

Two Pillars of the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts History Honored at Benefit Concert and Dinner

Joshua Bell and Academy of St Martin in the Fields Headlined the Performance to Celebrate \$2.5 Million Endowment for the New Jolene Koester Arts Education Endowment Fund, launched on April 4

(Los Angeles, CA) April 17, 2024 — A nearly sold-out audience of 1500 performing arts lovers joined together on Thursday, April 4 to celebrate two individuals most responsible for establishing the dazzling Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts as a San Fernando Valley cultural cornerstone, former CSUN President, **Jolene Koester**, and noted violinist **Joshua Bell**.

A major announcement made at the Benefit Concert and Gala, chaired by **Milt and Debbie Valera**, was a \$2.5 million endowment for the new **Jolene Koester Music and Arts Education Endowment made possible with a leading gift from the Perenchio Foundation**. The program will provide K-12 students with a wide assortment of performing arts experiences such as attending matinees, in-class workshops, master classes with noted artists and numerous engagement opportunities designed specifically for CSUN students.

Jolene Koester, CSUN President Emerita and Interim Chancellor Emerita of the California State Universities, is the individual foremost responsible for The Soraya's existence. Koester has served the CSU for over four decades and is among the most respected leaders in California higher education.

Violinist **Joshua Bell** is one of the most esteemed musical artists of our era and has performed with every major orchestra on six continents. The April 4th Gala marked Bell's 9th appearance at The Soraya, making him one of its most beloved performers.

“This memorable performance provided an opportunity to honor two of the most important individuals in The Soraya’s history —Joshua Bell who celebrated his ninth appearance on our stage, the most of any other artist, and former CSUN President Jolene Koester,” said Soraya Executive and Artistic Director Thor Steingraber.

“It was Jolene’s remarkable tenacity that moved state and local leaders and philanthropists to realize the vision to open The Soraya in 2011. The Jolene Koester Music and Arts Education Endowment will build a permanent base of support for those much-needed education programs. We have raised \$2.5M for the endowment, a healthy starting point, and we hope to double that amount within the year. This is an investment in our community, and in the audiences of the future.”

Among the notable attendees were current CSUN President Erika Beck, CSU Chancellor Dr. Mildred Garcia, Congressman Brad Sherman, performance underwriters Jerry and Terri Kohl, CSU Trustees Wenda Fong, Lillian Kimbell, and Jean Firstenberg. Three generations of the Nazarian family were present, including the venue’s namesake Soraya Nazarian. Bell, in his closing remarks, recognized her and quipped, “I am grateful to be here and say, ‘thank you’ and actually get to meet Soraya, and to see Soraya whose the person the hall is named after. I mean you play at The Soraya and then you meet Soraya. That’s kind of cool. I’ve played at Carnegie Hall so many times and the Carnegies never show up!”

Gala Chairs **Milt and Debbie Valera** are passionate supporters of CSUN and education. They are members of the *President’s Associates and the Heritage Society* and major supporters of the journalism program, the library, The Soraya, athletics and numerous other campus programs. They are also sponsors of several University scholarships and endowments, including their endowment supporting K-12 Arts Education at The Soraya. In 2022, Milt and Debbie Valera made a transformative gift to CSUN and The Soraya naming University Hall (now Valera Hall) and *The Milt and Debbie Valera Lobby* at The Soraya. Milt and Debbie now honor their long-time friend Jolene Koester and Soraya regular Joshua Bell through The Soraya’s 2024 Gala

About Dr. Jolene Koester

Dr. Koester served as fourth President of California State University, Northridge from 2000–2011. During her tenure, the University enrolled nearly 37,000 students, employed nearly 4,000 faculty and staff, and celebrated its 50th anniversary as the only public university located in Los Angeles’ San Fernando Valley, home to about 1.8 million residents. Dr. Koester led the effort to construct The Soraya (formerly Valley Performing Arts Center), which opened its doors in January 2011. After her retirement from the CSU, she was asked to return as interim chancellor in May 2022, overseeing the world’s largest public education institution during a transformational time in the CSU’s history.

About Joshua Bell

With a career spanning over thirty years as a soloist, chamber musician, recording artist, conductor and director, Joshua Bell is one of the most celebrated violinists of his era. Named the

Music Director of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields in 2011, he is the only person to hold this post since Sir Neville Marriner formed the orchestra in 1958, and recently renewed his contract through 2023. Bell's interests range from the repertoire's hallmarks to commissioned works, including Nicholas Maw's Violin Concerto, for which Bell received a GRAMMY® Award. He has also premiered works of John Corigliano, Edgar Meyer, Jay Greenberg, and Behzad Ranjbaran. Committed to expanding classical music's social and cultural impact, Bell has collaborated with peers including Chick Corea, Wynton Marsalis, Chris Botti, Anoushka Shankar, Frankie Moreno, Josh Groban, and Sting. In Spring 2019, Bell joins his longtime friends, cellist Steven Isserlis and pianist Jeremy Denk, for a ten-city American trio tour.

Bell advocates for music as an essential educational tool. He maintains active involvement with Education Through Music and Turnaround Arts, which provides instruments and arts education to children who may not otherwise experience classical music firsthand.

Born in Bloomington, Indiana, Bell began the violin at age four, and at age twelve, began studies with Josef Gingold. At age 14, Bell debuted with Riccardo Muti and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and debuted at Carnegie Hall at age 17 with the St. Louis Symphony. Find out more about Joshua Bell at JoshuaBell.com.

About the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)

The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for The Performing Arts (The Soraya) is an award-winning, state-of-the-art 1,700-seat theatre designed and built by HGA Architects and Engineers and opened in January 2011 as the Valley Performing Arts Center (VPAC). Through a transformative gift by Younes and Soraya Nazarian the venue was renamed as The Soraya in 2017. Vibrant programming has served to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and its 1.8 million residents, and as one of the top arts and culture venues in Southern California. Since its inaugural season, The Soraya has presented over 500 artists and companies across the genres of music, dance, theater and film and is a highly in demand location for filming and rental events.

The Soraya's 2023/2024 Season boldly advances the expansive sound of orchestras both traditional and contemporary; the freestyle vibe of jazz; an array of dance luminaries, and a cultural bounty drawn from the musical well of global voices. The Soraya continues its vigorous commitment to innovating, excelling, and amplifying access by offering a wide variety of performances that reflect Los Angeles' many distinctive communities and featuring new and original work and artists from the local region as well as nationally and around the world.

Located on the vibrant campus of California State University Northridge (CSUN), The Soraya and the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication share an integral link that enhances student access and opportunities in the arts and performing arts. A \$5 million contribution from record producer and former California Lieutenant Governor Mike Curb was pivotal in ensuring the completion and opening of The Soraya in 2011. For his founding support and in acknowledgment of the integral relationship between the Mike Curb College and The Soraya, Mike Curb is recognized as one of The Soraya's Cornerstone Benefactors. This partnership fosters academic and artistic excellence, elevating the talents and the future growth of CSUN's students through master classes, student tickets, concerts of student ensembles, and students appearing alongside renowned artists such as Wynton Marsalis, Aida Cuevas, and Martha Graham Dance Company.

Where: Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)

18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330

Website: www.thesoraya.org

Phone: 818-677-3000

Press Kit: <https://mycsun.box.com/s/nacxohfdre7ke9p6dvu0ql9enkol5wy>

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