

Leif Bjaland, Music Director and Conductor



For the past fifteen seasons, Leif Bjaland has served as Music Director and Conductor of the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra, where his engaging conducting style and artistic vision have heralded an era of musical excellence. He also serves as Artistic Director and Conductor of the Florida West Coast Symphony. “The growth and maturity of the Florida West Coast Symphony seems to be unfolding right before our ears this season,” stated the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* in 2003. “Each concert is better than the previous one.”

In July 2005 he made his debut at the Music in the Mountains Festival in Durango, Colorado. In June 2003, he made his debut at the internationally renowned Ravinia Festival in an all-Bernstein Concert with the Chicago Symphony. Also in 2003, he conducted the San Francisco Symphony in an all-Russian concert featuring *Pictures at an Exhibition*. This was Mr. Bjaland’s long-awaited return to the San Francisco Symphony since departing in 1989 as assistant conductor and music director of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra. He recently returned to conduct a concert in the orchestra’s Summer in the City series.

As a champion of unjustly neglected works and composers Mr. Bjaland has conducted a substantial number of world and local premieres. With the Florida West Coast Symphony he conducted the first orchestral performance of the complete orchestral version of Ravel’s masterpiece for solo piano, *Mirror*, with orchestrations by Ravel, Grainger, Stuckey. He also led the world premiere of David Carlson’s “Quantum Symphony,” a co-commission between the Waterbury Symphony and the Florida West Coast Symphony. With the New World Symphony he conducted the first performance in Florida of Bruckner’s Second Symphony as well as the US premiere of the Frank Martin “Symphony 1937.” With his orchestra in Connecticut Mr. Bjaland led the long delayed first performance of George Chadwick’s opera “The Padrone” over 80 years after its composition. Other works performed there recently have been the world premieres Deborah Teason’s Concerto for Steel Band and Charles Griffes’ “Symphony 1919.”

Mr. Bjaland’s other recent guest conducting appearances have included the Nashville Symphony, the New Zealand Symphony, the World Youth Symphony at the National Music Camp at Interlochen, and the Boston University Tanglewood Institute Orchestra, as well as the Kalamazoo (Michigan) Symphony and the Marin (California) Symphony. In previous seasons he led many of the country’s leading orchestras, including the National Symphony, the Rochester Philharmonic, the Detroit Symphony, the Virginia Symphony and the Utah Symphony, where the *Salt Lake Tribune* critic wrote, “This singularly has to be the best interpretation of Prokofiev’s *Fifth Symphony* ever.”

Hailed by Sir Georg Solti as “a most musical young conductor with great future potential,” Mr. Bjaland was selected by Leonard Bernstein in 1988 to conduct the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at several Orchestra Hall concerts as part of the American Conductors Program. In the summer of 1990, he was invited by Leonard Bernstein and Michael Tilson Thomas to participate in the premiere season of the Pacific Music Festival in Japan. From 1989-1993, he served as resident conductor and artistic coordinator of the New World Symphony in Miami.

Leif Bjaland began his musical career as a Professor of Music at Yale University, where he served as music director of the Yale Symphony Orchestra, leading that ensemble on a very successful tour of Europe in 1985. A Michigan native, Maestro Bjaland received his Master’s Degree in Music from the University of Michigan, where he was a student of Gustav Meier and Elizabeth A. H. Green.