



NEWS RELEASE

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## **The Nazarian Family Announces the Fund for Artistic Innovation to Honor the Legacy of Thor Steingraber**

(Los Angeles, CA) December 3, 2025 — The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya) announced today the launch of a new initiative to honor the legacy of Executive and Artistic Director Thor Steingraber as he concludes his 12-year leadership of the institution currently celebrating its 15th anniversary. With key philanthropic leadership support from the Younes & Soraya Nazarian Family Foundation and Milt and Debbie Valera, the [Thor Steingraber Fund for Artistic Innovation](#) will underwrite high-quality, original public performances that exemplify The Soraya's artistic leadership and profile, preserving and perpetuating its commitment to new works, commissions, premieres, and major programs in scale or scope.

Soraya Nazarian, for whom the theater is named, said, "Over the past ten years, we have come to know Thor and his vision. Through his leadership, we have witnessed values we so admire come to life on this stage — in the artists, their work, and the experiences they create for Los Angeles' many communities and for the students of CSUN. Thor's dedication and imagination serve so many, and it is my wish that his legacy be preserved long into the future. In honor and recognition of Thor's accomplishments, I am pleased to announce a new fund supporting the art and artists who will continue this work, to be named the **Thor Steingraber Fund for Artistic Innovation.**"

Proud of the artistic collaborations and creative ingenuity that are regularly on display at The Soraya, Steingraber said the commitment to the arts is evident in the new works The Soraya brings to the stage — premieres, commissions, and cross-discipline artistic collaborations cultivated by The Soraya and often featuring the artists of Los Angeles.

"These projects are significant not only in their demands of time and resource, but also in the impacts they provide — new, diverse, and cross-generational audiences served, educational opportunities created, and the major contributions to the output and advancement of artists

themselves, representing a vast array of different artistic disciplines,” Steingraber said, sharing an example of The Soraya’s work.

“A decade ago, we invited Bobby McFerrin and his son Taylor to share the stage at The Soraya. No one had previously done so, and the two artists confessed to only making music together around the Thanksgiving table and other family occasions. Our proposal was met with some skepticism by their agents, but we persevered, and the end result was electric, with two artists of different disciplines and generations finding common ground that thrilled audiences. This was proof of concept enough to expand our efforts with original programming. If we offer the right prompt to the right artists, great things happen.”

The initial goal for the **Thor Steingraber Fund for Artistic Innovation is to secure \$1.25 million by the end of The Soraya’s 2025-26 Season in April 2026**, which will ensure The Soraya’s programming excellence in the future.

Three events will provide key opportunities for support beginning **with The Soraya’s 15th Anniversary Celebration Dinner** on Jan. 22, 2026, in conjunction with a debut concert by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Riccardo Muti; The opening performance of **The Soraya’s 5th annual Jazz at Naz festival** on Jan. 31 featuring ***Sacredness***, where Gerald Clayton will honor Duke Ellington’s Concert of Sacred Music; and **The Final Salon** on Apr. 25 will feature an intimate conversation with Steingraber as he prepares to conclude his 12-year tenure of leadership at The Soraya.

### **About Thor Steingraber’s Legacy at The Soraya**

Since assuming leadership of The Soraya in 2014, Steingraber has presented more than 500 performances that are both culturally diverse and widely acclaimed. Of these, **more than 120 were either commissioned by The Soraya, premiered there for the first time, or were produced exclusively by The Soraya**. Steingraber’s intention was to build a recognition of The Soraya as an organization that creates new productions that might otherwise never be seen, building on-going and creative relationships with global artists across a variety of disciplines that encourages them to push their artistic boundaries. A number of these performances have gone on to tour venues around the U.S. and internationally.

### **Original Performance Highlights Include:**

- Ten-year collaboration with the **Martha Graham Dance Company** resulting in five world premieres as well as four new musical scores, each commissioned by The Soraya, most recently **GRAHAM100’s** world premiere of En Masse with music by **Leonard Bernstein** and Wild Up’s Christopher Rountree. Furthermore, Steingraber, Martha Graham Dance Company Artistic Director Janet Eilber, and Wild Up Music Director Christopher Rountree

have launched an ongoing project to commission and record musical scores for Graham's works that lack usable recordings. This initiative will revive pieces for touring, especially at venues without live music.

- Two consecutive dance companies-in-residence — **Aspen Santa Fe Ballet** and currently, **Ballet BC** (Vancouver, British Columbia) now in its sixth season with The Soraya, both of which premiered original works at The Soraya.
- Soraya-produced tribute concerts to music legends **Henry Mancini**, **Linda Ronstadt** (co-produced with KCET), **Quincy Jones**, **Leonard Bernstein**, **Frank Sinatra**, and activist **Dolores Huerta**.
- Exclusive concert presentations of Broadway shows such as the recent off-Broadway hit ***Fiddler on the Roof in Yiddish*** in collaboration with the National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene, ***Randy Newman's Faust: The Concert*** produced exclusively by The Soraya, and ***Dear World*** starring Tyne Daly.
- Concerts with Broadway artists have often introduced superstars to Los Angeles audiences, most recently with original arrangements by **Pacific Jazz Orchestra**, including packed theaters for **Aaron Tveit** and **Eva Noblezada**.
- Soraya Original Production, and beloved holiday tradition, ***Nochebuena: A Christmas Spectacular*** celebrating cultural traditions from the various regions of Mexico, now in its 10th year.
- Commissioned and produced by The Soraya — **DIABOLO: Existencia**, a dance/music piece commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Northridge earthquake, with a live score composed and performed by jazz drummer **Antonio Sanchez** and vocalist **Thana Alexa**.
- The Soraya spearheaded **Violins of Hope** — an ambitious region-wide collaborative initiative that shined a light on rescued and restored musical instruments from the Holocaust.
- Jazz vocalist **Samara Joy's** first concert immediately following her breakout 2023 GRAMMY Award for Best New Artist, partnered with the **Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra**.
- A major element of The Soraya's efforts to expand audiences with original offerings, The Soraya's multi-camera livestreaming expands availability for audiences around the world, both for the jazz festival and some of its Spanish-language performances. The livestreams feature behind-the-scenes content and backstage interviews with the artists, in addition to the complete concert. The annual **Jazz at Naz** festival was recently named by Downbeat magazine as one of the world's top jazz venues of 2025 and the winner of "Best Festival" by San Francisco Classical Voice's Audience Choice Awards. The festival also features its 230-seat Jazz Club, a unique and intimate setting for jazz performances complete with food and drink.

