



MICHAEL MORGAN

Music Director

Oakland East Bay Symphony

No one ever accused Michael Morgan of playing it safe. Now in his 25th year as music director of the [Oakland East Bay Symphony](#), the conductor has charted a singular path—one that reflects the unique spirit of the diverse community he serves.

Throughout his tenure, Morgan's eclectic approach to programming has prompted him to mix appearances by rock stars, gospel singers, and funk masters with concerts featuring works by Beethoven and Brahms. He has shared the orchestra's programs with artists such as Carlos Santana, Isaac Hayes, local choirs, and klezmer bands, and conducted large-scale performances of works such as Bernstein's *Mass*. Last year, he introduced a sitar concerto by Ravi Shankar; the current season has already featured an appearance by a jazz quintet. This month, he'll lead a holiday tribute concert to the late folksinger and activist Pete Seeger.

An outside observer might think these mix-and-match programs are simply the result of marketing strategies. But Morgan has a keen sense of the Bay Area's musical pulse. The D.C.-born, Oberlin-trained conductor has made his home in Oakland for years, and he can hold forth as fluently about the local jazz scene as he can about Mozart (another of his favorite composers.)

Morgan's work as music director has been transformative, but his reach extends well beyond the orchestra. Over the years, he's been a prime advocate for restoring music training in Oakland public schools. He has built the Oakland Youth Orchestra with similar success.

Morgan, who studied with Gunther Schuller and Seiji Ozawa at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, was a protégé of Leonard Bernstein, who invited him to make his New York Philharmonic debut in 1986. The same year, Sir Georg Solti chose him as assistant conductor of the Chicago Symphony, a position he held for five years. Having made his operatic debut at Vienna State Opera conducting Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, he maintains his love of opera as music director of another East Bay-based company, Festival Opera.

When Morgan joined the Oakland East Bay Symphony, the downtown area was in desperate need of revitalization. Today, it's thriving—and Morgan's courageous, forward-thinking leadership is a big part of the reason. Morgan hasn't simply rebuilt his orchestra. He's helped chart a new course for the city he calls home.

— Georgia Rowe

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