91105
- **Cost:** Tickets start at \$55
- **Parking:** Valet parking is available on St. John Ave for \$30. General parking is available in two locations: next to Ambassador Auditorium (entrance on St. John Ave) at the covered parking structure, and directly across Green St. at the Wells Fargo parking structure (entrance on Terrace at Green). ADA parking is located at the above-ground parking lot adjacent to the Auditorium (entrance on St. John). Parking may be pre-purchased for **\$15 in advance or \$20 onsite. Parking purchased onsite is cash only.**

#### **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

##### **Brett Mitchell**

##### **Music Director**

Hailed for the breadth of his work on the podium and at the piano, Brett Mitchell has carved a unique path for himself in the world of contemporary American classical music. Mitchell began a five-year term as Music Director of the Pasadena Symphony—an orchestra composed of the greatest studio musicians in Hollywood—in 2024, and has served as Artistic Director & Conductor of Oregon's Sunriver Music Festival since 2022.

In May 2025, with less than 24 hours' notice, Mitchell stepped in for his subscription debut with

the New York Philharmonic, leading three performances of Kevin Puts's *The Brightness of Light* featuring soprano Renée Fleming and baritone Rod Gilfry, followed by the complete score of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* featuring the New York Philharmonic Chorus.

Working widely as a guest conductor, Mitchell's other recent engagements have included appearances with the Dallas, Detroit, Edmonton, Fort Worth, Houston, Indianapolis, Memphis, Milwaukee, National, North Carolina, Oregon, San Antonio, San Francisco, Tulsa, and Vancouver symphonies; the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl; the Cleveland and Minnesota orchestras; the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra; the River Oaks and Saint Paul chamber orchestras; the Grant Park Festival Orchestra; and a two-week tour with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. He has also guest conducted the Grant Park Festival Orchestra, and led a two-week tour with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Mitchell regularly collaborates with the world's leading soloists, including Renée Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Kirill Gerstein, Conrad Tao, Rudolf Buchbinder, James Ehnes, Augustin Hadelich, Leila Josefowicz, and Alisa Weilerstein.

From 2017 to 2021, Mitchell served as Music Director of the Colorado Symphony in Denver, following a term as Music Director Designate during the 2016–17 season. During his tenure, he led the organization through a period of significant artistic growth, helped position the orchestra as a central cultural voice in the region, strengthened community ties via strategic collaborations, and broadened the orchestra's commitment to American music with new commissions, premieres, and recordings.

From 2013 to 2017, Mitchell served on the conducting staff of The Cleveland Orchestra, joining as Assistant Conductor in 2013 and receiving a promotion to Associate Conductor in 2015. More than a decade later, he continues to return as a frequent guest conductor, having led more than 150 performances with the orchestra over the past twelve years.

From 2007 to 2011, Mitchell led over one hundred performances as Assistant Conductor of the Houston Symphony, to which he also continues to return regularly as a guest conductor. He held Assistant Conductor posts with the Orchestre National de France, where he worked under Kurt Masur from 2006 to 2009, and the Castleton Festival, where he worked under Lorin Maazel in 2009 and 2010. In 2015, Mitchell completed a highly successful five-year appointment as Music Director of the Saginaw Bay Symphony Orchestra, where an increased focus on locally relevant programming and community collaborations resulted in record attendance throughout his tenure.

Equally at home in the pit, Mitchell has served as music director of nearly a dozen opera productions spanning the core works of Mozart, Verdi, and Stravinsky to contemporary works by Mark Adamo, Robert Aldridge, Daniel Catán, and Daron Hagen. As a ballet conductor, Mitchell most recently led seven performances of *The Nutcracker* with the Pennsylvania Ballet in collaboration with The Cleveland Orchestra.

In addition to his work with professional orchestras, Mitchell is widely recognized for his

commitment to mentoring young musicians. During his highly regarded tenure as Music Director of the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra (2013–17), he led a much-lauded four-city tour of China in 2015. At home, he has worked extensively with students at this country's leading training programs, including the Cleveland Institute of Music, Interlochen Center for the Arts, National Repertory Orchestra, Sarasota Music Festival, and Texas Music Festival. He has also held faculty appointments at Northern Illinois University (2005–07), the University of Houston (2012–13), and the University of Denver (2019–20, 2022–23).

