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**THE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY OF ORANGE COUNTY PRESENTS  
ITS 2026 GALA, *ILLUMINATING DREAMS THROUGH MUSIC*,  
WITH SIX-TIME TONY-WINNER, AUDRA MCDONALD**



*Audra McDonald (Photo: Allison Michael Orenstein)*

**(IRVINE, CA, MARCH 12, 2026)**—The Philharmonic Society of Orange County is pleased to present its **2026 Gala, *illuminating Dreams Through Music***, featuring a private performance by Emmy, Grammy, and six-time Tony Award-winning artist, **Audra McDonald**, the most honored performer in Tony history and one of the most celebrated

stage artists of our time. McDonald will be accompanied by pianist Andy Einhorn, leading Broadway music director and conductor. Taking place at Newport Beach County Club on Friday, April 24, 2026, the gala is set to celebrate the transformative power of music with an unforgettable evening of gourmet dining, fine wines, and signature cocktails, while raising funds to sustain the Philharmonic Society's artistic and youth music education programs.

The spectacular evening is made possible through the vision of its event co-chairs **Deirdre Smith** and **Marlene Nielsen**. Honorary Committee members include **Kay Burra, Lauren & Cor Claus, Margaret Gates, Elizabeth Henry & Bruce Ibbetson, Kari Kerr, Elaine & Carl Neuss, Marcia Kay & Ronald Radelet, Karen & Philip Ridout, Gail & Robert Sebring, Ruth & David Seigle,** and **Linda Silverman & Ercil Brown.**

Upon arrival, guests will be welcomed by a string quartet featuring musicians from the Philharmonic Society's Orange County Youth Symphony, followed by a cocktail hour with an ice luge display featuring signature cocktails. Following the cocktail reception, attendees will be directed into a main dining and performance area, where they will enjoy a sumptuous three-course meal prior to the live auction, paddle raise, and a private performance by McDonald.

The gala will support the Philharmonic Society's "Strike Up the Band" grant program, which puts new musical instruments into Orange County schools for generations of schoolchildren to foster their passion for music. Since 2013, funds raised for the "Strike Up The Band" program through the Philharmonic Society's galas have enabled the Philharmonic Society to serve 88 schools in Orange County, granting new instruments and materials valued at more than \$733,500.

The evening will also support the Philharmonic Society's Youth Music Education programming at large, which offers a diverse array of musical opportunities completely free of charge to Orange County students from elementary through high school, serving as one of the primary supplements to make up for music education funding deficits in our

county. Since 1956, the Philharmonic Society’s Youth Music Education Programs have provided free music education programs for more than 6.7 million Orange County students across 28 school districts in over 416 schools, with 50% of those schools being Title I schools, ensuring students have open access to musical education, performances, and instruments, with the goal of inspiring a life-long love of music.

These programs begin as early as first grade, where students are introduced to orchestral instruments through the “Digital Music Mobile,” a fun and engaging virtual experience. In “Concerts for Second Grade,” a full marching band from the Southern California Brass Consortium—led by former Disneyland band conductor, Kurt Curtis—teaches second graders about each instrument’s role alongside some familiar tunes, while third graders get the chance to explore musical instruments up close through the Philharmonic Society’s “Music Mobile.” In “California Journeys,” fourth graders participate in a cross-curricular music and history immersion experience held at Orange County historical sites, and in “Concerts for Fifth Grade,” students attend a live Orange County Youth Symphony concert at one of Orange County’s esteemed concert halls.

In grades 6-12, students experience “Sounds Around the Globe,” which showcases musical traditions beyond the Western canon through live performances, and are invited to participate in masterclasses or watch private performances by Philharmonic Society presented musicians, such as Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Anthony McGill, Vienna Philharmonic musicians, Chicago Symphony Orchestra members, and more. Additionally, middle and high school students have the opportunity to perform in the Philharmonic Society’s Orange County Youth Symphony and String Ensemble and are invited to participate in “Tix For Teens,” which offers students complimentary tickets to Philharmonic Society concerts. The Philharmonic Society also hosts Orange County’s High School Orchestra Festival, giving students the rare opportunity to perform in a world-class concert hall and demonstrating their hard work and dedication over the course of the school year.

## ABOUT AUDRA MCDONALD:

**Audra McDonald** is unparalleled in the breadth and versatility of her artistry as both a singer and an actor. The winner of a record-breaking six Tony Awards, two Grammy Awards, and an Emmy, she was named one of *Time* magazine’s 100 most influential people and received the National Medal of Arts in 2015—America’s highest honor for achievement in the field—from President Barack Obama. In addition to her Tony-winning performances in *Carousel*, *Master Class*, *Ragtime*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess*, and *Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar & Grill*—the role that also served as the vehicle for her Olivier Award-nominated 2017 debut in London’s West End—she has appeared on Broadway in *The Secret Garden*; *Marie Christine* (Tony nomination); *Henry IV*; *110 in the Shade* (Tony nomination); *Shuffle Along, or, The Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed*; *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* (Tony nomination); and *Ohio State Murders* (Tony nomination). She earned an unprecedented eleventh Tony nomination in a revival of *Gypsy* (2024–25), becoming the acting categories’ most decorated individual in Tony history and prompting *Time* to pronounce her “the greatest living stage actor.”