- In 2017, The Soraya launched **Music Knows No Borders**, a series that shines a light on musicians and cultures from around the world. Since the program's inception, The Soraya has presented artists from over 40 nations. Many of these performances paired global artists in new collaborations.
- In the Spring of 2025, The Soraya also introduced **the L.A. Seen** festival, a month-long series of programs dedicate to the performing arts and artists in Los Angeles, including new works such as the double bill of opera excerpts by Terence Blanchard, including for the first time both ***Fire Shut Up in My Bones*** and ***Champion***.
- The Soraya marked California composer **John Adams'** 70th birthday in 2016 with three performances in collaboration with Jacaranda and Wild Up that featured Adams' works *AMERICAN BESERK*, *String Quartet 1*, *Punk Rock/Player Piano*, *Hallelujah Junction*, *Shaker Loops*, *Grand Pianola*, and *Book of Alleged Dancer*.
- Collaborations with bone fide rock stars are also at home at The Soraya, including projects with The Police drummer **Stewart Copeland**, and System of a Down's **Serj Tankian**.
- Some of The Soraya's programs feature themes of environmental stewardship. ***Future Currents: The Los Angeles River*** was a collaboration between The Soraya and CSUN's Mike Curb College of Arts, and Media and Communications, aiming to inspire creativity and awareness about the Los Angeles River. Eco-artist and choreographer Lynn Neuman and local activist Steve Appleton led the project.
- In collaboration with ***The New York Times***, The Soraya commissioned and produced the world premiere of ***Treelogy***. Three contemporary composers — **Billy Childs**, **Steven Mackey**, and **Gabriella Smith** — each with deep roots in California and each with their own original musical voice, created and performed compositions to honor three of the trees most in danger as California's destructive wildfires continue. ***Treelogy*** was performed by Delirium Musicum and, following its Soraya premiere, toured venues throughout California.
- Numerous **live-to-film concerts** including Buster Keaton's *The General* with New West Symphony, *Amadeus* with LACO and LA Opera, *Selma* with the CSUN Symphony and Jason Moran, Disney in Concert's *The Sound of Magic* with New West Symphony, Disney and Pixar's *Coco* with Orquesta Folklórica Nacional de México, Disney and Pixar's *Toy Story* 30th Anniversary with the CSUN Symphony, and many more.

### **About Thor Steingraber, Executive and Artistic Director**

Thor Steingraber will conclude his 12-year tenure at the end of this season as The Soraya's Executive and Artistic Director, the San Fernando Valley's 1,700-seat performance venue known for its architecture, acoustics, artistic excellence and programmatic variety.

The Soraya is the region's foremost presenter of Spanish-language programs, and its jazz festival has garnered national recognition, including *DownBeat* magazine's "Great Jazz Venues of the World," the only Southern California performing arts venue awarded this distinction. Under the banner Music Knows No Borders, The Soraya presents artists from across the globe — including orchestras, dance companies, and musical artists from more than 40 different nations.

Prior to The Soraya, Steingraber oversaw the opening of Grand Park at the foot of City Hall in downtown Los Angeles, establishing it as the city's go-to location for milestone events. Steingraber was the first Arts Fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School, and wrote extensively about the arts for publications including the *Boston Globe* and many arts and policy journals.

For nearly two decades, Steingraber directed operas at some of the world's major venues, from Los Angeles to New York, Hong Kong to Barcelona. In this capacity, he honed his commitment to producing multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural works, a through-line to his work at The Soraya and beyond.

### **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 that opened in 2011 as the Valley Performing Arts Center (VPAC). Through a transformative gift by Younes and Soraya Nazarian, the venue was renamed The Soraya in 2017. The Soraya is located on the campus of California State University Northridge, the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley.

Executive and Artistic Director Thor Steingraber, in his 12th year leading the organization, sums up what makes The Soraya a central piece of Los Angeles arts and culture. "At The Soraya, we hold a high standard of excellence for every performance from a vast array of artistic disciplines, and we hold steadfast to our commitment to the value and impact of the performing arts in community-building, for the Valley's 1.8 million residents and beyond."

The Soraya's 2025-26 Season is a journey through the expansive sounds of orchestras, the freestyle vibes of jazz, the innovations of dance luminaries, and a vast array of global voices. The Soraya continues its vigorous commitment to excelling, innovating, and amplifying access for Valley residents, students, and arts lovers across Southern California.

**Where:** Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)  
18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330

**Website:** [www.TheSoraya.org](http://www.TheSoraya.org)

**Ticket Office:** 818-677-3000

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