Also an accomplished pianist, Mitchell has a devoted fanbase of his work at the keyboard, including a widely praised YouTube channel featuring his original transcriptions of iconic cues from film history. He also concertizes regularly at the piano, often performing in recital with musicians from his orchestras. In recognition of his work at the keyboard, Mitchell was named a Steinway Artist by Steinway & Sons in 2025.

Born in Seattle in 1979, Mitchell holds degrees in conducting from the University of Texas at Austin and composition from Western Washington University, which selected him as its Young Alumnus of the Year in 2014. He studied with Leonard Slatkin at the National Conducting Institute in 2005, and was selected by Kurt Masur as a recipient of the inaugural American Friends of the Mendelssohn Foundation Scholarship in 2008. Mitchell also one of five recipients of the League of American Orchestras' American Conducting Fellowship from 2007 to 2010. For more information, please visit [brettmitchellconductor.com](http://brettmitchellconductor.com).

### **Juan Pablo Contreras Composer & Special Guest**

Three-time Latin GRAMMY®-nominated composer and conductor Juan Pablo Contreras (b. 1987, Guadalajara, Mexico) masterfully weaves Western classical and Mexican folk music into an exhilarating soundscape, crafting works with “orchestrations that bring [his] scores to splendid life” (*Los Angeles Times*). His most popular orchestral piece, *Mariachitlán*, has garnered an impressive 120 performances worldwide, including a notable rendition by the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl.

Contreras is the founder and conductor of the Orquesta Latino Mexicana, a two-time Latin GRAMMY®-nominated ensemble based in Guadalajara. He is renowned as the first Mexican-born composer to sign a record deal with Universal Music, to serve as Sound Investment Composer for Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and to win the Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise.

Contreras’ music has been performed by 60 major orchestras around the world, including Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, and National Symphony Orchestra (USA), Extremadura Orchestra (Spain), Jalisco Philharmonic and Minería Symphony Orchestra (Mexico), Córdoba Symphony (Argentina), National Symphony of Colombia, and Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. His works have also been presented in prestigious venues such as Walt Disney Concert Hall, Carnegie Hall, and Hollywood Bowl. Contreras has received commissions from Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra,

California Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Tucson Symphony, ROCO, Berkeley Symphony, Fresno Philharmonic, Chicago Sinfonietta, Las Vegas Philharmonic, and Richmond Symphony.

He has been honored with numerous awards, including BMI William Schuman Prize, New Music USA's Amplifying Voices, Presser Music Award, Jalisco Orchestral Composition Prize, Brian Israel Prize, Arturo Márquez Composition Contest, ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award, Dutch Harp Composition Contest, Nicolas Flagello Award, and two grants from Mexico's National Fund for Culture and the Arts. Contreras has also served as Composer-in-Residence with Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in Santa Cruz, soundON Festival of Modern Music in San Diego, Cactus Pear Music Festival in San Antonio, and Concerts on the Slope in New York.

He earned degrees in composition from University of Southern California (DMA), Manhattan School of Music (MM), and California Institute of the Arts (BFA). His most influential teachers include Richard Danielpour, Daniel Catán, Nils Vigeland, Andrew Norman, and Donald Crockett. Contreras' music has been recorded on Universal Music Mexico, EMI, Albany Records, Epsa Music, and Urtext Digital Classics. With a deep commitment to championing the music of living composers, Contreras is the first Mexican-born member of New Music USA's Board of Directors. He lives in Los Angeles and currently teaches at the USC Thornton School of Music.

#### **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 film, television, recording and the orchestral industry, the artists of the Pasadena Symphony and POPS are some of the most heard in the world.

Brett Mitchell assumed the post of Pasadena Symphony Music Director on April 1, 2024. The multi-platinum-selling, Emmy and Grammy Award-nominated entertainer dubbed "The Ambassador of the Great American Songbook," Michael Feinstein, assumed the role of Principal Pops Conductor Emeritus in September 2025, after leading the POPS for 14 years, succeeding Marvin Hamlisch. Resident Pops Conductor Larry Blank will lead the POPS for the 2026 season.

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 Los Angeles Arboretum & Botanic Garden.

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). PYSO offers supplemental in-class instruction within the Pasadena Unified School District and eleven performance ensembles, serving over 700 4th-12th grade students from all over Southern California. The PYSO has performed at venues across the globe as well as on the television show *GLEE*.

The Pasadena Symphony Association provides people from all walks of life with powerful access points to the world of symphonic music. [www.pasadenasympphony-pops.org](http://www.pasadenasympphony-pops.org)

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