On television, she was seen by millions as the Mother Abbess in NBC’s *The Sound of Music Live!*, won an Emmy Award for her role as host of PBS’s *Live From Lincoln Center*, and received Emmy nominations for *Wit*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar & Grill*. Having played Dr. Naomi Bennett on Shonda Rhimes’s *Private Practice* (ABC) and Liz Reddick (formerly Lawrence) on both *The Good Wife* (CBS) and *The Good Fight* (Paramount+), she may now be seen as Dorothy Scott on Julian Fellowes’s *The Gilded Age* (HBO). On film, she has appeared in *Seven Servants*, *The Object of My Affection*, *Cradle Will Rock*, *It Runs in the Family*, *The Best Thief in the World*, *She Got Problems*, *Rampart*, *Ricki and the Flash*, Disney’s live-action *Beauty and the Beast*, the movie-musical *Hello Again*, *Down Low*, Ava DuVernay’s *Origin*, Cinergistik’s documentary *Whitney Houston in Focus*, the Obamas’ Higher Ground Productions’ *Rustin*, and MGM’s Aretha Franklin biopic, *Respect*.

McDonald is a Juilliard-trained soprano, whose opera credits include *La voix humaine* and *Send* at Houston Grand Opera, and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* at Los Angeles Opera, where the resulting recording earned her two Grammy Awards. She has issued five solo albums on the Nonesuch label as well as *Sing Happy* with the New York Philharmonic on Decca Gold. She also maintains a major career as a concert artist, regularly appearing on the great stages of the world and with leading international orchestras. She is a founding member of Black Theatre United, board member of Covenant House International, and prominent advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights, whose favorite roles are those performed offstage, as an activist, wife to actor Will Swenson, and mother to her children.

The Philharmonic Society's 2026 Gala, *Illuminating Dreams Through Music*, will take place at Newport Beach Country Club, located at One Clubhouse Drive, Newport Beach, CA 92660. For more information, call (949) 553-2422, ext. 204, or visit us online at [www.philharmonicsociety.org/gala](http://www.philharmonicsociety.org/gala).

#### **ABOUT ANDY EINHORN:**

Leading Broadway music director and conductor, **Andy Einhorn**, most recently served as the music supervisor and music director for the award-winning revival of *Gypsy* starring Audra McDonald. Other Broadway music supervising and conducting credits include *Hello, Dolly!* starring Bette Midler (Grammy-nominated for Original Broadway Cast Recording), *Carousel* starring Renée Fleming (Grammy-nominated for Original Broadway Cast Recording), *Holiday Inn*, Woody Allen's *Bullets Over Broadway*, Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Cinderella*, *Brief Encounter*, and *Sondheim on Sondheim*.

Since 2011, Einhorn has served as music director and pianist for the six-time Tony Award-winner, Audra McDonald, performing both nationally and internationally on concert stages including The London Palladium, Sydney Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. They have recorded two albums together: *Sing Happy* and *Go Back Home*.

TV work includes HBO's Peabody Award-winning documentary *Six By Sondheim* and Great Performances' *Broadway Musicals: A Jewish Legacy* for PBS. In 2018, Einhorn music supervised and appeared on camera for the Emmy award-winning performance of "Eat Sh\*t Bob" for HBO's *Last Week Tonight*, starring John Oliver, and in 2019, Einhorn conducted Bette Midler and Marc Shaiman at the 2019 Academy Awards. Andy has also served as faculty for The Juilliard School, Aspen Music Festival, and Brevard Music Festival.

#### **ABOUT THE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY OF ORANGE COUNTY:**

Founded in 1954 as Orange County's first music organization, the Philharmonic Society of Orange County presents national and international performances of the highest quality and provides dynamic and innovative music education programs for individuals of all ages to enhance the lives of Orange County audiences through music.

Since its inception, the Philharmonic Society has evolved and grown with the county's changing landscape, presenting artists and orchestras who set the standard for artistic achievement from Itzhak Perlman, Gustavo Dudamel, Yo-Yo Ma, and Renée Fleming to the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and many others. In addition, the Philharmonic Society celebrates multi-disciplinary performances under its Eclectic Orange brand and embraces music from a wide range of countries with its World Music performances. Its celebrated concerts introduce children to classical music with creative and inspiring performances, instilling music appreciation for future generations.

The Philharmonic Society's nationally recognized Youth Music Education Programs, offered free of charge, engage more than 80,000 students annually through curriculum-based music education programs that aim to inspire, expand imaginations, and encourage learning at all levels. These programs are made possible by the Committees of the Philharmonic Society comprised of nearly 450 volunteer members who provide more than 50,000 hours of in-kind service each year. As a key youth program, the exceptional Orange County Youth Symphony and String Ensemble provide top-tier training to the area's most

talented young musicians through multi-level ensemble instruction, leadership training, touring opportunities, challenging professional repertoire, and performances in world-class venues. The Philharmonic Society also promotes life-long learning, connecting with colleges and universities to conduct masterclasses and workshops and providing pre-concert lectures to introduce audiences to program selections.