

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) Announces Chad Hilligus as the New Executive & Artistic Director of the Younes & Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts

(Los Angeles, CA) April 8, 2026 – California State University, Northridge (CSUN) has appointed Chad Hilligus as the new Executive and Artistic Director of the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya), a nationally recognized performing arts venue.

“I’m so pleased that Chad Hilligus will be leading The Soraya,” said CSUN President Erika D. Beck. “Chad is a proven leader in the performing arts, with more than 20 years of experience as an artist, producer, director, and fundraiser and a deep understanding of how the arts connect us across cultures, across generations, and across differences. The Soraya serves as both a transformative learning environment for our students and a dynamic gathering place where everyone belongs. Chad’s vision and artistic integrity will realize even greater impact.”

Hilligus joins CSUN from the Gallo Center for the Arts in Modesto, California, where, as Chief Executive Officer, he leads artistic programming and oversees operations, finance, education, and advancement. During his tenure, he has curated more than 100 multidisciplinary live performances annually, strengthening the center’s reputation for diverse and high-quality programming.

“I feel incredibly honored and energized to step into this role,” Hilligus said. “The Soraya has built a remarkable reputation as a home for elevated, world-class work, and it’s deeply meaningful to join an institution with such artistic integrity and cultural impact.”

A former professional performer, Hilligus brings a unique artist’s perspective to his leadership. He toured internationally as a member of The Ten Tenors from 2011 to 2014 and starred as Tony in the 50th anniversary world tour of *West Side Story* from 2009 to 2011.

The Soraya is an award-winning, state-of-the-art, 1,700-seat performance venue that presents more than 40 events each year, featuring renowned orchestras, dance companies, and musical artists from around the globe.

Originally opened in 2011 as the Valley Performing Arts Center (VPAC), the venue was renamed The Soraya in 2017 following a transformative gift from philanthropists Younes and Soraya Nazarian.

“The Soraya is the artistic and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley and beyond, bringing world-class performances to audiences that reflect the vibrancy of the region’s diverse communities,” said Sharon S. Nazarian, President of the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Family Foundation. “Its commitment to arts education and inclusive programming opens doors for thousands of students across Southern California each year.”

“Our family is deeply committed to The Soraya reaching new heights, building on its remarkable foundation while expanding its impact and ambition. With Chad’s wide-ranging experience in the performing arts, I am confident he will build on this extraordinary foundation, and I look forward to partnering with him to deepen and expand The Soraya’s impact on Los Angeles and the campus.”

Hilligus emphasized his commitment to serving both the campus and the broader community.

“I step into this role with a deep sense of responsibility to our artists, CSUN students, faculty, and staff and the diverse communities we serve,” he said. “Los Angeles is one of the most creatively vibrant and diverse cities in the world, and The Soraya is uniquely positioned not only to reflect that energy, but to help shape it. I look forward to expanding partnerships, exploring new ideas, and fostering a space where creativity can truly thrive.”

Hilligus will begin his tenure on June 15, 2026.

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.

For the past 12 years, Thor Steingraber served as Executive and Artistic Director of The Soraya. He built the performing arts center into a nationally recognized cultural powerhouse, expanding its programming and commissioning or premiering more than 120 original works, elevating its reputation as one of the West Coast’s premier destinations for jazz and multidisciplinary performance.

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.

For more information about The Soraya, visit www.thesoraya.org

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